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MATCHING RELATIONS IN BORGES' *LA MUERTE Y LA BRÚJULA*: AN EXERCISE IN LINGUISTIC STYLISTICS¹

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This article introduces and exemplifies a pervasive linguistic feature of literary and non-literary texts, the *matching relation*, and then sets out to demonstrate how matching relations are a basic organising device of the Borges short story. A close examination of the text shows how carefully constructed and worded the original is and how important clues are conveyed through the matching relation. A brief comparison of several translations shows that some of these crucial matching relations are obscured by careless translation.

In the short story *Death and the Compass*, by the Argentinian writer J.L. Borges, Lönnrot, detective and 'puro razonador', is tricked by his enemy, the 'pistolero' Dandy Red Scharlach, and lured to his death in the deserted villa of Triste-le-Roi.

The story is cunningly constructed because the trap depends on Lönnrot's self-deceiving belief in his own cleverness and on his desire to impose 'una explicación puramente rabínica' on an accidental murder. Moreover, it is cunningly narrated because, like all good detective stories, it contains all the necessary clues and yet both reader and detective allow themselves to be misled.

What I hope to show is that both the construction and the narration of the story exploit a basic psycholinguistic pattern, the Matching Relation, a narrative device familiar to most readers from their knowledge of traditional Western European children's stories.

At this point, I would urge anyone who has not read *La Muerte y la Brújula* to do so before reading any further.

Matching relations in stories for children

One of the marked features of stories for young children and apparently one of the features which they greatly enjoy is repetition. If we look, for example, at the following

¹Mike Hory first introduced me to this story. We have since jointly and severally used it in narrative courses in England and abroad and it would be difficult to decide how much of this analysis is mine and how much his.

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