

Defining Neomedievalism(s) II

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Borges and the North

Vladimir Brljak

Old English? Why don't you study something more useful,
like ancient Greek?¹

Jorge Luis Borges's affair with the Boreal Muse is no secret. The precise beginning of this affair, however, the chronology of its subsequent development, the number and nature of its plentiful and diversiform progeny, its place in the work of one of the twentieth century's major writers, its significance in understanding that century's interpretations and uses of the medieval past – these are all matters that have thus far received relatively little attention from Borgesians and medievalists alike.² In the absence of scholarship, fables thrive. Indeed, it might seem that one can actually point to a precise year, a key one in the Borges mythology: that same 1955 in which God, as he later wrote, “with such splendid irony/ granted me books and blindness at one touch” (*SP* 95).³ In 1955 Borges was appointed director of the Argentine National Library in Buenos Aires, even as his sight was deteriorating to the point of leaving him unable to read the books on its shelves. And, according to the account he gave in the lecture “Blindness” (1964), it was then that:

I thought: I have lost the visible world, but now I am going to recover another, the world of my distant ancestors, those tribes of men who rowed across the stormy northern seas [...]. I thought: “I am returning to the language my ancestors spoke fifty generations ago; I am returning to that language; I am reclaiming it. It is not the first time I speak it; when I had other names this was the language I spoke.” [...] So I began my study of Anglo-Saxon, which blindness brought me. And now I have a memory full of poetry that is elegiac, epic, Anglo-Saxon.

I had replaced the visible world with the aural world of the

Anglo-Saxon language: I went on to the *Eddas* and the sagas. I wrote *Ancient Germanic Literature* and many poems based on those themes, but most of all I enjoyed it. (*SNF* 477–8)

By this date, these were old memories: it is perhaps not to be expected that they will conform to the truth. For what it is worth, however, the true story of Borges's encounter with the North is not that of one deliberate, fateful decision but rather of a gradual, uneven development, spanning many years and a variety of works and publications. Telling it, in however crude and incomplete a form, thus requires a patient retracing of Borges's northernist footsteps rather than placing one's trust in his own accounts of the matter, which, it will be seen, are more often than not of a palpably "auto-mythographical" nature.⁴

The passage cited above is but one example: Borges says he turned to Old English about 1955, then progressed to Old Norse, and eventually wrote a book on early Germanic literatures. In fact, however, he had already published such a book – *Antiguas literaturas germánicas* [Ancient Germanic Literatures], of which, as discussed below, the later *Literaturas germánicas medievales* [Medieval Germanic Literatures] is but a partial revision – back in 1951. On other occasions, he preferred to date his involvement with the North to a much earlier point. "What secret paths led me to the love of the Scandinavian," he asks himself in the Preface to the 1966 *Seis poemas escandinavos* [Six Scandinavian Poems], and in answer to this question he mentions, among other undatable references, his father giving him a copy of the Morris–Magnússon translation of *The Saga of the Volsungs*, "some half a century ago" (*TR* 3:110), which would have been around 1916. Yet elsewhere, describing experiences that he dates explicitly to 1916, he says that Old English and Old Norse literature were something he was to find only "years and years afterwards."⁵ And even if we allow that Borges was familiar with at least some Old Germanic literature at a fairly early date, this only raises the question of why there are comparatively few traces of that familiarity in his work up to the early 1950s, in contrast to the abundance found from that date onwards. For such reasons, one needs to turn to the biographical and bibliographical records and, even more importantly, the works themselves: only once these have been given a chance to tell their own version of the story shall we arrive at a more objective understanding of what is surely one of the most interesting chapters in the history of twentieth-century medievalism.

The Making of a Northernism

Borges's northernist interests can be safely traced at least as far back as 1932, when a "Noticia de las *kennigar*"⁶ [Note on the *kenningar*] was published in the Buenos Aires journal *Sur*. What scattered references appear prior to this date do not seem to testify to much beyond a general interest in ancestral roots. Borges's paternal grandmother, Frances "Fanny" Haslam, was an Englishwoman of Northumbrian origin. Edwin Williamson notes that Borges's father was brought up "in what was to all intents and purposes an English household [...]. They all spoke English at home, and as a great reader herself, Fanny encouraged the boys to read English books."⁷ A quarter-English, Borges grew up as "Georgie" in a partly English-speaking household and would later make much of this precious ancestral link with the North. "It may be no more than a romantic superstition of mine," he notes in the "Autobiographical Essay," "but the fact that the Haslams lived in Northumbria and Mercia [...] links me with a Saxon and perhaps a Danish past."⁸ Indeed, according to Williamson, it was his grandmother's tales of England that instilled a "childhood interest" in early English history that "he would revive as a grown man in his study of Anglo-Saxon and Norse literature."⁹

Be that as it may, it was his ongoing investigations in poetic language, rather than in his ancestry, that led him to the kennings.¹⁰ During the 1920s he had published a number of texts dealing with poetic language, and in particular with metaphor, all of which, including the "Noticia," must be understood in the context of the Ultraist polemic with their "modernist" elders. Here Borges promoted such views on poetry and poetic language as were, in chief principles at least, shared by many other contemporary avant-garde movements. In opposition to the poetry of their predecessors, which was seen as conventionalized and verbose, they call for a revitalization of poetic language, through which one is also to attain a reawakened experience of life. This might seem an unlikely context for a semi-scholarly study of skaldic kennings but in fact the subject, as Borges viewed it, was well suited to the purpose.

Basically, the kennings, "one of the most frigid aberrations recorded in literary histories" (*OC* 1:368), serve Borges as an illustration of the terminal stage of the conventionalization of metaphor, and poetic language more generally, as well as a point of departure for the critique of any poetry, past or present, that is perceived to be moving in that direction. Thus, in the Spanish literary tradition, the kennings are comparable to nothing so much as to the "frenzy of the academic mind" (*OC* 1:377), that is, the poetry of a Gracián or a Góngora. They are a mirror held up to any poetry neglecting the call of the avant-garde: its ultimate destiny is "a vain/ herbal of

metaphors and sophistries,” as Borges would later describe the work of Gracián (*SP* 185). His inscription in a copy of the 1933 separate publication of the study under the title *Las kenningar* refers to it as “this ancient Gongorine alphabet.”¹¹ Interestingly, Borges, who by that point had read through R. K. Gordon’s *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* as well as through some secondary literature on the subject, makes careful distinctions in this respect between Old Norse and Old English poetry. The skaldic kenning is an “exhaustion and almost a *reductio ad absurdum* of a predilection common to all Germanic literature: that of compounded words” (*OC* 1:377). But the compounds found in the oldest surviving Germanic literature, that of the Anglo-Saxons, present an earlier stage of development:

The skalds use these very same figures [as the Anglo-Saxon poets]; their innovation consisted in employing them in torrential effusions and combining them to form more complex symbols. We may presume that time also conspired toward this end. Only once *the moon of the Viking* had become an immediate equivalent of *shield* could a poet formulate the equation *serpent of the moon of the Vikings*. This took place in Iceland, not England. (*OC* 1:377)

This sets the stage for Borges’s later view of the Old English language and its poetry, for a perspective that was almost diametrically opposed to his view of the skaldic craft.

The essay also testifies to a certain amount of reading on the subject. In a postscript added to it in 1962, Borges distances himself from some of the arguments in the piece and submits a list of books that are said to be a selection of the sources used for it. Besides Gordon’s anthology, the list includes John Earle’s *Deeds of Beowulf*, one English (Brodeur) and several German translations of the Eddas (Gering, Neckel and Niedner, and Ranisch), English translations of three major sagas, and two of Niedner’s studies of Old Icelandic culture and literature. Whatever one makes of this list, the essay itself testifies to a decent introductory overview of the subject, especially by the standard according to which Borges must be judged. Indeed, it is no overstatement to say that he himself set the standard, as the “Noticia” is apparently one of the very first treatments – perhaps *the* first – of an Old Germanic subject in the Spanish language, a fact that seems to have eluded even some Spanish Anglo-Saxonists (see n. 30 below).

One wonders whether Borges – who boasted of such things as being “the first traveler from the Hispanic world to set foot upon the shores of *Ulysses*” (*SNF* 12) – was aware of this. If he was, then it might have had something to do with his decision not to include the “Noticia” among the writings collected in the 1932 volume *Discusión*, but rather to republish it in

the following year as a separate booklet, under the more confident title *Las kenningar*.¹² More than thirty years later, in the Prologue to the *Seis poemas escandinavos*, he would employ the same metaphor: "I am not the first Spanish-speaking intruder to explore these latitudes. Who can forget the *Castalia barbara* (1897) of Jaimes Freyre and these verses which still resound: 'A strange and mysterious God visits the forest/ He is a silent God with wide open arms'" (*TR* 3:111). These are the opening lines of Freyre's "Eternum vale": Christ, the silent and mysterious god with wide open arms, visits the forest of the old deities of the North. There are other northernist-inspired poems by Freyre, yet he was not a scholar: in effect, by acknowledging Freyre as a predecessor in the domain of northernist-inspired poetry in the Spanish language, Borges, consciously or not, underlines his own primacy in Spanish-language Old Germanic scholarship. The text on the cover of the first edition of *ALG* would also describe the subject of that book as "almost completely unknown to the Spanish-language reader."

There is thus the polemical cause of the avant-gardist and the thrill of the intruder upon virgin latitudes. There is also the appeal to the erudite: why not extend that trademark pose of the benevolently omniscient deity of the library to things Old Germanic, a subject irradiating such profuse quantities of the antiquarian sublime. And then there is another perspective on the piece, one which is perhaps properly the business of biographers, but which can hardly be ignored if attempting to explain why a man who had apparently shown no particular interest in Old Germanic literature up to that point suddenly became fascinated by it. This perspective thrusts itself on the reader in the very last words of "*Las kenningar*," where the piece is dedicated "to an unsullied companion from those heroic days. To Norah Lange, whose blood will perhaps remember them" (*OC* 1:380) – remember the kennings, that is, as well as the kenningsque "games" of Ultraism.

Norah Lange was a member of the Buenos Aires Ultraist group. In 1925 Borges arranged the publication of her collection *La calle de la tarde*, to which he contributed a Foreword. According to Williamson, the mentor soon became infatuated with the protégée, who happened to be of Scandinavian descent: Lange's father was Norwegian, her mother Norwegian-Irish. Williamson could have cited this dedication to Lange and her Norse blood in further support of his claim that Borges, "who spoke to Norah Lange mostly in English, entertained a fantasy of an ancient ethnic affinity with her, deriving from his paternal family's roots in the north of England."¹³ Yet it was not meant to be, for Lange fell for another man – no less than Borges's literary rival, Oliverio Girondo. But the relationship between Lange and Girondo was to be unstable until 1934, and Williamson suggests that Borges may have still hoped to win her back. This might be of interest, since Borges apparently renewed his contacts with Lange sometime around 1931 in a

move that took on a distinctly northernist aspect. Norah Lange was supposed to contribute a piece on the Eddas to the same June 1931 issue of the journal *Azul* to which Borges contributed his essay "The Postulation of Reality"; Williamson does not think this a coincidence and takes it to indicate that possibly "some kind of rapprochement had taken place" between them.¹⁴ And then, in April of the following year, Borges published the "Noticia," his very first Germanicist piece, the last line of which dedicates it to Norah Lange and appeals to her Norse blood.

What to make of all this? Williamson constructs an elaborate and rather compelling theory ascribing to Borges a life-long obsession with Lange, intimately related with his life-long obsession with the North and culminating, many years later, in the writing of the story "Ulrikke," which he persuasively demonstrates to be "sown with secret autobiographical allusions" to Lange (397–99). It is hard to determine the extent to which Williamson's Borges, a man possessed by this and other such intricate private mythologies – a man who, having been spurned by a Norsewoman in his late twenties, was still writing his way out of this trauma half a century later – is a faithful portrait of the artist, whether as a young or an old man. Suffice it to say that Williamson is definitely on to something and that phrases such as "private mythology" or "poetic sense of destiny" (392) seem to be fairly adequate denominations of this something.¹⁵

What is certain is that Borges did "entertain fantasies" about Germanic identity. As early as 1923, we find the young poet of the Buenos Aires *barrios* claiming kinship with "the Saxons, the Arabs, and the Goths/ who, without knowing, would engender me" (*SP* 31), a theme to which he would return on numerous later occasions. Indeed, it is no understatement to say that re-inventing himself as Germanic – and as a Germanicist – was one of the key trajectories of both his public and private life. Yet to ascribe it wholly to romantic fantasies, in either sense of the word, would be an exaggeration. Nor should one overestimate the overall impact of Borges's northernism on his work, even though it is much greater than appears to have been generally noted. The first flourish of Borges's northernist interests resulted in the piece on kennings and a solid introduction to Old Germanic literature. He had read the major texts in German and English translations, along with some scholarship on the subject. After 1933, however, there comes a marked slump in the bibliographic record with respect to northernist material, lasting until the beginning of the 1950s.¹⁶ It is precisely in this period that Borges wrote the work that made his name and that is still considered to be most characteristically "Borgesian." Indeed, the fact that relatively little overt northernist influence is to be found in these writings goes a long way towards accounting for the neglect of Borges's northernism, in spite of the fact that it looms so large in his later work.

Moreover, when references to Germanic matters do begin appearing in Borges's non-literary output of the war years, it is in a mood wholly different from the one that informs either "Las *kenningar*" or his post-1950 writings. For example, in a 1941 article he cites Bertrand Russell's attribution of the origins of fascism to the thought of Fichte and Carlyle, with the latter accused of such iniquities as having "praised the Middle Ages," "defended the memory of the god Thor," and "adulated and invented the Teutonic race" (*SNF* 209–10). In 1944, "[t]o be a Nazi" is "to play the energetic barbarian, Viking, Tartar, sixteenth-century conquistador, gaucho, or Indian" (*SNF* 210–11). The review of Gilbert Waterhouse's 1943 *Short History of German Literature* is another opportunity for voicing the same sentiments, this time with an explicit comment on the medievalist fantasies of the Third Reich: "The Germans seem incapable of working without some hallucinatory apprenticeship: they can win battles or compose languid and infinite novels, but only on the condition that they conceive of themselves as 'pure Arians,' or Vikings molested by Jews, or characters from Tacitus' *Germania*" (*OC* 1:279). Ultimately, "[t]o say that England has triumphed is to say that Western Civilization has triumphed, that Rome has triumphed" (*SNF* 212).

Particularly interesting is the poem "El enemigo generoso" [The Generous Enemy], first published in the October 1946 issue of *Los anales de Buenos Aires*.¹⁷ The poem is cast as an imaginary "greeting" from the Irish king Muirchertach to Magnus Barfod, the twelfth-century king of Norway who met his untimely end in an unsuccessful attempt at a conquest of Ireland. The greeting, said to have been delivered to Barfod on the night before his death, begins deceptively, with Muirchertach, the generous enemy of the title, wishing his Norse opponent glorious victories against the Irish forces he is to meet at dawn. The Irish king even throws a couple of kennings – the weaving of the sword's cloth, the red swan – into his "generous" greeting to the Viking conqueror, before arriving, in the final lines, to its unexpectedly terrifying ending:

May none of your numerous days shine more brightly than the
day of tomorrow.
Because this will be your last day, King Magnus, I swear it.
Because before its light is snuffed out, I will defeat you and snuff
you out, Magnus Barfod. (*SP* 141)

The ending of the greeting is not, however, the ending of the poem, for this final verse is followed by a postscript, presenting the poem as an extract "from *Anhang zur Heimskringla* (1893), by H. Gering."

As might be expected, it is this postscript that holds the key to the

poem's meaning. "H. Gering" must be Hugo Gering (1847–1925), the German scholar whose translation of the *Edda* was among those Borges claims to have used in the period of "Las *kenningar*." However, Hugo Gering never published a work entitled *Anhang zur Heimskringla* [Supplement to the *Heimskringla*], and the postscript is to be taken as a Borgesian conceit, alluding, through the accidental similarity offered by this abbreviated form of the German scholar's name, to Hermann Göring. In his memoirs, Richard W. Sonnenfeldt records that in the early days of Hitler's Germany the Nazis were still a subject of jokes, including the one where "Hermann Göring was referred to as 'Gering,' a German word meaning 'little nothing,' a play on his enormous girth."¹⁸ The publication date of the fictional book is most likely also an allusion to Göring, who was born on 12 January 1893. The title of Snorri's history of the kings of Norway – which, as Borges of course knew, means *orbis terrarum*, the globe – is made to echo the appetites of the Nazi regime, fed, among other things, by romantic visions of a heroic Germania. Borges's sympathies are obviously on the Irish side, the side of Rome, while the conqueror, again, is the barbarian Viking. The defeat of the Norwegian by the Irish king prefigures the defeat of Germany by the Allies, and, by extension, the inevitable demise of any further "supplements" of the same sort – the ultimate triumph of good over evil, of Rome over the Barbarians.

It would seem, then, that during the war and its aftermath Borges shared the experience of many a "Germanophile" – a word that had by 1940 taken on a meaning that he felt called upon to sharply denounce (*SNF* 203–5) – namely, the outrage felt at the appropriation and misinterpretation of German(ic) culture by the Nazi regime. The pronouncements on Carlyle are revealed in their proper light only when one recalls that it was Carlyle with whom he was "overwhelmed" in his Geneva teens, and that it was Carlyle who had "sent [him] to the study of German," as well as to something else, which by that point must have taken on a terribly sinister aspect, namely:

the idea of Germanism. [...] I was led by Carlyle to think that I could find it in German literature. I found many other things [...]. But the idea I had – the idea of men not at all intellectual but given over to loyalty, to bravery, to a manly submission to fate – this I did not find, for example, in the *Nibelungenlied*. All of that was too romantic for me. I was to find it years and years afterwards in the Norse sagas and in the study of Old English poetry.¹⁹

And now he has to concede that Carlyle was a fascist, and he sees what his beloved fatalistically unintellectual Germanism can turn into once it descends from the realm of ideas and puts on a uniform.

There is not much, then, that can be seen as anticipating the publication in September 1951 of a monograph entitled *Antiguas literaturas germánicas*, a slender book listing Delia Ingenieros as a collaborator and enfolded a vast design of introducing its Spanish-speaking reader to the literatures of the Gothic, Old English, Old Norse, Old Saxon, Old High and Middle High German languages. This book is something of a mystery. What were the circumstances of its publication, in Mexico City, as part of the series “Breviarios del Fondo de cultura económica”? Why did Borges decide to write such a book? Why at this time? He had, as we have seen, taken a significant interest in the subject long before 1951, yet we have also seen that the evidence prior to that date does not seem to paint a picture of a man at work on, or even contemplating the writing of, such a book. Why with Delia Ingenieros? The daughter of the distinguished Argentine psychiatrist and thinker José Ingenieros was by all accounts a rather remarkable woman of many interests and passions, but there is not much, except of course the book itself, to testify to her interest, let alone competence, in Old Germanic literature.²⁰ The nature and extent of her “collaboration” are unspecified. On top of all this, Borges would later pretend that the book had never existed, preferring instead the demonstrably automythographical chronology related in “Blindness” and elsewhere in which he first discovers Old English around 1955, then progresses from it on to Old Norse, and eventually gets around to writing *Literaturas germánicas medievales* (1966), which, in reality, is just a slightly revised version of the 1951 monograph. Indeed, the earlier book is not mentioned at all in *LGM*, where, along with the book she supposedly co-authored, Delia Ingenieros also disappears and María Esther Vázquez is listed as the sole collaborator.²¹

Did Borges feel uneasy about the fact that he had published a work of scholarly pretensions without the required qualifications? The “Breviarios” series was definitely scholarly in character: as stated on the back cover, each of the titles was supposed to constitute a “complete introductory treatment of the matter announced in its title” and to be “composed by universally acknowledged specialists.” Needless to say, Borges was not a universally acknowledged specialist in early medieval Germanic literatures. He did not even hold a university degree. It can also be demonstrated quite conclusively that he had very little knowledge of Old English at that point, let alone of the other Old Germanic languages. His own description of the Old English reading group formed during the period of his professorship at the University of Buenos Aires, which is to say sometime after 1956, leaves little doubt of this. Preparing the first session, the account goes, he remembered two forgotten books, Sweet’s *Reader* and a text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which he had placed “on the highest shelf, thinking I would never use them” (*SNF* 478). Armed with these two, and with what Williamson describes as “a

large dictionary given him by a Scots friend in Buenos Aires”,²² the group met in the National Library:

It was Saturday morning. We gathered in Groussac’s office, and we began to read. There was a detail that pleased us and mortified us, and at the same time filled us with a certain pride. It was the fact that the Saxons, like the Scandinavians, used two runic letters to signify the two sounds of *th*, as in “thing” and “the”. This conferred an air of mystery to the page.

[...] You must remember we knew nothing of the language; each word was a kind of talisman we unearthed.

[...] Blindness is a gift. [...] It gave me Anglo-Saxon, it gave me some Scandinavian, it gave me a knowledge of a medieval literature I didn’t know [...]. (*SNF* 477–83)

This, again, took place at least five years after he had published a scholarly monograph on early medieval Germanic literatures.²³

Did Borges suppress the earlier book because it fell below his improved Germanicist standards? In their Foreword to *LGM*, published in Madrid – very much like in the 1962 postscript to “Las *kennningar*”²⁴ – the authors consider it “most important to point out that the conception and composition of this book have been based directly on the ancient texts, except in the case of the Ulfilian Bible” (*LGM* 390). In 1951, Borges was still not internationally famous and the chance was exceedingly slim of the obscure Mexico City monograph ever coming under the scrutiny of professional, mostly European and North-American, Germanicists. A decade later, however, even such works were liable to raise previously unexpected interest and reach previously unlikely readers.²⁵ Whatever the reason, the fact remains that Borges not only authorized the publication of the 1966 book knowing that it nowhere acknowledges the existence of its 1951 original, but contributed to the latter’s oblivion by failing to mention it where such mention would be expected.

A more important question, however, is that of why he wrote it in the first place. In the 1930s Borges was interested in the kennings as a “frigid aberration” of poetic diction, while in the 1940s he equated the Nazis with the Vikings and used the name of a Germanicist medievalist as an allusion to Hermann Göring – how, then, are we to account for the full-blown northernist “turn” that occurred around 1950?

Perhaps the reason is to be sought in the social climate of those years. Perhaps we do well to remember that for Borges the end of one war also meant the beginning of another, indeed a more personally immediate one – his war with the Perón regime, which was at the height of its power around

1950. In the same year in which *ALG* was published Borges gave his lecture on “The Argentine Writer and Tradition,” denouncing the “nationalists [who] pretend to venerate the capacities of the Argentine mind but wish to limit the poetic exercise of that mind to a few humble local themes, as if we Argentines could only speak of neighborhoods and ranches and not of the universe” (*SNF* 424). In the 1949 “Story of the Warrior and the Captive Maiden” he had already written of Droctulf, a Langobard chieftain who, as recorded in the *Historia Langobardi* of Paulus Diaconus, joined the forces of Rome in fighting against his own people. With the help of Droctulf and his men, Ravenna defended itself from the Langobard onslaught and its citizens were so grateful that they built Droctulf a sepulcher inscribed with an epitaph praising him and his deeds. Borges quotes two lines from this epitaph in the story, the Latin of which roughly corresponds to the italicized portion of the following:

Loving the standards of Rome and the emblems of the republic,
Aid unto them he brought, *crushing the power of his race.*
Love unto us he bore, despising the claims of his kindred,
*Deeming Ravenna his own fatherland, dear to his heart.*²⁶

“Droctulf was not a traitor,” the text continues, “[h]e was an *illuminatus*, a convert” (*CF* 209). In the 1953 “The Innocence of Layamon” Borges again meditated on the fate of, in his eyes at least, a similar character: “this forgotten man, who abhorred his Saxon heritage with Saxon vigor, and who was the last Saxon poet and never knew it” (*SNF* 357). These paradoxical – and Germanic – figures strike one as emblematic of Borges’s own position. Droctulf is most Langobard, and Layamon most Saxon, in despising the claims of their kindred. In its dreary footnote to Plato, the regime demanded a social realism of neighborhoods and ranches: perhaps Borges only did the one thing that seemed truly Argentine in such circumstances – write a book on ancient Germanic literatures.

Professor Borges

It is ironic that Borges bothered to erase the 1951 *ALG* from his bibliographical record, for along with the 1932 kennings piece, it is precisely with this work that his claim to Germanicist fame lies. It has already been noted that the 1932 “Noticia” may have been the very first study of any length on the subject of vernacular medieval Germanic literature in the Spanish language, while the 1951 *ALG* is certainly the first book-length Spanish-language study on the same subject. Two further publications appeared in 1965–66, in collaboration with María Esther Vázquez: the 1965 *Introducción a la*

literatura inglesa, containing a chapter on the Anglo-Saxon period, and the silent revision of *ALG* as *LGM* in 1966. There are also a number of translations, most notably those included in the 1978 *Breve antología anglosajona* and the 1984 translation of *La alucinación de Gylfi*, the first section of the Old Norse *Prose Edda* (both co-authored with María Kodama). Perhaps the most important of these translations is that of *The Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn*, a verse from the Old English Exeter Book: this was originally published under the title “Un diálogo anglosajón del siglo IX” [A Ninth-Century Anglo-Saxon Dialogue] in a 1961 issue of the Buenos Aires journal *La biblioteca* and thus barely beats the 1962 *Beowulf* translation by Orestes Vera Pérez for the title of the first separate and complete translation of an Old English poem into the Spanish language. In addition to these authorized publications, a sizeable portion of the posthumously published transcripts of the 1966 lectures for Borges’s English literature class at the University of Buenos Aires is also devoted to Old English and other northernist matters.

The initial thing to note about *ALG* and *LGM* is that these are, by and large, the same book – or rather, that the latter is a fairly slightly revised version of the former. Entire chapters were left almost completely untouched. The only substantial revisions take place in the chapter on Anglo-Saxon literature – the “Literature of Germanic England,” as Borges first called it in *ALG* – where several new sections and paragraphs were added, along with some modifications to the chapter’s overall layout. As far as Borges’s views of his material are concerned, they fall firmly within the “paganist” tradition of nineteenth and early twentieth century Old Germanic studies, the tradition that would, within Borges’s lifetime, outlive most of its academic usefulness and give way to more objective and inclusive approaches to Old Germanic literature. That being said, *LGM* is slightly less “paganist” than *ALG*, a good example of which is the change in the treatment of the pagan–Christian problem in Old English poetry. In *ALG* the section on *Beowulf* was followed by one on “Otras poesías precristianas” [Other pre-Christian poetry], including brief discussions of *Widsith*, *Deor*, *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Ruin*, and the charms. The new layout has the section on *Beowulf* followed by one on the “Finnsburh Fragment,” which is followed by one on “Poesías precristianas” (the plural is misleading, however, since the only pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon poetry to be had is *Widsith*, and not the whole of it but only the “central nucleus” [*LGM* 403]). By the time of *LGM*, then, Borges had ceased to view the Old English “heroics” and “elegies” as pre-Christian poetry, and in another decade or so he would be comfortable with considering *The Seafarer* as a Christian allegory (*Breve antología anglosajona*, *OCC* 2:316). Similarly, in *LGM* *Beowulf* is no longer “perhaps the oldest poem of the Germanic literatures”

but rather their “oldest epic monument” (*ALG* 18, *LGM* 398), while its author is a “Northumbrian cleric” acquainted with the *Aeneid* (*ALG* 24–5, *LGM* 402–3).

The chief modification to this chapter, however, is the addition of separate sections for the heroic poems and the late poem known as *The Grave*, which he describes as “memorable,” emphasizing that “there is nothing Christian in it; it does not speak of the soul, only of the body decomposing in the ground” (*LGM* 425). In both its versions, the chapter contains sections on *Cædmon* and *Cynewulf*, yet the fame of the former is ascribed “to reasons other than aesthetic pleasure” (*ALG* 33, *LGM* 409), while the latter is most interesting for his runic signatures. Nor does Borges’s definition of Anglo-Saxon literature include the Latin writings of the Anglo-Saxons: “Bede wrote in Latin, but his name cannot be disregarded in a history of Anglo-Saxon literature” (*ALG* 48, *LGM* 411).

The “paganist” bias also governs the German and Scandinavian chapters. The former first discusses those Old High German and Old Saxon texts that are seen to belong to, or contain traces of, the pre-Christian culture of the Germans. A short section then covers the production of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, where, in a comment added in the *LGM* revision, Borges delivers the most explicit statement of the book’s rationale. The study of the chivalrous epic falls outside of the scope of his study, he says, partly “for linguistic reasons” and partly because they “have nothing in common with the forms and the spirit of primitive Germanic poetry” (*LGM* 438). The chapter then moves on to the *Heldenbuch*, the *Nibelungenlied*, and *Kudrun*. The real subject of the book(s), then, is not ancient or medieval Germanic literature but rather “primitive Germanic poetry”: the primordial poetic expression of, or at the very least springing from, pre-Christian Germanic culture, composed in the Old Germanic vernaculars.

It is interesting to observe the pull of Borges’s northernism when it comes into contact with his interest in post-medieval English literature. In his *Introducción a la literatura inglesa*, for example, William Morris gets more space than most other writers, Gerard Manley Hopkins is mentioned solely as a resurrector of alliterative diction in English verse and as a forerunner of W. H. Auden, while the entire treatment of the latter is one half of a sentence about “the unforgettable Wystan Hugh Auden (1907–1973), who translated the Elder Edda” (*OCC* 2:368). Dating from the same period are the transcripts of lectures given by Borges at the University of Buenos Aires, edited from notes taken from dictations recorded by Borges for the benefit of those students who were unable to attend the course regularly. As duly noted by the transcripts’ editors, their most striking peculiarity is the fact that no fewer than seven of the twenty-five sessions were devoted to Old English literature and Anglo-Saxon culture, again with a distinctly “paganist” outlook.²⁷

Then there are the translations. Again, whatever competent reviewers may make of their quality, these are of undeniable historical importance. It has already been noted that Borges's 1961 annotated translation of *The Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn* appears to be the first of its kind in the Spanish language. The 1978 *Breve antología anglosajona* is also a first: the first Spanish-language anthology of Anglo-Saxon texts, including the first translations into Spanish of *Deor*, *The Seafarer*, *The Grave*, and of the account of Ottar from the *Old English Orosius*, apparently the first extended translation into Spanish of a piece of Old English prose. The 1976 *Libro de sueños* [Book of Dreams] includes the first Spanish-language translation of *The Dream of the Rood*. The *Gylfaginning* translation is also a pioneering effort, appearing only one year later than that of Enrique Bernárdez.²⁸

Finally, there are several works that deserve mention here even though they are situated on those fluid Borgesian borders between fiction, essay, and scholarly writing. A series of such pieces followed the publication of *ALG*, all of which contain material from the 1951 book or were reworkings of entire sections. Five were published in 1953 – the already mentioned “Innocence of Layamon” and “The Dialogues of Ascetic and King,” as well as “The Scandinavian Destiny,” “El destino de Ulfilas” [The Destiny of Ulfilas], and “La apostasia de Coifi” [The Apostasy of Coifi] – with “El dios y el rey” [God and King] appearing in the following year. It is also worth mentioning that Borges was planning a second book on Old English and Old Norse literature: he mentions this in a 1968 interview, specifying that it is not to be, like *ALG/LGM* was, “a book of information, but rather a book with my personal opinions, a book wherein I try to say what I thought that poetry might have meant to the Saxons and to the Norsemen.”²⁹

These, then, are the scholarly and semi-scholarly fruits of Borges's northernism.³⁰ It is up to Germanicists to judge them, as it is up to those competent in the relevant languages to determine the value of Borges's translations. Certainly in 1951 the “paganist” view was still widespread, and in his approach Borges was merely following some of the most respectable literature on the subject. In all senses of the word, he was a dilettante. If there is no reason to doubt that he acquired a little Old English and less Old Norse in the period from around 1955 (at the earliest) onwards, by his own admission he knew next to nothing of them prior to that period, when *ALG* was published. As late as 1980, he claimed to be “now [...] attempting Old Norse.”³¹ In the meantime, 1966 saw the publication of *LGM*, explicitly claiming to be based on a competent reading in the original of all the texts in question save the Gothic of Ulfilas.

Regardless of the obvious objections that might be raised here, there is still much to praise in these works: if they are inferior scholarship, they *are* scholarship and apparently the first of its kind in the Spanish language. Also,

if Borges works within the bounds of outmoded scholarly and interpretive traditions, he also brings certain original, characteristically Borgesian, touches to the subject. There is, for example, his habit of comparing these old texts with later as well as earlier ones, of seeking in them analogues and prefigurations. Thus the skalds prefigure Gracián; the sagas prefigure the technique of the modern novel or even of film; the vision of Cædmon prefigures those of Stevenson or Coleridge; and so on. In general, Borges displays a remarkable, if idiosyncratic, ear for Old English poetry *as poetry* and always insists on presenting this poetry as fully relevant to the contemporary reader, rather than of merely historical and antiquarian interest.

One fictional text should probably be mentioned before moving on to the next section of the paper: the story entitled “The Bribe,” included in the 1975 *Book of Sand*. The story involves two Anglo-Saxonist scholars, the American Ezra Winthrop, professor of Old English at the University of Texas at Austin, and Eric Einarsson, a younger Icelander who receives an appointment at the same university. In the Afterword to *The Book of Sand*, Borges writes that he has “always been surprised by the Americans’ obsession with ethics; ‘The Bribe’ is an attempt to portray that” (CF 485). This is certainly one part of the story: by an appeal to his “curious American passion for impartiality” (CF 470), Einarsson manipulates Winthrop into recommending him for chairing an Anglo-Saxonist conference. Winthrop has to decide between Einarsson and another candidate, Herbert Locke; Einarsson publishes an article indirectly, but unmistakably, critical of Winthrop; just as Einarsson had planned, Winthrop reacts by choosing him over Locke so that he would not be perceived as holding a grudge. The irony is that the passion for being impassionate is just as much of a passion as any other: “perhaps we aren’t so different, you and I,” says Winthrop in the end, “[w]e share one sin, at least – vanity. You’ve come to my office to throw in my face your ingenious stratagem; I gave you my support so I could boast my integrity” (CF 471).

But certainly the stated theme could have been handled in any number of ways: that Borges chose to raise it through a story about Anglo-Saxonists and Anglo-Saxon studies is just as interesting as the theme itself. Also interesting are the narrative details that have little or nothing to do with the theme, but have a great deal to do with Borges’s adventures in the Old North. Thus Herbert Locke is the author of a study entitled *Toward a History of the Kenning*, in which he argues – just as Borges had done in his essay – “that the Saxons put aside those somewhat mechanical metaphors they used [...], while the Scandinavian poets were combining and intermingling them almost to the point of inextricability” (CF 466). Similarly, Eric Einarsson publishes a controversial edition of *The Battle of Maldon* in which he claims that “the poem’s employment of moving circumstantial details oddly prefigures the methods we admire, not without good reason, in the Icelandic sagas”

(*CF* 467) – basically restating Borges’s comment in the Foreword to the very collection in which the story is found (346, cited below; Einarsson later admits to Winthrop that the hypothesis is “absurd” and “unthinkable,” and was included only “in order to flatter English readers”). There is a little bit of Borges in Winthrop as well: on the shelves in Winthrop’s office, Einarsson spots a copy of Resen’s 1665 edition of the *Edda Islandorum*, a book that Borges also appears to have possessed (see *SP* 365).

The story triggers further northernist resonances: even as Borges pauses to parody his own “thesis” on the prefiguration of Icelandic sagas in Anglo-Saxon poetry, we are certainly meant to perceive that the conflict between Winthrop and Einarsson at the University of Texas at Austin is prefigured by the conflict between the Saxons and the Danes at Maldon. The Norsemen won the day only because the Saxons opted for fair play: already then, it is implied, the “passion for impartiality” was a characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race. But what is the real nature of this passion? Did Byrhtnoth act out of an impassionate sense of ethics, or is this sense of ethics a dangerous passion in its own right? Whatever the answer, one does not imagine that many other stories about machinating Anglo-Saxonists at the University of Texas at Austin have been written by major twentieth-century writers, and while an interesting piece of short fiction, “The Bribe” is just as interesting for its autobiographical allusions and its indirect testimony to Borges’s own scholarly efforts and aspirations in the field.

The Northernism of a Making

It has already been noted that comparatively few overt northernist references appear in Borges’s pre-1950s work, especially in the fiction. There are, however, several pieces worth mentioning. One of these is “The Library of Babel,” originally published in 1941: the infinite library contains all possible books, including “the treatise Bede could have written (but did not) on the mythology of the Saxon people” (*CF* 115). The narrator of “The Zahir,” first published in 1947, writes a story retelling a part of *The Saga of the Volsungs* from the dragon’s perspective (*CF* 245–6). “Dante and the Anglo-Saxon Visionaries,” one of the *Nine Dantesque Essays* that were first published as a collection in 1982 but are dated collectively in Weinberger’s edition to 1945–51, contains an extended digression on the same subject touched upon in “The Library of Babel”: Bede leaving England without its Snorri.³² There are also texts that lack overt references but do contain more subtle northernist allusions, such as the famous “*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*” (1940).³³ A careful reading of Borges’s stories would no doubt unearth other such subtle allusions, but in what follows only definite, overt references will be noted.

From about 1950, then, Borges's northernism begins to leave considerable traces in his non-scholarly work, both essayistic and more strictly literary. A 1981 postscript added to the 1948 "Last Voyage of Ulysses" is emblematic of this turn:

Postscript, 1981: It has been said that Dante's Ulysses prefigures the famous explorers who, centuries later, arrived on the coasts of America and India. Centuries before the *Commedia* was written, that human type had already come into being. Erik the Red discovered Greenland around the year 985; his son Leif disembarked in Canada at the beginning of the eleventh century. Dante could not have known this. The things of Scandinavia tend to be secret, as if they were a dream. (*SNF* 283)

From the 1950s onwards, northernist references become ubiquitous. As far as the essayistic opus is concerned, the most revealing testimony to Borges's altered view of, and expanding interest in, the North is to be found in "The Scandinavian Destiny" (1953), a piece that is nothing short of a paean to early medieval Germanic, and especially Norse, culture. Borges enthusiastically cites runic inscriptions, Icelandic sagas, and W. P. Ker. He elaborates on the "remarkable" fact of the "perfect" realism of the sagas, that oasis amid the arid desert of medieval allegorism, peacefully co-existing alongside the "baroque" poetry of the skalds. Where he had once used it as an allusion to Nazi ambitions of world conquest, he now says that the "geographic nomenclature" of Snorri's *Heimskringla* is a "testimony to the breadth of the Scandinavian sphere." The essay ends with a melancholic, Ker-influenced meditation on how:

In universal history, the wars and books of Scandinavia are as if they had never existed; everything remains isolated and without a trace, as if it had come to pass in a dream or in the crystal ball where clairvoyants gaze. In the twelfth century, the Icelanders discovered the novel – the art of Flaubert, the Norman – and this discovery is as secret and sterile, for the economy of the world, as their discovery of America. (*SNF* 381)

Clearly, we have come a long way from the view that equated Western civilization with Rome and its enemies with the barbarian Viking.

To this northernist manifesto and the pieces discussed in the preceding sections can be added, as far as the essayistic opus is concerned, the northernist references found in: "The Enigma of Edward FitzGerald" (1951); "Coleridge's Dream" (1951), where Bede's account of Caedmon is

retold at some length; “Forms of a Legend” (1952), where there is mention of *Barlaam’s Saga*; “German Literature in the Age of Bach” (1953); “A History of the Tango” (1955), which in spite of its quintessentially Latin-American subject contains – a uniquely Borgesian stunt – choice cuts of *Beowulf*, skaldic poetry, *Færeyinga saga*,³⁴ and even Jordanes’s *History of the Goths*; the lecture on “The Concept of the Academy and the Celts” (1962); and “Immortality” (1978), where he relates that he has “devoted the last twenty years to Anglo-Saxon poetry, and I know many Anglo-Saxon poems by heart” (*SNF* 490); as well as some of his prologues.³⁵

It is in verse, however, that Borges’s northernist muse found its medium of expression. By the late 1950s, Borges’s work makes a general turn to poetry, which he had not published since the 1929 *San Martín Copybook* – a development at least partly due to the increasing deterioration of his sight. Already in *The Maker* (1960) we start to come across poems partly or even wholly northernist in inspiration, such as the well-known “Embarking on the Study of Anglo-Saxon Grammar” or “Poem Written in a Copy of *Beowulf*.”³⁶ Besides these, however, there are many other poems containing northernist references of one kind or another, lengthy or brief, most of which do not appear to have received any attention in this respect,³⁷ as well as two collections devoted exclusively to northernist-inspired poetry: *Seis poemas escandinavos*, published in 1966 in Buenos Aires, and the bilingual *Siete poemas sajones/ Seven Saxon Poems*, hand-printed in Verona by Richard-Gabriel Drummonds and published in 1974 for his Plain Wrapper Press. Both of these are reminiscent of the 1933 *Las kenningar* booklet in being small-run, limited-edition prints, indicative of a particular reverence for these subjects.³⁸

It is in these poems that Borges expressed himself most freely, creatively, and, perhaps, intimately on these subjects. Some envisage alternative histories, such as “The treatise on Saxon myths that Bede omitted to write,” or “The vast empire the Vikings declined to found” (*SP* 407). Some long for impossible memories: “What would I not give for the memory/ of the ships of Hengist,/ that set sail from the sands of Denmark/ to conquer an island/ which was not yet England” (*OP* 435). Some run fingers down the blade of a rusty sword in York Minster (*SP* 209). Some pledge “love, ignorant love” (*OP* 376) to Iceland. And some are simple expressions of the poet’s gratitude for the northernist revelations that were clearly of such exceptional importance to him: “for the language which, centuries ago, I spoke in Northumbria,/ for the Saxon sword and harp,/ [...] for the verbal music of England,/ for the verbal music of Germany,/ for the gold that glitters in its verses” (*OP* 250). If the scholarly and essayistic writings are the head, then these poems are the heart of Borges’s northernist opus, paced by “the iron beat of Saxon syllables” (*SP* 431).

There remains the fiction of the post-1950 period. Borges would, apart

from the narratives included in *The Maker* (which contains the short piece “Ragnarök”), publish three further collections of stories: *Brodie’s Report* (1970), *The Book of Sand* (1975), and *Shakespeare’s Memory* (1983). *Brodie’s Report*, set in a world of gauchos and knife-fighters of suburban slums and rural nowheres of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Argentina, would seem to be a most unlikely place to look for northernist influence. Still, to a reader of Old English literature the very first story in the collection, “The Interloper,” about two brothers who take to sharing one woman between them – a ménage which eventually ends in a brutal and, for the woman, tragic manner – might call to mind that lurid passage from the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, where Wulfstan admonishes those who:

pool money together and buy a woman in common as a joint purchase, and with the one woman commit foul sin, one after another and each after the other, just like dogs who do not care about filth, and then for a price they sell out of the land into the hands of the enemy this creature of God, His own purchase that He bought so dearly.³⁹

There are further Anglo-Saxon echoes: the woman’s name is Juliana, clearly alluding to the legend of St. Juliana (and specifically, given the context, to Cynewulf’s Old English poem on the subject), another story where a woman is bartered like a thing only to end up gruesomely murdered; and the Nilsen brothers “were tall, with reddish hair – the blood of Denmark or Ireland (countries whose names they probably never heard) flowed in the veins of those criollos” (CF 349).

Some of the other stories include such northernist details as the claim that the “bloodcurdling gauchos” in “The Duel” are “as tall as Norsemen” (CF 383), and beyond such minute parallels lies a broader similarity between the world of the sagas and that of *Brodie’s Report*: tough men in tough circumstances, personifying their weapons and commodifying their women, their fates turning on a volatile economy of honor, chance, brute force, and alcohol. Moreover, this general similarity extends even to matters of style and narrative technique: “I have tried [...] to write plain tales,” claims Borges in the Foreword, adding, however, that they do “abound in circumstantial details that writers are required to invent – details that we can find such splendid examples of in the tenth-century Anglo-Saxon ballad of the Battle of Maldon and the Icelandic sagas that came later” (CF 346). Similarly, in the Foreword to *In Praise of Darkness* (1969) he lists among his “few tricks” the manner of “narrating events (this I learned from Kipling and the Icelandic sagas) as though I didn’t fully understand them” (CF 331).

One should not take all this too seriously, of course, even though any

reader of both will probably agree that there is an air of the sagas to *Brodie's Report*,³⁶ but in *The Book of Sand* northernism clearly takes center-stage, as four out of the thirteen stories in the collection are wholly and overtly northernist in inspiration.⁴⁰ "The Bribe" has already been discussed, as well as "Ulrikke," the curious semi-allegorical piece that revolves around an old Colombian professor named Javier Otárola and a young woman named Ulrikke, who refer to each other as Sigurd and Brunhild. But the collection also includes possibly the most extravagant of Borges's northernist fantasies, "Undr," in which the narrative supposedly comes from a newly discovered manuscript by Adam of Bremen, who claims to be merely relaying the words of an Icelandic skald he met "in Uppsala, near the temple" (CF 456). "The Mirror and the Mask" takes a very loose cue from the historic Battle of Clontarf (1014) between mixed Irish-Scandinavian armies, focusing on an Irish bard commissioned to compose a poem on his king's victory. In "The Disk," Odin pays a visit to an Anglo-Saxon woodcutter. Brief references are also found in "The Other" – "I'm studying Anglo-Saxon," elderly Borges informs his younger self, "and I'm not at the foot of the class" (CF 415) – as well as in three of the four stories in his final collection, *Shakespeare's Memory*: "August 25, 1983" (CF 491), "Blue Tigers" (495), and "Shakespeare's Memory" (508).

No claim of inclusiveness is made with respect to any of these catalogues; surely further items could be added. They do, however, offer a wider overview of Borges's northernist opus than previous accounts: around one-hundred items have been mentioned here that are at least partly northernist in inspiration, and a good number of them are wholly so. Most deal with a handful of themes to which Borges returns time and time again, many of which fall squarely into the mainstream of the northernist imaginary. He never tires of referring to familiar motifs from the most famous Old Norse texts or the corpus of what used to be called "heroic" or "secular" Old English poetry, to key historical figures and events, to the famous battles. Indeed, it could almost be said that the most remarkable thing about Borges's views of the peoples and literatures of the ancient North is that they are, for the most part, rather unremarkable – except, of course, for the rather remarkable fact that they are Jorge Luis Borges's.

Nevertheless, there are some certain original touches, such as Borges's mobilization of his northernist aesthetics in the cause of his views on poetic diction. An early instance of this is found in the well-known "Embarking on the Study of Anglo-Saxon Grammar." The natural first step for the beginner is to translate Old English words into their English and German equivalents, but Borges's ultimate goal is a much more profound and elusive understanding, for these words, which for him are now "symbols of other symbols," were once:

fresh images
 and a man used them to invoke the sea or a sword.
 Tomorrow they will come alive again:
 tomorrow *fyr* will not become *fire* but rather
 some vestige of a changeable tamed god
 whom no one can confront without feeling an ancient fear.
 (SP 129)

The poem concludes with an ecstatic exclamation of gratitude for “this perfect contemplation/ of a language at its dawn.” Here and elsewhere, Borges seeks the experience of a language at its primitive origins, a language still immersed in the mythical consciousness of the primitive man, which, however, is at the same time a model for the poetic use of modern language. Poetry is to remythify language, reclaiming its ancient power of speaking in “fresh images” rather than in “symbols of symbols.”

This is the view of poetic language that Borges held in his early Ultraist days. In the 1922 essay “The Nothingness of Personality,” published in the first issue of the Ultraist *Proa*, he denounces the “fallacy” committed by those who falsely proclaim themselves “witness[es] to the unicity of things” and whose “Romantic ego-worship and loudmouthed individualism are in this way wreaking havoc on the arts” (*SNF* 7). “If ever I made mention of the dawn,” a representative of these impostors is made to say, “it was not merely to follow the easy current of usage. I can assure you I know what the Dawn is [...]. It matters little whether I have proclaimed it in feeble verse or in rough-hewn prose.” On the contrary, protests Borges, this is all that matters, for to truly *bear witness* to the unicity of things means precisely to struggle with language, to abandon the possibility of resting on the withering laurels of metaphor and embark on an uncharted quest “After Images” (1924): “To add provinces to Being, to envision cities and spaces of a hallucinatory reality, is an heroic adventure” (*SNF* 11). And the heroes, the true witnesses to the unicity of things, the genuine wielders of the word and envisioners of hallucinatory realities, are rare. Joyce was one such “millionaire of words and styles,” and this is why a “total reality teems vociferously in the pages of *Ulysses*”; “In no other book,” says Borges, with what was for him the greatest of praise, “do we witness the actual presence of things with such convincing firmness” (*SNF* 14).

In the essentials of this view of poetic language, which is part and parcel of what has been referred to as the modernist avant-garde’s “Orphic” poetics⁴¹ and its “perceptual millenarianism,”⁴² Borges was neither unique, nor prescient, nor particularly radical. He was still in his teens when, for example, Viktor Shklovsky demanded the “resurrection of the word.” Yet

half a century later he would employ the exact same phrase, in almost exactly the same sense, when a book is said to be a “set of dead symbols” until “the right reader comes along, and the words – or rather the poetry behind the words, for the words themselves are mere symbols – spring to life, and we have a resurrection of the word.”⁴³ This sentiment made itself felt throughout the early twentieth century West. As Borges himself would write, looking back on this period:

Scattered in scattered capitals,
solitary and many,
we played at being the first Adam
who gave names to things. (“Invocation to Joyce,” *SP* 287)

In some cases, lines of influence can be traced; remarkably, however, most of the resurrectors of the word seem to have sprung up independently of each other. The affinity, at any rate, is unmistakable, and many other poets and thinkers could be mentioned who, scattered in their scattered capitals, shared this dream of a language that communicates in “images” rather than in words, invokes rather than refers.

Most of them also entertained this related conviction: if the word is now dead and in need of resuscitation, there was a time, in a more or less distant past, when it was still alive. It could be as early as Shklovsky’s “beginning,” or, in the case of Eliot’s “dissociation of sensibility,” as late as the seventeenth century. Alternatively, the distance could be cultural rather than temporal: the word was still alive, only in remote, non-Western traditions, and in their quest for the living word many avant-garde poets immersed themselves in the study of ancient and/or distant languages and literatures. As can be seen in the passage above from “Embarking on the Study of Anglo-Saxon Grammar,” Borges’s choice was the ancient North. Another particularly explicit pronouncement is found in the 1969 Prologue to *The Self and the Other*:

The roots of language are irrational and of a magical nature. The Dane who pronounced the name of Thor or the Saxon who uttered the name of Thunor did not know whether these words represented the god of thunder or the rumble that is heard after the lightning flash. Poetry wants to return to that ancient magic.
(*SNF* 149)

This claim is reiterated elsewhere in the late poetry (cf. *SP* 305, 343, 351), where northernist medievalism finds itself at the heart of a quintessentially modernist conception of poetry and poetic diction, espoused by Borges, as

these passages testify, long after he had supposedly broken with the avant-garde poetics of his early years.

The Cult

In the final stage of Borges's northernism, literary and scholarly pursuits were joined by an increasingly personal involvement with the North. This development was well underway by the mid 1960s, when the audience of the 1966–67 Charles Eliot Norton Lectures was made privy to the following anecdotal remark: "Whenever I walk into a bookstore and find a book on one of my hobbies – for example, Old English or Old Norse poetry – I say to myself, 'What a pity I can't buy that book, for I already have a copy at home.'"⁴⁴ In the index to the published text of these lectures "Old English" comes in second – just below "Homer" and just above "Bible." Around the same time, he published *LGM* with María Esther Vázquez, who had previously accompanied him on a 1964 tour of Europe that included a visit to Schleswig, where he "asked to be taken to the beach and, falling to his knees, dipped his hand in the sea, reciting out loud a number of Anglo-Saxon poems about the Vikings."⁴⁵ Anthony Burgess relates an anecdote presumably dating to the mid-1970s, when Borges was out of favor with the revived Peronist regime in Argentina: "At a party in the Argentine Embassy in Washington DC, when he was dogged by spies listening for words of disaffection, he and I spoke in Anglo-Saxon. This baffled completely the polyglot agents of a repressive state; it was very Borgesian."⁴⁶ Moreover, there are various other reports of Borges reciting Old English poetry in interviews or at social events during this period.⁴⁷

Indeed, it is in this final decade or so of his life, marked by his relationship with María Kodama, that Borges's northernism reaches its apogee. In the "Autobiographical Essay," he had written of the wish to make "a pilgrimage to Iceland."⁴⁸ In 1971, a friend surprised him by arranging such a visit. Borges had divorced his wife Elsa some months earlier; he invited María Kodama to join him in Iceland. The quotes assembled by Williamson speak for themselves: the visit was "the greatest revelation of my life," "a kind of ecstasy," "a dream come true"; "he was moved to tears by the emotion of it all, for in Iceland, he would explain to Carrizo, 'you have the sagas and the Eddas, and I have always felt very deeply about all of that.'"⁴⁹ According to Williamson's interpretation, his new relationship with Kodama was an integral part of this northernist epiphany and the private northernist mythology rooted in the Norah Lange affair. Kodama and Borges had met in Borges's English class in Buenos Aires, continued to see each other in his Old English reading group, and now it was in the *terra sacra* itself that "the failures of the past

would be repeated one more time or finally redeemed in the person of María Kodama.”

They made another visit to Iceland in 1976, and a paragraph of Williamson’s account of this second visit is worth quoting at length:

Borges kept quizzing his hosts as to the grammar and pronunciation of Old Icelandic and about the customs of the island. He was curious to know whether the old pagan culture of the sagas had survived into the modern times. The Icelandic poets assured him that it had, but several days later, while visiting a Lutheran church, he learned from the pastor that there was in fact only one pagan priest to be found on the island. The latter turned out to be a tall man in his fifties, with bright blue eyes and a long white beard, who lived on his own out in the country in a house full of black cats and shelves displaying assorted animal bones. He claimed that there was a revival of interest in the old religion, and a great many people came to him to be married. When Borges inquired whether he and María might be wed according to the ancient rite of the god Odin, the priest was only too pleased to oblige.⁵⁰

Williamson says no more of the pagan wedding and does not cite his source. A year later, Borges opened the 1977 *History of the Night* with an inscription to Kodama rich with the recollections of their northernist romance:

For the blue seas of the atlas and for the great oceans of the world.
For the Thames, the Rhône and for the Arno. For the roots of a
language of steel. For a pyre on a Baltic promontory, *helmum*
behongen. For the Norsemen who cross a bright river, shields on
high. For a Norse ship, which my eyes did not see. For an old
stone in the Althing. (SP 391)

In short, from being one among his innumerable interests, Germania eventually became, in his own words, a “cult which illuminates my decline” (SP 371).

One can hardly read through a dozen pages of late Borges without coming across some northernist reference. The cult is evidenced in such intimate flotsam and jetsam of a literary life as a calling card that is now in the Borges collection at the University of Texas at Austin and bears on its back some forgotten citation from the *Prose Edda*,⁵¹ as well as in more enduring and public monuments. The North remained with Borges to the grave, and very literally so. Even when viewed from afar, his gravestone in the Geneva Plainpalais cemetery, a roughly cut slab of plain grey rock, inevitably

reminds one of the Scandinavian runestones. The impression is only confirmed by the engravings and inscriptions it bears: on the front is an Old English citation from *The Battle of Maldon*, “and ne forhtedon na,”⁵² above which is an engraving of the seven armed figures found on the so-called Lindisfarne Stone. On the back is the same *Völsunga saga* citation that appears as the epigraph of “Ulrikke” – “Hann tekr sverthit Gram ok leggri i methal theira bert” (*CF* 418)⁵³ – and below it an engraving of a Viking longship similar to those found on Norse image-stones, coupled with the words “De Ulrica a Javier Otárola” (“From Ulrica to Javier Otárola”), confirming Williamson’s interpretation of “Ulrikke.”

The great Argentine writer, buried in neutral Geneva, under a modern-day runestone, leaving behind a widow in Odin: there is no escaping the intended effect of this, of Borges’s final Droctulfian gestures. Not merely do they turn their back on nationalism as a political and cultural atavism – they call into question the very notion of nationality. “It was Switzerland,” writes Williamson, “with its diverse cantons and languages and races, that could offer Argentina an example of concord, a fruitful ‘confederacy’ of reason and good faith.”⁵⁴ Yet a multi-cultural or multi-national “confederacy” is still composed of irreducibly mono-cultural and mono-national ingredients. Commenting, in the Preface to the Spanish translation of *Moll Flanders*, on Defoe’s *True-Born Englishman*, Borges notes how “Defoe explains that to speak of pure-blooded Englishmen is a *contradictio in adjecto*, since all the continental races had already mixed in England, the sink of Europe,” adding that it was this poem that cost Defoe his pension.⁵⁵ Typically, Borges makes no overt pronouncements in this text, one of the last he ever wrote, but the implications for his situation in 1985–86 are unmistakable.⁵⁶

Thus Borges’s final work, his Genevan *ars moriendi*, issues a far more radical statement than that of the “Confederates.” Just like the Langobard *illuminatus* Droctulf, he, too, decided to die in a foreign city, despising the claims of his kindred, buried under an epitaph in a language he could not, or could barely, read. Here again Borges’s northernism takes the most unexpected turns: the gravestone – at first glance a quaint, almost distasteful artifact, informed by a cultural phenomenon whose origins are paradigmatically nationalist and whose politics has often been staunchly reactionary – reveals itself as a radically cosmopolitan political statement. In the same way, Borges’s poems and stories on the North, at first glance so escapist, so self-indulgently private, also reveal themselves as intensely public and political. But these observations are offered only as afterthoughts: much remains to be said about this northernist oeuvre and the Droctulfian “destiny of Borges, perhaps no stranger than your own” (*SP* 231).

NOTES

1. The alleged words of Borges's mother, Leonor, to her son; cited as "undoubtedly apocryphal" in Carlos Gamerro, "Borges y los anglosajones" (paper, "Borges y la Ley," Jornada anual del Departamento de humanidades, Universidad de San Andrés, Buenos Aires, 16 November 2006), <http://www.udesa.edu.ar/files/Events/archivos/Gamerro-Borges-y-los%20anglosajones.pdf> (accessed 25 February 2010).

2. See, however, Enrique Bernárdez, "Borges y el mundo escandinavo," *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos* 505/507 (1992): 361–70; Sigrún Á. Eiríksdóttir, "La alucinación del lector: Jorge Luis Borges and the Legacy of Snorri Sturluson," *Iberoamerikanisches Archiv* 12 (1986): 247–60; Eiríksdóttir, "Borges' Icelandic Subtext: The Saga Model," *Neophilologus* 71 (1987): 381–7; Eiríksdóttir, "'El verso incorruptible': Jorge Luis Borges and the Poetic Art of the Icelandic Skalds," *Variaciones Borges* 2 (1996): 37–53; Fernando Galván, "Jorge Luis Borges, poeta anglosajón," *Revista de filología de la Universidad de La Laguna* 1 (1982): 139–52; Galván, "Rewriting Anglo-Saxon: Notes on the Presence of Old English in Contemporary Literature," *SELIM* 2 (1992): 72–93; Martín Hadis, "Borges y el anglosajón," *El Lenguaraz* 4 (2003): 59–74; Margrét Jónsdóttir, "Borges y la literatura islandesa medieval," *Acta poética* 16 (1995): 123–57; Karen Lynn and Nicolas Shumway, "Borges y las Kenningar," *Texto crítico* 28 (1984): 122–30; Hugh Magennis, "Some Modern Writers and Their *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*," *Old English Newsletter* 24 (1991): 14–18; Joseph Tyler, "Borges y las literaturas germánicas en *El libro de arena*," *Hispanic Journal* 2 (1980): 79–85.

3. Where possible, Borges's works are quoted from the Penguin translations – *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (Harmondsworth, 1999); *Selected Non-Fiction*, ed. Eliot Weinberger (Harmondsworth, 2000); *Selected Poetry*, ed. Alexander Coleman (Harmondsworth, 2000) – henceforth abbreviated as *CF*, *SNF*, and *SP*. For works not included in these editions, the reader will most often be referred to the *Obras completas*, 3 vols. (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1996); *Obra poética* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2005); *Obras completas en colaboración*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1983); and the *Textos recobrados*, ed. Sara Luisa del Carril and Mercedes Rubio de Zocchi, 3 vols. (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1997–2003); these will be abbreviated as *OC*, *OP*, *OCC*, and *TR*. The abbreviations *ALG* and *LGM* will be employed for Jorge Luis Borges and Delia Ingenieros, *Antiguas literaturas germánicas*, Breviarios del Fondo de cultura económica 53 (Mexico City: Fondo de cultura económica, 1951), and Jorge Luis Borges and María Esther Vázquez, *Literaturas medievales germánicas* (Buenos Aires: Falbo Librero Editor, 1966), even though the latter will be cited from *OCC*. Unattributed translations are my own; I thank Tomislav Brlek for his assistance with these. The numerous bibliographical references throughout the paper rely mostly on Fabiano Seixas Fernandes, "Bibliografía de Jorge Luis Borges," *Fragmentos* 28/29 (2005): 245–431; Annick Louis and Florian Ziche, "Bibliografía cronológica de la obra de Jorge Luis Borges" (Borges Center, University of Pittsburgh, 1996), <http://www.borges.pitt.edu/louis/main.php> (accessed 25 February 2010); and Sergio Pastormerlo, "Bibliografía de los textos

críticos de J. L. Borges” (*Borges Studies Online*, Borges Center, University of Pittsburgh, 1999), <http://www.borges.pitt.edu/pastorm.php> (accessed 25 February 2010).

4. A coinage borrowed from Robert Lefere’s *Borges: entre autorretrato y automitografía* (Madrid: Gredos, 2005).

5. Jorge Luis Borges, *This Craft of Verse*, Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1967–68, ed. Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 104.

6. Thus Pastormerlo and Louis and Ziche; Fernandes, “Bibliografia,” 262, lists the title as “Noticias [*sic*] de los kenningar.”

7. Edwin Williamson, *Borges: A Life* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 25.

8. Jorge Luis Borges, “An Autobiographical Essay,” in *“The Aleph” and Other Stories, 1933–1969*, with Norman Thomas di Giovanni (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1971), 178.

9. Williamson, *Borges*, 36.

10. Cf. the 1966 interview in Derek Wolcott, *Latin American Writers at Work* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 9–10.

11. The copy is offered for sale by “Lame Duck Books” of Boston and their description of it, from which the inscription is cited, is available at <http://lameduckbooks.com> (accessed 22 May 2009).

12. This was published for Francisco A. Colombo in Buenos Aires; reprints of the essay in subsequent collections appear under the title “Las *kenningar*.” See also Fernandes, “Bibliografia,” 165, for the series of anonymous vignettes on “Antiguos mitos germánicos” published in four 1933 issues of the newly founded *Crítica*.

13. Williamson, *Borges*, 145.

14. Williamson, *Borges*, 182.

15. Williamson, *Borges*, 392.

16. For some exceptions see Borges, “Autobiographical Essay,” 172; *OC* 2:151; *SNF* 241.

17. Curiously, *SP* gives the title as “The Generous Friend” (*SP* vi, 141) – perhaps “fiend” was intended?

18. Richard W. Sonnenfeldt, *Witness to Nuremberg* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2006), 107. Strictly speaking, *gering* is an adjective meaning “small,” “meager,” and so on.

19. Borges, *This Craft of Verse*, 104–5.

20. See Mauro A. Fernández and Ernest G. Küng, “Delia Kamia: entre la realidad y la illusion,” *Todo es historia* 354 (1997): 44–50 (“Kamia” is a pseudonym Ingenieros adopted by 1952 at the latest). Delia Ingenieros is also acknowledged as co-author of the short story entitled “Odín,” published in the *Antología de la literatura fantástica*, that is actually a separately published extract from *ALG* (see *ALG* 57–8, *LGM* 455) and is also found incorporated in “The Dialogues of Ascetic and King” (*SNF* 385). For two other separately published extracts from *ALG*, see Fernandes, “Bibliografia,” 343.

21. There is only one instance known to me where Borges makes mention of *ALG*: in the Prologue to the *Historia de la eternidad*, dated 24 May 1953, referring the book to that “improbable and perhaps nonexistent reader” whose interest is raised by “Las *kenningar*,” which was included in that collection; see *Historia de la*

eternidad (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1978), 12. Apparently this Prologue continued to be printed in the separate editions of *Historia de la eternidad*, but in the text included in *OC* the sentence is altered to read: “The improbable and perhaps nonexistent reader of ‘Las kenningar’ may consult the handbook *Literaturas germánicas medievales* that I have written with María Esther Vázquez” (1:351). It may also be noted that in the 1962 postscript to “Las kenningar” (included in the *Historia*) – thus prior to the publication of *LGM* in 1966 – Borges takes time to correct errors and to provide a bibliography of the works he had used in writing the piece, but does not refer his reader to *ALG*, the book that actually includes a revised version of that same essay (*ALG* 87–95). So when the old 1953 Prologue disappears from at least some of the later editions of the *Historia*, *ALG* disappears with it. Vázquez has acknowledged the relation between the two books in a recent interview on the book and her legal battle over it with María Kodama, while at the same time greatly exaggerating the extent of revision in *LGM*; see Juan Manuel Bordón, “Reeditarán una obra de Borges con Vázquez,” *El Clarín*, 10 September 2008, <http://www.clarin.com/diario/2008/09/10/sociedad/s-01756834.htm> (accessed 25 February 2010).

22. Williamson, *Borges*, 343.

23. In a 1968 interview, Borges claimed that he had never, beginning his study of Old English subsequent to the deterioration of his sight, even *seen* the two runic letters representing the “th” sounds in Old English until he asked the students in his seminar to draw them in great scale “on the blackboard in the National Library [...]. The students drew them very large, in chalk, and now I have some idea what those unseen pages look like”; Jorge Luis Borges, *Conversations*, ed. Richard Burgin, Literary Conversations Series (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 45.

24. In this postscript, it may be added, Borges presents us with yet another chronology of his involvement with Old English: “Two years devoted to the study of Anglo-Saxon texts,” he says, have driven him to modify some of the views maintained in the 1932 piece (*OC* 1:380).

25. Thus, for example, a Norwegian translation of the Scandinavian chapter of *ALG* appeared in 1969, with Delia Ingenieros duly listed as collaborator: Jorge Luis Borges and Delia Ingenieros, *Den norrøne Litteratur*, trans. Hans Erich Lampl and Niels Magnus Bugge (Oslo: Capellen, 1969). Predictably, the only Scandinavian review of the book unearthed by Jónsdóttir is “highly critical”; “Borges y la literatura islandesa medieval,” 141.

26. Paul the Deacon, *History of the Langobards*, trans. William Dudley Foulke (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1907), 120.

27. See Jorge Luis Borges, *Borges profesor: curso de literatura inglesa dictado en la Universidad de Buenos Aires*, ed. Martín Arias and Martín Hadis (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2000).

28. Cf. Bernárdez, “Borges y el mundo escandinavo,” 361.

29. Borges, *Conversations*, 83.

30. The relevant bibliographies and surveys have significantly underrepresented Borges’s contribution to Spanish-language Old Germanic studies: see Fernando Galván, “Medieval English Studies in Spain: A First Bibliography,” *Atlantis* 11 (1989): 191–207; Antonio Bravo García, “Old English in Spain,” *Medieval English Studies Newsletter* 25 (1991): 4–7; Antonio Bravo García, Fernando Galván,

and Santiago Gonzalez y Fernández-Corugedo, *Old and Middle English Studies in Spain: A Bibliography* (Oviedo: Selim – Universidad de Oviedo, 1994); Juan Camilo Conde-Silvestre and Mercedes Salvador, “Old English Studies in Spain: Past, Present and . . . Future?” *Old English Newsletter* 40 (1995): 38–58 (38, n. 2). These fail to include a number of relevant items, while those included are misrepresented by being dated to later reprints. For example, none of these surveys notes the original date of the “Noticia de las *kenningar*,” which must be acknowledged as “the pioneering paper [...] in the study of medieval Scandinavian, and especially Icelandic, literature in the Spanish-speaking world” (Bernárdez, “Borges y el mundo escandinavo,” 362) – to which it only needs to be added that it is just as pioneering as far as Old English studies are concerned.

31. Jorge Luis Borges and Daniel Bourne, “A Conversation with Jorge Luis Borges,” *Artful Dodge* 2 (1980), <http://www.wooster.edu/artfuldodge/interviews/borges.htm> (accessed 28 September 2009).

32. This particular essay, however, might date from 1951 or even later: in Weinberger’s edition at least, it bears a later date than the other *Dantesque Essays*: 1945–51/1957.

33. See Eiríksdóttir, “‘El verso incorruptible,’” 44; Ernesto Porras Collantes, “Texto y subtexto: de ‘Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’ de Jorge Luis Borges,” *Thesaurus* 36 (1981): 464–526, 38 (1983): 82–117 (2:104); Jónsdóttir, “Borges y la literatura islandesa medieval,” 134–8.

34. *Via* a footnote in W. P. Ker, *Epic and Romance: Essays on Medieval Literature*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1908; repr. New York: Dover, 1957), 206.

35. Cf. *SNF* 437, 443, 446, 449, and *Biblioteca personal: prólogos* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1998), 143, 204–5.

36. See also, in order of publication: “A Saxon (A.D. 449)” (*SP* 189–91); “Fragmento” [Fragment] (*OP* 214); “Hengist cyning” (*OP* 212–13); “Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241)” (*OP* 218); “To a Sword at York Minster” (*SP* 209); “A un poeta sajón” [To a Saxon Poet] (*OP* 216–17); “To a Saxon Poet” (a different poem, *SP* 243); “A Islandia” [To Iceland] (*OP* 375–6); “Hengist Wants Men (A.D. 449)” (*SP* 335); “Brunanburh, 937 A.D.” (*OP* 411); “991 A.D.” (*OC* 3:144–5); “En Islandia el alba” [In Iceland at Dawn] (*OP* 457); “Einar Tambarskelver” (*OP* 456); “Nightmare” (*SP* 373); “Iceland” (*SP* 403); “Midgarthorm” (*OP* 606); “Un lobo” [A Wolf] (*OP* 605).

37. These include, in order of publication: “Matthew XXV: 30” (*SP* 173); “The Moon” (*SP* 109–13); “The Other Tiger” (*SP* 117–19); “The Hourglass” (*SP* 99–101); “Ariosto and the Arabs” (*SP* 123–7); “A Carlos XII” [To Charles XII] (*OP* 219); “Al vino” [To Wine] (*OP* 229); “El hambre” [Hunger] (*OP* 233); “Elegy” (*SP* 361–2); “España” [Spain] (*OP* 244–5); “Otro poema de los dones” [Another Poem of the Gifts] (*OP* 249–51); “Someone” (*SP* 225); “To a Coin” (*SP* 235); “Cambridge” (*OP* 298–9); “In Praise of Darkness” (*SP* 299–301); “Un lector” [A Reader] (*OP* 331–2); “El mar” [The Sea] (*OP* 364); “El pasado” [The Past] (*OP* 341–2); “Los cuatros ciclos” [The Four Cycles] (*OC* 2:504); “The Gold of the Tigers” (*SP* 339); “The Watcher” (*SP* 325); “Things” (*SP* 317–19); “Tú” [You] (*OP* 358); “Browning Resolves to Be a Poet” (*SP* 351); “Elegy” (*SP* 231); “Espadas” [Swords] (*OP* 396); “Talismans” (*SP* 365); “Quince monedas” [Fifteen Coins] (*OP*

399–402); “Elegía del recuerdo imposible” [Elegy to an Impossible Memory] (*OP* 435–6); “Herman Melville” (*SP* 377); “Los ecos” [The Echos] (*OP* 459); “Things That Might Have Been” (*SP* 407); “Fame” (*SP* 453); “Notes for a Fantastic Story” (*SP* 437); “That Man” (*SP* 431); “The Cloisters” (*SP* 435); “Estambul” (*OC* 3:408); “Esquinas” [Corners] (*OC* 3:430); “Alguien sueña” [Someone Dreams] (*OP* 600–1); “Christ on the Cross” (*SP* 471); “Haydée Lange” (*OP* 618); and “La trama” [The Plot] (*OP* 590).

38. *Seis poemas escandinavos*, originally a limited edition of 84 copies, is included in *OP*. According to information gathered from rare-book dealers and other sources, *Siete poemas sajones/ Seven Saxon Poems* was a limited edition of 120 lavishly manufactured copies signed by Borges and the artist Arnaldo Pomodoro, after whose work the etchings included in the book were made. In 1975, a hand-printed Italian translation, *Sette poesie sassoni*, was published in Verona in a limited edition of 150 copies.

39. Wulfstan, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, in *Beowulf*, Roy Liuzza, ed. and trans. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2000), 199.

40. Cf. Gambero, “Borges y los anglosajones”: “just as the sea is the Englishman’s pampa, so are Borges’s Anglo-Saxons the gauchos and ruffians of the British Isles.”

41. On the northernist element in *The Book of Sand* see also Tyler, “Borges y las literaturas germánicas en *El libro de arena*.”

42. Gerald L. Bruns, *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language: A Critical and Historical Study* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974; repr. Urbana-Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001).

43. Katerina Clark, *Petersburg, Crucible of Social Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 30.

44. Borges, *This Craft of Verse*, 4.

45. Borges, *This Craft of Verse*, 9.

46. Williamson, *Borges*, 356.

47. Anthony Burgess, “Foreword by Anthony Burgess,” in Evelyn Fishburn and Psiche Hughes, *A Dictionary of Borges* (London: Duckworth, 1990), xi–xii.

48. See for example Borges, *Conversations*, 1, 42, 200.

49. Williamson, *Borges*, 394.

50. Williamson, *Borges*, 422.

51. “Autobiographical Essay,” 183.

52. Catharine E. Wall, “The Jorge Luis Borges Collection at the University of Texas at Austin,” *Latin American Research Review* 36 (2001): 154–62 (159).

53. “[A]nd that they should not feel scared at all”; S. A. J. Bradley, ed. and trans., *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: J. M. Dent, 1982; repr. London: J. M. Dent, 2004), 520.

54. Williamson, *Borges*, 492.

55. “He took the sword Gram and placed it unsheathed between them”; Jesse L. Byock, ed. and trans., *The Saga of the Volsungs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; repr. London: Penguin, 1999), 81.

56. *Biblioteca personal*, 143. See *The Works of Daniel Defoe*, Cripplegate Edition, 16 vols. (New York: George D. Sproul, 1908), 11:224, 242.

57. The Prologue was written in 1985. On Borges’s deliberate decision to die in Geneva see Williamson, *Borges*, 481–2.