

THE JORGE LUIS BORGES COLLECTION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN*

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Abstract: This research note reports on a collection of manuscript and print materials relating to Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986). The collection was acquired in 1999 by the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. It features unpublished manuscripts in a variety of literary genres and an excellent representation of Borges's published works, including several rare books and periodicals from the 1920s, a period of increasing importance in Borges scholarship.

In April 1999, the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center acquired a collection of manuscript and print materials relating to Jorge Luis Borges. Although this rare books library at the University of Texas at Austin has been known more for its holdings in French, British, and Anglo-American literature than for an interest in Latin American letters, the center immediately processed the manuscripts and made them available for use by scholars.

The print materials (just over three hundred discrete titles) are currently being catalogued for incorporation into the general Ransom Center collection. The dealer's list of 420 items, which accompanied the acquisition, is an indispensable research tool, in spite of some minor factual errors in the annotations. The print materials include a complete selection of Borges's published works and several rare books and periodicals from the 1920s, a period of growing interest to Borges scholars.

The Jorge Luis Borges Papers, the heart of the collection, comprise eight manuscripts and one typescript: a 1922 letter by Borges to Ricardo Molinari; the manuscript of a letter by Borges later published in the final issue of *Proa* in 1926; a letter by Borges to Ulyses Petit de Murat, bound with a manuscript notebook of Petit de Murat's poems; five notebooks of mostly unpublished writings, primarily in Borges's hand; the manuscript of an unpublished short story; Borges's calling card; the draft of a film script to be

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coauthored by Borges; a manuscript variant of the poem "Mateo XXV, 30"; and a typescript of the short story "Emma Zunz."

THE JORGE LUIS BORGES PAPERS

Unpublished 1922 autograph letter to Ricardo Molinari

In March 1922, Borges wrote this three-paragraph letter to Molinari (1898–1996), an Argentine poet who later participated in the Ultraísta-Martinfierrista movement and published two books before the end of the 1920s, *El imaginero* (1927) and *El pez y la manzana* (1929). In the letter, Borges named the editor Evar Méndez and the Ultraísta broadside *Prisma*, alluded to Molinari's friendship with a mutual acquaintance (Argentine writer Norah Lange). Borges also expressed his admiration for a poem by Molinari entitled "Veleta" and his desire to publish it in *Prisma*. The letter accompanied inscribed copies of the two published issues of *Prisma* (December 1921 and March 1922), both of which are included among the print materials in the collection. Borges never published the poem in *Prisma*, however, because the subsequent issue never materialized.

The premier issue of *Prisma: Revista Mural*, which appeared overnight on walls throughout Buenos Aires, launched the introduction in Argentina of Ultraísmo, the Spanish avant-garde movement in which Borges had participated in Seville and Madrid from 1919 until he returned to Argentina in March 1921. The large-format broadside has five columns in a horizontal orientation. It bears the masthead in the leftmost column and in the adjacent one, the text of "Proclama," the first manifesto of Argentine Ultraísmo. The manifesto is headed with a woodcut illustration by Norah Borges (Borges's sister and a prominent contributor to Ultraísta publications in Spain and Argentina). The masthead and manifesto sections have been reproduced (Verani 1986, opp. p. 36) and thus are familiar to scholars of the Argentine avant-garde. In contrast, the contents of the remaining three columns—nine poems by eight Spanish and Argentine Ultraístas, including Borges's "Aldea"—are discussed infrequently. In this copy of *Prisma* 1, tucked into the blank space at the lower left of the Borges poem, Borges inscribed a brief dedication to Molinari, addressing him as "fino poeta."

The second issue of *Prisma* has a similar horizontal-columnar layout and features similar contents: a Norah Borges woodcut, a prose manifesto, the masthead, and ten poems. This copy bears two autograph notes to Molinari. The first is identical to the inscription found on the first issue, with the same placement, tucked into the empty space to the left of the final lines of "Atardecer," Borges's contribution to the *Prisma* 2 anthology. The other note is longer and more personalized, nine lines in which Borges reaffirms his interest in "Veleta" and declares it superior to his own "Atardecer."

Autograph manuscript of "Carta a Güiraldes y a Brandán, en una muerte (ya resucitada) de Proa," a 1925 letter to Ricardo Güiraldes and Alfredo Brandán Caraffa (published in 1926)

This autograph manuscript, written on four numbered pages from a lined notebook and dated "Julio del novecientos veinticinco," was published six months later in the final issue of the Ultraísta journal *Proa* (2d ser., 15 Jan. 1926, 26–27). Güiraldes (1886–1927) and Brandán (1898–?) coedited that journal with Borges at various times, along with Pablo Rojas Paz and Francisco Luis Bernárdez (Salvador and Ardissonne 1983, 19). Although Borges's letter is addressed to "Brandán, Ricardo," it is as much a personal essay in which he invoked the names of many other cohorts in the Buenos Aires avant-garde of the 1920s and took leave of their common endeavors in *Proa*, a major avant-garde journal of the decade.

Two series of the journal were published during the rise of the avant-garde in Buenos Aires: *Proa: Revista de Renovación Literaria*, published from 1 August 1922 until 3 July 1923; and *Proa*, the second series published from 1 August 1924 to 15 January 1926. Like the *Prisma* broadside, the first series of *Proa* was concerned primarily with poetry. The second series also published literary essays, criticism, reviews of exhibitions, art criticism, and other pieces on the fine arts. Both before and after the "death" of *Proa*, Güiraldes, Brandán, and Borges all contributed regularly to the semimonthly *Martín Fierro: Periódico Quincenal de Arte y Crítica Libre*, published from 1 February 1924 to November 1927. This journal inherited the avant-garde imperative of its predecessors, *Prisma* and *Proa*, and also gave Argentine Ultraísmo its own name—Martinfierrismo. The Ransom Center Borges collection includes a complete set of the second series of *Proa*. In this particular set, numbers 1–14 are bound in boards individually, and number 15 is in its original published state. In an apparent binding error, the boards and wrappers for numbers 1 and 11 are reversed. This is a rare holding, as Jared Loewenstein suggested in identifying issues 14 and 15 as "virtually impossible to find" (1993, 152).

Unpublished autograph letter to Ulyses Petit de Murat, bound with a leather-bound manuscript notebook by Petit de Murat

Borges wrote this undated letter (twelve lines on blue-monogrammed stationery) to Argentine poet Petit de Murat (1907–1983) in advance of the 1929 publication of the latter's first collection of poems, *Commemoraciones*. Borges judged it "una colaboración honrosa." He also mentioned his recent social and professional contacts with a variety of associates in the avant-garde movement, including writers Nicolás Olivari, Enrique González Tuñón, Jacobo Fijman, Macedonio Fernández, and Norah Lange as well as artists Xul Solar (pseudonym of Alejandro Schulz Solari) and Norah Borges. Petit de Murat and Jorge Luis Borges worked together on *Martín Fierro* and later on *Revista Multicolor de los Sábados*, the Saturday supplement to the news-

paper *Crítica* (Rodríguez Monegal 1978, 251–52). (Both publications are represented among the print materials of the Borges Collection: two September 1933 issues of *Crítica* and a complete set of *Martín Fierro*.) Borges's letter to Petit de Murat is bound with a leather-bound notebook with marbled end pages. On the spine of the half-inch binding are embossed "ULISES / PETIT / DE / MURAT" and "CONME / MORA / CIONES." The twenty-one numbered leaves of the notebook, written primarily in pencil in Petit de Murat's hand, include drafts, excerpts, and textual variants of poems and titles of poems.

Although Petit de Murat won several regional and national prizes for his poetry, fiction, and screenplays, his work is no longer as highly regarded as it was at one time. Nor are all his publications widely available in academic libraries outside Argentina. At the least, the Petit de Murat notebook is a bibliographic curiosity that will appeal to bibliophiles in general. More important, the manuscript variants in the notebook contribute significantly to the textual scholarship of some of Petit de Murat's earliest poetry: six poems tentatively titled "Elegía con ausentes," "Elegía para . . . un poeta joven," "De los pueblos tristes," "Ultimo poema a las manos de Octavio," "Teresita en Lisieux," and "Calle final."

Five notebooks of mostly unpublished writings, primarily in Borges's hand

The 103 leaves of these unpublished notebooks comprise essays, excerpts, notes, drafts, and transcriptions on a variety of topics, mainly Argentine, Scandinavian, Anglo, and Anglo-Saxon literary and philosophical subjects. The library has followed the dealer's list in labeling each discrete file on the basis of the color and brand of the notebooks: "Red 'Avon' Notebook, in Borges' Hand, c. 1952"; "Green 'Avon' Notebook"; "Lanceros' Notebook"; "Grey 'Avon' Notebook"; and "Red 'Avon' Notebook, 1955–1960." (The dealer's list dates the manuscripts in the three undated notebooks as circa 1954, circa 1949, and circa 1950–1951, respectively.) Three of the notebooks feature a table of contents on the inside back cover, and all but the fifth are written exclusively in Borges's hand. Many of the documents include extensive corrections, revisions, and other editing appropriate to the in-progress nature of the notebook form.

The twenty-two leaves of the first red Avon notebook contain notes and commentary on topics including "Destino escandinavo," early German Christianity, Anglo-Saxon battle songs, and *Don Segundo Sombra*, the 1926 novel by Ricardo Güiraldes. Seven of the leaves are in English. The less-finished materials that follow include a ten-line rough draft of a letter to an unidentified addressee and charts of the zodiac and the elements. Borges revised, edited, and annotated this notebook extensively.

The twenty leaves of the green notebook feature several complete essays, each titled and separately paginated by Borges: "Juan Escoto" (four leaves), "Francis Bacon" (three leaves), "Místicos del Islam" (three leaves),

and “Bertrand Russell” (five leaves). Three less-complete single-leaf pieces are interspersed among the essays. The table of contents lists all the texts. Borges annotated each essay and fragment with copious and detailed marginal notes and references to sources as diverse as the New Testament, Boethius, Fray Luis de León, John Stuart Mill, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

The sixteen-leaf Lancers notebook is physically and intellectually the least integral of the notebooks. The leaves come from disparate sources, each one separate from the others, yielding a file of leaves housed inside one cover rather than an intact notebook. In content, some of the texts are fragmentary, and there are numerous revisions, changes, and variants throughout the pages. The notebook displays two manuscript quotes on the front cover, one from Pliny, the other from William Butler Yeats. Eight numbered leaves designated “Prólogo” comprise more than 110 lines; each leaf has been trimmed to the exact size of the text therein, in accordance with a working technique sometimes employed by the meticulous Borges. The remaining eight leaves are made up of fragments and working drafts, including sixteen substantially edited lines on Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche’s *Also Sprach Zarathustra*; two leaves of research notes; a thirteen-line paragraph on natural sciences and metaphysics, revised in eight lines on the following leaf; and an extensively corrected rough draft of a text describing an imaginary book by one “González Carbalho.”

The eight-leaf gray notebook also has autograph notes on the front cover. All but the sixth and eighth leaves include writing on the recto only. The table of contents on the inside back cover identifies two topics: English literature and Mark Twain. The first four leaves cover Geoffrey Chaucer in an essay on *The Canterbury Tales* and one unnumbered leaf entitled “El inglés de Chaucer.” The following three leaves (numbered 1 to 3) contain notes on Mark Twain. The eighth and final leaf includes further commentary on medieval English literature—Sir Thomas Malory, Arthurian romance, and Layamon’s *Brut*.

The later red Avon notebook comprises thirty-seven leaves, most with transcriptions on the verso as well as the recto (unlike in the other notebooks). The pages are written mainly in the hand of Borges’s mother, Leonor Acevedo de Borges. Only three leaves contain a total of thirty-nine lines in Borges’s handwriting (35r, 36r–36v, and 37r–37v). The almost complete illegibility of these lines is a poignant reminder of Borges’s blindness. The topics on which Borges dictated (listed in the table of contents) include *Beowulf*, the ancient Germanic runes, Dante’s *Paradiso*, and South American Modernista poets Julio Herrera y Reissig and Leopoldo Lugones.

As a group, the five notebooks offer myriad projects for scholars of the compositional techniques, creative process, intellectual development, and publishing history of Borges’s essays of the 1950s. These pages likely will have the greatest impact on Borges scholarship of all those in the collection because of the preponderance of unpublished texts, the sheer quantity of

material, and the importance of this decade in Borges's literary production as a whole.

Autograph manuscript of an unpublished short story

This untitled manuscript comprises six paragraphs on the recto of four leaves of lined notebook paper. Borges numbered leaves 2, 3, and 4 and made seven revisions. The dealer's list identifies the unpublished and unfinished text as a short story, although the narrator characterizes it as "una crónica." The first few lines identify the setting as the house of a prominent Buenos Aires family, "los Rivero," circa 1905. The piece is classically Borgesian. First, the characters, like Borges himself, exhibit a literary avocation and other scholarly inclinations. Second, Borges alludes to many of his favorite topics, including Argentine military history and the city of Buenos Aires and its neighborhoods, with references to the "barrio Sur," calle Sarmiento, and "la plaza del Once." Finally, one finds a hint of the thin line separating truth and fictionality. Is the Rivero family factual or fictional, and is the text a chronicle or a story? This file also includes a typescript transcription of unidentified provenance with several spelling and punctuation errors mistranscribed from the original. Like the notebooks, this unknown and unpublished Borges manuscript represents a substantial contribution to Borges scholarship.

Borges's calling card (with a transcription from the Prose Edda)

On the reverse of his calling card, Borges transcribed in five lines an excerpt from the English translation of the foreword of the Prose Edda, an Old Norse saga. The source is indicated on a sixth line. The card reads simply "Jorge Luis Borges," centered in italic script, with his street address in small caps at the lower right. Although the purpose and destination of this particular transcription remain unidentified, the piece lends a personal and whimsical touch to the Borges Papers. Even Borges used the back of his business cards to record thoughts to himself or others.

Unpublished draft of a proposed film script to be coauthored by Borges and José Luis Romero

This autograph manuscript written in Borges's hand (twelve lines on the verso of a sheet of graph paper torn from a notebook) outlines the plot of a film script featuring the murder-suicide of two sisters, the wrongful accusation of the murder victim's boyfriend, and a trite resolution. The characters are identified only as "A," "B," and "C." An autograph note at the bottom of the page, written by Romero and dated "Adrogué, 1953," identifies the script as a joint project of "Jorge Luis Borges . . . y J. L. R." Romero (1909–1977) was a historian, university teacher and administrator, and the author of more than 125 essays and books, beginning in 1929. He was an eclectic humanist, and some of his earliest writings were on film (*De historia*

e historiadores 1982, 15). Borges's interest in film extended back as early as mid-1933, when he served as film editor for the three-issue *Selección: Cuadernos Mensuales de Cultura* (item 80 on the dealer's list).

Autograph manuscript of the poem "Mateo XXV, 30"

This twenty-line draft begins "—Estrellas, pan, bibliotecas occidentales y orientales." It has few corrections or variants, suggesting that Borges copied it from an earlier version. "Mateo XXV, 30" was first published in *La Nación* in November 1953, a facsimile of which Horacio Jorge Becco reproduced in his annotated bibliography of Borges (1973, 127).

Typescript draft of the short story "Emma Zunz," with a signed and dated postcard to Cecilia Ingenieros

This double-spaced typescript on five folio leaves exhibits several autograph corrections and revisions. In a two-line autograph note at the top of the verso of page 5 addressed to "Cecilia" and signed "Borges," Borges identifies the typescript as "el primer borrador de Emma Zunz" and parenthetically suggests "El castigo" as an alternate title. Neither the typescript nor the note bear a date, but "Emma Zunz" was published first in *Sur* in September 1948 (Rodríguez Monegal 1978, 34) and was collected the following year in *El Aleph*, Borges's fourth collection of short stories (Becco 1973, 43). Also included in this file is a picture postcard of the Port of Buenos Aires with eighteen lines of text, dated "19 de abril de 1946," addressed to "Admirada Cecilia," and signed with Borges's full name. The postcard is neither stamped nor postmarked, and it is not clear whether or not the postcard accompanied the typescript. The Cecilia of both autograph communications is Cecilia Ingenieros, a friend of Borges who suggested to him the plot of "Emma Zunz" (Rodríguez Monegal 1978, 410, quoting Borges's epilogue to *El Aleph*). In the postcard note, Borges invited Ingenieros to submit an article to *Los Anales de Buenos Aires*, an academic literary journal that he edited (Rodríguez Monegal 1978, 398–400).

THE PRINT MATERIALS

Apart from the papers, no discrete Borges collection exists in the Ransom Center. Rather, the print materials included in the acquisition will become part of the center's general collection. The preceding evaluation of the Borges papers has emphasized the significance of three periodicals associated with Borges and his earliest literary development during the Argentine avant-garde of the 1920s: *Prisma* (1921–1922), the second series of *Proa* (1924–1926), and *Martín Fierro* (1924–1927). Complete runs of three other periodicals from around the same period are likewise now available in the Ransom Center: *Síntesis: Artes, Ciencias y Letras* (nos. 1–41, June 1927–October

1930); *Selección: Cuadernos Mensuales de Cultura* (nos. 1–3, May 1933–July 1933); and *Poesía: Revista Internacional de Poesía* (nos. 1/2–6/7, June 1933–October–November 1933). All these publications counted on the editorial or creative contributions of Borges and some of the 1920s associates represented in the manuscript collection, notably Molinari and Petit de Murat. It is significant that these periodicals exist alongside first editions of all Borges's book monographs of the decade (his first publications), including the hard-to-find *Inquisiciones* (1925) and *El tamaño de mi esperanza* (1926), neither of which Borges allowed to be republished during his lifetime. Given Borges's later rejection of the avant-garde roots of his literary formation in "An Autobiographical Essay" (1970, 227) as well as increasing scholarly interest in this period of Spanish American literature, this combination of manuscripts, periodicals, and books is perhaps the most exceptional contribution of the Ransom Center's holdings on Borges.

Another prominent component of the acquisition is the selection of Borges's later published works. The holdings include first and other significant editions of most of these books—many in the original wrappers or with the pages uncut, several in limited editions designed to be collector's items, and several bearing an autograph or inscription. There are also first editions of various essays, anthologies, and fiction that Borges published in collaboration with other authors, including his celebrated pseudonymous partnership with Adolfo Bioy Casares (as H. Bustos Domecq and Benito Suárez Lynch). Finally, the printed materials include a representative selection of anthologies containing Borges's work (dealer's list, items 184–209), critical editions introduced by his prefaces (items 211–59), and his translations and miscellaneous other materials (items 260–66, 346–49, and 388–420). Less significant are the few books and articles on Borges (items 289–345 and 350–87).

These Ransom Center manuscript and print holdings on Borges, while certainly important on their own merit, also complement existing library holdings on Borges and Argentina elsewhere at the University of Texas at Austin in the Edward Larocque Tinker Collection and the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection. The Tinker Collection, a discrete collection of the Ransom Center, contains numerous items in various mediums relating to Argentine and Latin American history and literature (see the center's 1990 *Guide*, 29–30). The Benson Latin American Collection, which has a historical collection-development commitment to Argentina, also holds many of the book monographs and specific issues of some of the periodicals now available in the Ransom Center. While the center's Borges materials are fewer than those in the Jorge Luis Borges Collection at the University of Virginia Library (nineteen manuscripts and typescripts and more than nine hundred print materials as opposed to the center's nine manuscripts and three hundred books), the potential for scholarly impact is no less notable.

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