

S. Eriksthir

ESSAYS ON HISPANIC THEMES

IN HONOUR OF EDWARD C. RILEY

edited by Jennifer Lowe and Philip Swanson

Department of Hispanic Studies
University of Edinburgh

Published by the Department of Hispanic Studies, University of
Edinburgh, David Hume Tower, George Square, Edinburgh,
EH8 9JX, Scotland.

© The Contributors, 1989.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Essays on Hispanic Themes: in honour of Edward C. Riley.

1. Spanish cinema films 2. Spanish literature, - critical studies
I. Lowe, Jennifer II. Swanson, Philip, 1959 - III. Riley, Edward C.
791.43'0986

ISBN 0-9514476-0-2

Typesetting by Graffiti - David & Arlette Walls, Nunraw Barns Farmhouse,
Garvald, Nr HADDINGTON, East Lothian, EH41 4LW, Scotland.
(tel. 062 083 - 249).

Printed by Antony Rowe Ltd., Bumper's Farm, CHIPPENHAM, Wiltshire,
SN14 6QA, England.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Preface

Principal Publications

Kenneth Adams

Plogom

Pero López

Angus Mackay

The Lor

Daniel Rogers

'Bien po

Anthony Close

Comic E

Edwin Williams

Cervante

Autobiog

los perro

Jennifer Lowe

Henry Ea

James Whiston

The 'Cub

Mairena

Javier Herrero

The Fath

Donald Shaw

Lorca's L

Eamonn Rodger

Can the C

Señas de

Patrick Gallagher

Moonrise

Francisco García

Texto y s

Buñuel

grew up in the United States in the 1950s Haskell remarks that the classic split between Virgin and Whore 'was internalized in the moral code we adopted out of fear as well out of an instinct for self-preservation' (*From Reverence to Rape: the Treatment of Women in the Movies* [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973], vii). Ms Haskell bears fascinating — and chilling — testimony to the accuracy of Borau's depiction of Pepa and her predicament in 1980s Andalusia. Complementary reading on the imposition of cultural stereotypes on women may be found in E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film. Both Sides of the Camera* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983).

Icelandic Sagas and Archetypes in Jorge Luis Borges' 'Undr'

SIGRÚN ASTRÍÐUR EIRÍKSDÓTTIR

University of Iceland

In the epilogue to *El libro de arena* (1975),¹ Jorge Luis Borges states that the stories 'Undr' and 'El espejo y la máscara' represent 'literaturas seculares que constan de una sola palabra' and thus form a contrast with the vastness of 'La biblioteca de Babel' (II, 537). We could take this contrast further by considering the endings of these three stories. The first two seem to end upon some kind of understanding, a notion of the transcendental, whereas 'La biblioteca de Babel' points to the futility of even trying to come to grips with the meaning of life, and ends in an ironic paradox. But we should not overlook the fact that the two stories from *El libro de arena* do not exactly have a 'happy ending'. In 'El espejo y la máscara' the poet and king have to pay dearly for 'haber conocido la Belleza, que es un don vedado a los hombres' (II, 504), and we are led to suspect that not only is there an irony underlying Ulf Sigurdarson's revelation, but that he would eventually have found the word anyway, irrespective of the dictates of the author's literary purpose, 'a orillas de un río que se dilataba en un mar' (II, 509).

'Undr' is arguably Borges' most closely glossed and extended reference to the Old Icelandic literary sources which, directly and indirectly, permeate both his prose and poetry. While couching his narrative in a passage fictitiously attributed to the German bishop and historian Adam of Bremen, Borges

draws widely upon Icelandic historical and literary sources (the two were effectively the same at the time, since Saga means both history and story) not only for his title but also for his setting, motifs and epistemology. In this essay we will examine 'Undr' both in its Nordic context and the more Borgesian framework.

The collection *El libro de arena* in which 'Undr' is found contains unusually many stories (five out of thirteen) which refer directly to Germanic (Nordic or Anglo-Saxon) literature. Borges' preoccupation with these old cultures is well known; as early as 1933 he manifests an interest in the languages and literatures of the North with the publication of the essay 'Las kenningar', first appearing in the literary magazine *El Sur* and later included in *Historia de la Eternidad* (1936). Kennings are employed in both 'Undr' and 'El espejo y la máscara', although not as active literary figures, but rather as local references to a concept of language which has lost currency, as I shall mention later in this essay.

I.

In 'Undr', Borges typically avoids authorial responsibility by claiming that he has come across the story in other books. Adam from Bremen is supposedly the recorder of the story told to Ulf Sigurdarson, but our third narrator, who presents the story to the reader, offers a version which 'no es literal'. This immediate narrator, who is 'un mero aficionado argentino' and whose opinion 'vale muy poco', makes it clear that we are dealing with a work of fiction while at the same time affirming that his version is 'digna de fe' (II, 515). Could it be this third narrator alone, this twentieth-century Borgesian 'I', who supplies the nostalgic tone of the story, its matter-of-fact listing of how time is spent which recalls Anglo-Saxon elegiac traditions, its sense of a quest which ends with something lost as much as gained?

Perhaps the most important distinction between the three

narrators is that the once 'universal' languages used by the first two are virtually dead. Old Norse has admittedly survived in a relatively pure form in Iceland but is no longer used 'desde la Ultima Thule hasta la mercados del Asia' (II, 506). Adam of Bremen's Latin is not even the medium of clerics any more. In the fact that an Argentinian retells a story told in dead languages we can perhaps see a variation on the Borgesian theme of the eternal recurrence. However, his recreation of the past in 'Undr' is not literal (unlike, for example, Pierre Menard's Don Quixote or Einar Tambarskelfir's words in the poem of the same name), and as such aligns itself alongside the 'Poema conjetural' and 'Páginas para recordar al coronel Suárez, vencedor en Junín'.² By recreating times past (or 'dreaming' them, as in the poem 'Un Lobo'³) Borges seems to be rescuing them from oblivion.

He quotes enough historical material to give his work the appearance of being based on fact. In the opening of the story, for instance, we have Adam of Bremen, whose *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* (written around 1075) deals to a considerable extent with the history of the Northern people. The same kind of historical plausibility is found in the description of the Urnos, whose presentation recalls Tacitus' *Germania*. And, finally, dwelling upon Odin also gives an impression of 'history', since Odin belongs to the cultural heritage of the North and forms part of our history, part of the tradition through which we strive to identify our origins. By this method of engaging documented references with fictional action, history is rescued from being merely 'una fecha que se aprende para un examen' ('Páginas para recordar . . .', *OP*, 193) and acquires authentic being.

According to the narrative persona of Adam of Bremen, the Urnos are genuinely Christian and believe in the consubstantiality of the three parts of the Trinity. In their faith that the Word is not inferior to the Father, they have something in common with the sect of 'La secta de los treinta', whose

followers profess that 'El verbo se hizo carne para ser hombre entre los hombres' (II, 494) — yet it transpires later in 'Undr' that the word pursued is not 'Dios' in this instance. The most striking comment made about the Urns is that they should use the runic alphabet — a vehicle of magical as much as literal expression — of the ancient Odin, who was the heathen god of war and, more importantly, of poetry. This fact is stressed by the putative Bishop of Bremen's emphasis on Odin's self-sacrifice to obtain the runes: 'las runas que Odín les reveló, después de haber pendido del fresno, Odín sacrificado a Odín, durante nueve noches' (II, 505). The weight given here to Odin's sacrifice cannot be mere coincidence. The conceit would of course appeal to Borges, who so often makes his fictitious characters pay a high price for the knowledge they obtain. In his book *Literaturas germánicas medievales*⁴ Borges dwells upon the god's sacrifice of himself to himself and draws a parallel with the same act undertaken by Christ: 'Una divinidad que se sacrifica, una divinidad herida de lanza y pendiente de un árbol, sugiere invenciblemente a Jesús' (*LGM*, 82). With his, at first sight, gratuitous mention of Odin, Borges seems to be establishing a link both with the quest for the Word and the crucifixion of Christ.

This link is given added depth through King Gunnlaug and the mention of human sacrifice at the temple of Uppsala. The latter is further evidence of 'historical plausibility' because the work of the original Adam of Bremen cited above contains a thorough description of the temple and pagan rituals (Uppsala was the last major centre of 'organised' heathendom in the Nordic countries). As Borges was well aware, the 'Lord of the Hanged' (Odin) received human sacrifice, in which the victims were hung from a tree and 'marked for Odin' with a spear in the chest, thus emulating the mystery of the god. After describing this sacrifice in *Literaturas germánicas medievales* so as to suggest that it is a ritual of initiation, Borges conjectures:

'quienes morían, verdadera o figurativamente, como Odín, se convertían en Odín' (*LGM*, 82). (Curiously enough, 'La secta de los treinta' have themselves crucified 'para seguir el ejemplo de sus maestros' [II, 495].) King Gunnlaug also seems to make use of human sacrifice, although his medium is the cross instead of a tree: 'supe que librada la última guerra miraba con recelo a los forasteros y que su hábito era crucificarlos' (II, 506).

Around King Gunnlaug who 'estaba doliente y yacía con los ojos semicerrados . . . había gente de armas, toda a pie' (II, 507). Meanwhile the Word is sung to him. Gunnlaug seems here to perform a double function in very much the same way as the god Odin. He is king of a nation of warriors, just as Odin is their god.⁵ He is also the king of a nation that has found the one poetical word, as Odin is the god of poetry. To paraphrase Borges' own words, the description of the king 'sugiere invenciblemente a Odín', albeit somewhat more passively. King Gunnlaug is 'un hombre gastado y amarillento, una cosa sagrada y casi olvidada; viejas y largas cicatrices le cruzaban el pecho' (II, 507). In certain ways the description of the king is reminiscent of the old gaucho who provides Dahlmann with a knife in the story 'El Sur'. The old gaucho is 'inmóvil como una cosa' and 'como fuera del tiempo en una eternidad' (I, 533).⁶

Odin himself appears in various of the Icelandic Sagas, even those relating events which take place after Christianity has been substituted for the old religion. He appears as a very old man 'envuelto en una capa oscura y con el ala del sombrero sobre los ojos', as Borges himself puts it (*LGM*, 82). His presence is especially strong in the *Völsungasaga*, which was the first saga Borges read in his youth and for which he frequently expressed his admiration.⁷ In *Völsungasaga*, it is Odin who determines the ultimate fate of his 'favoured' characters, even by supplying them with a sword at crucial moments in a fashion similar to the old gaucho's intervention in Dahlmann's life.

The scars on King Gunnlaug's chest call to mind, almost

like stigmata, Odin's self-sacrifice. We relate them, of course, to the many wars the Urnos have had to fight, but the double function of the king also make us think of Odin's self-sacrifice in order to obtain knowledge: King Gunnlaug knows the Word, he is the king of a nation that has found the Word. At the same time, it is stressed that each individual has to discover the Word for himself, or as Bjarni Thorkelsson says: 'nadie puede enseñar nada. Debes buscarla solo' (II, 508). On what seems to be his deathbed, King Gunnlaug has the Word intoned for him to the extent that 'ahora no quiere decir nada' (II, 504), which does seem rather ironic; how can something as sacred and sought-after as the Word dissolve into nothing?⁸

II.

This 'reductive' conclusion strikes a contrast with the 'acopio de pormenores circunstanciales' (II, 505) which permeate the story, and which the reader tries to fit to the context, perhaps even with 'some discrimination'.⁹ Yet if examined closely, we see that most of these symbols here could well be called typically Borgesian. There is the reiterated number three, which seems to be a preoccupation of Borges, for instance in 'La muerte y la brújula'¹⁰ and later in 'El congreso'.¹¹ In 'Undr' we find the three gods of the Uppsala temple — Odin, Thor and Freyr — along with the non-Arian trinity and three narrators. In the physical details of the world of 'Undr', we also have the three poles, and we notice that the city of the Urnos is not an organic form of uncontrolled life growing according to its own principles, but has organisation imposed upon it from outside: it has its three squares and a circular wall surrounding it.

This sense of order forms a contrast with the sense of chaos which we also find implied elsewhere in the story. Adam of Bremen speaks of the 'incierto o fabulosa información' that he

has about the Urnos and 'lo azaroso del rumbo' which leads to their country (II, 505), while Ulf Sigurdarson's account of his adventures includes mention of 'azares' and the oxymoronic 'orden cabal de sus inconstancias' (II, 508). Yet the central symbol of chaos is to be found in 'un tablero de ajedrez, con un centenar de casillas y unas pocas piezas desordenadas' (II, 507) to the king's right side. Chess is a metaphysical symbol in Borges evoking a wide range of connotations, as for instance in his poem 'Ajedrez': '¿Qué dios detrás de Dios la trama empieza/De polvo y tiempo y sueño y agonías?' (OP, 125), in which the notion of God dissolves into an infinite number of gods — a repetition which ultimately dissolves into nothing, as is the case with the Word. Here the most important point to notice would seem to be the disorderly state of the pieces, as if the discovery of the Word had not given to life the sense of order that might perhaps be expected. Chaos does not seem to have turned into cosmos except on the surface.

The wooden poles seem to invite more interpretations than simply being devices to emphasise the number three, just as the number itself is not reiterated merely for its own sake but for its apparent implications about religion or the cosmos and man's tendency to define God by dividing his attributes into three parts. Within the 'Saga setting' of the story, the poles can act as pagan symbols, since Nordic pagans used long poles with symbols on (generally faces) during their worship. The poles form a striking contrast with the pyramids which Ulf Sigurdarson expected to find. In their different colours and the different sign each bears, they seem to have a significance beyond the casual implication of paganism and, by extension, of Odin. Moreover, the colours of the poles invite the conclusion that they bear an intimate relation to the signs upon them. Thus it is probably unwise to relate the yellow pole to any inherently sinister implications as we sometimes can do in Borges, for instance in 'Emma Zunz' and 'La muerte y la brújula',¹² but the fish on the top of the pole is

an early Christian symbol. Red, the colour of the disk, is characteristic of the red-bearded thundergod Thor of whom Borges says: 'dios plebeyo, especie de Hércules popular y colérico' (*LGM*, 84). It is interesting to note, *en passant*, how many of Borges' characters of Nordic or Anglo-Saxon stock have red beards or hair: the Nilsen brothers in the story 'La intrusa', los Gutres in 'El evangelio según Marcos', don Alejandro Glencoe and Twirl in 'El congreso', Eric Einarsson in 'El soborno'. But what inclines us to relate the colour red to the North in this particular case is the sign of the disk.

It seems possible, to some extent at least, to identify intertextual relationships among the stories of *El libro de arena*. We have 'La secta de los treinta' and the Urnos; the mention of kennings in 'Undr', 'El soborno' and 'El espejo y la máscara'; and early Germanic motifs in 'Undr' and 'Ulrica'. The connection between the sign of the disk here and the disk of the old king Isern scarcely seems accidental. The aged king appears, 'envuelto en una manta raída' (II, 528), and derives his royal authority from possession of 'el disco de Odín' (II, 529).

Lined up starkly beside the fish of Christianity, the heathen sign of Odin's disk seems to be endowed with exactly the same importance. Is this the eternal recurrence in which Christ has replaced Odin, effecting only cosmetic and not fundamental changes to the process which has always been taking place? We are not allowed to know, however, what will replace Christ, since Ulf Sigurdarson has forgotten what the sign on the black pole was, perhaps because he did not 'penetrate' its meaning (as when he heard the Word sung for the first time and could not 'penetrar' it). It forms a 'black hole' in his memory, like the other side of Isern's one-sided coin.¹³

The third level of significance of the poles concerns time, the transitoriness of things. They form an ironic contrast with the pyramids of 'La biblioteca de Babel' which seem to symbolise 'man's triumph over time'.¹⁴ The wooden poles are

as transitory as mankind, as religions and preferences, poetic or otherwise. They are no less symbolic of time than the pyramids, only their signification operates in the opposite direction, i.e. to exemplify time's ironical triumph over man's spiritual quests. Indeed, up to a certain point we can claim that 'Undr' is about the passing of time and of the lives of men.

We notice, for instance, that King Gunnlaug has passed away when Ulf Sigurdarson returns from his adventures, and we have already suspected that he is dying on Ulf's first visit to the Urnos. On his second visit, Ulf finds that Bjarni Thorkelsson is dying, and he notices that 'Tanto había envejecido su cara que no pude dejar de pensar que yo mismo era viejo' (II, 509). Our narrator may well be at death's door when Adam of Bremen meets him in Uppsala after he has discovered and understood the Word; he has already been told by Bjarni Thorkelsson, during his first visit, that 'no tardarás en morir porque has oído la palabra' (II, 508). The word presents itself at the right moment, when man has filled his predestined quota of adventures. The world presented in 'Undr' is coming to an end. Ulf Sigurdarson renounces the 'hermoso juego de combinar palabras hermosas' (II, 508), Bjarni Thorkelsson has reached the point in his life when he can say 'la vida me dio todo' (II, 509) and Ulf relives his adventures as something belonging irretrievably to the past. The aged Bjarni and Ulf do not have much 'energía física y psíquica' left, as Ramona Lagos postulates,¹⁵ when they unite in the revelation of the *words* (my italics). It is doubtful whether one can talk about 'el iniciado' in this context;¹⁶ after all, Ulf does not repeat Bjarni's word, but 'canté con una palabra distinta' (II, 509).

After the revelation Ulf Sigurdarson goes to Uppsala, to a world in which the end is imminent, where the 'fuego de leña había muerto'. In Uppsala all that Adam of Bremen mentions is dead, typified by the wolf, which in Borges always refers to something which has disappeared or is about to do so. This we

see in his poem 'Un lobo', dedicated to the last wolf in England, and in the story of Ulrica who, on hearing a wolf howl, says: 'ya no quedan lobos en Inglaterra', after saying in her prophetic guise of Brynhild that she is dying (II, 467). Is it too obvious to point out that the name *Ulf* itself, bestowed upon what might be the last of the breed of ancient poets, is Icelandic for 'wolf'? Gunnlaug, Brynhild, Isem, the wolves, the Old Saxon in 'El testigo' and even the young Borges in 'El otro' are all gone forever, but can be restored through the dreams of the poet/writer who professes his poetic art by 'Convertir el ultraje de los años/ En una música, un rumor y un Símbolo' ('Arte poética', *OP*, 161). 'Undr', with its personal and nostalgic tone, is distinguished from the objective dispassion of the Sagas from which its subject matter is drawn, although the concise style is still reminiscent of them: 'El estilo es breve, claro, casi oral' (*LAG*, 87). The tone is far closer to that of Anglo-Saxon elegiac verse, with its near-relish of loss. Borges explains his vocation to preserve lost worlds, describing an Old Saxon, as it happens, in his short piece 'El testigo': 'Antes del alba morirá y con él morirán, y no volverán, las últimas imágenes inmediatas de los ritos paganos; el mundo será un poco más pobre cuando este sajón haya muerto' (II, 331).

It is perhaps not surprising for us to find the notion of the eternal recurrence in 'Undr', although it is far less prominent than the nostalgic tone: one religion supplanting another; or a king and a name replacing another; the phrase, 'Siempre uno acaba por asemejarse a sus enemigos' (II, 506) and Ulf Sigurdarson's comment upon his adventures that 'En el curso del tiempo he sido muchos, pero ese torbellino fue un largo sueño' (II, 508). Whether or not historical time is circular does not seem to matter, because for each individual it is linear and has an end as well as a beginning. Each human being has to discover the meaning of life — or lack of meaning.

It is interesting to note that in 'Undr' there is no reference

to proper daytime. Adam of Bremen meets Ulf Sigurdarson when 'por las desparejas hendijas de la pared fueron entrando el frío y el alba' (II, 506). Ulf reaches the land of the Urnos during the night and leaves Orm's house when 'Aún había estrellas en el alba' (II, 506). He is surprised to find, on leaving the king's quarters, that he has spent the whole day there with him: 'Vi con asombro que la luz estaba declinando' (II, 507). His revelation comes to him at 'cierta aurora a orillas de un río' (II, 509) and when he arrives on his second visit to the Urnos it is night again. Is Borges suggesting that man's daytime activities are in some way less important for belonging to the 'fatal and illusory days' ('Heráclito', *OP*, 321), whereas twilight and night are deeper and transcendental?: 'Entre el alba y la noche hay un abismo / De agonías, de luces, de cuidados' ('El instante', *OP*, 423).

Ulf Sigurdarson's many and varied experiences during his travels seem to be almost a compendium of events drawn from various extant Sagas, combining the lives of many well- and lesser-known figures from Old Icelandic literature; but it is not these which eventually reveal the Word to him. In fact, his life seems to have little to do with the Word at all. It is Time which brings him the answer after many years: 'Cierta aurora a orillas de un río que se dilatava en un mar creí haber dado con la revelación' (II, 509). In the works of Borges, especially in his poetry, we find repeated references to Heraclitus' river of time. In 'Arte poética', which ends with a reference to 'un mismo Heráclito inconstante', we find these lines:

A veces en las tardes una cara
Nos mira desde el fondo de un espejo;
El arte debe ser como ese espejo
que nos revela nuestra propia cara. (*OP*, 161)

And a similar idea appears in the poem 'A quien está leyéndome':

¿No es acaso
 Tu irreversible tiempo el de aquel río
 En cuyo espejo Heráclito vio el símbolo
 De su fugacidad? (OP, 253)

Perhaps we can even see, in Ulf Sigurdarson's adventures as 'catador de aguas hondas y de metales' and his captivity in 'las minas de azogue' (II, 508), an indication of what he will ultimately find *reflected* in the river. With the help of time Ulf has found the Word, perhaps in a similar fashion to Borges when he claims to have found his ultimate literary style: 'El tiempo me ha enseñado algunas astucias' (Prologue to 'Elogio de la sombra' [1969], OP, 315). It is curious that Borges should choose to say 'time' and not 'experience' in this context, but that is consistent with the present reading of 'Undr'. The relation of the Word to flowing water seems clear enough: 'El hombre alzaba y alejaba la voz y los acordes casi iguales eran monótonos, mejor aún, infinitos. Yo hubiera querido que el canto siguiera para siempre y *que fuera mi vida*' (II, 507) (my italics). And when Bjarni Thorkelsson reveals the word, Ulf Sigurdarson feels *arrebataado* (my italics) by his song, as if it were the river: 'El río me arrebató y soy ese río' ('Heráclito', OP, 322).

III.

Let us now return to the ancient poetry and kennings which were outlined at the beginning of this essay as one of the characteristically Icelandic themes of 'Undr'. The poets in the story and the craft they practise offer, in fact, far more obvious

references to Old Icelandic literature than the parallels with paganism identified earlier.

Ulf Sigurdarson is a scald, or master of the ancient and complex poetical tradition which was characterised by its strict alliteration and use of kennings or metaphorical archetypes. Icelanders were held in particular renown as court poets on the mainland of Northern Europe, and many prominent characters in the Sagas spend time serving as scalds to kings, composing for them, like Ulf Sigurdarson for King Gunnlaug, a *drápa* or eulogy which 'celebraba las victorias, la fama y la misericordia del rey', as Borges himself puts it (II, 506). Two famous scalds of the Sagas spring to mind immediately in connection with 'Undr'. The first is Gunnlaugur Ormstunga ('Gunnlaug Serpent-Tongue'), whose Saga relates how he composed a *drápa* for King Ethelred of England and was formally rewarded with the gift of a scarlet mantle. Gunnlaugur Ormstunga's name is echoed in 'Undr' in the names of both the king and Orm the blacksmith. Secondly there is Egill Skallagrímsson, who went to York and fell into the hands of his arch-enemy, the Viking King Eirík Bloodaxe, but had his life spared after he composed and delivered a masterful *drápa* known as 'Head-Ransom' which sang the king's praises.

One of the main yardsticks of a good scald was his skill and imagination in creating kennings. While Egill Skallagrímsson is generally regarded as having saved his head by sheer dexterity of language, it is perhaps significant to note that Ulf Sigurdarson is 'only' rewarded with a silver ring and not the more customary gold ring, as if his chosen artistic medium of the kenning had quite literally been devalued in the eyes of the Urns with their single poetic word. The basic characteristic of the kenning is that it defines a single object or event by the related connotations of two or more others: from the long list cited by Borges, we can choose, to illustrate this principle, 'the gull of hate' (I, 340) as an epithet for the raven (which was said to feed on the corpses of

dead warriors). The elements of the kenning, as well as the connoted object, are generally archetypal or metonymical, drawn in Old Icelandic sources at least from a relatively small stock of concepts with numerous synonyms. Kennings can moreover be multiple or layered, when an additional word is made to qualify a basic kenning another step beyond the object it denotes, a device which Borges calls the 'segundo grado' (I, 344): since the raven is a 'gull of hate', then the warrior responsible for the corpses on which the raven feeds becomes a 'nourisher of gulls of hate' (I, 344). The concept 'reductive' was used earlier in this essay to describe the way in which all poetry is concentrated into the single word of the Urnos; in a parallel fashion, the kenning can be thought of as 'expansive' in its tendency to multiply the relationships between objects or events.

Kennings appear intermittently in Borges' work. As Jaime Alazraki has pointed out¹⁷ they appear implicitly in the story 'La viuda Ching, pirata'. In other works they appear more explicitly, as in 'El Zahir' or the poems 'Un sajón (449 A.D.)', 'Fragmento' and 'A un poeta sajón'. To some extent we can see Borges' use of kennings as an attempt to recreate the visions, if not the actuality, of the past. Like certain languages, kennings are an example of literary or rhetorical figures which die out, and Borges is consistent in his frequent desire to rescue both from oblivion.

The references to kennings in 'Undr' — when Bjarni Thorkelsson says, for example, 'En tu ditirambo apodaste agua de la espada a la sangre y batalla de hombres a la batalla. Recuerdo haber oído esas figuras al padre de mi padre' (II, 508) — are juxtaposed with the single word of the Urnos to establish a conflict which hinges upon the nature of language itself and its ability, or inability, to represent reality. This conflict appears elsewhere in Borges, for example in the poem 'Mateo, XXV, 30':

Y desde el centro de mi ser, una voz infinita
Dijo estas cosas (estas cosas, no estas palabras,

Que son mi pobre traducción temporal de una sola
palabra). (*OP*, 194)

What was it, then, that the narrator Ulf understood when Bjarni Thorkelsson whispered the Word, 'Undr' (Wonder), and he answered with a different word? Was it a realisation that all words, single or multiple, are only representations of all which passes away, including language, that the word when eventually found becomes a 'poor temporal translation' of another elusive word, that the poet is a craftsman of the transitory, and that the discovery is independent of the quest?

NOTES

1. All references to Borges' prose works are to Jorge Luis Borges, *Prosa completa*, I-II (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1980), hereafter referred to as I and II.
2. *El otro, el mismo* (1964), in Jorge Luis Borges, *Obra poética, 1923-1977* (Madrid: Alianza, 1985). All references to Borges' poetry written before 1977 are to this edition, hereafter referred to as *OP*.
3. Jorge Luis Borges, *Los conjurados* (Madrid: Alianza, 1985), 51.
4. Jorge Luis Borges: con la colaboración de María Esther Vázquez, *Literaturas germánicas medievales* (Madrid: Alianza, 1980), hereafter referred to as *LGM*.
5. Odin's paradise, Valhalla, is exclusively for those who die in battle; they arrive there with their weapons and spend the day in combat, waking restored the next morning to continue the cycle.
6. The link between 'El Sur' and Snorri Sturluson's *Gylfaginning* has been suggested in my article 'La alucinación del lector. Jorge Luis Borges and the legacy of Snorri Sturluson', in *Ibero-Amerikanisches Archiv, N.F.*, 12, 3 (1986), 247-60.
7. 'La *Völsunga Saga* es una de las máximas epopeyas de la literatura' (*LGM*, 132).

8. In the ending of 'El Zahir' the narrator hopes that he will reduce the Zahir's power to nothing by repeating its name: 'para perderse en Dios, los suffes repiten su propio nombre o los noventa y nueve nombres divinos hasta que éstos ya nada quieren decir. Yo anhelo recorrer esta senda' (II, 85).

9. As D.L. Shaw puts it in *Borges: Ficciones*, Critical Guides to Spanish Texts, 14 (London; Grant and Cutler, 1976), 20.

10. Shaw, 55.

11. Peter Standish, ' "El Congreso" in the works of J.L. Borges', *Hispanic Review*, LV, 3 (1987), 357.

12. Shaw, 72.

13. In the poem 'El lector' it is in fact oblivion which forms 'la otra cara secreta de la moneda' (OP, 359).

14. Shaw, 39.

15. Ramona Lagos, *Jorge Luis Borges 1923-1980* (Barcelona: Edicions del Mall, 1986), 273.

16. Lagos, 272.

17. Jaime Alazraki, *La prosa narrativa de Jorge Luis Borges. Temas y estilo* (Madrid: Gredos, 1983), 425.

Sailing Away on a Boat to Nowhere: *El beso de la mujer araña* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, from Novel to Film

PHILIP SWANSON

University of Edinburgh

The Cuban novelist Severo Sarduy has described Manuel Puig's landmark second novel, *Boquitas pintadas*, as at the same time a 'folletín casi perfecto' and 'el doble irrisorio del folletín'¹ — a serious-minded re-evaluation of the novelette form which nonetheless mocks that form. Sarduy's remarks alert us immediately to the essentially ambivalent and problematic nature of Puig's work. Hence also, the titles of Pamela Bacarisse's two important books on Puig are the contradictory-sounding *The Necessary Dream* and *Impossible Choices*, referring to dreams which, though illusory, are somehow necessary and choices which, though impossible to make, simply must be made.² Indeed, behind Bacarisse's conclusion on Puig, that 'his head and his heart are at odds',³ there may be an even deeper suspicion that Puig's novels point simultaneously in all sorts of opposing and self-thwarting directions. This may be taken by some as an indication of the characteristic ambiguity of the Latin-American 'new novel' whose genesis is intimately connected with a loss of faith in the supposedly simplistic, black-and-white perceptions of reality that underlay the fiction of so-called traditional realism. But equally Puig's texts can be seen simply as ones which consistently deconstruct any ideology