

BORGES AND PORTUGUESE LITERATURE¹

Daniel Balderston

E todo este mundo meu de gente entre si alheia projecta, como uma multidão diversa mas compacta, uma sombra unica – este corpo quieto e escrevente com que reclino, de pé, contra a secretária alta do Borges onde vim buscar o meu mata-borrão, que lhe emprestára.

Pessoa, O livro do desassossego, 1: 24²

Fernando Pessoa--or rather his alter ego Bernardo Soares--leaning over Borges's desk: a seductive image, an invitation to meditate on the relations between the Argentine writer and the literature of Portugal. Borges defines literature as "un eje de innumerables relaciones" (a countless series of relations: *Obras completas* 747) and continually invites his readers to discover and to explore those relations. As always with such things, the unexpected

¹ This article was first presented as the Robert O'Grady Lectura at the University of Notre Dame in September 2005. I am grateful to Robert O'Grady, María Rosa Olivera-Williams and Hugo Verani for the invitation.

² Here is Richard Zenith's translation of this passage from Bernardo Soares's *The Book of Disquiet*: "And my entire world of all these souls who don't know each other casts, like a motley but compact multitude, a single shadow--the calm, bookkeeping body with which I lean over Borges's tall desk, where I've come to get the blotter that he borrowed from me" (328). Obviously "Borges" here is one of Bernardo Soares's co-workers in the office in the fictional autobiography, although, as I suggest toward the end of this piece, he might also be Jorge Luis.

offers special pleasures, as if Borges were to look up from that desk and smile at Pessoa. What follows would inform their conversation.

The poem "Los Borges" (1960) begins with the statement "Nada o muy poco sé de mis mayores/ portugueses, los Borges" (*Obra poética* 145) [I know little or nothing of the Borges,/ my Portuguese forebears], but Borges then creates a fictive genealogy that links him to the Portuguese voyages of exploration in Asia and to the death of King Sebastião in Morocco in 1578. A significant elision in this poem, and in Borges's few other scattered references to the history of his father's family, is the likely fact that whatever Borges emigrated to Entre Ríos in the nineteenth century came from southern Brazil. I have speculated elsewhere that due to the frequent rather seamy representation of the border area between Uruguay and Brazil in Borges's writings there may have been a family history in contraband. Today I will be going in a different direction: to reconstruct Borges's interest in Portugal and Portuguese literature, a topic that has been neglected (while Borges's few references to Brazilian literature have been studied in depth by scholars such as Jorge Schwartz and Raúl Antelo).³ Borges is of course a common surname in Portugal and Brazil (Juan Carlos Onetti's mother, for instance, was a Borges from Rio Grande do Sul, and a famous Portuguese bank is Banco Borges e Irmãos), but what seems to be of interest more than real or verifiable genealogies are imaginary ones.

Here then is the 1960 poem, from *El hacedor*:

Nada o muy poco sé de mis mayores
portugueses, los Borges: vaga gente
que prosigue en mi carne, oscuramente,
sus hábitos, rigores y temores.
Tenues como si nunca hubieran sido
y ajenos a los trámites del arte,
indesciframente forman parte

³ Much of the material on Borges's relations to Brazilian literature is collected in the special issue of the *Boletim Bibliográfico* and in Schwartz's *Borges no Brasil*. In addition, I have worked on how Borges imagines southern Brazil in such stories as "Emma Zunz" and "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius."

del tiempo, de la tierra y del olvido.
 Mejor así. Cumplida la faena,
 son Portugal, son la famosa gente
 que forzó las murallas del Oriente
 y se dio al mar y al otro mar de arena.
 Son el rey que en el místico desierto
 se perdió y el que jura que no ha muerto. (*Obra poética* 145)⁴

This sonnet is immediately followed by another one on a Portuguese theme, "A Luis de Camoens":

Sin lástima y sin ira el tiempo mella
 las heroicas espadas. Pobre y triste
 a tu patria nostálgica volviste,
 oh capitán, para morir en ella
 y con ella. En el mágico desierto
 la flor de Portugal se había perdido
 y el áspero español, antes vencido,
 amenazaba su costado abierto.
 Quiero saber si aquende la ribera
 última comprendiste humildemente
 que todo lo perdido, el Occidente
 y el Oriente, el acero y la bandera,
 perduraría (ajeno a toda humana

⁴ Here is Alastair Reid's (sometimes inaccurate) translation, "The Borges":

I know little or nothing of the Borges,
 my Portuguese forebears. They were a ghostly line,
 who still ply in my body their mysterious
 disciplines, habits and anxieties.
 Shadowy, as if they had never been,
 and strangers to the processes of art,
 indecipherably they form a part
 of time, of earth, and of oblivion.
 Better so. When everything is said,
 they are Portugal, they are that famous people
 who forced the Great Wall of the East, and fell
 to the sea, and to that other sea of sand.
 They are that king lost on the mystic strand
 and those at home who swear he is not dead. (*Selected Poems* 121)

mutación) en tu Eneida lusitana. (*Obra poética* 146)⁵

Once again the Portuguese defeat in Alcaçar Quibir in Morocco, which had as a consequence the annexation of Portugal and its empire to Spain for the next sixty years, holds center stage. Camões's career—linked to this defeat, as the legend has it, because King Sebastião was inspired to an emulation of the Crusaders by the heroic images from Portuguese history in Camões's epic poem—takes its shape with regard to one of the great crises in the history of his country. Interestingly the phrase about the national poet died “en ella/ y con ella” echoes the famous last words of Francisco Solano López at the conclusion of the War of the Triple Alliance: the Paraguayan dictator is reported to have said “Muero por mi patria” (I die for my country) or perhaps, and more eloquently, “Muero con mi patria” (I die with my country). Thus perhaps the conclusion of one terrible war anticipates that of another, one in which Borges's grandfather, Colonel Francisco Borges, took part.

Borges's most frequent allusions to Portuguese literature are to Camões and to Eça de Queiroz, by all accounts one of his (and his mother's) favorite novelists. And, as we shall see, there are a couple of intriguing references to Fernando Pessoa, the famous Portuguese poet of the multiple heteronyms. In sum, Borges's references to

⁵ And now, my translation of the sonnet to Camões:

Without pity or anger time nicks
 the heroic swords. Poor and sad
 you returned to your lamented country,
 oh captain, to die in her
 and with her. In the magic desert
 the pride of Portugal had been lost
 and the rude Spaniard, defeated before
 threatened the open side.
 I want to know if before the final
 shore you understood, modestly,
 that everything that had been lost, Occident
 and Orient, steel and flag,
 would survive (indifferent to all human
 changes) in your Lusitanian Aeneid.

Portuguese literature are considerably more extensive than may appear at first glance, and provide evidence for a thorough study of this literature, something that has not been commented upon to date.

A worthy question is what language Borges read Portuguese literature in, and an answer of sorts is provided by his extensive article on Portuguese literature for the *Enciclopedia práctica Jackson* (1951).⁶ In it, he translates a *cantiga de amigo* (it appears “en nuestra traducción castellana”), and his old friend Francisco Luis Bernárdez translates another. The paragraph on Bernardim Ribeiro’s *Menina e moça* includes both the Portuguese original and a Spanish translation of the first line of the famous novel (*Textos recobrados* 2: 285), and a quotation from Bocage (1735-1805) again includes the original and a translation: it seems clear, then, that Borges read Portuguese literature extensively in the original. (Already in 1933 he had reviewed a book by a minor Brazilian poet, Ribeiro Couto.) Remember that when he published this extensive essay in 1951 he had just published a whole series of essays on Dante, and when he talks about his research on Dante he explains that initially he relied on Italian-English bilingual editions until he felt comfortable reading the original directly (*Textos recobrados* 3: 73-74). As he explains in an essay on Camões, he read Dante and Camões “sin saber ni el italiano, ni el portugués” (*Páginas de Jorge Luis Borges*, 238) [without knowing Italian or Portuguese], but in the rest of the same sentence he explains that he had forgotten his Latin and that “el olvido del latín . . . ya es una posesión” (*Páginas* 238) [that forgetting Latin is a possession], so we may reasonably assume that he is pulling our leg. Because certainly he read Camões and others in the original.

⁶ The *Enciclopedia práctica Jackson: Conjunto de conocimientos para la formación autodidacta* is a multi-volume work that is organized around articles on such subjects as popular mechanics basic English, physical and political geography and so forth. The only set in a library in the United States (the fifth Mexican edition, published in 1963) is at the University of Missouri; I am grateful to Professor Magdalena García Pinto for photocopies of parts of volumes 6 and 9. The article on Portugal is part of a sequence of various articles on literature in volume 9 including Arturo Torres-Río seco on “Literatura americana” (Spanish America, the US, Brazil, Haiti and Canada), Ariel Maudet on French literature, Renata Donghi Halperín on Italian literature, and Borges on Portuguese literature.

And he read them carefully. The sections of the essay on Camões and *Os Lusíadas* (and even more so in a later talk on Camões, to be discussed shortly) show a thorough knowledge of the Portuguese national poem but also of Camões's other work, as well as a familiarity with details of his biography. Similarly, he comments with authority on the prose, theater and poetry of the medieval period and the Renaissance, on the historical works, sermons (Padre Vieira) and theater of the seventeenth century, on the "Arcadian" writings of the eighteenth century, on Portuguese romanticism (Garrett and Herculano), on the poets of the late nineteenth century (Antero de Quental, Guerra Junqueiro), and on the novels of Castelo Branco, Gomes Coelho and (most extensively) Eça de Queiroz. He also mentions nineteenth century historiography and travel writing. In sum, in twenty pages he provides a wide-ranging and well-informed survey of Portuguese literature from the cantigas to the end of the nineteenth century.

The first paragraph of the article sets out Borges's approach to Portuguese literature:

Por su anhelo de maravillas, por su nostalgia, por su afición a la melancolía y a la desdicha, la literatura portuguesa difiere profundamente de la española. También la diferencia de ésta su limitado radio de acción. El *Quijote* y la novela picaresca española son acontecimientos europeos, que influyen en las literaturas de Inglaterra, de Francia y de Alemania; nada comparable a esa difusión continental hay en las letras portuguesas. Camoens es un gran épico, de la altura de Milton o de Torcuato Tasso; Oliveira Martins, un gran teorizador de la historia; Eça de Queiroz, un novelista de la talla de Flaubert o de Meredith; pero no modifican, fuera de su país, la evolución de sus disciplinas. Los escritores de Portugal no influyen en otras naciones; tampoco los acompaña la atención de su pueblo, y, en general, trabajan en la soledad. Por otra parte, la literatura portuguesa no se arraiga en la tradición popular, como la española. También la diferencia de aquélla su contacto secular con las civilizaciones asiáticas. Heterogéneas pruebas de ese contacto son *Los Lusíadas*, de Camoens, *la Peregrinación*, de Mendes Pinto, que refiere el descubrimiento de Japón y la obra entera de Wenceslao de Moraes. En la literatura de Portugal, como en la vida de Portugal, tierra de

navegantes, están presentes el océano y las remotas aventuras de Africa, de la China y del Brasil. Así, las “relaciones de naufragios” constituyen una especialidad de la literatura portuguesa del siglo XVI. (*Textos recobrados 2: 277*)⁷

In this opening paragraph Borges clearly posits an idea similar to that proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their well-known (and controversial) book on Kafka. Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of a “minor” literature—or perhaps a “minority” literature would be more accurate, since they are concerned both with Kafka’s double minority status in Prague and his peripheral relation to German literature—operates here in Borges’s comparison of the place in world literature of Portugal as compared to Spain. The excellence of Portuguese literature is not in doubt; what characterizes a “minor” literature, though, is its small sphere of influence. Spain, the possessor of a great world empire, was a net exporter of literature; Portugal, the seat of another great empire, was

⁷ And now to translate this passage: “Because of its taste for marvels, its nostalgia, its fondness for melancholy and unhappiness, Portuguese literature differs profoundly from that of Spain. It also differs due to its limited sphere of influence. *Don Quixote* and the Spanish picaresque novel are European events, influencing the literatures of England, France and Germany; Portuguese literature has nothing of this continental scope. Camões is a great epic poet, of the same order as Milton or Tasso; Oliveira Martins, a great theorist of historiography; Eça de Queiroz, a novelist of the stature of Flaubert or Meredith; but beyond the borders of their country they did not modify the evolution of their genres. Portuguese writers have no influence in other nations; nor have they had the constant attention of their own people, so that in general they work in solitude. On a different note, Portuguese literature does not have the same roots in popular traditions as Spanish literature. Another difference is due to the centuries-old influence on Portugal of Asian civilizations. Assorted proofs of this contact are Camões’s *Lusíadas*, Mendes Pinto’s *Peregrination* (which tells of the discovery of Japan) and the whole works of Wenceslao de Moraes. In Portuguese literature, as in the life of Portugal, land of navigators, the ocean and remote adventures in Africa, China and Brazil are present. For this reason, “shipwreck narratives” constitute a specialty of Portuguese literature of the sixteenth century.”

largely an importer.⁸ Borges positions himself, then, as an arbiter of taste who seeks to correct this evident injustice.

Camões is also the subject of an extensive essay “Destino y obra de Camões” (1972), which strangely enough was not included in the third volume of *Textos recobrados* (the one that includes texts from 1956 to 1986), although it had been included in the *Páginas de Jorge Luis Borges seleccionadas por el autor* in 1982 and was published in Portuguese in the *Boletim Bibliográfico* special issue on Borges in 1985. In this essay Borges shows great familiarity with Camões’s life, times and work. In this transcribed talk (from the period after Borges had gone blind) given at the Centro de Estudios Brasileños, in presence of the director and the Brazilian ambassador, Borges situates Camões with reference to classical and medieval epic, noting that Renaissance epic deliberately imitated classical poetry (as in the famous first line of Camões’s poem, which echoes the first line of the *Aeneid*) and invoked the gods of classical mythology. Even when representing a recent historical figure like Vasco de Gama, Borges notes, Camões fuses the real person with a mythological figure. In this slightly rambling talk Borges reveals great familiarity with and fondness for *Os Lusíadas*, for him a great poem of loss.

Eça de Queiroz, the other writer to whom considerable space is devoted in the encyclopedia article, is mentioned in the list of favorite novelists in the apocryphal note from a 2074 encyclopedia that closes the *Obras completas* of 1974: “Esta novela [el *Quijote*] fue una de las pocas que merecieron la indulgencia de Borges; otras fueron las de Voltaire, las de Stevenson, las de Conrad y las de Eça de Queiroz” (*Obras completas* 1143) [*Don Quixote* was one of the few novels that merited Borges’s favor; others were those of Voltaire, Stevenson, Conrad and Eça de Queiroz]. Another prominent reference to the great ironic novelist of nineteenth-century Portugal is in the dedication of the 1974 *Obras completas*, “A Leonor Acevedo de Borges,” which mentions “tu amor a Dickens y a Eça de Queiroz”

⁸ These economic metaphors are similar to those used by Pascale Casanova in *The World Republic of Letters*: see 12-17.

(9). Eça is also mentioned at the end of the essay “Flaubert y su destino ejemplar” (266).

I had the privilege in 1982 of seeing a public interview with Borges at Dickinson College in which a rather irritated Gonzalo Sobejano asked Borges how he could refer with such admiration to Eça de Queiroz when nineteenth-century Spain had four great writers. And who were they? asked Borges, with a bit of an ironic twinkle. Sobejano listed: Larra, Bécquer, Galdós and Clarín. “Ah, mi sentido pésame entonces,” said Borges, without clarifying whether he was responding for having forgotten them—or, as is no doubt more likely, to compassion for Sobejano for his ill judgment. One can only imagine Borges’s delight as his mother read Eça’s ironic masterpieces to him—indeed irony and an urbane wit is what links Eça to the other novelists in that particular list, Stevenson, Conrad and Voltaire.

In the encyclopedia article Borges refers to many of Eça’s works. He compares *O primo Basílio* to *Madame Bovary* (as he does also in the essay on Flaubert just mentioned), mentions the anticlerical theme of *O crime do padre Amaro*, describes *Os Maiás* as a sharp critique of the Portuguese society of Eça’s time (specifically mentioning Eça’s use of irony), mentions *A Relíquia*’s sarcastic tone (at the same time noting that the ending was weak), celebrates the metafiction in *A ilustre casa de Ramires* (and the fact that in it Eça breaks with naturalism), notes the unexpected reversal in *A cidade e as serras* (in which nature triumphs over artifice), and comments on the presence of Oriental themes in some of Eça’s writings, including the fantastic tale *O mandarim*. Eça’s travel writings are also mentioned in a different section of the article. The article, then, confirms Borges’s preference for Eça among the nineteenth century writers of Spain and Portugal.

Around 1960 Borges wrote a continuation of the article on Portuguese literature, presumably for a new edition of the *Enciclopedia Jackson*, but this piece was not published until 2003 when it was included in the third volume of the *Textos recobrados*.⁹ This new (and much briefer) article starts at the end of the

⁹ According to the note at the end of the text, the typescript belongs to Alicia Jurado.

nineteenth century with the rise of *soismo* and *saudosismo*, and continues with discussions of Antonio Nobre, Fernando Pessoa, Mario de Sá-Carneiro, the *Presença* group, Antonio Sérgio, Aquilino Ribeiro and Fernando Namora (with brief mentions of a number of other writers including Teixeira de Pascoaes, Jorge de Sena, Miguel Torga and José Rodrigues Miguéis). The article ends with the declaration: “Lo indiscutible, lo que nadie podrá negar, es que Portugal ha dado a la gloria dos grandes nombres: el de CAMOENS y el del sonriente y múltiple EÇA DE QUEIROZ” (*Textos recobrados* 3: 59). For Borges in 1960 the unquestioned great figures of Portuguese literature continue to be not Pessoa but Camões and Eça de Queiroz.

Without question the most important section is the paragraph devoted to Pessoa, which reads:

Hacia 1912, ANTONIO SERGIO acusa a Pascoaes de anhelar un pasado inaccesible y de rehusar lo contemporáneo. Algo después, empieza a destacarse FERNANDO PESSOA, cuyo *Mensagem* aparecerá en 1933 y que fue equiparado a Walt Whitman, mereció el epíteto de genial e hizo sentir su influencia en ambas costas del Atlántico. Tenía el hábito de abundar en seudónimos; bajo el de Alberto Caerio [sic] firmó poemas que se niegan a las especulaciones del intelecto y exaltan la pura visión de las cosas. Citemos este fragmento:

*Metafísica? Que metafísica tem aquelas árvores
A de serem verdes e copadas e de terem ramos
E de dar fruto na sua hora, o que não nos faz pensar,
A nos, que não sabemos dar por elas.
Mas que melhor metafísica que a delas,
Que é a de não saber para que vivem
Nem saber que o não sabem? (57)¹⁰*

¹⁰ Here's a translation of the paragraph on Pessoa: “Around 1912, ANTONIO SERGIO accuses [Teixeira de] Pascoaes of desiring an inaccessible, even a Utopian past and of avoiding the present day. A bit later, FERNANDO PESSOA begins to come to prominence; his *Mensagem* appears in 1933 and was compared to Walt Whitman, earning him the title of genius and making his influence felt on both sides of the Atlantic. He had the habit of abounding in pseudonyms; with that of Alberto Caerio [sic] he signed poems that refuse intellectual speculation and exalt the pure vision of

The passage on Pessoa, then, is evidence of a reading of Pessoa (in the original) by 1960.

Near the end of Borges's life he wrote a "letter" to Pessoa, dated Geneva, 2 January 1985, which reads:

La sangre de los Borges de Moncorvo y de los Acevedo (o Azevedo) sin geografía puede ayudarme a comprenderte Pessoa. Nada te costó renunciar a las escuelas y a sus dogmas, a las vanidosas figuras de la retórica y al trabajoso empeño de representar a un país, a una clase o a un tiempo. Acaso no pensaste nunca en tu sitio en la historia de la literatura. Tengo la certidumbre de que te asombran estos homenajes sonoros, de que te asombran y de que los agradeces, sonriente. Eres ahora el poeta de Portugal. Alguien, inevitablemente, pronunciará el nombre de Camoens. No faltarán las fechas, caras a toda celebración. Escribiste para ti, no para la fama. Juntos, hemos compartido tus versos; déjame ser tu amigo. (Blanco 176)¹¹

This text, written apparently for a commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Pessoa's death (in late November 1935), is—like the

things." He then quotes the end of the fifth poem of Caieiro's *The Keeper of Sheep*, which I will cite in Richard Zenith's translation:

Metaphysics? What metaphysics do those trees have?
 Only that of being of being green and lush and of having branches
 Which bear fruit in their season, and we think nothing of it.
 We hardly even notice them.
 But what better metaphysics than theirs,
 Which consists in not knowing why they live
 And in not knowing that they don't know. (*Selected Poems* 49)

¹¹ This text was published in *Fernando Pessoa, poète pluriel* and in the *Boletim bibliográfico* (39). Here is my translation: "The blood of the Borges line of Moncorvo and of the Acevedos (or Azevedos) without geographic origin can help me understand you, Pessoa. It cost you nothing to renounce literary schools and their dogmas, the vain figures of rhetoric and the difficult task of representing a country, a class or a period. Perhaps you never thought of your place in the history of literature. I am sure you would be surprised by these noisy acts of homage, they would surprise you but that you, smiling, would be grateful for them. You are now the poet of Portugal. Someone inevitably utters the name of Camões. There will be festive dates, so beloved to this kind of commemoration. You wrote for yourself, not for fame. Together, we share your verses; let me be your friend."

talk on Camões—not included in the third volume of *Textos recobrados*, greatly diminishing the part of Borges’s “visible work” that relates to Portuguese literature.

To speculate for a moment, it would seem reasonable that Borges learned of Pessoa much earlier: not in 1985 (when he wrote him a letter asking to be his friend) or in 1960 (when he wrote the paragraph in the second encyclopedia article). Perhaps, indeed, during the Borges family’s visit to Lisbon in 1924. Pessoa—the Portuguese writer with the strongest affinities to Borges—was certainly a quiet celebrity in literary circles in Lisbon in the mid-twenties, even though the vast majority of his writings would only be published after his death in 1935. Borges, due to his associations with avant garde groups and small literary magazines in Madrid and in Buenos Aires from 1920 to 1924, would presumably have looked into what was happening in Portugal in these regards, and if he talked to anyone involved in literary circles he would have heard about *Orpheu* and surely about Pessoa himself. It is even tempting to posit a visit by Borges to the cafés frequented by Pessoa. Certainly Borges reveals a familiarity with Pessoa’s work in 1960 that contradicts the sense of the 1985 “letter,” which expresses a new discovery.

A wonderful homage to both Pessoa and Borges is hidden in José Saramago’s wonderful novel *O ano da morte de Ricardo Reis* (*The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*). Pessoa’s neoclassical heteronym Ricardo Reis returns (shortly after the death of Pessoa) to Lisbon, where he will have a series of conversations with Pessoa’s ghost. In his suitcase: *The God of the Labyrinth* by Herbert Quain, an oblique reference to one of the apocryphal books by Quain mentioned in a story in *Ficciones*, “Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain.” Saramago writes:

O tédio da viagem e a sugestão do título o tinham atraído, um labirinto com um deus, que deus seria, que labirinto era, que deus labiríntico, e afinal saíra-lhe um simples romance policial, uma vulgar história de assassinio e investigação, o criminoso, a vítima, se pelo contrário não preexiste a vítima ao criminoso, e finalmente o detective, todos três cúmplices da morte, em verdade vos direi que o

leitor de romances policiais é o único e real sobrevivente da história que estiver lendo, se não é como sobrevivente único e real que todo o leitor lê toda a história. (23)¹²

Throughout the Saramago novel Reis tries to finish reading the Quain novel but can never do so: the apocryphal reader never finishes the apocryphal novel. In any case Reis—one of Pessoa’s imaginary authors turned protagonist of the Saramago novel, where he has earnest conversations with Pessoa’s ghost—is at the same remove from “reality” as *The God of the Labyrinth*, an apocryphal novel by an imaginary author.

So I think it is worth entertaining the idea of a conversation that Borges could have had with Pessoa, and maybe even with Pessoa’s heteronyms, in Lisbon during his six weeks there in May-June 1924. “La nadería de la personalidad,” “La encrucijada de Berkeley,” and the other philosophical essays of the period (some collected in *Inquisiciones* in 1925) make sense in dialogue with Pessoa’s philosophical works and with the *Livro do desassossego* (*The Book of Disquiet*), almost all of which were published posthumously. How one could wish to be sitting at a neighboring table in the café listening in on the conversation of these two diffident and brilliant writers, no doubt conversing in an English that was already turning a bit antique the English of Borges’s grandmother who had emigrated to Argentina in the 1870s, the English that Pessoa had learned in South Africa twenty years before. Pure speculation, surely, but speculation of a kind that is of a piece with both writers, with both of their projects.¹³

¹² And in Giovanni Pontiero’s translation: “The tedium of the voyage and the book’s evocative title had attracted him. A labyrinth with a god, what god might that be, which labyrinth, what labyrinthine god. In the end it turned out to be a simple detective story, an ordinary tale of death and investigation, the murderer, the victim, and finally the detective, all three accomplices to the crime. In my honest opinion, the reader of a mystery is the only real survivor of the story he is reading, unless it is as the one real survivor that every reader reads every story” (12)

¹³ The intellectual kinship of Pessoa and Borges has been the subject of various texts, including Emir Rodríguez Monegal’s “Jorge Luis Borges, el autor de Fernando Pessoa” (1985), José Blanco’s “Breve nota bibliográfica sobre los encuentros de Jorge Luis Borges

So maybe it was about Borges that Pessoa wrote, in an unfinished poem dated 3 September 1924 (two months and four days after the Borges family left Lisbon for Buenos Aires):

Ah quanta melancholia!
 Quanta, quanta solidão!
 Aquella alma, que vazia,
 Que sinto inútil e fria
 Dentro do meu coração!

Que angústia desesperada!
 Que magua que sabe a fim!
 Se a nau foi abandonada,
 E o cego caiu na estrada . . .
 Deixae-os, qué é tudo assim.

Sem socego, sem socego,
 Nenhum momento do meu . . .
 Onde for que a alma emprégo . . .
 Na estrada morreu o cego

 A nau desapareceu. (*Poemas* 68-69)¹⁴

y Fernando Pessoa" (1989) and Sabrina Sedlmayer's *Pessoa e Borges: Quanto a mim, eu* (2004). It is also the subject of the thesis by one of the characters in Carlos Cañeque's novel *Quién* (1997); I am grateful to Samuel Amago of Notre Dame for pointing this reference out to me.

¹⁴ This unfinished poem can be translated as:

Oh such melancholy!
 Such, so much solitude!
 That soul, so empty,
 That feels useless and cold
 In my heart!

What desperate anguish!
 What woe that tastes of the end!
 If the ship was abandoned,
 And the blind man fell by the road—
 Forget them, that's the way it is.

Pessoa inevitably calls Borges “o cego,” the blind man, a full thirty years before Borges went blind, but for a writer accustomed to making star charts, and who was in correspondence with the esoteric master Aleister Crowley (like Borges’s Buenos Aires friend Xul Solar), this is not too much of a stretch. And the image of the ship disappearing—an image that is real enough in Lisbon, where the Tagus empties into the ocean, and where the Borges family went off into the horizon on the last day of June, 1924—is also the image that Pessoa frequently uses to refer to the historic catastrophe that King Sebastião’s expedition to Morocco represented for his country (see for instance “A última nau,” “The Last Ship,” in *Mensagem*).

To sum up, then, Borges’s interest in Portuguese (not Brazilian) literature is framed in a mythical genealogy that would link him (and his half-English father, who taught psychology, and the paternal grandfather, a military officer) to the epic of navigation and discovery and to its great poet, Luis de Camões. But that was just a starting point: Borges clearly was well-acquainted with the full sweep of Portuguese literature from the cantigas to the mid-twentieth century; his articles on Portuguese literature are well-informed and would have served the reader of the Jackson encyclopedia well. The most frequent references in Borges’s works are to Camões and to a favorite novelist, Eça de Queiroz, appreciated for his sharp irony and satiric vision of Portugal in its transition toward modernity. The two texts on Fernando Pessoa are intriguing because they suggest some knowledge of the European writer whose project bears the strongest affinity with Borges’s own. Portuguese literature’s great themes, for Borges, are nostalgic loss and the loneliness of the sea. Pessoa wrote in *Mensagem*: “Que o mar com fim será grego ou romano:/ O mar sem fim é português” (*Obra poética* 13)—in Zenith’s translation “That the sea with limits is for Greece or

Without rest, without rest
 No time whatsoever
 For my use of the soul—
 The blind man died on the road
 The ship disappeared.

Rome:/ The limitless sea is Portuguese" (*Selected Poems* 274)—an idea that resonates with Borges's first published poem, "Himno del mar" (1919) and with many of his later texts. Portugal, then, has a literature that Borges discovered, and one that he travelled in. The six weeks in Lisbon in 1924 left their mark: deep, but also somewhat secret.

Daniel Balderston

University of Iowa

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