

Poems written to poets

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The poet and his language

Chroniclers and writers, philosophers and poets have been celebrated by Borges in a series of connected poems the diversity through which Borges perhaps emphasized his own genealogy, and in secret the language of each recipients which he wished to pay homage to. In diverse instances Borges has revealed that Spanish is not a language in which he moves comfortably; on other occasions he has confessed that Spanish was perhaps not the most appropriate vehicle for his writing. Furthermore constant observations about the Spanish language have accompanied many of the essays written during his youth, which was observed by the essayist and critic Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot (1998). And yet in the beautiful poem 'Al idioma Alemán' [To the German language] (Borges 1989/96: 2.494) Borges establishes the priority of Spanish as the destiny that stamped him into shape and distinguished him: 'Mi destino es la lengua castellana / El bronce de Francisco de Quevedo' [My destiny is the Castilian language / Francisco de Quevedo's bronze]. In the same poem where he acknowledges English as being his blood inheritance, and without particularly mentioning any other languages, he declares German to be the chosen one, the one he had looked for and learned in solitude.

A través de vigiliyas y gramáticas,
De la jungla de las declinaciones,
Del diccionario, que no acierta nunca
Con el matiz preciso, fui acercándome.

[Amid vigils and grammars
Through the jungle of declinations
Through the dictionary that never finds
The precise hue, I slowly gained proximity.]

Nevertheless Borges also exalted his literary past by means of the Spanish writers that moved him most. Likewise, he also praised Argentine writers and poets who were his friends or to whom he felt intellectually close.

Yet when in 'All our yesterdays' (Borges 1989/96: 3.106) Borges questions himself so personally about his identity, about the period of time during his childhood and adolescence, which he spent alternately in Geneva and in Buenos Aires, he reveals remarkable emotional hesitation:

Quiero saber de quién es mi pasado
¿De cuál de los que fui? ¿Del ginebrino ...

[I want to know who my past belongs to
To which of those selves I once was? To the Genevan ...?]

When the time comes to bestow a title to his poem, he does so in English, as though he wished to emphasize his constant dialogue with English culture.

Proximity and distance

In most of the celebrations what is evident is the greater or lesser proximity that Borges creates between himself and the author he is praising. For the sake of methodological clarity the material has been organized in four series, according to the greater or lesser emotional distance that the poetic voice creates with the other poet, taking the communicative criterion into consideration. Starting from these series we will analyze how Borges suppresses the enunciative distance and bestows greater density to sentiment. Fundamentally what we shall study is the semiotic point of view while isotopy is being considered, as from Greimas.

Browning's monologues have inspired him to identify with the poem's subject, that modality which conveys such intimacy and provides intensity as the singularity of the person evoked is discovered. In 'Browning resuelve ser poeta' [Browning resolves to become a poet] (Borges 1989/96: 3.82), 'James Joyce' (Borges 1989/96: 2.361), 'Poema conjetural' [Conjectural poem] (Borges 1989/96: 2.245) which at the same time are far from all Narcissistic unfolding, or in that most beautiful sonnet dedicated to 'Alexander Selkirk' (Borges 1989/96: 2.274), included in the same book, that follows the same procedure: the protagonist's voice resounds.

Cervantes, on the other hand, is presented following an objective treatment of apparent distance, though it has happily been impossible to elude its emotion, in 'Un soldado de Urbina' [A soldier of Urbina] (Borges 1989/96: 2.256) with Cervantes he not only shares the language but the creative process as well, which, in Borges's case is always like a dream. It places him in that unfortunate age in which the soldier of Urbina is forced to wander through the hardened Spain of the Renaissance, when 'solo y pobre' [alone and poor] he had not yet glimpsed that Don Quijote and Sancho have already kindled his fantasy.

Sospechándose indigno de otra hazaña
Como aquella en el mar, este soldado
A sórdidos oficios resignado
Erraba oscuro por su dura España.

(Borges 1989/96: 2.256)

[Suspecting himself unworthy of another feat
Such as the one accomplished at sea
The soldier became resigned to sordid tasks
While wandering obscurely through his hardened Spain.]

This is the first quatrain of the sonnet where Borges has recovered not the personage in his social representation, but the anonymous humanized character who still ignores his literary destiny and searches for oblivion — another Borgean preferred subject — far from the real world, immersed in the illusory epics of Roland and of Brittany. The same emotion one discovers in his poem in honor of Cervantes, as he followed his steps before *Don Quijote de la Mancha* was written, discloses the measure of his judgment appearing in the prologue to the 'Novelas ejemplares' [exemplary novels] (Borges 1975). After extensively considering Chesterton's, Quevedo's and Virgil's style, he comes round to Cervantes. He acknowledges the fact that his style includes repetitions, hiatus, mistakes in construction, useless epithets. At length he declares: 'there isn't one of his sentences that would not bare correction ...; and yet, thus incriminated, the text is nevertheless most efficacious, though we do not know why this is. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra belongs to that category of writers that reason cannot explain' (Borges 1975: 45).

Here we have the statement of the essayist that not only accompanies the measure of consideration in which he holds the poets he admires, but also discloses the tone that makes him and his poetry vibrate: emotion. It is with emotion itself and no other feeling that he sets the

tone used in writing 'Una rosa y Milton' [A rose and Milton] (Borges 1989/96: 2.269), a sonnet evoking the English poet. Milton's silhouette is intimately bound to the rose he carries to his face, in spite of already being blind. A kind of reciprocity here unites both poets: blindness and love for the flower after which Borges named one of his books of poetry: *La rosa profunda* (Borges 1989/96: 3.77-117).

An object, which is almost magic because of its beauty, is what our poet wishes to save from oblivion, also feeling that this purpose was a part of his literary destiny: to name Milton's rose for the first time, when Milton who is already blind, draws it to his face, as he would have done, in spite of being unable to see it. That 'invisible' condition attributed to the rose because of Milton's blindness, is transformed because of the accent on the final part of the line, into an adjective which is just as valid as 'bermeja, amarilla y blanca' [bright red, yellow, white], 'tenebrosa' [gloomy] because it is the last one; and by that same quality that Borges the poet bestows onto words, by displacing the play of his senses, the nouns 'oro, sangre, marfil' [gold, blood, and ivory] in this case have the value of adjectives. He who pays homage to the rose and to Milton, demands peremptorily and by means of poetic language that the final dark rose shall shine in the alluded line, lighting up the whole poem. The conceptual play of opposites displaced by Borges has been able to make Milton's invisible rose shine, while both poets could have pressed it to their faces.¹

In other instances, the motive for the poem is someone who Borges addresses in the first person establishing the 'thou' treatment annulling distance, whether of time or of language, as in the sonnet dedicated to the Icelandic poet and historian of the thirteenth century, Snorri Sturluson, first compiler of the kenningars. In the sonnet the 'thou' anaphoras annuls the linguistic, historic, and geographic distance between reader and the person invoked:

Tú, que legaste una mitología de
hielo y fuego a la filial memoria,
tú, que fijaste la violenta gloria de
tu estirpe pirática y bravía.

(Borges 1989/96: 2.285)

[Thou hast bequeathed a mythology
Of ice and fire to the filial memory
Thou hast established the violent glory
Of thy lineage of piracy and bravery.]

A poem devoted to the memory of Francisco López Merino, who disappeared when he was twenty-three years old, author of *Las tardes y Tono menor*, is included in *Cuaderno San Martín* (Borges 1989/96: 1.93). This young poet from La Plata City, whose work Borges never ceased to evoke,² chose suicide. This tragic event compels Borges to pay homage to one of the ethical questions that had always worried him, that is to say, death by one's own hand, and the need to pay silent respect toward the final decision of another. It is useless, says the young Borges, to contradict the desires of he who is now absent, so he begins his poem with two conditionals that start with the word 'if'. Here he tries to penetrate the death-wish of Francisco López Merino, mistrusting the efficacy of his words 'es inútil que palabras rechazadas te soliciten / predestinadas a imposibilidad y a derrota' (It is useless that rejected words should importune you / words predestined to impossibility and defeat). Death as a dream, as 'olvido del mundo' [oblivion of the world] can justify the desire to disappear and those who demand the presence of the 'amigo escondido' [hidden friend] (take notice of the tender, felicitous and respectful way he mentioned the dead poet) should not desecrate his memory, the darkness into whose folds he supposedly has wrapped himself.

To another poet who disappeared in the very midst of his youth Borges dedicates the sonnet 'A John Keats (1796-1821)' [to John Keats (1796-1821)] in *El oro de los tigres* (Borges 1989/96: 2.473). The poet who writes in English (a language that is 'my blood heritage' Borges says of himself) is remembered in the streets of London, where beauty awakens in 'El arrebatado Keats' [the rapturous Keats] the odes to a nightingale (Keats in the suburban garden in Hampstead heard the eternal nightingale celebrated by Ovid and Shakespeare). He felt his own mortality and opposed it to 'the tenuous ever lasting voice of the bird', Borges had declared in 1952 in 'El ruiseñor de Keats' [Keats' nightingale] in *Otras inquisiciones* (Borges 1989/96: 2.95) and to a Greek urn which has been mentioned as often as the beloved Fanny Brawne. Perhaps Borges did not consider passion to be one of the lesser aspects to be noticed in this English poet. He concludes:

El alto ruiseñor y la urna griega
Serán tu eternidad, oh fugitivo.
Fuiste el fuego. En la pánica memoria
No eres hoy la ceniza. Eres la gloria.

[The high flying nightingale and the Greek urn
Shall be thy eternity, Oh fugitive.

Thou hast been fire. In the panic memory
Cinders thou are not. Thou art glory.]

'A un viejo poeta' [To an aged poet] (Borges 1989/96: 2.201) where the figure of Quevedo rises from one of his own rhymes 'y su epitafio la sangrienta luna' [And his epitaph the bloody moon] perhaps earned a slight reproach because of the reference to the symbol of the Turks 'eclipsed by some piracy or other committed by don Pedro Tellez Girón', Borges will say in *Otras inquisiciones* (Borges 1989/96: 2.38), although he admitted the splendid efficacy of the distic ('Su tumba son de Flandes las Campañas / y su Epitafio la sangrienta Luna') [His grave the campaigns in Flanders / His epitaph the bloody moon], in the sonnet 'Immortal Memory of Don Pedro Girón, Duke of Osuna, who died in prison' (Quevedo 1981: 103).

As in the sonnet to the Icelandic poet Snorri Sturluson, the chosen treatment is 'thou', though it is still more vivid than the formerly mentioned. Quevedo is seen by a careful look that seems to provide him with life, and with an aureole, by the thought of poetic creation that guides him and distracts him from his surroundings:

Caminas por el campo de Castilla
Y casi no lo ves. Un intrincado
Versículo de Juan es tu cuidado
Y apenas reparaste en la amarilla
Puesta de sol. La vaga luz delira ...

(Borges 1989/96: 2.201)

[You walk through the Castilian countryside
Almost unseen.
John's verse is your care
And the yellow sundown went almost unnoticed
Sunset. The vague light is delirious ...]

In 'Ricardo Güiraldes' (Borges 1989/96: 2.366) Borges emphasizes the most conspicuous aspects of the personality of this Argentine writer, with whom he kept up a discontinuous and difficult friendship. As Borges evokes Güiraldes, calling him 'un alma clara como el día' [a soul as bright as day], praising his courteousness, serenity, even his guitar (remarked as emphatic characteristics belonging unequivocally to Güiraldes) he does so warmly and tenderly, using the first person. The proximity that is established shows the friendship bond: 'No he de olvidar ...' [I shall never forget ...], 'Te veo conversando con nosotros / en Quintana'

[I see you conversing with us in Quintana]. And in a synthesis that is clearly literary, which includes the novel that made him famous, Borges exalts the mythic Gaucho past that the novel supports:

Tuyo, Ricardo, ahora es el abierto
Campo de ayer, el alba de los potros.

[Yours now, Ricardo, is the open
Countryside of yesterdays, a sunrise of colts.]

In the spirit of an authorized quotation, Borges reminds us at the beginning of his poem 'A Manuel Mujica Lainez' [to Manuel Mujica Lainez] (Borges 1989/96: 3.133) of the different meanings that scripture has for the reader, for the book as such and when it is being read, according to Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534–1572). In this singularly appraising manner, he begins his homage to the Argentine poet and novelist, written by a Borges that thus recognizes one of the poets who has been most constant in singing the praise of Argentine tradition and history. Upon comparing Mujica Lainez' work with his own, as far as it concerns the celebration of the fatherland, he defines the poverty of his own outlook 'una nostalgia de ignorantes cuchillos / y de viejo coraje' [a nostalgia of ignorant knives / and ancient courage] while the poet he celebrates has written in another spirit, according to Borges:

Tu versión de la patria, con sus fastos y brillos,
entra en mi vaga sombra como si entrara el día.

[Your version of homeland, with its pageantry and splendor
Enters my wavering dusk as if the day had entered.]

Much more insistently than he did for Güiraldes, Borges augurs a secure place in history for Mujica Lainez, whose memory he shall possess at last, and in the first person plural, he shares the disillusion of having been present when the homeland that had once been theirs, was lost:

Manuel Mujica Lainez alguna vez tuvimos
una patria — ¿recuerdas? — y los dos la perdimos

[Manuel Mujica Lainez, we once had
A homeland, remember? we both lost]

The same emotional and intellectual proximity even deeper perhaps, he seems to declare in his work written in praise of another poet of

the English tongue, born in the USA, Ralph Waldo Emerson (Borges 1989/96: 2.289). Borges imagines 'ese alto caballero americano' [this tall American gentleman] reading a book by Montaigne, until sundown on the plain captures his senses and he abandons his reading to walk through the fields in the setting sun's light. The two central rhymes of the sonnet, two endecasyllabic verses — one heroic the other sapphic — together create a harmony of composition because of their respective accentuation and rest upon each other's meaning, placing the poet who is being praised nearer the one who is paying homage, joining them both in a same thought. These rhymes — the third and fourth of the second quatrain — establish the displacement of one poet towards the other, in a moment that happens physically and in memory at once, as if in specular conjuration:

Camina por los campos como ahora
Por la memoria de quien esto escribe.

[Walks through the fields as now
He walks through the memory of him who writes.]

Emerson's reflection becomes coincident with Borges's own, present in other of his poems: the writer's work, reading and writing, tend to conserve memory, challenging 'oscuro olvido' [dark oblivion]. Fame and the belief that a god has given possible knowledge to mortals are recognizable motives to feel blissful, yet at the same time a conviction of not having really lived and a desire to be somebody else escorts both poets, like a deep wound: 'Por todo el continente anda mi nombre; / no he vivido. Quisiera ser otro hombre' [throughout the whole continent my name travels; / I have not lived I wish I were another man] Borges's voice following Emerson's fantasy perhaps resembles Emerson's rhythm following Borges's fantasy.

Another American poet, Edgar Allan Poe (Borges 1989/96: 2.290) is also someone Borges seems to feel near to. In his sonnet he describes with great clarity the remarkable particulars of the storyteller who celebrated darkness. Very gently, also in two lines (as in the sonnet in Emerson's honor) the approach that creates proximity and identification as well, is ventured: 'Temía la otra sombra, la amorosa, / las comunes venturas de la gente' [He feared the other shadow, the dusk of loving, /the common hazard run by people]. Once again true to himself, the rose reappears, more powerful than ever in its fragility, more powerful than marble or metal. Between the ordinary oppositions he here shows the contrast between the hardness of metal and marble when faced by the rose's fragility, to reunite in this play of opposites, the fortitude and power

of that which is fragile against the weakness of the apparently hard and strong.

No lo cegó el metal resplandeciente
Ni el mármol sepulcral sino la rosa.

[He was not blinded by the shining metal
Nor by sepulchral marble, only by the rose.]

The last stanzas of the sonnet that are a reminder of the act of creation, or perhaps of the kind of life the writer chooses to be near his art, also show the shared Borgean vibration when faced by the mystery of poetry. Not like the too-witty Spanish conceptist poet Baltasar Gracián, whom he imagines as splurging in his plays among words even in his afterlife (*laberintos, retruécanos, emblemas*) [labyrinths, word plays, and emblems], he also imagines that Poe perhaps:

Siga erigiendo solitario y fuerte
Espléndidas y atroces maravillas.

[Keeps erecting, strong and alone,
Splendid and atrocious marvels.]

The third American (following the order of this selection) celebrated by Borges is Walt Whitman. The sonnet titled 'Camden, 1892' (Borges 1989/96: 2.291) refers to the place in New Jersey where Whitman spent the last years of his life. Another Borges, with a greater proximity to daily life, shows himself as he evokes the intimate scene: the coffee, the newspapers, Sunday mornings, the vane poetry written by another poet in the newspapers. The great poet, who is already old, presents himself portraying his poverty and his empty gestures like a scene contemplated in a mirror. The barrier between the past and the present suffering, also shows admiringly the resigned understanding the poet has of his old age and how he judges his art with true knowledge:

Casi no soy, pero mis versos ritman
La vida y su esplendor. Yo fui Walt Whitman.

[I almost am no more but my rhymes keep the rhythm
Of life and its splendor. I was Walt Whitman.]

'Camden, 1892' is almost an inversion to the sonnet dedicated to Cervantes ('Un soldado de Urbina') [A soldier of Urbina] (Borges

1989/96: 2.256), where the author of *Don Quijote* ignores or imagines mistily the novel he will write. In this case Borges summons the end of Walt Whitman's life, where the poet can already evoke his task as accomplished 'la peculiar poesía de la arbitrariedad y la privación' [the peculiar poetry of arbitrariness and want], Borges had written in 'El otro Whitman' [The other Whitman] (Borges 1989/96: 1.208). It is the end of the life of one of the poets that Borges most admired in his youth, as María Luisa Bastos has acutely observed in the study, 'Whitman, signo visible y marca secreta en la poesía de Borges' [1989/96: 109–121].³

In the sonnet 'Rafael Cansinos-Asséns (Borges 1989/96: 2.293) — in *Luna de enfrente*, 1935, a homonymous poem exists — the image of the Spanish poet, critic and novelist appears, exalted because of having read 'Los Psalmos y el Cantar de la Escritura' [The Psalms, and the Songs in Scripture]. Cansinos-Asséns had loved Hebrew voices as much as he loved God's own. Movingly, in the two last rhymes of the sonnet, Borges expresses almost as a prayer, the fervor he felt for his poet:

Acompáñeme siempre su memoria;
Las otras cosas las dirá la gloria.

[Let me always keep his memory
The other things shall be said by glory.]

Borges felt admiration for Cansinos-Asséns and he kept unfading memories to the days of his youth when he resided in Spain and embraced ultraism. 'The most important event for me was Rafael Cansinos-Asséns's friendship. I still feel happy to call myself his disciple' we read in 'Las memorias de Borges' (Borges 1974). The assimilation of this poet with the Hebrew people is not a mere referred accident. It is instead the central motive of the development that makes this evocation show Borges's intimate attachment, as he so often has demonstrated in the poem 'Baruch Spinoza' (Borges 1989/96: 3.151), for example.

Nine endecasyllabic quatrains have been dedicated by Borges to Baltasar Gracián, whose distant, faraway figure the poet takes up after his death, differing in this with his treatment of Quevedo and Cervantes. The great distance and a kind of mocking pity compose a portrait where Gracián is evoked because of the light tricks of his style and his many conceptist word play, which places him in an area that is almost nonpoetic. It is a circular text that Borges opens and closes with the repetition of the same rhyme. In opposition to the poems celebrating other Spanish writers, this poem reveals less emotion and seems to have been written with the same practice of poetic knowledge which Gracián doesn't lack and that Borges acknowledges, even after learning about the disdain in

which this conceptist poet held voices such as Homer's or Virgil's and of the indifference shown towards passions that often sustain art.

First series

Of all these poems 'Un soldado de Urbina' [A soldier from Urbina] seen from a distance, still movingly portrayed and 'Una rosa y Milton' [A rose and Milton], both centered on Borges himself, are surely those who offer the greater semantic density and at the same time an insistent conditional proposition (verbs such as 'I would contemplate' in the first, the repetition of alternate adverse conjunctions such as 'or' in the second). There is no final evaluation in these poems as they end with open possibilities, and they may be considered in their paradigmatic dimension, or in their greater loveliness when compared to other poems revealing aesthetic and emotional uncertainty: it is the uncertainty of the poet that celebrates with a certain amount of shyness the highly respected words of another. Of this first series we shall analyze 'Un soldado de Urbina' [A soldier from Urbina] at the end of this work.

Second series

Following the discursive method of organization and meaning that lead to the collection of the second series, impels us to gather 'Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241)', 'A Francisco López Merino', 'A John Keats (1795-1821)', 'A un viejo poeta', 'Ricardo Güiraldes', 'A Manuel Mujica Lainez' and even 'A Luis de Camoens' (Borges 1989/96: 2.210) (who has not been included in this text), a dialogistic dimension and a proximity is observed, which Borges the poet establishes with those he celebrates. Doubtlessly, communication is established with these poets, in perhaps a more human and close manner, showing less admiration than that shown to those in the first series, but plainer and strictly limited to the shared literary work as in an open invitation to convivial amity (I remember the well-chosen designation of Giovanni Pascoli). The exception is Francisco López Merino, to whom he also feels attached by the persistent phantom of suicide.

Third series

A third series is composed of 'Emerson' and 'Camden 1892', which keeps the figure of the poet in a kind of fixed image. Here the poet is addressed

with a most plastic verbalism, as if he were a painting, and the address closes in the first person. This same group could include those authors who are not present in this textual corpus: 'Sarmiento', 'Swedenborg', 'Spinoza' (all included in Borges 1989/96: 2.277, 287, and 308) and 'Susana Bombal' (Borges 1989/96: 2.472).

Fourth series

More intellectual homages could be collected in a fourth series, composed of 'Edgar Allan Poe', 'Rafael Cansino-Asséns', and 'Baltasar Gracián'. All of these authors are placed in the past, and the preferred form used is the simple past, like in 'Elvira de Alvear' and 'Susana Soca' (Borges 1989/96: 2.194 and 2.195), which have not been included in this text, and an abundance of negatives are conspicuous: 'no lo cegó el metal resplandeciente / Ni el mármol sepulcral sino la rosa' [He was not blinded by the shining metal, / or the sepulchral marble, but by the rose] in 'Edgar Allan Poe' (Borges 1989/96: 2.290); 'No hubo música en su alma ... / No lo movió la antigua voz de Homero ... / no vio al fatal Edipo en el exilio. / Ni a Cristo que se muere en un madero' [There was no music in his soul ... / Homer's ancient voice did not move him ... / He didn't see fatal Edipus in exile / Nor did he see Christ dying on the cross] in 'Baltasar Gracián' (Borges 1989/96: 2.259). We here perceive an evaluation performed by the poet's interpretation. Only a most negative treatment is observable in the poem dedicated to Gracián because Borges disagrees with his aesthetics.

The different dimensions and the diverse web of relations that Borges establishes emotionally from a dialogic point of view, or in order to communicate or for intellectual reasons, shall culminate in the moving lines of the poem quoted at the beginning of this work, which is included in 'All our yesterdays' (Borges 1989/96: 3.106). An underlying dynamic — I dare say — seems to gather, as was the case in the recollective schemes of classical sonnets, the poets of the past thus honoring the figure of 'the poet'. This produces a confusion and mingling of emotions, loyalties, and destinies that go far beyond languages and nationalities.

In the universe of poetry that this corpus trims to size, we are able to read a search for identity, 'Quiero saber de quién es mi pasado' [I wish to know who my past belongs to] ('All our yesterdays'). The web shows the construction of the poet's identity. The celebrations addressed to writers are mostly in honor of poets and this web is able to show Borges's

identity as writer, in 'All our yesterdays',

Soy los que ya no son. Inútilmente
Soy en la tarde esa perdida gente.

[I am those that no longer are. Uselessly
I am those lost people in the afternoon.]

The poem establishes an equivalence with the other poets in life's different stages. Borges seems to declare that if an identity exists, it is that which is formed by the plural articulate utterances of different voices that together constitute the identity, like Kristeva's discursive alter-junctions (1978: 69).

'Un soldado de Urbina' [A soldier of Urbina]

In order to preserve disciplinary order we will adopt the definition of 'isotopy' as proposed by A. J. Greimas (1966), which in turn, was also used by François Rastier (1972) as the repetition of a linguistic unit. As Rastier acknowledges in his analysis of the isotopies of the contents, we will stop in order to point out the syntagmatic development of 'Un soldado de Urbina' [A soldier of Urbina]:

Sospechándose indigno de otra hazaña
Como aquella en el mar, este soldado,
A sórdidos oficios resignado,
Erraba oscuro por su dura España.
Para borrar o mitigar la saña
De lo real buscaba lo soñado
Y le dieron un mágico pasado
Los ciclos de Rolando y de Bretaña.

Contemplaría, hundido el sol, el ancho
Campo en que dura un resplandor de cobre;
Se creía acabado, solo y pobre,

Sin saber de qué música era dueño;
Atravesando el fondo de algún sueño,
Por él ya andaban Don Quijote y Sancho.

(Borges 1989/96: 2.256)

[Suspecting himself unworthy of another feat
Such as the one accomplished at sea,

The soldier became resigned to sordid tasks,
 While wandering obscurely through his hardened Spain.
 To efface or appease the fury
 Of that which is real, he searched past dreams
 And was given a magic past
 The cycles of Roland and Brittany.

He would contemplate, once the sun was sunk
 The wide countryside where a copper radiance perdures;
 Feeling finished, alone and poor,

Without knowing what music he owned;
 Crossing the depth of some dream,
 Where already Don Quijote and Sancho roamed.]

We find two isotopies that rest upon each other. The name of the semantic field of the first is *arms*.

Soldier	= Feat.
Unworthy	= This line implies the impossibility of being acclaimed once more for showing skill at arms.
Crafts	= The mere mention of this semema is bound to the traditional contempt Spaniards in Cervantes' times held for manual labor.
Darkness	= In shadow.
That which is real	= Designates the darkness of sordid tasks.
Past dreams	= The cycles of Roland and Brittany, the world of chivalry.
The past	= The magic time in which his own figure grows larger because of the heroic deeds of fiction.
Radiance	= Implies sunshine reflecting the deeds of the past, during the cycles of Roland and Brittany.
Finished	= Implies the same perspective as unworthy, despicable.
Music	= A way of designating the capacity to create.
Dream	= The impulse of creativity.
Don Quijote and Sancho	= In praise of the greatest novel written in the Spanish Language.

The semantic field of the second isotopy designates the *literary work*.

Soldier	= In the same way a soldier practices the use of his arms, the practitioner or militant writer.
Unworthy	= Not given proper recognition for his previous work.
Crafts	= The job of writing.
Dark	= The work of the writer bound to a late recognition.
That which is real	= The name given to what Cervantes takes from the novels about Chivalry in order to fight against it.
What has been dreamed past	= The fantastic world of Don Quijote. = The universe of Chivalry.
Glow	= That which under another name, vertigo, is revealed in writing.
Finished	= The novel concluded to perfection.
Music	= The greatest art of arts that Cervantes' novel deserves as description.

These semic nuclei, opposed where meaning is concerned, refer to that old question, arms versus letters. In this respect in many of Borges's poems, interviews, essays, lectures, our author has disclosed the contradiction existing within himself between what he considered to be the mandate of his ancestors: 'Al Coronel Francisco Borges (1833-1874)' [To Colonel Francisco Borges (1833-1874)] (Borges 1989/96: 2.206) that is to say the fulfillment of a military destiny, and the choice made by him of becoming a writer.

From this perspective the tension of two opposing semes breaches two identities like Cervantes's own refract in Borges, which provides semantic thickness, subjective depth, and plural meanings to the poem. In choosing Cervantes as the center of his reflection, Borges perhaps secretly agrees about how he himself thought when it came to the construction of his own life as a poet.

Conclusion

In this study we have taken into consideration poets who write in Spanish and others who write in foreign languages that Borges has admired. We have observed the distance or the emotional proximity that the

poet establishes with them, and we have attempted to analyze the poem Borges dedicated to Cervantes according to a semiotic perspective — one in which the theme of identity is approached and the symmetrical relationship between Borges the writer and Cervantes the writer, is revealed.

Translated by Teodelina Carabassa

Notes

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1. As in that page whose title is 'Una rosa amarilla' [A yellow rose] (Borges 1989/96: 2.173) where Borges imagines a scene where Giambattista Marino, the day before his death, sees (Borges's boldface) the yellow rose. A woman has placed a yellow rose in a cup. He, Marino, by an act of 'illumination' distinguishes it from the books in his library — which up to that time he had considered to be a mirror of the world. This makes the poet appear more human. Homer and Dante, perhaps as well, which had been the conceited Baltasar Gracián's reading material ('Baltasar Gracián' also written by Borges): 'Tan ignorante del amor divino / como del otro que en las bocas arde, / lo sorprendió la Pálida una tarde / leyendo las estrofas del Marino' [As ignorant of divine love / as he is of that other love that burns people's mouths / he was surprised by Pale Death one afternoon / while reading Marinos's stanzas] (Borges 1989/96: 2.259). He also had a revelation that taught him the real thickness of his words.
2. Borges often celebrated the young poet Francisco Lopez Merino, during the dialogues we held between 1980 and 1985.
3. Walt Whitman was one of the American poets that exerted most influence in modern poetry written in Spanish by the poets of South America. It is impossible not to perceive that Pablo Neruda, Silvina Ocampo, and Sara de Ibáñez from Uruguay have read his work, together with a host of others.

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