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BORGES AGAINST THE VIKINGS: EARLY WRITINGS ON OLD GERMANIC LITERATURE AND HISTORY, 1932–46

Vladimir Brljak

This special issue adds to a substantial and steadily growing scholarly literature on Borges's engagement with Old Germanic tradition, including monographs by Uwe Ebel, Martín Hadis, and J. M. Toswell.¹ Understandably, most of the attention has been devoted to the period inaugurated by the 1951 monograph *Antiguas literaturas germánicas*, in which the subject assumes a prominent place in Borges's work, inspiring, wholly or partly, a corpus of well

I am grateful to Daniel Balderston, Margaret Cormack, Vanessa Fernandez Greene, Martín Hadis, Ivana Krpan, and Jane Toswell, for their comments and assistance; to David Whitesell, for his help with reproductions of rare items in the Jorge Luis Borges Collection at the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia; and to the staff at Durham University Library, for reproductions of other publications otherwise inaccessible due to restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ In addition to studies quoted in a previous article on the subject—Vladimir Brljak, 'Borges and the North', *Studies in Medievalism* 20 (2011): 99–128—see Sigrún Á. Eiríksdóttir, 'Icelandic Sagas and Archetypes in Jorge Luis Borges' "Undr", in *Essays on Hispanic Themes in Honour of Edward C. Riley*, ed. Jennifer Lowe and Philip Swanson (Edinburgh: Department of Hispanic Studies, University of Edinburgh, 1989), 315–30; Teodosio Fernández, 'Jorge Luis Borges y el destino escandinavo', in *La aurora y el poniente (Borges, 1899–1999)*, ed. Manuel Fuentes and Paco Tovar (2000; repr. Tarragona: Publicacions URV, 2011), 89–96; Uwe Ebel, 'Zur historischen Signifikanz einer empatischen Germanenbefassung im 20. Jahrhundert: Altgermanistik und Jorge Luis Borges' [2001], in *Gesammelte Studien zur skandinavischen Literatur*, 5 vols to date (Metelen, Steinfurt: DEV, 1998–), 3:81–197; Carlos Gamarro, 'Borges y los anglosajones', *Variaciones Borges* 28 (2009): 27–42; Martín Hadis, *Siete guerreros nortumbrios: enigmas y secretos en la lapida de Jorge Luis Borges* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2011); M. J. Toswell, 'Jorge Luis Borges and Medieval Germanic Literatures', *Old English Newsletter* 43.1 (2012); Daniel Balderston, 'Descubrimientos secretos: Reflexiones en torno al manuscrito de "Destino escandinavo" (1953) de Jorge Luis Borges', *Lo que los archivos cuentan* 3 (2014): 213–28; Philip Lavender, 'The *Snorra Edda* of Jorge Luis Borges', *Variaciones Borges* 37 (2014): 1–18; M. J. Toswell, *Borges the Unacknowledged Medievalist: Old English and Old Norse in His Life and Work* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Ben Garceau, 'Passing Over, Passing On: *Survivance* in the Translations of *Deor* by Seamus Heaney and Jorge Luis Borges', *PMLA* 132 (2017): 298–313; M. J. Toswell, 'Borges, Old English Poetry and Translation Studies', in *Translating Early Medieval Poetry: Transformation, Reception, Interpretation*, ed. Tom Birkett and Kirsty March-Lyons (Cambridge: Brewer, 2017), 61–74; Miguel A. Gomes Gargamala, 'Borges, Solomon and Saturn: "Un diálogo anglosajón del siglo XI" (1961)', *SELIM* 25 (2020): 37–60; Daniel Balderston, 'Point and Counterpoint: On the Manuscript of "El fin" (1953)', *Variaciones Borges* 51 (2021): 149–68, esp. 152, 165–8. Toswell has also translated *Antiguas literaturas germánicas*: Jorge Luis Borges, *Ancient Germanic Literatures*, with Delia Ingenieros (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2014). An unpublished manuscript essay, 'Thorkelin y el *Beowulf*', has been edited and translated by Joe Stadolnik in *PMLA* 132 (2017): 462–70, while the manuscript of 'Destino escandinavo', containing important information about Borges's Old Germanicist sources, has been reproduced in Jorge Luis Borges, *Ensayos*, ed. Daniel Balderston and María Celeste Martín ([Pittsburgh]: Borges Center, University of Pittsburgh, 2019), 145–56. Several points in this article correct or expand on those in Brljak, 'Borges and the North'.

over a hundred items, encompassing a wide range of genres and formats.² The preceding decades, however, remain relatively unexplored, and this article seeks to shed some light on the unresolved questions they raise. Specifically, it argues that Borges is very likely to have developed this interest through the influence of fellow author Norah Lange; it elucidates the topical subtext of his first non-fictional piece on an Old Germanic motif, the 1932/33 essay ‘Noticia de los Kenningar’/*Las Kenningar*; and it offers a close reading of what seem to be his earliest literary works on such motifs—two miniatures published in 1946 as part of a project titled *Museo*, one of his several collaborations with Adolfo Bioy Casares.

Norah Lange

Later in his career, Borges would claim that his interest in Old Germanic literature began very early in his life and would credit this interest partly to his ancestry—through his English paternal grandmother, Frances Borges, née Haslam—and partly to his teenage reading. He recalls, for example, being given by his father a copy of the Morris-Magnússon translation of *The Saga of the Volsungs*, being struck by a depiction of Vikings encountered in some long-forgotten illustrated history, and making his way through Tacitus’ *Germania* as part of his Latin class in Geneva—all events which presumably took place c.1916–17.³ Apart from Borges’s own statements on the subject, however—which cannot be taken at face value, as they are often unreliable and in some instances intentionally misleading—there seems to be no hard evidence of his interest in Old Germanic topics until 1924, when a brief reference to kennings and Old Norse poetry appears in his prologue to *La calle de la tarde*, the first collection of poetry by fellow Ultraist Norah Lange.⁴ Singled out for particular praise are Lange’s daring metaphors,

cuyo encuentro de hermandades imprevisibles justifica la evocación de las grandes fiestas de imágenes que hay en la prosa de Cansinos Assens y la de los escaldas

² Jorge Luis Borges, *Antiguas literaturas germánicas*, with Delia Ingenieros (Mexico City/Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1951).

³ *Seis poemas escandinavos* (Buenos Aires: Colombo, 1966), [7]; *Siete poemas sajones / Seven Saxon Poems*, with Arnaldo Pomodoro (Venice: Plain Wrapper Press, 1974), 9.

⁴ In the poem ‘Lines That Could Have Been Written and Lost Round About 1922’, Borges writes of ‘the Saxons, the Arabs, and the Goths / who, without knowing, would engender me’; *Selected Poetry*, ed. Alexander Coleman, trans. Willis Barnstone et al. (New York: Penguin, 2000), 31. However, although this poem is now included in editions and translations of *Fervour of Buenos Aires*—Borges’s first collection of poetry, originally published in 1923—it was in fact written in 1966 and added to an extensively rewritten edition of *Fervour* in 1969. On Borges’s reworking of *Fervour* for this edition, see Tommaso Scarano ‘Riscrittura, scrittura, rilettura: la ragioni della intertestualità nelle revisioni di *Fervor de Buenos Aires*’, *Linguistica e Letteratura* 16.1–2 (1991): 9–48, esp. pp. 47–8, and Antonio Cajero Vázquez, ‘Estudio y edición crítica de *Fervor de Buenos Aires*’ (diss. Colegio de México, 2006). A quotation from the *Poetic Edda* appears in the text of *Evaristo Carriego* included in the edition of the *Obras completas* used in this article: ‘Y antes que el hijo de Martín Fierro, el dios Odin. Uno de dos libros sapienciales de la Edda Mayor (*Hávamál*, 47) le atribuye la sentencia *Mathr er mannz gaman*, que se traduce literalmente *El hombre es la alegría del hombre*’ [And before the son of Martín Fierro, the god Odin. One of the two wisdom books of the *Elder Edda* (*Hávamál*, 47) attributes him with the saying, *Mathr er mannz gaman*, the literal translation of which is *Man is the joy of man*]; *Obras completas, 1923–1946*, 15th ed. (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2004), 133. Here again, however, this is a later addition and is not found in the first-edition text: *Evaristo Carriego* (Buenos Aires: Gleizer, 1930). Where possible, Borges’s works are cited in extant English translations. Works unavailable in translation are cited in the original, with literal renderings provided in the notes or in brackets.

remotos—¿no es Norah, acaso, de raigambre noruega?—que apodaban a los navíos potros del mar y a la sangre, agua de la espada.⁵

There is no reason to read too much into this reference at this date: Lange indeed was of predominantly Norwegian descent and Borges is taking this feature, rare and therefore distinctive in the Argentine context, as the basis for a casual, good-humoured conceit of Lange as a born Ultraist, the vivid metaphorical imagery prized by the movement running in her Scandinavian blood. That said, the reference to kennings and skaldic poetry is unusual and proves significant in the light of later developments. The theory and history of metaphor was a major interest for Borges in this period and he could have encountered the kennings in the course of his reading in the subject, yet he does not refer to them in any of his most directly relevant writings of the 1920s.⁶ It is therefore of interest that the reference is made in relation to Lange and that the kennings are presented in a highly positive light—indeed, as comparable not only to Lange’s work but that of Rafael Cansinos Assens, whom Borges acknowledged as the father of the Ultraist movement and who occupied a particularly prominent place in his personal canon.

There is still no indication, however, of any deeper interest in the subject on Borges’s behalf or any emphasis on his own ancestry in this connection. In fact, in his prologue to Alberto Hidalgo’s 1926 anthology *Índice de la nueva poesía americana*, Borges criticizes authors of the preceding generation—the *rubenistas*, as he calls them, after the leading figure of Rubén Darío—for their preference for foreign and/or historically remote subjects, including the Bolivian poet Ricardo Jaimes Freyre, for drawing on ‘leyendas islándicas’ in his work.⁷ As discussed below, Borges would later completely reverse his opinion, praising Jaimes Freyre as a precursor of his own Norse-inspired poetry, yet for the Borges of the 1920s this was a dead end. As he saw it, the aim of the ‘Generation of 1922’ was not only to revolutionize poetic language but also to apply this language to subject matter drawn from common, local, and contemporary experience: ‘La verdad poetizable ya no está sólo allende el mar. No es difícil ni huraña: está en la queja de la canilla del patio y en el Lacroze que rezonga una esquina y en el claror de la cigarrería frente a la noche callejera. Esto, aquí en Buenos Aires.’⁸ This does not mean restricting one’s *reading* interests to Argentine and other Latin American literature—discussing his formation as a writer in 1929, Borges states that he has always had a ‘particular predilección’ for English literature, and is more widely read in it

⁵ I have not been able to consult the first edition of *La calle de la tarde*, whose date is widely listed as 1925. However, Borges’s prologue, as well as a selection of three poems from the collection, appeared in the September-October 1924 double issue of *Martín Fierro*: see Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Nora [sic] Lange’, and Norah Lange, ‘De “La calle de la tarde” por Nora [sic] Lange’, in *Martín Fierro* 9–10 (1924): 69, 74. I am quoting the prologue as printed here, which is presumably identical to the text included in the collection: ‘whose encounters of unpredictable affinities justifiably evoke the great fiestas of images that we find in the prose of Cansinos Assens and the ancient scalds—is not Norah, perhaps, of Norwegian roots?—who dubbed ships the stallions of the sea and blood the water of the sword’.

⁶ See ‘Anatomía de mi “Ultra”’ (1921), ‘La metáfora’ (1921), ‘Ultraísmo’ (1921), ‘Después de las imágenes’ (1924), ‘Examen de metáforas’ (1924), ‘La metáfora’ (1926), ‘Gongorismo’ (1927), and ‘La simulación de imagen’ (1928)—see Balderston’s bibliography for references. For an early, c.1923–24 manuscript version of ‘Examen de metáforas’, see Carlos García, ‘Borges: “Examen de metáforas (MS)”’, edición crítica y anotada’, *Fragmentos* 28–9 (2005): 199–212.

⁷ ‘Prólogo’ [1926], in *Textos recobrados*, ed. Sara Luisa del Carril and Mercedes Rubio de Zocchi, 3 vols (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1997–2003), 1:275: ‘Icelandic legends’.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:276: ‘Poetizable truth is no longer found only overseas. It is neither difficult nor elusive: it is in the plaint of the tap in the patio and in the Lacroze moaning as it turns a corner and in the radiance of the cigar shop in the street night. This, here, in Buenos Aires.’

than any other.⁹ However, in contrast to later, post-1950 interviews, where this topic would invariably elicit at least some mention of Old English and other Old Germanic literature, Borges highlights only modern authors—Browning, Whitman, Emerson, Shaw. At least as late as 1939, he still shows no interest in adopting a more broadly Germanic as opposed to specifically English identity: ‘My blood and love of literature make me a natural ally of England; the years and books draw me to France; but to Germany, pure inclination.’¹⁰

While Borges was not the only contemporary to highlight Norah Lange’s Scandinavian heritage, Lange herself downplayed it in this period, insisting on her Argentine identity.¹¹ In a biographical note accompanying a selection of her poetry in another collection, the 1927 *Exposición de la actual poesía argentina*, she writes: ‘Nací en Villa Mazzini, en la calle Tronador y Pampa. Soy por lo tanto argentina, esto dicho a trueque de causar desconcierto entre ciertos noruegos generosos de nacionalidad, y por cuyo parrafito se descubre la ascendencia noruega.’¹² Likely written shortly after Lange’s twentieth birthday, 23 October 1926, the note gives a candid account of her relationship with Borges up to that point: she is happy to acknowledge him as a mentor, her horizons broaden with each new literary and artist friend he brings her way, and she has measured out her life in Saturdays spent in their company—the Saturdays at the Lange residence, which had by that time become one of the salons of the Buenos Aires avant-garde.¹³ Within months, however, the circumstances appear to have changed considerably. With her second collection out—*Los días y las noches*, appearing toward the end of 1926¹⁴—Lange evidently began to distance herself from Borges and his immediate circle, carving out an independent place in the thriving literary scene, a development overlapping with the beginning of what would prove a

⁹ ‘Entrevista en *La literatura argentina*’ [1929], in *Textos recobrados*, 1:398: ‘particular predilection’.

¹⁰ ‘An Essay in Neutrality’ [1939], in *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger (1999; repr. New York: Penguin, 2000), 202.

¹¹ For another example, see Borges’s letter to his friend Jacobo Sureda, at some point before October 1925, quoted in César Antonio Molina, *Sobre la inutilidad de la poesía* (Madrid: Huerga y Fierro, 1995), 323: ‘Ya tenemos una poetisa ultraista: Norah Lange, pelibermeja, de ascendencia noruega, dieciocho años, muy entusiasta’; ‘We now have an Ultraist poetess: Norah Lange, redhead, of Norwegian descent, eighteen years old, very enthusiastic.’

¹² *Exposición de la actual poesía argentina (1922–1927)*, ed. Pedro-Juan Vignale and César Tiempo (Buenos Aires: Minerva, 1927): ‘I was born in Villa Mazzini, on calle Tronador and Pampa. I am therefore Argentine, this said in return for creating confusion among certain Norwegians generous of nationality, whose little paragraph uncovers one’s Norwegian ancestry.’ The reference to the parrafito is unclear to me, and therefore quite likely mistranslated here, but the general point is clear. Cf. the passage in Lange’s *45 días y 30 marineros*, in *Obras completas*, ed. Adriana Astutti, 2 vols (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2005–06), 1:255–6—discussed by Sylvia Molloy in her prologue to this edition, 1:14–15—where the novel’s protagonist, Ingrid, takes offence at the claim that she is not Argentine because her ‘sangre es noruega’ [blood is Norwegian]; nationality, she believes, is not a matter of mere ‘glóbulos rojos’ [red blood cells] but also of ‘una carta de ciudadanía, el nacimiento, la educación, el cariño, y acaso, por encima de todo, la predilección’ [citizenship, birth, education, affection, and perhaps above all, preference].

¹³ Some biographers, notably Edwin Williamson, have argued that there was more: that the two were at this point, and perhaps intermittently into the early 1930s, also romantically involved to some degree; see Williamson’s *Borges: A Life* (2004; repr. New York: Penguin, 2005), *passim* but esp. chs 7–14. Indeed, Williamson goes much further, ascribing to Borges a lifelong obsession with Lange, but while intriguing in certain respects, his account is to be approached with caution, as much of it is speculation based on references and allusions in the two authors’ literary works rather than documentary evidence. For testimony against any romantic involvement between Lange and Borges, see Fernandez Greene in this special issue, n. 2.

¹⁴ In the *Exposición* note, Lange writes that *Los días y las noches* was published ‘ayer nomás’ [only yesterday] as well as that she is twenty years old at the time of writing; in other words, the collection, dated 1926, appeared at some point between 23 October and the end of the year.

life-long relationship with another fellow avant-gardist, Oliverio Gironde.¹⁵ By the early months of 1927, when the *Exposición* volume appeared, this note, still presenting her as Borges's protégé, may have thus become something of an embarrassment—especially as it was also included in a selection of biographical notes from the collection published in the 28 March 1927 issue of *Martín Fierro*, one of the key magazines of the period.¹⁶ This might explain the fact that in the very next issue of *Martín Fierro* Lange published a subtly but still decidedly critical review of Borges's poetry, which may in turn account for the altered and increasingly negative tone of Borges's reviews of her first and second novels, *La voz de la vida* (1927) and *45 días y 30 marineros* (1933).¹⁷

On the whole, it seems that the relationship, however it is to be categorized, was a close one and meant a great deal to both authors, but that by early 1927 the protégé had outgrown the mentor and the two began to engage as equals, including publicly criticizing each other's work. This is to be kept in mind when references to Old Norse literature begin appearing in Lange's published work, a development perhaps precipitated by her visit to family in Norway between the final months of 1927 and mid- to late 1929.¹⁸ A more general interest in Norway and Scandinavia is attested even before this date. One of Lange's earliest poems, dated to 1922 and only posthumously published, is titled 'Noruega' and finds the teenage poet taken with 'La belleza nórdica / en un esplendor imponente' and 'El horizonte polar / con su eterna tristeza blanca'.¹⁹ In her third collection, however, the 1930 *La rumbo de la rosa*, appear verses incorporating motifs drawn specifically from early Scandinavian history and literature: 'Estás en mi recuerdo, Noruega / inquebrantable como un viking / que no calmó su sed de guerra.'²⁰ In the same period, Lange also publishes essays on modern and contemporary Norwegian literature, with a particular interest in Camilla Collett and Herman Wildenvey, and her voyage to Norway in late 1927 also inspires *45 días y 30 marineros*.²¹ Later on, in May 1940, during the German invasion of Norway, she writes articles defending the country against widespread media reports of Norwegians passively acquiescing to, or worse still, actively welcoming Nazi occupation, spreading in the wake of the infamous attempt at installing a pro-Axis puppet government by Vidkun Quisling.²² The Vikings make another appearance here, striking a discordant tone in the second of the two essays—even as she praises the pacifism of modern Norway and laments its occupation, Lange is still enamoured of 'La historia gloriosa de sus conquistas, el orgullo y el valor de sus antepasados,

¹⁵ See Williamson, *Borges*, chs 9–10, with further references.

¹⁶ 'Algunas páginas de la "Exposición de la actual poesía Argentina" por P.-J. Vignale y César Tiempo', *Martín Fierro* 39 (1927): 320–1.

¹⁷ See Norah Lange, 'Jorge Luis Borges pensado en algo que no alcanza a ser poema', *Martín Fierro* 40 (1927): 332, collected in *Papeles dispersos*, ed. Susana Lange (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2012), 65; Borges, *Textos recobrados*, 1:239, 2:77–8.

¹⁸ Lange left in late November or December 1927: a notice for the farewell party appeared in *Martín Fierro* 44–5 (1927): 375, published on or after 15 November; cf. Williamson, *Borges*, 164. She was still in Norway on 5 August 1929, when she attended an event held at the National Theatre in Oslo on the occasion of Knut Hamsun's seventieth birthday; see *Papeles dispersos*, 84.

¹⁹ 'Noruega' [1922], ll. 1–4, in *Papeles dispersos*, 27: 'Nordic beauty / in its awesome splendour / The polar horizon / with its eternal white sorrow'.

²⁰ Untitled poem [1930], in *Obras completas*, 1:205: 'You are in my memory, Norway / implacable as a Viking / who has not quenched his thirst for war.'

²¹ *Papeles dispersos*, 82–93.

²² *Ibid.*, 123–9.

el terror que infundieron en todas partes y que motive la célebre súplica: “fra furore normanarus libera nos [sic]”.²³

The most prominent expression of Lange’s interest in Old Norse literature, however, appears in an essay titled ‘Los cantos de los Eddas’, published in the June 1931 issue of *Azul*, a wide-ranging *revista de ciencias y letras*.²⁴ In addition to its significance in the present context, the essay is worthy of discussion in its own right, both for its place in Lange’s work and in the history of the reception of Old Norse literature in the Spanish-speaking world. Since it is translated and introduced in the pages of this special issue by Vanessa Fernandez-Greene, only a brief summary is required here. Essentially, the essay is an introductory overview of the *Poetic Edda*, presenting basic information about the work and its wider literary and cultural tradition, and illustrating it with a number of quotations in translation. It shows Lange familiar with other Old Norse literature—Snorri Sturluson’s *Prose Edda* and *Heimskringla*, the sagas—as well as some scholarship on the subject, including that of Sophus Bugge and Kristian Elster. There are remarks on individual works and passages as well as broader literary-historical judgments, drawing comparisons between different segments within the Old Norse corpus, as well as between that corpus and other literatures, for example the ancient Greek. The essay also contains a number of elements indicative of Lange’s personal appreciation of Eddaic poetry: she is impressed, for example, by the quality of ‘shared daring’, which she feels to pervade all expressions of Old Norse culture; she takes particular interest in the poems’ women characters, zooming in to compare the figures of Gudrun and Brynhild; she stops to reflect on more general aesthetic questions raised by the subject—‘Does not the truth of all beauty generally reside in its creation?’

All of this is to be kept in mind when assessing Borges’s initial burst of sustained interest in the subject, occurring within a year or so after the publication of Lange’s piece, with an essay, ‘Noticia de los Kenningar’, appearing in the November 1932 issue of the magazine *Sur*; a revised and expanded version of this essay published as a separate booklet, *Las Kenningar*, in 1933; and a series of vignettes on ‘Antiguos mitos germánicos’—unsigned but likely Borges’s—in four issues of the *Revista multicolor de los sábados* between September and November 1933.²⁵ Of particular interest is the ‘Noticia’/Kenningar essay, discussing the kennings of Old English and Old Norse poetry in the context of Borges’s ongoing interest in metaphor. The piece occupies an important place in his work, representing a kind of public farewell to his Ultraist phase, which is likely to be the main reason why he

²³ Ibid., 127: ‘The glorious history of its conquests, the pride and courage of its ancestors, the terror they instilled everywhere and which gave rise to the famous prayer: “deliver us from the Northmen”’. The Latin is a defective rendering of the apocryphal phrase usually given as *a furore Normannorum libera nos*; see Magnus Magnusson, *Vikings!* (New York: Dutton, 1980), 61.

²⁴ ‘Los cantos de los Eddas’, *Azul: revista de ciencias y letras* 10 (1931): 19–32; here quoted from the reprint in Lange, *Papeles dispersos*, 94–105.

²⁵ ‘Noticia de los Kenningar’, *Sur* 6 (1932): 202–8; *Las Kenningar* (Buenos Aires: Colombo, 1933); ‘Antiguos mitos germánicos’, *Revista multicolor de los sábados*, 23 September (‘El Dragón’), 7 October (‘Las Brujas’), 21 October (‘El Gnomo’), and 14 November 1933 (‘El Mito de los Elfos’). The *Revista multicolor*, which Borges co-edited in this period, was the literary supplement of the daily *Crítica*. Reproductions of several of the periodicals cited in this article are freely accessible either through the Archivo Histórico de Revistas Argentinas, <www.ahira.com.ar> (*Los anales de Buenos Aires*, *Destiempo*, *Martín Fierro*, *Revista multicolor*), or the Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno, Buenos Aires, <www.bn.gov.ar> (*Sur*). The discussion is indebted throughout to Daniel Balderston’s bibliography of Borges’s work at the Borges Center, University of Pittsburgh, <www.borges.pitt.edu>.

saw it worthy of extensive revision and separate publication in booklet form.²⁶ There is also, however, a further and more narrowly topical context at work, which relates to Norah Lange, to whom the essay is dedicated: ‘El ultraísta muerto cuyo fantasma sigue siempre habitándome goza con estos juegos. Los dedico a una clara compañera de los heroicos días. A Norah Lange, cuya sangre los reconocerá por ventura.’²⁷

All things considered, it seems highly likely that it was Lange in general, and her *Azul* essay in particular, that brought this subject to Borges’s attention. There can certainly be no question of his familiarity with Lange’s essay, especially since the same issue of *Azul* carried a piece of his own, ‘La postulación de la realidad’. Edwin Williamson takes this circumstance to indicate that ‘some kind of rapprochement had taken place’ between Lange and Borges, noting that ‘Borges, who spoke to Norah Lange mostly in English, entertained a fantasy of ancient ethnic affinity with her, deriving from his paternal family’s roots in the north of England’.²⁸ On close inspection, however, Williamson fails to provide tangible evidence of this fantasy at this early date. It is well-known that Borges would later make much of his ancestral link to the Old Germanic world, but his earliest statement of this kind would seem to be in the poem ‘Embarking on the Study of Anglo-Saxon Grammar’, written in 1956.²⁹ By contrast, Lange’s interest in her Norwegian heritage is firmly attested from an early age and it is easy to see how this interest, along with her literary and intellectual pursuits, could have led her to Old Norse literature. There is no reason to believe that Borges had a hand in this or that the publication of the two essays in the same issue of *Azul*—the only thing they have in common—indicates that this was a shared interest at this point. On the available evidence, it seems much more likely that influence flowed in the opposite direction: that it was Lange who occasioned Borges’s first reference to the subject in the 1924 prologue; that it was Lange who subsequently developed an interest in Old Norse literature, and that her essay turned Borges’s attention to the subject; and that Borges’s ‘Noticia’/*Kenningar* in particular,

²⁶ There seems to be no detailed account of the revisions executed in *Las Kenningar*, and some authors have underestimated their extent and misconstrued their nature, additionally obscured by the cobwebs of Borgesian automythography—see Donald A. Yates, ‘Behind “Borges and I”’, *Modern Fiction Studies* 19 (1973): 317–24, p. 320, who claims, presumably on Borges’s word, that the revised version was published ‘primarily to correct in the public eye what [Borges] considered a lamentable error’, namely ‘consistently ascrib[ing] the wrong gender to the noun “kenningar,” giving it as masculine plural instead of feminine plural’. Borges does correct this detail but that is certainly not the primary motivation behind the revised publication. At c.3,500 words, *Las Kenningar* is a significantly longer text than the c.1,200-word ‘Noticia’, and while the additions and revisions do not fundamentally alter the argument, they considerably enrich it in nuance and scope. The most notable additions are the references to Spanish Baroque literature but various other details are also of interest. For example, in the ‘Noticia’, 204, Borges thanks Raimundo Lida—a philologist with wide-ranging interests, who also contributed to *Sur* and would go on to a distinguished career in the US—for donating a ‘veintena’ [score] of kennings to his catalogue. In *Las Kenningar*, Borges adds almost a hundred new kennings to this catalogue—mostly from the *Skáldskaparmál*, which he had discovered in the meantime—yet seventeen items included in the ‘Noticia’ are removed, presumably the ‘veintena’ contributed by Lida, since the reference to him also disappears. This does not appear to be due to any personal animus—Borges would remain on friendly terms with Lida: see Williamson, *Borges*, 348, 375–6—but presumably to his desire to claim sole authorship of the piece. Borges then continued to revise the essay, with another 600 words and a short bibliography added at some point after 1933—possibly for inclusion in the 1936 *Historia de la eternidad*—and an additional postscript added in 1962. In at least some editions of the *Obras completas* still further revisions occur—see following note.

²⁷ Borges, ‘Noticia’, 208: ‘The dead Ultraist whose ghost continues to inhabit me at all times delights in these games. I dedicate them to a bright companion of the heroic days. To Norah Lange, whose blood will perhaps recognize them.’ In the text of this essay included in the cited edition of the *Obras completas*, 380, the words ‘de los heroicos días’ are absent, but it is unclear whether or not the omission is intentional.

²⁸ *Borges*, 145, 185–7, 193, 195–7, 201–2, 213–14.

²⁹ The poem was first published in the 1960 *El hacedor*, but in *Siete poemas sajones*, 33, Borges notes that it was written in 1956.

dedicated to Lange and referencing her Scandinavian ‘blood’, can be viewed at least in part as a response to this essay. In fact, Borges almost explicitly admits as much in his inscription in Lange’s copy of *Las Kenningar*, which has been reproduced in French translation by Jean Pierre Bernès: ‘À Norah, cette visite imparfaite à un thème inauguré par elle. À Norah avec mon admiration habituelle et mon ancienne affection. À Norah, toujours dans sa splendeur. Georgie.’³⁰ Williamson notes that this inscription ‘credit[s] Norah with being the inspiration of his interest in Norse literature’, but this casts Lange as a muse-like figure, whereas Borges’s language—‘a theme inaugurated by her’—clearly attributes her with an active and indeed pioneering role, and in all probability refers specifically to her essay in *Azul*.³¹

But if the ‘Noticia’/*Kenningar* is in some measure Borges’s response to Lange’s essay, it is by no means a straightforward one. Lange’s view of Old Norse literature is overwhelmingly positive: she finds it ‘admirable’, ‘of an inestimable value’, possessing a ‘unique power’, and so on. In the opening paragraph of her essay, she cites with appreciation the same example of the kenning—the ship as ‘sea-stallion’—that Borges had employed when praising her metaphors in the prologue to her first collection.³² Borges’s own position, however, is very far from such enthusiasm. There are instances of appreciation, for example of the ‘precelente’ *Njal’s Saga*—although even here we find that detail removed in later revisions.³³ The kennings, however, are now described as ‘Una de las más frías aberraciones que las historias literarias registran’.³⁴ ‘Lo que procuran transmitir es indiferente,’ he notes of the kenning-heavy verses of Egill Skallagrímsson, ‘lo que sugieren nulo. No invitan a soñar, no provocan imágenes o pasiones; no son un punto de partida, son términos.’³⁵ Where he had previously referred to them as a historical precedent for the vitality of the Ultraist experiment in poetic language, the kennings are now a prefiguration of its inevitable demise, illustrating the terminal stage of the conventionalization of metaphor. This was once a criticism the Ultraists levelled at their predecessors but now Borges turns it on Ultraism itself, whose own metaphors would not escape the same fate. It is a major manoeuvre on his part—by declaring himself a ‘dead Ultraist’ and consigning the movement to bygone ‘heroic days’, he both reaffirms his avant-garde credentials and stays in the lead, placing a distance between himself, heading off in a new direction, and epigones still clinging to the old creed. Although the essay testifies to a certain amount of reading in Old Germanic literature and scholarship—there would have been ample time for such reading between encountering Lange’s essay in June 1931 and the publication of the ‘Noticia’ in November 1932, and still more between then and the revised version of 1933—the kennings are little more than a prop in this polemic.

³⁰ The inscription is reproduced, in French translation, in Jorge Luis Borges, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jean Pierre Bernès, trans. Paul Bénichou et al., 2 vols (1993; repr. Paris: Gallimard, 2010), 1:1527: ‘To Norah, this imperfect visit to a theme inaugurated by her. To Norah with my habitual admiration and my ancient affection. To Norah, always in her splendour. Georgie.’ Cf. Williamson, *Borges*, 193.

³¹ Williamson, *Borges*, 193. For criticism of this tendency to attribute a muse-like role to Lange, see, e.g., Molloy, ‘Prólogo’, in Lange, *Obras completas*, 1:10–15, and more recently, Vanessa Fernandez Greene, ‘Norah Lange as Avant-Garde Writer and Girl-Woman’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 60 (2018): 79–104, with further references.

³² *Ibid.*, 96.

³³ ‘Noticia’, 202: ‘superb’; retained in *Kenningar*, 9, but absent from the *Obras completas*, 15th ed.

³⁴ ‘Noticia’, 202: ‘one of the coldest aberrations recorded in literary histories’.

³⁵ *Kenningar*, 9: ‘What they manage to transmit is indifferent, what they evoke null. They do not invite us to dream, nor elicit images or passions; they are not a point of departure but destinations.’ This passage is added in the 1933 text and retained in subsequent versions

Once viewed in this context, the essay's dedication seems far from flattering to Lange—on the contrary, it comes across as proprietary, polemical, perhaps even subtly offensive. In 1924, Borges professed to find the supreme form of poetic imagery in Lange's work and toyed with attributing it to her Scandinavian blood. Now that same Scandinavian blood is appealed to yet its products are classed as mere 'games', or worse still, as 'frenzies' and 'aberrations'. A further dimension—absent in the 'Noticia' but added in *Las Kenningar*, retained in subsequent versions, and voiced elsewhere in Borges's writings on the subject—is added to this by drawing a distinction between Old English and Old Norse kennings. The former, Borges argues, are a legitimate extension of a tendency which is common to all Germanic languages and which also finds analogues in other early literatures, including the Homeric epics. The latter, however, represent a baroque decadence of this tendency, and are comparable to late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish authors like Góngora and Gracián:

El culteranismo es un frenesí de la mente académica; el estilo codificado por Snorri es la exasperación y casi la *reductio ad absurdum* de una preferencia común a toda la literatura germánica: la de las palabras compuestas. Los más antiguos monumentos de esa literatura son los anglosajones. En el *Beowulf*—cuya fecha probable es el 700—, el mar es el camino de las velas, el camino del cisne, la ponchera de las olas, el baño de la planga, la ruta de la ballena También las naves de la *Iliada* son *atravesadoras del mar*—casi *trasatlánticos*—, y el rey, *rey de hombres*. . . . Los escaldos manejan puntualmente esas mismas figuras; su innovación fué el orden torrencial en que las prodigaron y el combinarlas entre sí como bases de más complejos símbolos. Es de presumir que el tiempo colaboró. Sólo cuando *luna de viking* fué una inmediata equivalencia de *escudo*, pudo el poeta formular la ecuación *serpiente de la luna de los vikings*. Ese momento se produjo en Islandia, no en Inglaterra.³⁶

Mapping this onto the topical subtext inaugurated by the reference to Lange as a descendant of the Norse scalds in the 1924 prologue, the implication seems clear: the 'Anglo-Saxon' Borges is the genuine Ultraist whereas the 'Norse' Lange is the decadent epigone.³⁷ Even after 1933, Borges continues to deploy some of his cruellest, driest wit in denigrating these 'games' which Lange's Norse blood 'will perhaps recognize'—in collecting the kennings for his catalogue, he has experienced 'un placer casi filatélico'.³⁸ On closer reading, even his

³⁶ Ibid., 20–1: 'Culteranismo is a frenzy of the academic mind; the style codified by Snorri is the exhaustion and almost a *reductio ad absurdum* of a preference common to all Germanic literature: that of compounded words. The oldest monuments of this literature are the Anglo-Saxon. In *Beowulf*—which probably dates to 700—the sea is the sail-road, swan-road, wave-bowl, gannet-bath, whale-path. . . . The ships of the *Iliad* are likewise *traversers of the sea*—*transatlantic*, almost—and the king is *king of men*. . . . The scalds occasionally employ these same figures; their innovation was to lavish them out in torrential outpours and combine them as the components of more complex symbols. It may be presumed that time conspired toward this end. Only once *the moon of the Viking* became the immediate equivalent of *shield* could a poet form the equation *the serpent of the moon of the Vikings*. This moment occurred in Iceland, not England.'

³⁷ Another detail that would be consistent with this is Borges's downgrading of 'los escaldas remotos' [ancient scalds], as he wrote in the original version of the prologue, to 'los escaldas medievales' [medieval scalds], being the text of the version collected in *Prólogos, con un prólogo de prólogos*, ed. Miguel de Torre Borges (Buenos Aires: Agüero, 1975), 106–7.

³⁸ 'Las Kenningar', in *Obras completas*, 1:371: 'a pleasure almost philatelic'. This sentence is neither in the 'Noticia' nor *Las Kenningar* and was thus presumably added in 1936.

inscription in Lange's copy of *Las Kenningar* seems subtly underhanded—presuming Bernès' translation accurately renders the original, it seems significant that Borges's affection has become 'ancient' and his admiration merely 'habitual'.

Nevertheless, it seems highly likely that Lange was a key influence on Borges in this respect and that the nature of her 1931 piece—combining scholarly, essayistic, and topical elements, and published in a *revista de ciencias y letras* rather than a purely literary venue—provided a model for Borges's own writings in a similar vein, beginning with the 'Noticia'/'*Kenningar* essay and then rising to particular prominence in his post-1950 work. Yet while Borges clearly felt obliged to record this debt in private, he would later fail to acknowledge it in public, including in places where he specifically discusses the origins of his interest in the subject. For example, in the Prologue to the 1966 *Seis poemas escandinavos*, he notes:

No soy, por lo demás, el primer intruso de lengua hispana que ha explorado esas latitudes. Nadie puede olvidar la CASTALIA BARBARA (1897) de Jaimes Freyre, con esos versos que aún retumban:

Un Dios misterioso y extraño visita la selva.
Es un Dios silencioso que tiene los brazos abiertos.³⁹

However, while Jaimes Freyre may have been an influence on some of Borges's later poetry on Old Germanic topics, the earliest manifestation of this influence would seem to date from 1961, and as noted above, in 1926 Borges actually criticized the Bolivian poet precisely for the Old Germanic influence in his work.⁴⁰ Again, while we find some evidence of Borges's *interest* in Old Germanic literature from 1924 onward, we find little evidence of his *appreciation* of this literature until almost two decades later. By acknowledging Jaimes Freyre as a Latin American precursor in the domain of Old Germanic-inspired poetry—while at the same time omitting, here and elsewhere, any mention of his debt to Lange—Borges is implicitly asserting his own primacy in the sphere of Spanish-language Old Germanic scholarship and semi-scholarly, essayistic prose drawing on this subject.

Museo

In 1932, Borges struck up what would turn out to be a life-long friendship and collaborative partnership with Adolfo Bioy Casares, and one of their earliest projects was *Destiempo*, a short-lived literary magazine launched in October 1936. *Destiempo* folded after three issues, each of which contained an unsigned column co-authored by Borges and Bioy Casares titled *Museo*, consisting of a series of quotations from a wide range of sources, unaccompanied by

³⁹ *Seis poemas escandinavos*, 8. The quotation is from the opening lines of Jaimes Freyre's 'Æternum vale', in *Castalia barbara* (Buenos Aires: Schürer-Stolle, 1899), 49: 'I am not, besides, 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 mysterious and foreign God visits the forest / He is a silent God with open arms." The foreign God with open arms is Jesus Christ; the forest is that of the old pantheon of the North. The presence of Old Norse myth and literature is pervasive in Jaimes Freyre's volume, and is also discussed at some length in the substantial preface by Leopoldo Lugones.

⁴⁰ See Borges's note to the poem 'Fragmento' in *Siete poemas sajones*, 33: 'This poem was written in Texas, in 1961. I had been struck by a strange experiment by the Bolivian poet Ricardo Jaimes Freyre, a sonnet of beauty and word music with no particular meaning. Using a quite different theme, I tried to do something similar in free verse. I have worked in a number of Saxon and Old Norse kennings.'

any commentary or paratext other than brief references supplied for each item.⁴¹ For example, the first *Museo* contained prose and verse extracts of varying length from works by—in order of appearance—Herman Melville, Ghislaine Lakor, Baltasar Gracián, Plutarch, Gabriel Bocángel, Isaac Walton, Leonor de Ovando, and William Blake. At first sight, then, the column is simply a florilegium by a reader of strikingly eclectic interests, yet on closer inspection one finds that some of the extracts have been tampered with, while others—the one by ‘Ghislaine Lakor’, for example—seem to be invented altogether. One finds, in other words, that the column is a literary work rather than a genuine florilegium, with the format offering the perfect vehicle for intertextual allusion and allegory of various kinds and degrees. The column then temporarily ceased with the folding of *Destiempo*, but a decade later Borges and Bioy Casares resurrected it in the pages of the more successful *Anales de Buenos Aires*, a monthly launched in January 1946 which Borges was closely involved with, and which he edited between its third and eleventh issue, from March to December 1946.⁴² The *Museo* reappeared in the March 1946 issue, the first published under his editorship, and end continued for the following eight issues. The title and the basic format remained the same, but a number of significant changes were also introduced: the columns were considerably longer than they had been in *Destiempo*, some of them running to four pages and containing up to eighteen items; each item now carried a title, adding another dimension to the format and offering further interpretive clues; and except for the first one, which appeared unsigned, the columns were published under a pseudonym, ‘B. Lynch Davis’. Several of these items were subsequently published separately or integrated into other works, but have only posthumously been collected as a corpus in their own right.⁴³

The four fragments that are of interest here—‘El promesa del rey’ [The King’s Promise], ‘Epitafios de Vikings’ [Viking Epitaphs], ‘La bofetada’ [The Slap], and ‘El enemigo generoso’ [The Generous Enemy]—appeared in this second run of the *Museo*.⁴⁴ Two of them, ‘El promesa del rey’ and ‘La bofetada’, are extracts from genuine works: Snorri Sturluson’s *Heimskringla* and Andrew Lang’s essay ‘The Sagas’, collected in his 1897 *Essays in Little*.⁴⁵ Of particular interest, however, are the fragments ‘Epitafios de Vikings’

⁴¹ See Fabiana Sabsay-Herrera, ‘Para la prehistoria de H. Bustos Domecq: *Destiempo*, una colaboración olvidada de Jorge Luis Borges y Adolfo Bioy Casares’, *Variaciones Borges* 5 (1998): 106–12. The idea for the *Museo* may have owed something to a column titled *El museo de confusión* by Borges’s cousin and fellow Ultraist Guillermo Juan Borges, published under Borges’s editorship in the *Revista multicolor* under the pseudonym Anímulá Vágula.

⁴² ‘Editor’ seems like a fair description of his role, although the terminology varies: there is no editorial credit in issues 1–2 (January–February 1946); Borges is then credited as *director* in issues 3–11 (March–December 1946); then as *asesor* in issues 12–22 (February–December 1947); and then *director* again for the final issue, published several months later, perhaps in October 1948. This final issue bears no date, but it cannot have been published before September 1948, since it was a special issue devoted to the Spanish poet Juan Ramón Jiménez, occasioned by his visit to Buenos Aires at the magazine’s invitation, which lasted at least until early September; see *Los anales de Buenos Aires* 23 (1948): [2]. The impression is that the *Anales* had effectively ceased publication in December 1947, and that this final issue was published to honour the commitment to Jiménez, whose visit was likely arranged several months ahead. The change to *asesor* is probably due to Borges beginning to publish signed fiction in the magazine’s pages at this time, beginning with the classic ‘Los inmortales’—*Los anales de Buenos Aires* 12 (1947): 29–39—later retitled ‘El inmortal’ when included in *El Aleph*.

⁴³ Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares, *Museo: textos inéditos*, ed. Sara Luisa del Carril and Mercedes Rubio de Zocchi (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2002); I was unable to consult this edition.

⁴⁴ *Los Anales de Buenos Aires* 4 (1946): 45, 5 (1946): 50, 7 (1946): 62, and 10 (1946): 56.

⁴⁵ See Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, trans. Lee M. Hollander (1964; repr. Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2011), 653; Andrew Lang, ‘The Sagas’, in *Essays in Little* (New York: Scribner, 1897), 141–52.

and ‘El enemigo generoso’: essentially fictional, these represent Borges’s first literary works based entirely on Old Germanic motifs. Although first published as part of this collaborative project, the fragments are likely Borges’s work and three of them reappear in later publications by Borges without credit to Bioy Casares.⁴⁶ Little has been written on them, and it is not difficult to see why. Like many other *Museo* items, they can initially seem like mere pranks and riddles: eclectically erudite pranks and riddles, to be sure, and perhaps carrying some long-forgotten topical reference, but unlikely to repay sustained critical attention more than seven decades later—presuming, of course, they can be deciphered to begin with, which is not merely a critical but also, and indeed primarily, a source-critical exercise. To seriously engage with any of these *Museo* fragments, one must first determine whether they are authentic, fictional, or somewhere in between; if found to be authentic or partly authentic, one must then determine the nature of the interventions into the source; and finally, one must relate these interventions to some broader and potentially topical interpretive horizon, whether indicated by the remaining items in the column, or the wider context, or both. As will be seen, however, the effort invested is amply repaid, and in addition to what they contribute to our understanding of Borges’s ‘medievalism’, it is hoped that the ensuing discussion offers some indication of the potential for further close readings of the *Museo* project.

For one thing, a quick look at the two (largely) non-fictional fragments is of interest in showing that Borges continued to read in this field. Apart from a few expository lines added at the beginning, ‘El promesa del rey’ is a translated passage from Snorri’s account of the Battle of Stamford Bridge: the king of the title is the English king Harold Godwinson and the promise is that which he makes to his opponents—his renegade brother, Tostig, and his ally, the Norwegian king Harald Hardrada, who had joined forces to invade England. To the former, should he cease his hostility, Harold promises his pardon, his friendship, and a third of his kingdom; to the latter, ‘seis pies de tierra inglesa y, ya que es tan alto, uno más’.⁴⁷ Borges loved these one-liners—another appears in ‘La bofetada’, translating the passage from Lang’s essay recounting Hallgerd’s vengeance on Gunnar in *Njal’s Saga*. Slapped in anger by Gunnar for engaging in theft, Hallgerd postpones her vengeance until she is able to execute it in the most devastating form—by refusing to help him at a critical moment, as their house is surrounded and invaded by his enemies. Gunnar is killed in the fight, but not before managing to spear one of the invaders:

Uno de los enemigos trepó hasta el alféizar de una ventana y Gunnar lo atravesó de un lanzazo.

—¿Está Gunnar en casa?—preguntaron los sitiadores.

⁴⁶ ‘Epitafios de Vikings’ resurface in the *Antiguas literaturas germánicas* (1951) and ‘Destino escandinavo’ (1953), of which more below. ‘El enemigo generoso’ appears as a separate text in second edition of *The Universal History of Infamy* (1954) and *The Maker* (1960).

⁴⁷ ‘Six feet of English land and, since he is so tall, one more.’ Cf. Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, 653: “[Harold Godwinson] did say something about what he would grant of England [to Harald Hardrada]: seven feet of English soil or so much more as he is taller than other men.” The motif resurfaces in ‘The Immortal’, published a few months later, in February 1947—‘I wandered through new realms, new empires. In the autumn of 1066 I fought at Stamford Bridge, though I no longer recall whether I stood in the ranks of Harold, soon to meet his fate, or in the ranks of the ill-fated Harald Hardrada who conquered only six feet or a little more of English soil’—and the text of the *Museo* fragment is later recycled in the 1951 *Antiguas literaturas germánicas*. See Jorge Luis Borges, ‘The Immortal’, in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1999), 192; *Ancient Germanic Literatures*, 67–8.

—Él, no sé, pero está su lanza—dijo el herido, y murió con esa broma en los labios.⁴⁸

There is ground to suspect further, topical meaning in both items, but to address this question it is best to now turn to the other two fragments, ‘Epitafios de Vikings’ and ‘El enemigo generoso’, where the topical element is much more prominent.

‘Epitafios de Vikings’ appeared as the third *Museo* extract in the May 1946 issue of the *Anales*, alongside those attributed to Almoqtádir el Magrebi, Edwin Soames, Julio Platero Haedo, the *payadores* Juan Andrada and Manuel Juncal, the Seljuk sultan Malik-Shah I, Richard Francis Burton, Rudyard Kipling, the *Dhammapada* (as cited in Hermann Oldenberger’s *Buddha*), and Emmanuel Swedenborg—of which ten authors or works, only the latter five seem to be real and the rest fictional. Included among all this are two short texts presented as inscriptions on Scandinavian runestones:

EPITAFIOS DE VIKINGS

Tola erigió esta piedra a la memoria de su hijo Harald, hermano de Ingvar. Partieron virilmente, lejos, en busca de oro, y saciaron al águila en el Oriente. Murieron en el Sur, en España.

De una piedra rúnica en Gripsholm.

Que Dios se apiade de las almas de Orm y de Gunnlaug, pero sus cuerpos yacen en Londres.

De una piedra rúnica en Torvik.

Borges’s unacknowledged source here is the following passage in Bertha Phillpotts’ 1931 *Edda and Saga*, which he also draws on in several other works:

History records how long and how diverse were the ways which were trodden or sailed by these Northern peoples, but perhaps the imagination is more readily stirred by inscriptions cut in their own Runic alphabet on rocks or great boulders set up to the memory of the dead. There is the Runic stone in the island of Berezanij on the Black Sea: ‘Grani made this grave-mound in memory of Karl, his comrade.’ There is what seems to be a lament for a lost leader carved on the marble lion which adorned the Greek harbour at Piraeus and is now at Venice: ‘Warriors cut the runes . . . Swedes set this on the lion.’ Two scores or so of stones still stand in Sweden commemorating men who fell in far-off countries in the tenth and eleventh centuries, amongst them a

⁴⁸ Translating Lang, ‘Sagas’, 144–5: ‘One of the enemies climbed up to a window slit, and Gunnar thrust him through with his lance. “Is Gunnar at home?” said the besiegers. “I know not—but his lance is,” said the wounded man, and died with that last jest on his lips.’ Cf. *Njal’s Saga*, trans. Magnus Magnusson and Herman Pálsson (1960; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), 169: ‘When the attackers approached the house they were not sure whether Gunnar was at home, and wanted someone to go right up to the house to find out. They sat down on the ground while Thorgrim the Easterner climbed on to the roof. Gunnar caught sight of a red tunic at the window. He lunged out with his halberd and struck Thorgrim in the belly. Thorgrim dropped his shield, lost his footing, and toppled down from the roof. He strode over to where Gizur and the others were sitting. / Gizur looked at him and asked, “Is Gunnar at home?” / “That’s for you to find out,” replied Thorgrim. “But I know that his halberd certainly is.” And with that he fell dead.’

stone at Gripsholm: ‘Tola had this stone raised to the memory of her son Harald, Ingvar’s brother. Gallantly they sought gold afar, and sated the eagle in the East: they perished south in Arabia.’ Another stone commemorates Rodfos, ‘betrayed by the Wallachians.’ Then there is the stone set up to two warriors: ‘God help well their souls, but their bodies lie in London.’⁴⁹

Both of Borges’s epitaphs are thus based on authentic runestone inscriptions mentioned by Phillpotts, but they contain significant deviations from the source. In the first, Borges alters only a single word, changing the location of the dedicatee’s death from Arabia to Spain. In the second, he invents the names of the two Vikings, omitted by Phillpotts, as well as the runestone’s location, altering it from an unnamed location in Sweden to Torvik, Norway. In addition to their topicality, on which see below, the choice of the names ‘Orm’ and ‘Gunnlaug’ might be a deliberate clue to the text’s semi-fictionality, since they inevitably bring to mind Gunnlaug ormstunga, ‘Serpent-tongue’, the subject of one of the best-known Norse sagas. If he was merely aiming for authenticity, Borges had any number of more feasible names to choose from, so his choice might indicate that he wanted to be caught, signalling to the right kind of reader that there was more to the fragment than it might appear.

But if the two epitaphs, altered in the manner described above, comprise some kind of Old Germanicist riddle, then what is the solution? Here we need to turn from Viking-age Scandinavia to 1930s and 1940s Argentina, and in particular to Borges’s opposition to Nazi-Fascism and Peronism in this period. He was familiar with Nazi appropriation of Old Norse tradition and in several prior texts from this period Vikings and other Old Norse motifs figure as a historical prefiguration of Nazism. ‘Los alemanes parecen incapaces de obrar sin algún aprendizaje alucinatorio: pueden librar felices batallas o redactar lánguidas e infinitas novelas, pero sólo a condición de creerse “arios puros”, o vikings maltratados por los judíos, o actores de la *Germania* de Tácito.’⁵⁰ ‘To be a Nazi (to play the energetic barbarian, Viking, Tartar, sixteenth-century conquistador, gaucho, or Indian) is, after all, mentally and morally impossible.’⁵¹ ‘Tan manso, tan irreparablemente pacífico nos parecía el mundo, que . . . deplorábamos “el tiempo de lobos, tiempo de espadas” (*Edda Mayor*, I, 37) que habían

⁴⁹ *Edda and Saga* (London: Butterworth, 1931), 14. The book is cited and included in the bibliography of *Antiguas literaturas germánicas*, 122, 172, as well as the revised version of that book, the 1965 *Literaturas germánicas medievales*, produced in collaboration with María Esther Vasquez. The two relevant inscriptions were recovered at Gripsholm Castle, Mariefred, Sweden, and Valleberga, Scania, present-day Sweden but formerly part of Denmark, and are now designated Sö179 and DR337, respectively. Modern translations are available at *Early North Data Service*, ed. Tarrin Wills <skaldic.abdn.ac.uk>: ‘Tóla had this stone raised in memory of her son Haraldr, Ingvarr’s brother. They travelled valiantly far for gold, and in the east gave (food) to the eagle. (They) died in the south in Serkland’; ‘§A Sveinn and Thorgautr/Thorgunn made this monument in memory of Manni and Sveini. §B May God well help their souls. And they lie in London’. The Ingvarr of Sö179 is the chieftain known as Ingvarr the Far-Traveller, who led a disastrous expedition to the region known as ‘Serkland’, most often taken to mean ‘the land of the Saracens’, i.e. land of Muslims, i.e. the Islamic world that was the eastern- and southernmost reach of Viking activity, stretching from the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa across the Middle East and into Central Asia—i.e. ‘Arabia’, in Phillpotts’ rendering. See Judith Jesch, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001), 104–7.

⁵⁰ Review of Gilbert Waterhouse, *A Short History of German Literature* (London: Methuen, 1943) [1943], in *Obras completas, 1923–1949*, 279: ‘Germans seem incapable of working without some hallucinatory apprenticeship: they can happily march into battle or compose languid and infinite novels, but only on the condition they conceive of themselves as “pure Arians”, or Vikings abused by Jews, or characters from Tacitus’ *Germania*.’

⁵¹ ‘A Comment on August 23, 1944’ [1944], in *Selected Non-Fictions*, 210–11.

merecido otras generaciones más venturosas.⁵² ‘To say that England has triumphed is to say that Western Civilization has triumphed, that Rome has triumphed.’⁵³ ‘Mil y un doctores alemanes lo han invocado’—the myth of Valhalla—‘para demostrar el temple viril de las viejas tribus germánicas. Fuera de algunas líneas de César y de Cornelio Tácito, los alemanes han perdido toda memoria de su mitología; nadie ignora que se han acogido a la de los vikings.’⁵⁴ The *Museo* miniatures belong to this same topical context. It is highly unlikely that Borges knew that the word translated by Phillpotts as ‘Arabia’ was the elusive *Serkland*, and that replacing it with ‘Spain’ represents a considered guess at the region’s identity. More likely, he substitutes Spain to reinforce the fragment’s topical subtext: to replace a non-European with a European locality, and have this locality, in combination with London in the second epitaph, stand for the pan-European scope of Allied opposition to Nazi-Fascism—and perhaps, on a more personal level, to map this opposition onto his own Spanish-Portuguese-English ancestry.⁵⁵ The Vikings, by contrast, again stand for the Nazis. Just like the Norse warriors commemorated in the runestones, their would-be descendants travelled far in their conquests, ‘sating the eagle’—a kenning meaning ‘to kill’, but inevitably bringing to mind the hated Nazi *Reichsadler*—and their bodies now similarly lay strewn across foreign and distant lands. While borrowed from Gunnlaug ormstunga, the names ‘Orm’ and ‘Gunnlaug’ might have also been selected for their contrasting meanings. As Borges could have learned from any relevant dictionary he was able to consult, ‘Orm’, *ormr*, means ‘worm, snake, serpent’, contrasting with ‘Gunnlaug’, which is one of a number of compounds based on *gunnr*, ‘war, battle’, and presumably connotes ‘warlike’ or something to that affect. ‘Warlike’ and ‘Worm’ would be appropriately derisive names for these Nazi-Vikings, as is the ingeniously interpolated location of their resting place—Torvik, an inversion of *victor*.

Before turning to the second *Museo* fragment, which further corroborates and expands this subtext, it is worth pointing out that these ‘Viking Epitaphs’ reappear, along with the rest of the quoted passage from Phillpotts’ book, in the 1951 *Antiguas literaturas germánicas*:

Diseminados por el mundo se encuentran epitafios de vikings, en piedras rúnicas. Uno es así:

‘Tula erigió esta piedra a la memoria de su hijo Harald, hermano de Ingvar. Partieron virilmente, fueron muy lejos y saciaron el águila en el Oriente. Murieron en el Sur, en España.’

Otro dice:

⁵² Prologue to Domingo F. Sarmiento’s *Recuerdos de provincia* [1944], in *Prólogos*, 130: ‘So docile, so irreversibly peaceful the world seemed to us that . . . we lamented “the time of wolves, time of swords” (*Elder Edda*, I, 37) that other, more fortunate generations had merited.’

⁵³ ‘A Note on the Peace’ [1945], in *Selected Non-Fictions*, 212.

⁵⁴ Review of Hilda Roderick Ellis, *The Road to Hel: A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge: University Press, 1943), *Los anales de Buenos Aires* 3 (1946): 62–3: ‘A thousand and one German doctors have invoked it to demonstrate the manly fortitude of the Old Germanic tribes. Apart from a few lines in Caesar and Cornelius Tacitus, the Germans have lost all memory of their mythology; nobody is ignorant of the fact that they have embraced that of the Vikings.’ The date of Ellis’s book is erroneously given as 1945; the *Textos recobrados*, 2:236, mistakenly ‘correct’ *Hel to Hell* in the title.

⁵⁵ Possibly—although this is more speculative territory—the substitution of Spain is in part also a comment on Franco’s regime, to which Borges was still opposed to in this period: see ‘A Note on the Peace’, published in the July 1945 issue of *Sur*, where he criticizes England for the fact that ‘it tolerates Franco, it tolerates the subsidiaries of Franco’ (*Selected Non-Fictions*, 213). His often-cited statement in favour of Franco dates from a much later period: see the interview he gave in Madrid in November 1976, as reported in Fernando Samaniego, “‘La democracia es una superstición’ declara Borges al llegar a Madrid”, *El país*, 8 September 1976.

‘Que Dios se apiade de las almas de Orm y de Gunnlaug, pero sus cuerpos yacen en Londres.’

En una isla del Mar Negro se halló el siguiente:

‘Grani erigió este túmulo en memoria de Karl, su compañero.’

Éste fue grabado en un león de mármol que estaba en el Pireo y que fué trasladado a Venecia:

‘Guerre[r]os labraron las letras rúnicas . . . Hombres de Suecia lo pusieron en el león.’⁵⁶

The same passage then reappears in the 1953 essay ‘The Scandinavian Destiny’—where, however, ‘Spain’ is restored to ‘Arabia’.⁵⁷ This seems worth pointing out as it is illustrative of three circumstances that further work on these topics should take into account. One, none of Borges’s ostensibly scholarly or essayistic writings should be taken at face value. He obviously knows that his ‘Viking Epitaphs’ contain fictional additions and revisions, yet he still includes them, verbatim, in an ostensibly non-fictional work like *Antiguas literaturas germánicas*. One should thus always be ready to suspect fiction, even where it seems least likely. Two, it should not be assumed that Borges’s use of sources fully adheres to modern scholarly conventions. He includes Phillpotts’ book in the bibliography to *Antiguas literaturas germánicas* and cites it on at least two occasions, but as the quoted passage shows, he does not acknowledge every borrowing from it, and there is good reason to suppose that this is also the case with other sources. Three, Borges often silently recycles texts. Sometimes, a passage is simply extracted verbatim or near-verbatim and republished as a separate work: one instance is the paragraph found at the end of the opening section of the Old Norse chapter of *Literaturas*, which later appears as part of the 1953 ‘Dialogues of Ascetic and King’ and is subsequently included—as a self-standing text titled ‘Odín’, with Delia Ingenieros credited as co-author—in the 1965 second edition of the *Antología de la literatura fantástica*.⁵⁸ In other instances of recycling from *Antiguas literaturas germánicas*—including ‘The Scandinavian Destiny’, ‘La apostasía de Coifi’ [The Apostasy of Coifi], ‘La inocencia de Layamon’ [The Innocence of Layamon]—Borges retains a significant portion of the original text, but also introduces additions and revisions which modify the original meaning to the degree where the recycled text becomes a self-standing work in its own right. Tracking these alterations is therefore essential in understanding the relations between such publications and the development of ideas and motifs across larger arcs in Borges’s work. Finally, Borges often silently revises his published works. In result, although typically listed under the date of their original publication, the texts included in many editions of his works are often versions revised at later dates and thus unreliable for scholarly purposes, especially where dating plays a significant role in the argument. Until critical editions become available, the reader should always suspect such silent revision and consult earlier editions wherever possible.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *Antiguas literaturas germánicas*, 56–7; trans. in *Ancient Germanic Literatures*, 32.

⁵⁷ ‘The Scandinavian Destiny’, in *Selected Non-Fictions*, 378–9.

⁵⁸ *Antiguas literaturas germánicas*, 57–8; ‘The Dialogues of Ascetic and King’ [1953], in *Selected Non-Fictions*, 385; ‘Odín’, in *Antología de la literatura fantástica*, ed. Jorge Luis Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares, and Silvina Ocampo, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1965).

⁵⁹ On Borges’s revisions, cf. esp. Daniel Balderston, *How Borges Wrote*, esp. ch. 7.

The Generous Enemy

The same topical context at work in the ‘Viking Epitaphs’ also underpins this *Museo* fragment, appearing five months later, in the October 1946 issue of the *Anales*, alongside extracts attributed to Heraclitus, Plutarch, ‘Gaspar Camerarius’ (fictional), Thomas De Quincey, Aldous Huxley, Spinoza, Voltaire, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Eduard Hanslick:

THE GENEROUS ENEMY

In the year 1102, Magnus Barfod attempted to conquer all the kingdoms of Ireland. It is said that he received the following greeting from Muirchertach, the king of Dublin, the night before he died:

May gold and storms serve your army well, Magnus Barfod.
May your battle tomorrow be successful, in the fields of my kingdom.
May your regal hands weave the sword’s cloth, sowing terror.
May those who oppose your sword be food for the red swan.
May your many gods grant you your fill of glory—may they sate you with blood.
May you be victorious at dawn, o king who trods Ireland underfoot.
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.

—from *Anhang zur Heimskringla* (1893) by H. Gering⁶⁰

While the conceit of the ‘Viking Epitaphs’ is relatively simple, ‘The Generous Enemy’ is a minor masterpiece of multi-layered topical allusion. As the introductory sentence explains, the piece is loosely based on historical events which took place in 1102–03, when the Norwegian king Magnus III—known as Magnus Barfod, ‘Barefoot’—mustered a large force and disembarked in Ireland. The ensuing events are recounted, with significant differences, in a range of Irish and Scandinavian sources, but the consensus seems to be that Magnus formed an alliance with Muirchertach Ua Briain, who had proclaimed himself high-king of Ireland; that their forces engaged in a number of joint or coordinated campaigns against Muirchertach’s rivals; and that Magnus was eventually killed in a skirmish with some of these rival Irish forces.⁶¹ To my knowledge, in no account is Magnus killed by Muirchertach, nor does Muirchertach send Magnus a greeting of any description. There is one source, however, *The Saga of St. Jón of Hólar*, which relates how Magnus and Muirchertach agreed a year’s truce, sealed by the customary exchange of hostages, and how Magnus broke this truce, becoming Muirchertach’s enemy. When the hostages arrived at Muirchertach’s court, one of them, ‘who said he knew Irish well, . . . asked to greet the king’, and was permitted to do so:

⁶⁰ *Selected Poetry*, 141.

⁶¹ See Rosemary Powers, ‘Magnus Barelegs’ Expeditions to the West’, *The Scottish Historical Review* 65 (1986): 107–32, and ‘The Death of Magnus Barelegs’, *The Scottish Historical Review* 73 (1994): 216–22.

He then said to the king ‘Male diarik,’ which means in our language ‘Curse you, king!’ One of the king’s men answered, ‘Lord,’ he said, ‘This man must be the slave of all the Norwegians.’ The king answered, ‘Olgeira iagall,’ which means in our language ‘A dark road is unknown.’ The king treated them well. Later on King Magnús attacked Ireland. The king said: ‘Now all your lives are forfeit, but we will not kill you, even though King Magnús’s actions would justify it. Depart where you please.’⁶²

Rosemary Power notes that this passage is ‘unique among the sources in . . . imply[ing] that Magnús had broken his word and had actually fought against Muirchertach’, and since it is also the only to contain anything remotely similar to the deceptively ‘generous’ greeting imagined in Borges’s piece, it seems likely that it is the ultimate source on which he builds here.⁶³ Borges could not have known it in the original, nor was there an English translation, so presumably he either relied on a German translation, if one existed at that time, or more likely, an account in a work of secondary literature.

Wherever he found it, for the purposes of the fragment Borges clearly built on two key elements in the episode: the enmity between Magnus and Muirchertach, intensified to present the former as a bloodthirsty Germanic invader and the latter as a valiant Celtic defender, and the insulting greeting, expanded into the short poem. Just as the unnamed Norwegian hostage of the saga insults Muirchertach in his own Irish language, so the Muirchertach of Borges’s piece greets Magnus by employing the Norwegian’s own poetic tradition, most notably in the poem’s use of kennings—‘the weaving of the sword’s cloth’, or battle, and ‘the red swan’, or raven, who will feast on the bodies of the slain. This seeming flattery, however, serves only to lull the addressee into a false sense of security, amplifying the impact of the sting awaiting in the greeting’s tail—the turn of the final two lines, in which the misleadingly flattering verses are revealed as an unvarnished, uncompromising death threat. The title itself is taken from Mary Coleridge’s story ‘The Friendly Foe’, an unsigned translation of which—Borges’s?—appeared in the following, December 1946 issue of the *Anales*.⁶⁴ The story contains no references to Old Germanic topics and indeed bears no relation to Borges’s miniature apart from a very broad similarity in the general relation between its two principal characters, one of whom is referred to as ‘a generous enemy’ in the opening paragraphs, rendered straightforwardly in the Spanish translation as ‘un enemigo generoso’.⁶⁵

The key to the miniature’s topical meaning, however, lies neither in the title, nor the introductory sentences, nor the greeting itself, but in the reference supplied at the ending: ‘from *Anhang zur Heimskringla* (1893) by H. Gering’. Two elements in this reference are genuine. ‘H. Gering’ is a real person—Hugo Gering (1847–1925), a distinguished German scholar whose publications include an 1892 translation of the *Poetic Edda* that Borges lists in the bibliography to *Las Kenningar*—and the *Heimskringla* is of course a real book. The rest

⁶² *The Saga of St. Jón of Hólar*, trans. Margaret Cormack, intro. Peter Foote (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS Press, forthcoming). I am grateful to Professor Cormack for sharing the translation ahead of publication and pointing me to Rosemary Power’s discussion of the passage in ‘Cursing the King: An Irish Conversation in *Jóns saga helga*’, *Saga-Book* 25 (2000): 310–13.

⁶³ Power, ‘Cursing the King’, 311.

⁶⁴ See Mary E. Coleridge, ‘The Friendly Foe’ [1898], in *The Gathered Leaves from the Prose of Mary E. Coleridge, with a Memoir by Edith Sichel*, ed. Edith Sichel (London: Constable, 1910), 79–103; ‘El enemigo amistoso’, *Los anales de Buenos Aires* 11 (1946): 21–33.

⁶⁵ Coleridge, ‘Friendly Foe’, 79; ‘Enemigo amistoso’, 21.

is again fictional. Hugo Gering never published a work titled *Anhang zur Heimskringla* [Supplement to *Heimskringla*] and the fictional reference is to be taken as a conceit integral to the fragment's overall meaning. It operates on several levels. To begin with, through the incidental similarity offered by this abbreviated form of the German scholar's name, Borges alludes to Hermann Göring. The choice of Göring rather than Hitler or some other high-ranking Nazi is deliberate. Hitler was long dead by September 1946—when we may presume the piece was composed—while Göring was the highest-ranking Nazi alive and the chief defendant in the stocks at Nuremberg. There is every reason to believe that Borges followed the Nuremberg tribunal with close attention, and perhaps not only through media reports. He was a close friend of Victoria Ocampo, who visited the tribunal at the invitation of the British Council in early June and wrote about it in letters sent to family and friends in Buenos Aires.⁶⁶ It was in the pages of Ocampo's *Sur*, in early February 1946, that Borges published the story 'Deutsches Requiem', cast as a confession, on the eve of his execution, of the fictional Nazi concentration camp commander, Otto Dietrich zur Linde.⁶⁷ The story never explicitly refers to Nuremberg, but clearly this is a key context for it, and the same goes for the *Museo* pieces. In fact, it does not seem impossible that the publication of 'The Generous Enemy' in the October 1946 issue of the *Anales* was timed to coincide with the sentencing of the Nuremberg defendants, pronounced on 30 September and 1 October.

But how can we be sure that the similarity between 'H. Gering' and 'H. Göring' is not merely coincidental? Here we rely on those who lived to tell of the times, such as Richard W. Sonnenfeldt in his memoir *Witness to Nuremberg*. Born to a German Jewish family which fled Nazi persecution before the outbreak of the war and eventually settled in the United States, Sonnenfeldt went on to serve in the US army, seeing combat in the Battle of the Bulge, and later acted as the chief US interpreter at the Nuremberg tribunal. In his book, he recalls being 'too young', in 1933, 'to grasp that Hitler had conquered Germany. I doubt that many adults understood. In fact, the Nazis were joked about. Hermann Göring was referred to as "Gering," a German word meaning "little nothing," a play on his enormous girth'.⁶⁸ Sonnenfeldt also recounts how he made recourse to this joke when Göring behaved in a disruptive fashion during examination, interjecting as he was translating his statements to the judge, colonel John Amen:

I said: 'Herr Gering. When I translate the colonel's questions into German and your answers into English, you keep quiet until I am finished. You don't interrupt. When the stenographer has recorded my translation, you may tell me whether you have a problem, and then I will decide whether it is necessary to consider your comments. Or, if you would like to be interrogated without an interpreter, just say so, and I will merely listen and correct you.'

His eyes flickered, and he gave me a long look. He said, 'My name is Göring, not Gering.' . . .

I said, 'I am the chief interpreter here, and if you will never again interrupt me, I will never again mispronounce your name, Herr Göring.' Colonel Amen watched

⁶⁶ I have not been able to consult Ocampo's *Cartas de posguerra*, but at least a few letters in the collection discuss Nuremberg, including one which is not to a family member but a mutual friend, José Bianco; see Susana Reinoso, 'Testigo del horror: "Vi objetos hechos con piel humana"; lo que contó Victoria Ocampo de los juicios de Nuremberg', *Clarín*, 21 November 2020.

⁶⁷ 'Deutsches Requiem', *Sur* 136 (1946): 7–14; the date of printing is stated as 2 February 1946.

⁶⁸ *Witness to Nuremberg* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2006), 107.

our facial expressions and waited patiently during this interchange. I turned to him and said, ‘Prisoner Göring will now answer your questions.’⁶⁹

How Borges learned of the Göring-Gering joke by September 1946 is unknown, but if Sonnenfeld remembered it others must have remembered it as well, and here again Ocampo seems a possibility—especially as one of her letters contains a different joke on the same subject: ‘Todo el mundo está de acuerdo para decir que Goering tiene mucho *cran* (agallas).’⁷⁰

H. Gering is author of an *Anhang zur Heimskringla*. As Borges knew, the title of Snorri’s work is editorial: *heimskringla*, amounting to an Old Norse rendering of the Latin *orbis terrarum*, is simply a compound based on the text’s opening words—‘The earth’s round [*Kringla heimsins*], on which mankind lives, is much indented.’⁷¹ The title thus has nothing to do with the work’s actual subject, the history of the kings of Norway, but is open to unintentional irony in effectively conflating that history with the history of the entire world. Accordingly, H. Gering’s fictional *Anhang*—‘appendix’, ‘addendum’, ‘annex’—to *Heimskringla* decodes as the Nazi repetition of aspirations to global conquest already attempted by their Norse ancestors. Moreover, in another repetition, Magnus Barfod—whom Borges takes care to portray as not merely a Viking raider but as having ‘attempted to conquer all the kingdoms of Ireland’, and has him defeated by Muirchertach—is the grandson of Harald Hardrada, defeated by Harold Godwinson at Stamford Bridge (the subject, as discussed above, of ‘La promesa del rey’, which can now also be recognized as probably infused with this same topical context). The repeated defeat of the Viking at the hand of the Christian thus prefigures the defeat of the Axis by the Allies, and the ultimate demise of any further ‘addenda’ of the same kind—as already quoted above, ‘To say that England has triumphed is to say that Western Civilization has triumphed, that Rome has triumphed’.⁷² The fictional book’s publication date is probably also an allusion to Göring, born in 1893.

Beyond this, we move into the sphere of conjecture, but it seems likely that Borges knew that Göring had a daughter named Edda, born in 1938. There could thus be some Borgesian numerology at work here—compare, for example, his claim, in the anti-Nazi essay ‘1941’, that the ‘atrocious conspiracy by Germany to conquer and oppress all the countries of the atlas is . . . [n]otoriously anachronistic’ and ‘has the unmistakable flavor of 1914’.⁷³ Familiar with the appropriation of Old Norse tradition in Nazi propaganda, Borges may have believed that the name Edda was chosen for the Old Norse works, but could have also read that the child was named after Edda Mussolini, the eldest daughter of Benito Mussolini, later known under her married name, Edda Ciano. Edda Ciano was a figure of international stature and not just as Mussolini’s daughter but as an important Fascist agent in her own right. As late as 24 July 1939, for example—mere weeks before the formal outbreak of the war—she

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Reinoso, ‘Testigo del horror’: ‘Everyone agrees Goering has a lot of *cran* (guts).’ The first collection of anti-Nazi jokes was published already in 1946—Richard Hermes, *Witz contra Nazi: Hitler und sein Tausendjähriges Reich*—but I have not been able to consult it.

⁷¹ *Heimskringla*, 6. Cf. Borges, *Ancient Germanic Literatures*, 65: ‘Two random words wound up as the title of the book, two words which, without doubt, suggest the immensity of its range.’

⁷² ‘Note on the Peace’, 212.

⁷³ ‘1941’ [1941], in *Selected Non-Fictions*, 209. There are various further examples of Borges employing such devices. Cf., e.g., the fictional editor of ‘Deutsches Requiem’ commenting on Linde’s account of a Jewish poet named David Jerusalem: “‘David Jerusalem’ is perhaps a symbol for many individuals. We are told that he died on March 1, 1943; on March 1, 1939, the narrator had been wounded at Tilsit’ (*Collected Fictions*, 233).

appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, captioned ‘She wears the diplomatic trousers’. The accompanying article, ‘Lady of the Axis’, describes the glamorous life of ‘one of Europe’s most successful intriguers and string-pullers’, and mentions the child the Görings allegedly named after her:

As the Foreign Minister’s wife Edda became dashing, chic, smart. At times she was a brunette, at other times as is fashionable in Rome, a blonde. She wore heavy, fashionable make up—except when she went to see her father. The circular rolled hairdo she adopted means a daily visit to famed Hairdresser Attilio on the Piazzo di Spagna. All one winter she wore a sable coat everywhere. During her junket to Vienna and Budapest in 1936 she was seen in ermine, morning, noon and night. In Poland last winter she wore mink. . . .

Guido Manacorda, professor at the University of Florence, had been promoting the idea of a Rome-Berlin Axis for some time. It began to take form when the Countess made a month’s trip to Germany in June 1936. Officially, Countess Ciano traveled with 200 other Italians on a ‘goodwill’ tour, but on her arrival she was met by officials from the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Propaganda. Field Marshal Hermann Göring, Propaganda Minister Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels, Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop (then Minister Without Portfolio) were all present at a dinner for her at the Italian Embassy. Adolf Hitler gave a brilliant reception for her at the Chancellery and later presented her with his esteemed autographed photograph.

Her father’s daughter, she liked the heavy masculine atmosphere of Berlin. Handsome young Nordic men were always at hand to keep her in a proper Germanic frame of mind. Nazi bigwigs flattered her by talking international politics, insinuating projects of future German-Italian cooperation. Herr & Frau Göring became her fast friends (they later named their daughter after her). She made friends of bushy-browed Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess. Born and reared in Alexandria, Egypt, Herr Hess has long had a Mediterranean ‘outlook’ for Germany. The two talked so long and so earnestly, were seen together so much that wits came to call Countess Edda the ‘mother’ and Führer Hess the ‘father’ of the Rome-Berlin Axis.⁷⁴

Borges may well have read this article: *Time* was printed in Buenos Aires in parallel with the US edition until banned by the military dictatorship installed in the wake of the coup of June 1943.⁷⁵ But whatever details he may have known about the figures in questions, the names themselves—Edda Mussolini, Edda Göring—would have been enough, reading like bizarre, menacing ‘supplements’ to *Edda Saemundi*, the title under which the work we now call the *Elder* or *Poetic Edda* was first printed and widely known in early scholarship on the subject.

Finally, a further context that must be taken into consideration here is that of Peronism. In August 1945, Borges rejoiced at the Allies’ victory, and may have harboured hopes that it would spur political change in Argentina, only to see, in February 1946, democratically elected into office the man who embodied everything he stood against in both domestic and international politics—the man who participated in Argentina’s fateful first military coup of 1930, which ousted president Hipólito Yrigoyen, of whom Borges had been

⁷⁴ ‘Lady of the Axis’, *Time*, 24 July 1939.

⁷⁵ ‘TIME Banned in Argentina’, *Time*, 29 November 1943.

a fervent supporter; who was a key figure behind the second coup of 1943, rising to power in the dictatorship ensuing in its wake; and whose regime would persecute intellectuals who opposed it, including Borges, members of his family, and his friends and associates. By July 1946, Borges was effectively forced to resign from his job at a Buenos Aires public library—a calculated act of humiliation, hailed by the Peronist press, of a writer who had been one of the regime’s most prominent opponents.⁷⁶ In addition to all this, and crucially in the present context, Perón was also an ardent and unrepentant disciple, ally, and apologist of Nazi-Fascism, who would go to his grave lamenting the Allies’ victory and denouncing, in the strongest possible terms, the Nuremberg tribunal:

En Nuremberg se estaba realizando entonces algo que yo, a título personal juzgaba como una infamia y como una funesta lección para el futuro de la humanidad. Y no solo yo, sino el pueblo argentino. Adquirí la certeza de que los argentinos también consideraban el proceso de Nuremberg como una infamia, indigna de los vencedores, que se comportaban como si no lo fueran. Ahora entonces dándonos cuenta de que merecían haber perdido la guerra. ¡Cuántas veces durante mi gobierno pronuncié discursos a cargo de Nuremberg, que es la enormidad más grande que no perdonara la historia!⁷⁷

The end of one war, it turned out, only meant the beginning of another—or worse. Could it be that the Allies had merely won the battle, but that even in its defeat, Nazi-Fascism, in successfully loosing an unprecedented evil into the world, won a metaphysical war of far greater proportions? ‘Those who heed my words’, writes Otto zur Linde,

shall understand the history of Germany and the future history of the world. I know that cases such as mine, exceptional and shocking now, will very soon be unremarkable. Tomorrow I shall die, but I am a symbol of the generations to come. . .

Now an implacable age looms over the world. We forged that age, we who are now its victim. What does it matter that England is the hammer and we the anvil?⁷⁸

It does not seem coincidental that ‘Deutsches Requiem’ was published just weeks ahead of the election which, on 24 February 1946, saw Perón elected into office, and once viewed in this context, it is hard to resist the conclusion that the story is at least as much about Peronism as it is about Nazism—or rather, that it is about the survival of the essence of Nazi-Fascist ideology in Peronism and similar movements and tendencies.

Going back to ‘The Generous Enemy’ and its allusions to Hermann and Edda Göring, it would probably not have escaped Borges’s attention that Edda was Göring’s daughter by

⁷⁶ See Williamson, *Borges*, 291–6.

⁷⁷ *Yo, Juan Domingo Perón: relato autobiográfico*, ed. Torcuato Luca de Tena, Luis Calvo, and Esteban Peicovich (Barcelona: Planeta, 1976), 85–6 (posthumously edited from taped interviews conducted in the final years of Perón’s life): ‘What was then taking place in Nuremberg was something that I personally deemed to be an infamy and a terrible lesson for the future of humanity. And not only I, but the Argentine people. I became certain that the Argentines also considered the Nuremberg process to be an infamy, unbecoming of the victors, who did not comport themselves as such. Now then we realize at last that they deserved to have lost the war. How many times during my reign did I give speeches on Nuremberg, which is the greatest atrocity and which history will not pardon!’

⁷⁸ *Collected Fictions*, 229, 234.

his second wife, Emma Sonnemann, an actress he married in 1935. Since Hitler was unmarried, the wife of his right-hand man—‘Emmy’ Göring, as she was known—came to play the important public role of the Third Reich’s *Hohe Frau*, appealing in particular to German women and representing the female paradigm of Nazi ideology.⁷⁹ Which is to say, she came to play a role analogous to that which ‘Evita’ Perón—also an actress, also a second marriage for both her and Perón—was now playing in the Peronist regime in Argentina. Finally, by yet another in this purely incidental but darkly resonant series of parallels and analogies, Eva Perón also shared the name with Hitler’s partner and eventually wife, Eva Hitler. Thus a further, deeply sinister subtext emerges: not only are the Vikings a prefiguration of the Nazis, but Nazism is in turn a prefiguration of Peronism, and by extension, of the lasting threat that Nazi-Fascism continues to pose even after its defeat—the threat of that ‘implacable age’ that Otto zur Linde sees as ‘now . . . loom[ing] over the world’. In fact, written six months apart, ‘Deutsches Requiem’ and ‘The Generous Enemy’ can be profitably compared as two contrasting takes on what is essentially the same topic. In ‘Deutsches Requiem’, Borges raises the subject of Nazi-Fascism in the most explicit manner but buries his judgment of it between the lines, leaving it largely to the reader, following the subtle clues provided in the counterpoint of the fictional editorial commentary, to piece out the contemptible reality behind the self-aggrandizing façade of Linde’s confession, and to extrapolate from that to the contemporary situation in Argentina. In ‘The Generous Enemy’, he takes the opposite route: Nazi-Fascism is invoked only through the allusive subtext, but for the reader capable of discerning this subtext, Borges’s judgement is declared in the most direct terms possible—‘I will defeat you and snuff you out, Magnus Barfod’. Indeed, Muirchertach’s vow assumes additional significance and poignancy if we know that Magnus’s death turned out to mean much more than the death of a single Norwegian king—the event is usually taken to mark the end of the entire Viking Age—and if we also identify Borges’s final numerological touch to the piece, which again testifies to how deeply personal these miniatures were to him. According to the *Heimskringla*, Magnus Barfod was killed on the Feast of Saint Bartholomew, 24 August—Borges’s birthday.⁸⁰

I have tried to be clear about where demonstrable reference and allusion end and interpretive inference begins. That said, even the most casual reader of Borges’s work will have some sense of its continued fascination with ideas of historical prefiguration, analogy, and repetition, while even the most superficial familiarity with the context of 1946 will show that it provided textbook conditions for the kind of topical allusion we find at work in these intricate Old Germanicist riddles. Writing under the shadow of Peronism, Borges uses them to express opinions that could not be expressed openly without potentially serious consequences. Another useful point of comparison here is the story ‘Monsterfest’, cowritten with Bioy Casares in November 1947: explicitly critical of Peronism, it circulated in anonymous typescript until after Perón was removed from office in the coup of September 1955, and even then it was printed only in Uruguay and under a pseudonym.⁸¹ If its fate is at

⁷⁹ A similar role was also attributed to Magdalena ‘Magda’ Goebbels: see, e.g., Anna Maria Sigmund, *Die Frauen der Nazis*, rev. ed. (Munich: Heyne, 2013).

⁸⁰ Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, 684–5.

⁸¹ H. Bustos Domecq [i.e. Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares], ‘Monsterfest’, trans. Suzanne Jill Levine with Emir Rodríguez Monegal and Alfred J. MacAdam, *Fiction* 5.1 (1977): 2–5. The story would not be printed in Argentina and in the authors’ own names until 1967: see Sylvia Sáitta, “‘La fiesta del monstruo’ de H. Bustos Domecq en tres tiempos: 1955, 1967, 1977”, *Variaciones Borges* 49 (2020): 49–68.

all representative, then evidently these were the options for an Argentine writer interested in voicing opposition to Peronism in this period—to do so overtly but not in print, or to do so in print but not overtly.

Topical meaning can be plausibly suspected in any of Borges's writings on Old Germanic topics. In the early 1930s, the kennings were a proxy for his ongoing polemic on Ultraism, and perhaps, on a more personal level, his strained relation to Norah Lange. In the 1940s, the Vikings were Nazis and Peronists. What changes in Borges's later work utilizing Old Germanic motifs is not the topical lens as such but the altered, increasingly positive significance he begins to find in these motifs. A new note is sounded in the 1949 'Story of the Warrior and the Captive Maiden', which tells of the Langobard chieftain Droctulf, who abandoned his people to fight on the side of Byzantine Ravenna, realizing 'this city is worth more than his gods and the faith he is sworn to and all the marshlands of Germany'.⁸² While still an exception, Droctulf stands for positive qualities, with, again, fairly obvious topical-autobiographical implications—'Droctulft [sic] was not a traitor He was an *illuminatus*, a convert.'⁸³ Two years later, the publication of *Antiguas literaturas germánicas* reveals Borges himself as an Old Germanic *illuminatus*, and in the ensuing decades he goes on to produce a corpus of Old Germanic-inspired poetry and fiction with few parallels in modernist literature, as well as some of the earliest Old Germanic scholarship in the Spanish language. An improved understanding of his early writings on the subject is vital in grasping the significance of this turn of sympathies, in identifying the allusive patterns which continue to underpin the work emerging from it, and in assessing the place of this work both in wider perspectives in Borges criticism and the reception of the so-called Middle Ages in modern art and thought.

Durham University

⁸² *Collected Fictions*, 209.

⁸³ *Ibid.* Cf. Brljak, 'Borges and the North', 109.