

Borges, Solomon and Saturn: “Un diálogo anglosajón del siglo XI” (1961)

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J. L. Borges’s interest in and understanding of the Old English dialogues featuring King Solomon and the pagan Saturn have hitherto received little academic attention. This article will explore Borges’s engagement with these texts and in doing so aims at contributing to recent scholarship concerning the author’s lifetime fascination with the medieval literatures of northern Europe. Particular attention will be given to Borges’s annotated translation of one of the Solomonic dialogues published in the journal of the National Library of Argentina in 1961, *La Biblioteca*, under the title “Un diálogo anglosajón del siglo XI”. Borges’s reasons for selecting the text as well as the Old English sources used in this translation will be explored alongside his passion towards the subject of the translated passage.

Keywords: Borges; Old English; Solomon and Saturn; translation studies

No aspiro a ser Esopo. Mis cuentos, como los de *Las mil y una noches*, quieren distraer y conmover y no persuadir. Este propósito no quiere decir que me encierre, según la imagen salomónica, en una torre de marfil.

“El informe de Brodie”, J. L. Borges (OC, I: 1021)¹

¹ Throughout this article *OC, I* abbreviates Borges’s *Obras completas* Vol. I (1974) and, similarly, *OC, II* is the short form for *Obras completas* Vol. II (1989). Likewise, *OCC* will be used for citations and titles as appearing in *Obras completas en colaboración* (1997).

1. Introduction

1961 was undoubtedly an eventful and momentous time in the life of Jorge Luis Borges. It is well known among students of his work that it was during that year when an international group of publishers awarded the recently created Formentor Literature prize jointly to Samuel Beckett and the Argentine writer, marking a turning point in Borges's career. His now exponentially increased international reputation led to a significant number of translations of his literature, and Borges's fame travelled beyond the confines of the Spanish-speaking world. In September 1961, Borges first went to the United States to become a visiting professor at the University of Texas in Austin. The following year he would find himself in France, New Mexico, California, and Harvard. When it comes to his publishing activity, 1961 witnessed the first edition of *Antología personal*, as well as second editions of *Historia de la eternidad*, *El Aleph*, *Ficciones*, and *El hacedor*. A number of prefaces by Borges were also published around the same time, including a contribution to a volume on his mentor, Macedonio Fernández, and a prologue for Edward Gibbon, *Páginas de historia y de autobiografía*. His participation in periodical publications did not cease either.²

Bearing in mind the literary context presented above, it is somehow unsurprising that Borges's "Un diálogo anglosajón del siglo XI" ("An eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon dialogue"), first published in 1961 in *La Biblioteca* (Segundo periodo, 9.5), the journal of the Buenos Aires National Library of Argentina, has received very little attention. Borges's lifelong fascination with Old English and Old Norse literature has been well documented and studied in some detail since the 1980s. As early as in 1982, in 'Jorge Luis Borges, poeta anglosajón', Fernando Galván explored the affinities between Old English texts and the poetry of Borges, identifying a number of compositions in which "la huella de lo anglosajón" (1982: 142) could be easily appreciated. Among those singled out for analysis were "Al iniciar el estudio de la gramática anglosajona" ("On beginning the study of Anglo-Saxon grammar"), "Un sajón (449 A.D.)" ("A Saxon (449 A.D.)"), "Composición escrita en un ejemplar de la gesta de

² The website of the Borges Centre, now hosted by the University of Pittsburgh, offers an excellent timeline bibliography (<https://www.borges.pitt.edu/>, last accessed on 22 April 2020). L. Venuti (2018: 227) explains how in the 1950s and early 1960s translations of the work of Borges and Cortázar contributed to their inclusion in the modernist mainstream of European fiction, "[a]mong the first book-length translations in this tendency was in fact Borges's *Ficciones* (1962)".

Beowulf” (“A poem written in a copy of Beowulf”), “Hengist Cyning”, “Fragmento” (“Fragment”), “A una espada en York Minster” (“To a sword at York minster”), the two poems bearing the title “A un poeta sajón” (“To a Saxon poet”), “Hengist quiere hombres (449 A.D.)” (“Hengist wants men (449 A.D.)”), “Brunanburh, 937 A.D.”, and “La pesadilla” (“The nightmare”).³ Also in the 1980s, and through the following decade, Enrique Bernárdez (1992), Margrét Jónsdóttir (1995), and Sigrún Á. Eriksdóttir (1986, 1987, 1996) added to the emerging discussion around the influence and presence of the medieval Germanic world in the work of Borges, both in his fiction and his studies, focusing their attention on the Scandinavian world.

Borges never shied away from publicly displaying his love for the languages and literatures of “the old north”. Without any sort of formal training or academic expertise in medieval literature, an enthusiast rather than a scholar, he wrote a pioneering study of Old English, Old Norse, and Old High and Middle High German texts aimed at a readership in Spanish. This was first published, in collaboration with Delia Ingenieros, as *Antiguas literaturas germánicas (Ancient Germanic Literatures — ALG)* in 1951, with a second version of the book appearing under the title *Literaturas germánicas medievales (Medieval Germanic Literatures — LGM)*, this time with the collaboration of his close friend María Esther Vázquez, in 1966. Both publications, as well as his *Breve antología anglosajona (Brief Anglo-Saxon Anthology — BAA)* (1978), a choice of Old English texts translated by Borges and María Kodama, have been the object of academic scrutiny in the new century, which has seen renewed efforts to establish the relationship between Borges and Old English literature as a subject worth of detailed exploration. Martín Hadis’s ‘Borges y el anglosajón’ (2003), Carlos Gámerro’s ‘Borges y los anglosajones’ (2009), Vladimir Brljak’s ‘Borges and the North’ (2011), M. J. Toswell’s *Borges the Unacknowledged Medievalist* (2014), and

³ Vladimir Brljak (2011: 116) observes that “[i] the scholarly and essayistic writings are the head, then [the] poems are the heart of Borges’s northernist opus”. Brljak, who states that “[o]ne can hardly read through a dozen pages of late Borges without coming across some northernist reference” (2011: 122), provides a far more comprehensive list of Borges’s fiction in which Old English and Old Norse echoes can be heard. Some of Borges’s “Anglo-Saxon poems”, have been the subject of individual analysis; see, for example, J. L. Bueno’s (2011: 58–75) “Eorlas arhwate eard begeatan”: Revisiting Brunanburh’s (Hi)story, Style and Imagery in Translation’, in which Bueno explores Borges’s poetic inspiration for “Brunanburh, 937 A.D.”, included in *La rosa profunda* (1975) and “A un poeta sajón”, in *El otro, el mismo* (1964).

Joshua Byron Smith's 'Borges and Old English' (2016) should be listed as some of the most insightful contributions to the field in recent years.

Within the subject area of translation studies, including views on Borges *as* translator and Borges *in* translation, there have been a number of critics who have found in the work of the Argentine writer aspects which merit close and careful consideration: *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation* (Kristal 2002), and the more relevant 'Borges, Old English Poetry and Translation Studies' (Toswell 2017) are of particular interest to us since the text we will be exploring in this article is nothing but a translation by Borges of a fragment from an Old English original.

2. Borges and Old English literature

Borges's *Antiguas literaturas germánicas* (1951) was divided in three sections: I. "Literatura de la Inglaterra germánica" ("The Literature of Germanic England"), II. "Literatura escandinava" ("Scandinavian Literature"), III. "Literatura alemana" ("German Literature"). The first section, whose title Borges would change to "Literatura de la Inglaterra sajona" ("The Literature of Saxon England) in the revised version of the volume in 1966, *LGM*, was structured around the following subdivisions: La gesta de Beowulf (Beowulf's Geste), Otras poesías precristianas (Other Pre-Christian Poems), Poesía cristiana (Christian Poetry), El poeta Cædmon (The Poet Cædmon), El poeta Cynewulf (The Poet Cynewulf), Dos baladas guerreras (Two War Ballads), Las adivinanzas (The Riddles), El bestiario (The Bestiary), El Fénix (The Phoenix), Salomón y Saturno (Solomon and Saturn), La crónica anglosajona (The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle), Beda el venerable (The Venerable Bede), and Layamon: Último poeta Sajón (Layamon: The Last Saxon Poet). Beyond the modification to the title mentioned earlier, in the first section of *Literaturas germánicas medievales* (1966), "Literatura de la Inglaterra sajona", Borges occasionally extends the analysis and comments offered to some of the texts, a number of new paragraphs are added, a few sentences rewritten, the layout is slightly altered, however, it is, in essence, a revised version of the 1951 publication.

Both Toswell and Brljak have noticed the inconsistencies found in Borges's own account of his discovery of Old English presented in the lecture and essay "La ceguera" ("Blindness", 1964), and repeated in several interviews throughout his life. Borges claimed that it was in 1955, when he lost his eyesight for reading and writing and, therefore, access to the visible world, that he decided to recover

another one, that of his ancestors. Borges who in 1955 had just been appointed Director of the National Library, elaborates on his decision as he persuades a group of about ten of his female students at the Universidad de Buenos Aires to embark on the study of a language and literature at that point unknown to all of them:

Recordé que en casa había dos libros que pude recuperar porque los había puesto en el estante más alto, pensando que no iba a precisarlos nunca. Eran el *Anglo-Saxon Reader* de Sweet y la *Crónica anglosajona*. Los dos tenían glosario. Y nos reunimos una mañana en la Biblioteca Nacional. Pensé: he perdido el mundo visible pero ahora voy a recuperar otro, el mundo de mis lejanos mayores, aquellas tribus, aquellos hombres que atravesaron a remo los tempestuosos mares del Norte y que desde Dinamarca, desde Alemania y desde los Países Bajos conquistaron a Inglaterra; que se llama Inglaterra por ellos, ya que ‘Engaland’, tierra de los anglos, antes se llamaba ‘tierra de los britanos’, que eran celtas.⁴ (OC, II: 279–280)

If we are to believe this account, an obvious contradiction jumps out at the careful reader. If Borges discovered Old English in the mid-1950s, “así empezó el estudio del anglosajón” which is then followed by the study of “the later and richer Scandinavian Literature” (OC, II: 280), how could he have possibly published *Antiguas literaturas germánicas* in 1951? Toswell, in a note to her English translation of *ALG* believes that “his memory must be faulty” (2014: xiv). Brljak, who also entertains the possibility of old memories not conforming to the truth, summarises the Borgesian conundrum well: “Borges says he turned to Old English about 1955, then progressed to Old Norse, and eventually wrote a book on early Germanic literatures. In fact, however, he had already published such a book – *Antiguas literaturas germánicas*” (2011: 100).

⁴ “I remembered that at home there were two books I could retrieve. I had placed them on the highest shelf, thinking I would never use them. They were Sweet’s *Anglo-Saxon Reader* and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Both had glossaries. And so we gathered one morning in the National Library. I thought: I have lost the visible world, but now I am going to recover another, the world of my distant ancestors, those tribes of men who rowed across the stormy northern seas, from Germany, Denmark, and the Low Countries, who conquered England, and after whom we name England since ‘Angle-land’, land of the Angles, had previously been called ‘the land of the Britons’, who were Celts.” [Trans. E. Weinberger, 1984] as printed in J. L. Borges, *The Total Library. Non Fiction 1922–1986* (2001: 477).

Brljak further explores the early stages in the making of Borges's Northernism in detail, from the influence of his upbringing surrounded by English books and the presence of his English grandmother Frances Haslam, to Borges's interest in his ancestral Northumbrian and Mercian roots and the early attempts at exploring the poetic language of the Kennings in "Noticias de las Kenningar" published in the Buenos Aires journal *Sur* as early as in 1932.⁵ Brljak, questioning Borges's own accounts, described as of an "automythographical" nature, concludes that "the true story of Borges's encounter with the North is not that of one deliberate, fateful decision, but rather of a gradual, uneven development, spanning many years and a variety of works and publications" (2011: 100). For fear of digressing beyond what is acceptable, I shall not discuss in this article whether Borges felt uneasy or ashamed of *ALG* later in his life and decided to be playful with time, to merge the creation of *ALG* and *LGM* into a single event and moment, and, ultimately, confuse his critics; there is hardly anything more Borgesian than that. Whatever the case, in the prologue to *ALG* Borges & Ingenieros emphasise the importance of bringing the subject matter for a first time to a Spanish-speaking readership, as well as their decision to provide numerous quotations and transcriptions, with little critical commentary, and in such a way producing some kind of anthology. In 1965, Borges & Vázquez include a rather meaningful statement in the preface of *LGM*: "creemos más importante señalar que la concepción y redacción de este libro han sido efectuadas directamente sobre los textos primitivos, salvo en el caso de la Biblia ulfilana".⁶

⁵ Also, in the autumn of 1933 Borges published a series of short pieces on "old Germanic myths" and related subjects in the Buenos Aires *Crítica: Revista multicolor de los sábados* ["The Dragon", "On Witches", "The Gnome", "The Myth of Elves"]: "El dragón (Antiguos mitos germánicos)" in 1.7 (23rd September 1933: 8), "Las brujas (Antiguos mitos germánicos)" in 1.9 (7th October 1933: 8), "El gnomo" in 1.11 (21st October 1933: 6), and "El mito de los Elfos" in 1.13 (4th November 1933: 4) Also, if we are to accept that Borges also signed a number of contributions to the "Revista" with the pseudonym "Bernardo Haedo", then the number containing "El dragón" would include a second piece by Borges, a short story entitled "Renacen en el siglo XV Adán y Eva" ("Adam and Eve are reborn in the 15th C.") in 1.7 (23rd September 1933: 1). We shall return to the presence of Adam in the work of Borges in the following pages.

⁶ "We believe it is most important to note that the conception and writing of this book have been based directly on the primitive [ancient] texts, with the exception of the Ulfilian Bible". Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

By 1965 Borges is working directly from the Old English texts and in a number of the sections within “Literatura de la Inglaterra sajona” new translations are added to the 1951 core text, such is the case of “Salomón y Saturno”. What makes Borges’s treatment of this subject particularly interesting is the fact that in 1961, and therefore in between the publication of the two studies concerning Germanic literature, Borges had already published an intriguing translation of one of the Old English dialogues of Solomon and Saturn.

3. “Un diálogo anglosajón del siglo XI”: Borges and the critics

Five numbers of the journal of the National Library of Argentina in Buenos Aires, *La Biblioteca*, were published between 1957 and 1961 under the direction of J. L. Borges. This was a second period of activity for the journal founded in 1896 by Paul Groussac, who had directed the publication of eight volumes between 1896 and 1898, covering a range of cultural, historical, and scientific matters, as well as reviews of recent publications, all marked by the immediate context of the Federalization of Buenos Aires. The journal is reborn in the 1950s with Borges acting not only as director, but also contributing extensively to the new published numbers. The first of these opens with a brief preface in which Borges shares his intentions (“Intenciones”) for the journal in this new period, plus three prose pieces under the generic term *Prosas*: “El cautivo” (p. 116), “El simulacro” (pp. 116–117), and “Borges y yo” (pp. 117–118). Three more *Prosas* appeared later on in the same year in the second number of the journal: “Diálogo de muertos” (p. 44), “La trama” (p. 116), and “Un problema” (p. 116). He would conceive “El hacedor” for inclusion in the third issue of *La Biblioteca* (1958: 129–130), and after not penning any piece of the 1960 number, Borges the writer reappears in 1961 for a final published number of the journal with him as director. However, this time, he offers an annotated translation, “Un diálogo anglosajón del siglo XI” (pp. 156–157), and a short poem, “Composición escrita en un ejemplar de la gesta de *Beowulf*” (p. 158). If I may add a playful remark, this is a different Borges, “Borges y él”, Borges and the student of Old English.

A section dealing with the Old English dialogues between Solomon and Saturn had been included in *ALG* a decade earlier, perhaps showing an early interest by Borges in the texts, but no translation was appended. In *LGM* Borges will reproduce the comments offered in *ALG* verbatim, but would add,

at the end of the section, the translation previously published in *La Biblioteca* with the title “Un diálogo anglosajón del siglo XI”. This is introduced in *LGM* as follows: “Traducimos, a continuación, un fragmento que fue escrito a manera de catecismo y que ahora es magia y poesía”⁷ (OCC: 893–894).

In 1978 when Borges, this time working with Kodama, completes their *Breve antología anglosajona*, the first anthology of Old English texts ever to be published in Spanish,⁸ they choose, again, to include “Un diálogo anglosajón del siglo XI” as one of only seven translated Old English originals. *Deor*, *The Seafarer*, *The Finnsburgh Fragment*, and *Scyld Scefing* (from *Beowulf*) are what any early medievalist would call, perhaps, “obvious” choices; *The Grave*, *Othere*, and *Un diálogo* are certainly less so. Toswell has reflected on the translators’ criteria:

The last three texts are rather unusual choices: ‘The Grave,’ described by Borges and Kodama as an adaptation of Ecclesiastes chapter 12, the story of Othere from the translation of Orosius ordered by Alfred; and a piece of what they call an eleventh-century dialogue, which is the prose *Solomon and Saturn*. In the notes for two of these texts, **the authors refer to Longfellow’s use of these texts**, which may suggest the source for some of their translational choices. (Toswell 2014: 39, emphasis mine)

I shall return to Longfellow. Neither Martín Hadis (2003) nor Carlos Gamarro (2009) in the most recent studies in Spanish of ‘Borges y lo anglosajón’ that I have consulted make any reference to “Un diálogo anglosajón del siglo XI”.⁹

⁷ “We translate below a fragment which was written as Catechism and it is now magic and poetry.”

⁸ In the preface to *BAA*, Borges defines Old English poetry as “ancient gold once hidden in a secret chamber”: “Hará unos doscientos años se descubrió que [la literatura inglesa] encerraba una suerte de cámara secreta, a manera del oro subterráneo que guarda la serpiente del mito. Ese oro antiguo es la poesía de los anglosajones” (OCC: 787). Joshua Byron Smith believes that in this co-authored anthology Kodama “did much of the work. Her doctoral studies in English literature focused on the Anglo-Saxon period. Borges (2016: 316) probably received current scholarly opinions through María who, after reading articles and books, would relate the interesting bits to the aging blind poet”.

⁹ In *Borges Profesor* (2000), Arias & Hadis rightly identify the text Borges translates as *The Prose Solomon and Saturn*, but only note the translation as part of *BAA*, and seem to imply that Borges translated the whole Old English fragment: “Una traducción del diálogo en prosa de Saturno y Salomón aparece bajo el título “Un diálogo anglosajón del siglo XI” en su *Breve antología anglosajona*, libro escrito en colaboración con María

Brljak, has been, to the best of my knowledge, the first critic to notice the relevance of this rather forgotten translation:

[on the translations included in 1966] Perhaps the most important of these translations is that of the Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn, a verse from the Old English Exeter Book [*sic*]: this was originally published under the title “Un diálogo anglosajón del siglo IX” [A ninth-century Anglo-Saxon dialogue] [*sic*] in a 1961 issue of the Buenos Aires journal *La biblioteca* and thus barely beats the 1962 Beowulf translation by Orestes Vera Pérez for the title of the first separate and complete translation of an Old English poem into the Spanish language. (Brljak 2011: 110)

Any reader wishing to acquire in-depth knowledge about Borges and Old English, or more widely, to use Brljak’s terminology, about Borges and “the North”, should be encouraged to read Toswell’s and Brljak’s scholarly work. Their accounts are comprehensive, well informed, and insightful; however, there seems to be some confusion around Borges’s engagement with the Old English dialogues of Solomon and Saturn and much to be done in attempting to trace the texts and topics which explain his interest in analysing and translating these most complex compositions.

4. A translation of the Old English *Prose Solomon and Saturn*

Brljak (2011: 26) is right in highlighting the pioneering status of the publication “Un diálogo anglosajón del siglo XI” in *La Biblioteca*. I believe he is also most correct when he affirms that “the relevant bibliographies and surveys have significantly underrepresented Borges’s contribution to Spanish-language Old Germanic studies”. Conde-Silvestre & Salvador in ‘Old English Studies in Spain: Past, Present and...Future’ (1995), for example, only list Borges’s *ALG*

Kodama en 1978” (Intro, n.p.). In the transcripts of the twenty-five lectures Borges gave at the University of Buenos Aires in 1966, of which seven were devoted to Old English literature, there is a single reference to the Solomon and Saturn material. In the first lecture (“Los anglosajones. La poesía y las Kennings. Genealogía de los reyes germánicos”) delivered on 14th October, 1966, Borges says: “Sólo nos quedan cuatro códices y poco más [...] Hay otros códices: la Crónica anglosajona, una traducción de Boecio, de Orosio, leyes, un “Diálogo de Salomón y Saturno”. Y nada más.” (Arias & Hadis 2000: n.p.).

(1951) and *Literaturas germánicas medievales*, which is dated to 1978. Brljak observes that this and similar bibliographies in the Spanish-speaking world,¹⁰ have failed to include a number of relevant items, “Noticia de los Kenningar” (1932)¹¹ and “Un diálogo anglosajón” (1961) would be two obvious examples, and that some of those which are included are dated to later reprints. However, Brljak own statements are not free from omissions and inaccuracies; I do not claim to be immune to those either. Orestes Vera Pérez’s full prose translation of *Beowulf* was first published in 1959 and republished in 1962. For the translation of passages from *Beowulf* into Spanish, we would need to go back to Manent’s selection in *La poesía inglesa de los primitivos a los neoclásicos* published back in 1947. The reason why I mention fragmentary translations here is because, although Brljak describes “Un diálogo anglosajón” as “the first separate and complete translation” (p. 112), what Borges translates is, in fact, a fragment of *The Prose Solomon and Saturn*. Brljak adds to the confusion when he states that we have a translation of “the Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn, a verse from the Old English Exeter Book [...] originally published under the title “Un diálogo anglosajón del siglo IX” (ibid.). What Borges translates is: a) not a verse, b) there isn’t just one dialogue of Solomon and Saturn (“the Dialogue”), c) none of the surviving Old English Solomonic dialogues appear in the Exeter Book, and d) the title used by Borges was “Un diálogo anglosajón del siglo XI”.

There are as many as four separate dialogues between Solomon and Saturn which survive from the Anglo-Saxon period. Three of these texts, two poems commonly referred to as *Solomon and Saturn I* and *Solomon and Saturn II*, as well as the *Prose Pater Noster Dialogue*, are found in two separate Cambridge Corpus Christi College Manuscripts (CCC41, CCCC422) and have been most recently edited and translated by Daniel Anlezark (2009), who has argued for a common scholarly milieu in their origins.¹² A different dialogue, *The Prose*

¹⁰ Brljak (2011: 126–127) lists F. Galván 1989: *Medieval English Studies in Spain: A First Bibliography*. *Atlantis* 11: 191–207; A. Bravo García 1991: *Old English in Spain*. *Medieval English Studies Newsletter* 25: 4–7; A. Bravo García, F. Galván & S. G. Fernández-Corugedo 1994: *Old and Middle English Studies in Spain: A Bibliography*. Oviedo, Selim – Universidad de Oviedo.

¹¹ For an early article on the topic, see K. Lynn & N. Shumway 1984: *Borges y las Kenningar*. *Texto crítico* 28: 122–130.

¹² “The first part of *SolSatI* is found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41, of the mid-eleventh century, while all three texts (with a poetic fragment, *SolSatFrag*) are found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 422, of the mid-tenth century. A separate trivia dialogue presenting Solomon and Saturn as interlocutors is found in Cotton

Solomon and Saturn, a list of brief questions and answers between the two central characters, is preserved in the British Library manuscript Cotton Vitellius A. xv. (fols 86v–93v) and it is now, therefore, bound with the *Beowulf* manuscript. *The Prose Solomon and Saturn*, a fragment, appears in the ‘Southwick Codex’, alongside Old English versions of the *Soliloquia* of St Augustine (fols 4–59v), the *Gospel of Nicodemus* (fols 60–86v), and a homily to St Quintin (fol 93v). *The Prose Solomon and Saturn*, unlike the other Old English Solomonic texts, is a trivia dialogue featuring a series of questions “based on scripture or arising from scripture. Some demand direct knowledge of scriptural fact, even of the letter of scripture, some of apocryphal or rabbinic lore” (Cross & Hill 1982: 3).

Let’s remove all uncertainty and confusion. Borges’s “Un dialogo anglosajón” is a translation of the opening sentence and the first twelve questions of *The Prose Solomon and Saturn* (fols 86v–88r). The first and final of the question/answer exchanges by the interlocutors are given here in Old English, Modern English (cf. footnotes), and Borges’s Spanish translation so that readers may judge by themselves:

Her kið hu saturnus and Saloman fettode ymbe heora wisdom.
 þa cwaet saturnus to salomane:
 Sage me hwer god sete þa he geworhte heofonas and eorðan.
 Ic þe secge, he sætt ofer [winda] feðerum.¹³

Aquí se cuenta como Salomón y Saturno midieron su sabiduría.
 Saturno le dijo a Salomón:
 - Dime dónde estaba Dios cuando hizo los cielos y la tierra.
 - Yo te digo que estaba sobre las plumas (alas) de los vientos.

Vitellius A. xv., of the mid-twelfth century” (Anlezark 2009: vii). In his excellent introduction to the edition and translation of the Solomonic texts, Anlezark explores the influence of Irish continental learning in late Anglo-Saxon England and the possibility of a Glastonbury setting for the production of the dialogues, result of the work of a circle that probably included a young Dunstan.

¹³ “Here is shown how Saturn and Solomon contended about their wisdom. Then Saturn said to Solomon:

- Tell me where God sat when he made the heavens and the earth.
 - I tell you, he sat on the wings of the wind.”

Saga me hu fela wintra leofode adam on þissere worulde
 Ic þe secge, he leofode ix hund wintra, and xxx wintra, on
 geswince, and on yrmðe; and syððan to helle ferde, and
 þar grimme witu ðolode v þusend wintra, and twa hund
 wintra, and viii arid xx wintra.¹⁴

- Dime cuántos inviernos (años) habitó Adán en este mundo.
- Yo te digo que vivió novecientos inviernos y treinta inviernos en el trabajo y las aflicciones, y luego fue al infierno, y en ese cruel castigo padeció cinco mil inviernos y doscientos inviernos y veintiocho inviernos.

Once we have established what Old English text was Borges actually translating, we can turn our attention to the annotation. Six notes are added to the translation Borges published in 1961 in *La Biblioteca*. Toswell commenting on the final note, which she takes from *BAA*, finds a possible source for Borges's translation of *The Grave*:

A clue for the source of *The Grave* and for Solomon and Saturn material comes from the last note in the collection, which refers to the Solomon and Saturn dialogue: Debemos esta cita a las curiosas anotaciones que Longfellow agregó a su versión inglesa de la *Comedia*, publicada en 1867 ('We owe this reference to the curious annotations added by Longfellow to his English version of the *Comedia*, published in 1867'). The reference, a lengthy one, discusses the chronology of Adam as believed in the Middle Ages and references Dante and the Talmud. Longfellow's translation and commentary on Dante's *Divina Commedia* is clearly a rich source for Borges and Kodama. (Toswell 2017: 72–73)

Toswell does not fail to notice that one of the notes to Borges and Kodama's *Othere* also references Longfellow's use of this story. A final clue comes from the fact that *The Grave* is one of three texts that Longfellow himself translated from Old English originals, alongside Beowulf's passage to Heorot and *Soul and Body I*. Hence, Toswell concludes that "despite the clear declaration that they were working directly from the Old English texts, it seems likely that Borges and Kodama used other translations and read other commentaries and

¹⁴ "- Tell me, how many years lived Adam in this world?

- I tell you, he lived nine hundred and thirty years, in toil and in misery, and afterwards he went to hell and there he endured grim torments for five thousand two hundred and twenty-eight years."

comments on this material” (2017: 73). I find Toswell’s argument convincing, but, unfortunately, it does not help us identify a source for “Un diálogo anglosajón”. That is not to say that Borges’s interest in the subject of this Solomonic dialogue was not influenced by his, widely researched, fascination with Dante¹⁵ and his admiration for Longfellow’s nineteenth-century English translation and notes to *The Divine Comedy*. Longfellow, however, did not mention or translate any of the Old English dialogues between Solomon and Saturn.

Returning to Borges’s annotation of “Un diálogo anglosajón”, the opening remark contains the single clear reference to the literary tradition to which the Old English texts belong:

Salomón, en el diálogo, es el maestro; Saturno, el discípulo que recibe con pareja pasividad las contestaciones triviales y las contestaciones de índole mágica. Al cabo de los siglos da en rebelarse y toma el nombre de Marcul. Escribe Groussac: ‘En los folklores medievales, el sabio Salomón va seguido siempre de un acólito, Marcul, encargado de encontrar un reverso irónico a las nobles máximas del primero.’¹⁶

The quote from Groussac had already been included in the “Salomón y Saturno” section of *ALG* in 1951, which seems to give us some indication of Borges’s early encounter with the context of Solomonic dialogue literature. François-Paul Groussac (1848–1929), a notable figure, distinguished literary critic and Borges’s illustrious predecessor as director of the *Biblioteca nacional*, had published his *Crítica literaria* in 1924. It is in the second lecture printed in this volume (“Segunda conferencia: Génesis, realización y evolución mundial del Quijote”) where Groussac presents Marcul as a literary model for Sancho Panza.¹⁷ For what is worth, the third essay in *Crítica literaria* is entitled *La*

¹⁵ See F. J. Rodríguez Risquete’s ‘Borges: Fervor de Dante’ (2005: 195–218) and H. Núñez-Faraco’s *Borges and Dante. Echoes of a Literary Friendship* (2006).

¹⁶ “In the dialogue Solomon is the teacher, Saturn the disciple who shows an equally passive reaction to both trivial answers and replies of a magical nature. Over the centuries Saturn rebels and takes the name of Marcul. Groussac writes: “In medieval folklore, the wise Solomon is always accompanied by an acolyte, Marcul, whose role is to find an ironic reversal to the noble maxims of Solomon.”

¹⁷ Toswell, commenting on Borges’s practice of linking the Old English text under analysis to other Germanic and Spanish texts in *ALG*, points out that “[Borges] juxtaposes the oneiric inspiration of *Cædmon* against that of Robert Louis Stevenson,

gloria de Dante. Groussac's scholarship might have acted as a gateway for Borges's interest in the dialogues between Solomon and Marcul/Saturn, but it was certainly not how he discovered the Old English texts. What were, then, Borges's Old English sources in the 1950s and 1960s?

Joshua Byron Smith, noting Borges's pursuit of Old English scholarship in his lectures and writing from the mid-1950s, points out that "in *Literaturas germánicas medievales*, Borges mentions Otto Jespersen, Grímur Thorkelin, N. F. S. Grundtvig, J. R. Clark Hall, John Earle, William Morris, W. P. Ker, Martin Lehnert,¹⁸ and a host of other scholars"¹⁹ (2016: 313). M. J. Toswell (2017: 72), in her search for the Old English sources that Borges and Kodama could have worked from in the translations included in *Breve antología*, states that Borges was certainly familiar with R. Hamer's *A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse* (1970), a reader with facing-page Modern English versions, and that perhaps he might have had access to J. J. Conybeare's *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (1826), James W. Bright's *Old English Grammar and Reader* (1891), or *The Old English Handbook* (1935) of Marjorie Anderson & Blanche Colton Williams. The scholarship of J. M. Kemble and H. M. Chadwick, Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Reader* (1876), and Robert K. Gordon's *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (1922) can be added to this list of sources without fear of being mistaken.²⁰

who conceived the plot of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* during a fevered dream. He follows up with Coleridge's **Kubla Khan**, and later yet connects the dialogues of Solomon and Saturn with the proverbial elements of Don Quijote" (2010: 3, emphasis mine) In a poem to Sherlock Holmes of the same name, Borges equals Holmes, Quijano and Adam as they are all creations of a mind with no mother or ancestors: "No salió de una madre ni supo de mayores./ Idéntico es el caso de Adán y de Quijano./ Está hecho de azar, inmediato o cercano/ lo rigen los vaivenes de variables lectores." (OC, II: 474)

¹⁸ Martin Lehnert's *Poetry and Prose of the Anglo-Saxons* (1955) includes six out of the seven Old English texts that Borges and Kodama would translate in *BAA*. The one text missing is *The Prose Solomon and Saturn*.

¹⁹ By the mid-1960s Borges had "hoarded" a fair number of books on Old English and Old Norse literature: "In the final stage of Borges's northernism, literary and scholarly pursuits were joined by an increasingly personal involvement with the North. This development was well underway by the mid-1960s, when the audience of the 1966–1967 Charles Eliot Norton Lectures was made privy to the following anecdotal remark: 'Whenever I walk into a bookstore and find a book on one of my hobbies—for example, Old English or Old Norse poetry—I say to myself, What a pity I can't buy that book, for I already have a copy at home.'" (Brljak 2011: 121).

²⁰ Dates given in brackets are of first editions. I suspect Borges might have also been

In “Salomón y Saturno”, the section first included in *ALG*, Borges describes two fragmentary dialogues dating from the ninth century and a prose fragment. Borges is, no doubt, writing about the two poetic texts, *Solomon and Saturn I* and *Solomon and Saturn II*, and the *Prose Pater Noster Dialogue*, all three found in the Cambridge, Corpus Christi College manuscripts given above:

El primer diálogo es de índole sapiencial: Saturno interroga: «¿Qué maravilla es esa que recorre ferozmente la tierra y vence a las estrellas, a las piedras, a las piedras preciosas, a las fieras y a todo?» Salomón responde que se trata del Tiempo, «que devora al hierro con herrumbre y también nos devora a nosotros». El segundo diálogo es más extraño; Salomón, instado por Saturno, explica el poderío del Padrenuestro. Cada una de las letras de su nombre tiene una virtud especial; la P, por ejemplo, es un guerrero con una larga lanza de oro, que acomete al Diablo, a quien hostigan luego la A y la T. Un fragmento en prosa describe las formas que asumen el Padrenuestro y el Diablo para combatir y la configuración de la cabeza, de las entrañas y del cuerpo del Padrenuestro.²¹

Our reader must realise that what Borges calls “el primer diálogo” is the poem scholars today refer to as *Solomon and Saturn II*, and that Borges’s account of the “segundo diálogo” would match the content of *Solomon and Saturn I*. Borges concludes the section on Solomon and Saturn with an important clue for locating his Old English sources for the Solomonic dialogues. He quotes, in translation, John Earle’s rendering of the *Prose Pater Noster Dialogue*, in chapter X of his *Anglo-Saxon Literature*:

familiar with Dobbie’s *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* (1942), and possibly with other available sources of this kind in French and German.

²¹ In Toswell’s (2014: 25) translation, “The first dialogue concerns sapiential matters. Saturn questions: ‘What wonder is this that ferociously travels over the earth and conquers the stars, the stones, the precious gems, the beasts and everything?’ Solomon responds that they’re discussing Time, ‘which devours iron with rust and also devours us ourselves’. The second dialogue is more esoteric; Solomon, urged by Saturn, explains the power of the *Paternoster* [the Lord’s Prayer]. Each one of the letters of its name encodes a special virtue; the P, for example, is a warrior with a huge lance of gold who attacks the Devil, who the A and the T later lash out at. A prose fragment describes the forms that the personified Paternoster and the Devil assume in order to fight, and the configuration of the head, of the bowels, and of the body of the *Paternoster*.”

And his thought it is more alert and swifter than 12,000 angelic spirits, though each particular spirit have severally twelve suits of feathers, and each particular feather-suit have twelve winds, and each particular wind twelve victoriousnesses all to itself. (1884: 211–212)

“El pensamiento del Padrenuestro es más ágil que doce mil Espíritus Santos, aun si cada Espíritu Santo tuviera doce capas de pluma, y cada capa tuviera doce vientos, y cada viento doce victorias.”²²

Earle gives lines 65–86 of the *Prose Pater Noster Dialogue* in Old English and Modern English translation in the section dedicated to the first half of the tenth century and to Ælfric, acknowledging John Mitchell Kemble as his source. Earle, however, neither discusses nor presents or translates any fragment from *The Prose Solomon and Saturn* that Borges would put into Spanish in 1961 for the readers of *La Biblioteca*. At this point, two options seem possible. The first would be to assume that Borges had access to Kemble’s edition, *The Dialogue of Salomon and Saturnus with an Historical Introduction*, published by the Ælfric Society in 1848, and which included *The Prose Solomon and Saturn* from the Cotton Vitellius A. xv., with a facing-page Modern English translation, followed by notes (pp. 178–197). Although possible, this seems highly unlikely as a source for someone who was not an academic with a scholarly interest in the texts.²³ The second, and most likely option, would be to argue that in 1961 Borges was translating the twelve first questions of *The Prose Solomon and Saturn* as he had encountered them in an anthology or introductory text for students of Old English. The second contribution by Borges to the 1961 issue of *La Biblioteca* is rather significant in this context. “Composición escrita en un ejemplar de la gesta de *Beowulf*” (“A poem written in a copy of *Beowulf*”) is a short poem in which Borges portrays himself wondering about the reasons that have moved him to study “la lengua de los ásperos sajones” (“the language of the blunt-tongued Anglo-Saxons”). In Borges’s poetic composition, observes Joshua Byron Smith, “studying Old English becomes analogous with the

²² Toswell (2014: 25–26) translates Borges in *ALG*: “The thinking of the *Paternoster*, is more agile than two [*sic*] thousand Holy Ghosts, even if each Holy Ghost were to have twelve feather capes, and each cape had twelve winds, and each wind, twelve firm victories (*sigefæstniss*).” The first line should read “more agile/swifter than twelve [not two] thousand Holy Ghosts”.

²³ Robert J. Menner’s *The Poetical Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, published in 1941 in the *Modern Language Association of America* monograph series (13), contains the two poems, and the *Prose Pater Noster Dialogue* as an appendix.

‘inexhaustible’ universe [...] Borges believed that his immortal soul had once spoken the language of the Anglo-Saxons, learning that tongue was a reclamation of a forgotten self” (2016: 308). Immersed in such a process, the Borges of 1961, the laborious learner, student of the Old English language, must have found the source for “Un diálogo anglosajón” in one of the textbooks he was using to teach himself that language of those he considered his ancestors and, by extension, of his own.

Leafing through the volumes of a possible reconstructed library of Borges’s Old English readers and anthologies, including those we have mentioned earlier in this article, I believe we can safely say that Borges’s source for “Un dialogo anglosajón del siglo XI” was Alfred J. Wyatt’s *An Anglo-Saxon Reader*. First published in 1919, reprinted eight times by 1959, its contents were divided into three sections: I. Early West Saxon Prose, II. Later Prose, and III. Poetry. The third entry in Later Prose, after *Apollonius of Tyre* and *Ælfric’s Colloquy*, is *Solomon and Saturn*. What turns Wyatt’s reader from one of several possible sources into what I believe to be definitely Borges’s source text for “Un diálogo anglosajón” is that Wyatt reproduces exactly the same fragment that Borges will translate: the opening line and the first twelve exchanges between Solomon and Saturn in *The Prose Solomon and Saturn* (Her kið hu saturnus and Saloman fettode ymbe heora wisdom [...] and þar grimme witu ðolode v þusend wintra, and twa hund wintra, and viii arid xx wintra). If more evidence was required, the question concerning Time/Old Age that Borges had included in *ALG* can be found in the lines that Wyatt selects from the poem *Solomon and Saturn II* in the reader. Looking at the notes to the prose fragment, Wyatt argues that “the date is probably early 11th Century” (p. 221) providing Borges with a final title: “Un dialogo anglosajón del siglo XI”.

5. All about...Adam?

I hope I have been able to illustrate in this article how in 1961, Jorge Luis Borges, the passionate student of Anglo-Saxon England and its language, published a translation of a fragment from the Old English *Prose Solomon and Saturn* using the edited text he found in Wyatt’s *An Anglo-Saxon Reader* as his source. Now one final question remains. Why did Borges choose a dialogue between Solomon and Saturn for his first separate published translation of (a fragment from) an Old English original? I am sure that if anyone who specialises in the work of Borges, unfamiliar with Old English literature, were to read the

poetic dialogues between Solomon and Saturn, would probably think that there is something about them which is truly Borgesian; after all, it was Borges who genuinely believed that “cada escritor crea a sus precursores” (‘each writer creates his precursors’).

Anthropomorphised letters that fight against the devil, the symbolism in numbers, the magical power of runes,²⁴ an apocalyptic marvellous bird (*Vasa mortis*), a mysterious monster slayer with the courage and strength to slay twenty-five dragons at dawn (Wulf) ... And yet, Borges opted for a translation from the dialogue in prose. The wisdom embodied by Solomon would have certainly appealed to him. Without attempting to be exhaustive, it is not difficult to identify a number of short stories, poems, and other writing by Borges in which he makes use of Solomonic imagery, as in the quote from “El informe de Brodie” that opens this article, or the excerpt from Bacon (*Essays*, LVIII) cited in “El inmortal”: “Solomon saith: there is no new thing upon the earth. So that as Plato had an imagination, that all knowledge was but remembrance, so Solomon given his sentence, that all novelty is but oblivion. In “La cámara de las estatuas” (1933) the circular mirror of Suliman/Solomon is found in the fifth chamber of an Andalusian castle (OC, I: 337); in “Las mil y una noches” (OC, II: 238) Solomon, his seal and the link to the genie’s past are featured in the conversation between the latter and a fisherman. Finally, in “La memoria de Shakespeare” we read about Solomon’s ring in Islamic tradition and how it grants the bearer the power of understanding the language of birds. When in 1975 Borges puts together a book of dreams (*Libro de sueños*), which includes his version of *The Dream of the Rood* (“Sueño de la cruz”), he offers his readers a translation from 1 *Kings*, 3, 4–15 entitled “Sueño de Salomón” (1975: 24). Admitting that Borges might have “had a thing” for Solomon, and for dialogue literature, I believe that what Borges found of particular interest in the fragment he selected for translation in 1961 was the nature of its content rather than the speakers in the dialogue, the act of creation of the first man, and the chronology of Adam.

²⁴ In *ALG*, Borges discusses the runes used in Cynewulf’s poetry: “In order to make this method of Cynewulf’s less inexplicable, we can comment that the letters, over a long period of time, developed a kind of sacred quality; it is sufficient to remember that the cabbalists believe that God could create the world by way of the letters of the alphabet” [trans. Toswell 2014: 20]. Borges’s interest in the kabbalist understanding of God’s creation through letters, which is explicit here, will be explored in this section.

It is well known that Borges had a profound and lifelong interest in the mystical Kabbalistic tradition. Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem* (1915) was the first novel Borges read in German, around 1916, during the period spent with his family in Geneva (OC, II: 444). This first contact with a literary rewriting of the old popular Kabbalistic legend would make a lasting impression on the young man who in 1932 would include "Una vindicación de la cábala" ("A Defense of the Kabbalah") in his fifth book of essays *Discusión*. In a 1971 interview with Jaime Alazraki, when questioned about the earliest references to the Kabbalah in his work dating back to the 1926 essay "Historia de los ángeles", Borges admits that he took those, interestingly enough, from the Paradise appendix in Longfellow's *Divine Comedy* (1997: 167). He would return to the same appendix more than thirty years later in "Un diálogo anglosajón".²⁵ Borges would acquire a deeper understanding of the Kabbalah upon reading Henri Sérouya *La kabbale* (1947), and through the study of the work of Gershom Scholem—who he would meet in the 1960s—and his seminal work *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* published in 1941. However, his interest in *lo hebreo* must be traced back to the influence of her protestant grandmother, who according to Borges knew the bible by heart, and his fascination with divine and human creation through the power of the word to the impact of Meyrink's novel, Jewish mysticism, and, as Edna Aizenberg reminds us, "to the biblically imagistic German Expressionists" (2014: 340). The index provided by the Borges centre at the University of Pittsburgh offers over fifty entries for Adán/Adam referencing a wide range of poems, stories, essays, and lectures. In "Las ruinas circulares" ("The Circular Ruins") the central character, some kind of sorcerer, is trying to dream a man into existence, organ by organ (only to find out that he himself is the illusion created by another man's dream); Borges interrupts the main story to educate his reader: "En las cosmogonías gnósticas, los demiurgos amasan un rojo Adán que no logra ponerse de pie; tan inhábil y rudo y elemental como ese Adán de polvo era el Adán de sueño que las noches del mago habían fabricado".²⁶

²⁵ In the same interview Borges recalls an anecdote from the time he spent in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1967, and how he used to recite Old English verses once translated by Longfellow when walking near what had been the American author's house: "Yo viví a la vuelta de la casa de él en Cambridge. Cuando daba la vuelta a la manzana—si es que puede hablarse de manzanas en Cambridge—recitaba unos versos en anglosajón que él tradujo" (1997: 168).

²⁶ "In Gnostic cosmogonies, demiurges mould a red Adam who cannot stand. Just like

This “red Adam” (*Adama*) features in a high number of Borges’s poems²⁷ and the appeal to gnostic cosmogonies and or to the Kabbalistic tradition, and the possibility of creation encapsulated in one word (the *tetragramaton*), are displayed, in “La creación y P. H. Gosse” (1941), “El Golem” (1958), “Adam Cast Forth” (1964), “Invocación a Joyce” (1969), “La rosa de Paracelso” (1983), and in the lecture “La Cabala” (1977), just to name a few relevant texts. The first three stanzas of “El Golem” (OC, I: 885) published only three years before “Un diálogo anglosajón” are revealing, the link between Adam and the stars is made explicit in both texts:²⁸

Si (como el griego afirma en el Cratilo)	If (as the Greek states in the <i>Cratylus</i>)
El nombre es arquetipo de la cosa, En las letras de <i>rosa</i> está la rosa Y todo el Nilo en la palabra <i>Nilo</i> .	a name is the archetype of a thing, in the letters of <i>rose</i> the rose is, And all the Nile in <i>Nile</i> flows
Y, hecho de consonantes y vocales,	And, made of consonants and vowels,
Habrá un terrible Nombre, que la esencia	an awe inspiring Name there is, that the essence
Cifre de Dios y que la Omnipotencia	of God encodes and his Omnipotence
Guarde en letras y sílabas cabales.	in perfect letters and syllables holds
Adán y las estrellas lo supieron En el jardín. La herrumbre del pecado	Adam and the stars once knew it in the garden. By sin’s corrosion

that clumsy, crude and raw Adam of dust was the Adam of dreams fashioned by the magician’s nights.”

²⁷ See, for instance, “La luna” (OC, I: 819), “Al hijo” (OC, I: 948), “La Clepsidra” (OC, II: 157), or “A Israel” (OC, I: 996) and “La secta de los treinta” (OC, II: 39).

²⁸ In the passage from *The Prose Solomon and Saturn* which Borges translates, Saturn asks from where was Adam’s name created?, to which Solomon replies that it was created from four stars called Arthox, Dux, Arotholem, and Minsymbrie. Borges realises in the third note to his translation that the name of the stars are the four points of the compass in Greek (“proceden de los nombres griegos de los cuatro puntos cardinales”). In their edition of *The Prose Solomon and Saturn*, Cross & Hill point out that “this is a widely attested motif, particularly so in Hiberno-Latin texts” (1982: 67).

(Dicen los cabalistas) lo ha borrado	—the Kabbalists say— it has
	faded away
Y las generaciones lo perdieron	lost to generations.

It is also worth adding that in the penultimate note to “Un diálogo anglosajón” Borges draws on Richard Burton’s *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Mecca* (1855–1856), expanding the discussion around the stature of Adam, and its reduction after the Fall, to the Arabic world. The universal appeal of Adam, the first Golem, is acknowledged by Borges when in “La ceguera” he maintains that, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton aimed for a topic who would be of interest not just to the English but to all humankind, “that topic was Adam, our common father” (OC, II: 282). In “Un diálogo anglosajón”, Borges follows the same reasoning selecting for translation into Spanish a passage in which the reader is taken to the primordial time of the story of creation in which naming, the cosmogonic word, the nature of the divine, and the shaping of the first man are the subjects of the word exchange between Solomon and Saturn. All of these mattered most to Borges who thought of himself and of all humans as broken mirror reflections of an undecipherable god, of a pre-paradise Adam.

¿De qué Adán anterior al paraíso,
de qué divinidad indescifrable
somos los hombres un espejo roto?
BEPPPO (OC, II: 297)

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