

## THE SNORRA EDDA OF JORGE LUIS BORGES

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One of the last pieces of work to be produced by Jorge Luis Borges, although certainly one which had been a lifetime in the making, was a translation of part of a medieval Icelandic treatise on poetry and mythology published under the title *La alucinación de Gylfi*.<sup>1</sup> The treatise in its entirety is sometimes called the *Prose Edda* or the *Younger Edda*, to distinguish it from the *Poetic* or *Elder Edda*, a collection of mythological, gnomic and heroic poems, a great deal of which find themselves interpolated piecemeal into their younger namesake. The work is also called *Snorra Edda* (the title used from here onwards), after its author, Snorri Sturlusson (1179–1241). For scholars of Old Norse-Icelandic literature this work is considered a vital link not only to the medieval world but also to pre-Christian Scandinavia. This link came about tangentially, since

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1 The translation is said to be by Jorge Luis Borges and María Kodama but the extent of the latter's role (as with Borges's other female collaborators) is difficult to determine. See Margrét Jónsdóttir's article (139) for a theory on the matter. In the absence of further evidence, it is only Borges's role as translator that will be assessed here.

Snorri explains pagan mythology, despite its no longer being an object of firm belief, in order to explicate the mythologically-infused poetic allusions deemed necessary for the comprehension of the gradually disappearing tradition of court, or skaldic, poetry. The *Snorra Edda* is also one of the earliest literary manuals in a European vernacular.

Little has been written about *La alucinación de Gylfi*. Sigrún Á. Eiríksdóttir's article, "La Alucinación del lector: Jorge Luis Borges and the Legacy of Snorri Sturluson," plays upon the title and emphasises the identification of Borges with Snorri but says very little about the work of translation itself. The *Snorra Edda* is said to have "unquestionably influenced [Borges's] literary presentation of illusory and real worlds" (247) and in particular a vivid analysis of "El Sur" elicits this parallelism. A similar brief mention is provided in another article by the same author, "Borges' Icelandic Subtext: The Saga Model" (385–86) while Sigrún's article on Borges and kennings, "'El verso incorruptible': Jorge Luis Borges and the Poetic Art of the Icelandic Skalds," outlines the basics of kenning-lore and the strong influence that these may have had on Borges' oeuvre, perhaps the most noteworthy example being "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." *La alucinación de Gylfi* does not come into the latter and is merely named in Margrét Jónsdóttir's "Borges y la literatura islandesa medieval" (124) and Vladimir Brljak's fascinating article, "Borges and the North" (110), in which the path of northern influence is traced through Borges's life. Finally, Efraín Kristal devotes a section of his *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation* to *La alucinación de Gylfi*. While it is a welcome contribution, particularly in its comparison of this work to Borges's wider translation practices, the argumentation is somewhat weakened by Kristal's lack of familiarity with the original text.

In the following article a further contribution is offered. A discussion of the influence of *Snorra Edda*, in particular the second and third sections ("Skáldskaparmál" and "Háttatal"), on Borges's early work on kennings will serve as a starting point. This is followed by an example of how a nuance present in Borges's remodelled treatise is integrated into one particular later fictional work, namely "Undr." From there, the shift in later life towards an outlook more conversant with the material encapsulated within the "Gylfaginning," that is the first section of *Snorra Edda*, will be discussed. An analysis of the translation itself will be employed in an at-

tempt to reveal certain facets of the mature Borges's approach to his Scandinavian source material.

### AN EARLY *Skáldskaparmál*

In 1932 Borges's article "Noticia de los *kenningar*" (sic) appeared in the journal *Sur* and a connection with the *Snorra Edda* was definitively forged.<sup>2</sup> The very act of writing on kennings establishes such a link, but if any doubt were to remain, Borges's comments in a footnote that he is one of only two other intellectual traitors, as far as he knows, who are comparable to Snorri (371) sets it in stone. His short article, although ostensibly polemical and critical of this rhetorical device (they are called "frías aberraciones" in the first line), lists kennings and even suggests a paradigm of acceptable usage. A few years later, in an extended redaction, Borges admits to plundering the second section of the *Snorra Edda*, the "Skáldskaparmál" (called a "catálogo divino"), for his examples (371).

Since the ultraist polemical slant of this revised piece has previously been discussed elsewhere, I will here focus on Borges's adaptation of, and particularly deviations from, his source. While Snorri himself was clearly an advocate of skaldic poetry, he does warn us in the final section of his work, the "Háttatal," that certain uses of kennings are defective or excessive, i.e. bad taste. The two main issues which he identifies are the mixing of metaphors (e.g. calling a sword a fish of battle and a snake of battle in the same verse—both, however, acceptable in their own right) and the linking together of kennings to a point where there are more than five elements (7–8).<sup>3</sup> Borges seems to have agreed with the latter judgment, as he mentions, with reference to the kennings, "el orden torrencial en que [los escaldos] las prodigaron" (377). This opinion persisted, as later on, in *Literaturas germánicas medievales* after describing the linking of kennings,

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2 This appears a few years later, revised and expanded, in *Historia de la eternidad* and thus in *Obras completas* under the title "Las *kenningar*." It would seem that a booklet was published in 1933 on the same theme (presumably slightly extended—Margrét Jónsdóttir refers to it [127, 133], but I have been unable to consult it). I will take the text from the 1936 "Las *kenningar*" as the basis of my discussion here.

3 References to the text of *Snorra Edda* will be to Anthony Faulkes's four-volume edition, except when the discussion of Borges's sources requires previous editions to be considered. Faulkes is also responsible for an English translation which may be of use to those unfamiliar with Old Norse-Icelandic.

he states that in such a process “está compendiada la historia de la degeneración de la poesía de Islandia” (137). While such comments present ideas heavily influenced by the medieval source, others, while blending seamlessly into the mix, are additions with no Norse provenance.

The most notable regards circular definitions. In his list appears the kenning “primo del cuervo” which we are told is used to signify “cuervo.” A footnote expands upon this incongruity:

*definitium in definitione ingredi non debet* es la segunda regla menor de la definición. Risueñas infracciones como esta (y aquella venidera de *dragón de la espada: la espada*) recuerdan el artificio de aquel personaje de Poe que en trance de ocultar una carta a la curiosidad policial, la exhibe como al desgaire en un tarjetero. (372)

The rule is nowhere mentioned in Snorri’s work and with chains of metaphors there was no judgment of poor taste reserved for kennings containing the overall definition somewhere within the mix.

Of the list of kennings given by Borges, the majority are traceable to *Snorra Edda* or to the *Njáls saga* (in the translation of Webbe Dasent referred to in the bibliography at the end of the essay).<sup>4</sup> Thus from the latter, “fragua del canto: la cabeza del *skald*” seems to be “the forge which foams with song” (68) and “roedor de yelmos: la espada” from “helmgnaver” (339). In Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur’s translation of the former (also included in Borges’s bibliography) we find: “men may call [...] the tongue oar or tiller of the ship [...] sword of speech or of the mouth” (238), which gives “espada de la boca” and “remo de la boca” in Borges’s list. Yet not all the kennings’ sources are so easily located. In fact, the regressive kennings “primo del cuervo” for “cuervo” and “dragón de la espada” for “espada” pose particular problems. Neither appears in the two texts previously mentioned. A look at Rudolph Meissner’s monumental work on kennings reveals that “Hugins niðr” (“descendant of Hugin,” i.e. of one of Óðinn’s ravens)<sup>5</sup> can be used as a kenning for “raven” and in the skaldic

4 In the original article in *Sur* several are credited to Raimundo Lida and mention is made of Wilhelm Ranisch’s *Eddalieder*, which nevertheless contains few skaldic kennings, being an edition of the *Poetic Edda. Die Geschichte vom Goden Snorri* (a translation of *Eyrbyggja* saga by Felix Niedner from 1920) and “Inglinga saga,” mentioned in a note (373) (perhaps the William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon translation) may also have contributed.

5 “Óðinn” is frequently anglicised to “Odin.”

poetry corpus “Hrafns nafni” (“namesake of the raven,” i.e. raven) is also recorded (119).<sup>6</sup> A loose translation based on the former, “Hugins Brüder” (“Hugin’s brother”) appears once in Niedner’s translation of *Eyrbyggja saga* (44), which is listed in the bibliography at the end of Borges’s 1936 essay, but is not a common kenning and the use of the proper name Hugin makes it even less comparable with the reductive use of the common noun “primo del cuervo/Raben/raven” listed by Borges.

Swords, according to Meissner, are often called “snakes” (perhaps due to the damascened patterns made upon the blade, as well as their “writhing” movement in battle) but are nearly always referred to as snake of wounds/battle/shields, etc. (153–54). It is worth noting that the Nordic conception of dragons at the time tended towards the snakelike—dragon and snake were interchangeable synonyms. However a two-element kenning “snake/dragon of the sword” is not to be found. An extended example, however, which includes the final meaning “sword” within the elements, can be found in “Háttatal”: “linnr sennu sverða” means literally “the snake of the quarrel of swords” and ultimately “sword” (since the “quarrel of swords” is “battle” and “the snake of battle” is the sword [7]). It is worth noting that Snorri uses this verse as an example of good style since all of the “sword” kennings (there are others in the verse as a whole) refer to snakes and thus do not mix metaphors (see above). Ultimately, while Borges’s regressive examples were not necessarily fabrications, they represent an insignificant usage which he would have struggled to find examples of and towards which no criticism was directed by medieval commentators.

Although the non-regressive rule of definition is a commonplace of basic logic, it is tempting to see it as being connected to Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which Borges, at least at a later date, was familiar with (see the reference in “Funes el memorioso” and Jon Stewart’s article on the matter). Book III, Chapter IV of Locke’s work deals with the problem of *circulus in definiendo* and in particular regressive

6 It is possible that Borges may have been familiar with Meissner’s work, which appeared in 1921, but he does not mention it in the bibliography appended to “Las kenningar.” That work has an extensive treatment of the “Abgrenzung der Kenning” including the statement that “Im Grundwort darf nicht der Sinn des Ganzen enthalten sein” (28). Borges does mention it in the editorial prologue to “Historia de la eternidad” in the 1974 edition of *Obras completas* (351).

definitions in the following terms: “I think it is agreed, that a definition is nothing else but the showing the meaning of one word by several other non-synonymous terms” (2: 33). In this respect, could it be just a curious coincidence that the character in “El soborno,” writing a book entitled “Toward a History of the Kenning” is named Herbert Locke (3:57)? Whatever the source, however, Borges’s decision to highlight this feature suggests more about his personal concerns about the uses of poetic language than a desire to accurately represent the Old Norse context. Literalizing descriptions were apparently a particular target for his ultraist disdain and he imposes this assessment on the medieval material.

### BORGES’S KENNING-LORE IN PRACTICE

Finding references to medieval texts and authors, and even medieval Scandinavian ones, within Borges’s work is a fruitful activity. The trained eye can spot numerous such allusions in superficially non-septentrional stories. In the case of those which take the North as their explicit theme, such as “Undr” (from *El libro de arena*, published in 1975, around forty years after the essay on kennings), the possibilities are nearly endless. To point them all out here would be superfluous. Instead, attention will be paid to a connection between Borges’s above-mentioned essay and the fictional world represented. The heart of the story (it is doubly framed, a first-person narrative appearing within an interpolation found within a work by Adán, or Adam, of Bremen) is Ulf Sigurdarson’s account of his journey to the land of “los urnos.” In that place a mysterious word, referred to and then spoken in his presence, puts him on the run for his life as well as instigating a poetic crisis.

The presence of Snorri Sturlusson, who derives the Scandinavian royal dynasties from the pagan gods (or at least from Trojan refugees posing as the Nordic pagan gods), can already be intuited at the start when we hear in Adán’s voice of “[el] sangriento culto de los demonios, de los que derivan su estirpe las casas reales de Inglaterra y de otras naciones del Norte” (3: 48). In the knowledge that the learned framework of the foremost medieval authority on skaldic poetry is being alluded to, we may interpret later details of the tale accordingly.

Following the scene in the king's court where Ulf hears the impossible word, he is immediately accosted by Bjarni Thorkelsson who tells him that such knowledge puts his life in jeopardy and speaks the following words:

Soy de estirpe de *skalds*. En tu ditirambo apodaste agua de la espada a la sangre y batalla de hombres a la batalla. Recuerdo haber oído esas figuras al padre de mi padre. Tú y yo somos poetas; te salvaré. (3: 49)

The identification of Ulf as a poet is ambiguous. While he has been praised and given a talisman by the king for his *drápa* (or “praise poem”), and although it is apparently his poetic ability which encourages Bjarni's unexpected offer of sanctuary, the terms by which his abilities are recognised are one “good” kenning and one “bad” one. His breaking of the rule of “definitium in definitione” (“battle” is used in a kenning for battle) could point in several directions, but only if one is familiar with Borges's earlier idiosyncratic pronouncements upon the rules of skaldic versifying. Doubt may be cast on Ulf's talents, or a sly dig may be felt from Bjarni's side (although this might lead us to question of why he proffers his help). Perhaps a broader reading would see this as a subtle allusion to the non-normativity of the world we have entered—the metrics, the agglutinative structure which governs this verbally-constructed world—are different. Kennings always run the risk of being linked into extensive chains but the non-orthodox kenning twists that chain into an infinite regress, a type of paradox, where one of the component parts is the referent. This collapsing of meaning onto fewer signifiers is pondered by Ulf in his years of exile: “Me repetí que renunciar al hermoso juego de combinar palabras hermosas era insensato y que no hay por qué indagar una sola, acaso ilusoria” (3: 50–51).

While the problematic of infinity and unity is a common conceit within the works of Borges, perhaps here we are also presented with an ironic extradiegetic reference to his youthful over-exuberance with regard to the topic of kennings. There is a nod to and recognition of that previous work. That nod, by drawing attention to the earlier essay's modification of medieval material, subtly challenges its authority. The older, wiser Borges almost seems to be catching out his younger self.

## A LATE *Gylfaginning*

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The tension between continuity and change in Borges's relation with Old Norse literature makes summary descriptions dubious. While Brljak, among others, notes that the young ultraist Borges used the kennings as a critical example of the "terminal stage of the conventionalization of metaphor" (102) and distances himself from (certain interpretations of) Germanic greatness during the war years, he also emphasises the steadily rising influence of Old Norse and Germanic material in Borges's life from the 1950s onwards into "a cult which illuminates [his] destiny" (122). Not just the Second World War but also domestic political issues played a role. The Perón regime's penchant for Argentine social realism pushed Borges rebelliously towards the more obscure geographical and chronological ends of the literary spectrum. Yet alongside this development, which is vouched for by Borges's own "automythographical" interpretations of his passion, we find surprising consistency. Brljak suggests a continuity in Borges's use of Old Norse as a romantic point of connection with various women in his life, from Norah Lange to María Kodama. The works themselves also resist large-scale change. For example, the list of kennings given in "Las kenningar" is almost identical to that in *Antiguas literaturas germánicas* and *Literaturas germánicas medievales*. The latter two works as a whole are identified, again by Brljak (110) and also Margrét Jónsson (138), as almost identical. Moreover the sections on Snorri and the *Snorra Edda* find their way in an only slightly revised form into the introduction of *La alucinación de Gylfi*. The cliché that the more things change, the more they stay the same, seems curiously apt in this case.

The latter work brings us to the culmination (and perhaps acme) of Borges's interest in Snorri and skaldic poetry. It would have also been a challenge, judging by Borges's earlier description of the *Snorra Edda* as a "calmoso Gradus ad Parnassum" (the same book which Borges the character gives to Funes in "Funes el memorioso" in order to quash his budding interest in Latin). As already stated, Borges chose to translate only one part of the *Snorra Edda*. The work as a whole is divided up into a short prologue (which some commentators believe to be a later interpolation) followed by the three main sections. To recap, the first is "Gylfaginning," a collection of mythological stories which are useful in interpreting kennings and poetic language. The second, already discussed, is "Skáldskaparmál," where



those kennings are laid out. A third section, which focuses on questions of metrics is named “Háttatal.” Of the three main sections, the *Gylfaginning* is the one that contains the least poetry. That poetry which it does contain is, moreover, mostly eddic (i.e. taken from the *Poetic Edda* and metrically and thematically distinct from skaldic poetry), with only two verses of skaldic poetry being present. This is significant of the changing interests of the more mature Borges. The fascination with poetical ingenuity makes way for the primacy of mythic continuity. This is perhaps further highlighted by Borges’s dropping of the perhaps non-authorial prologue. In *Literaturas germánicas medievales* he explains that “Snorri, antes de exponer la cosmogonía pagana, quiere recordar a los lectores la otra, la cristiana, la verdadera” (151). Borges inverts this: by omitting the prologue the pagan material is subjected to no corrective. Kristal perspicaciously observes that “Borges removes divine elements from the original to emphasize magical aspects and dreamlike qualities” (80) and as long as we take divine to refer only to Christian elements and not pagan divinities then this is most certainly the case.

In considering Borges’s translation, it is worth identifying his source.<sup>7</sup> Curiously enough it is not immediately apparent. In the introduction to *La alucinación de Gylfi*, when the character of Snorri Sturluson is discussed, mention is made of Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur’s 1916 translation into English (already mentioned in connection with “Las kenningar”), suggesting that it may have been influential. In *Literaturas medievales germánicas* we are also pointed in the direction of Felix Niedner and Gustav Neckel’s German translation of 1925. A third translation (again into German and appended to a translation of the *Poetic Edda*) is mentioned in the short bibliography

7 As already noted Kristal falls into error by not doing so. A couple of examples may suffice. He states that the original wording (à la Byock) “I have tricked you with magical shapechangings” becomes “I planned a series of hallucinations for you” and thus Borges shifts the emphasis from deceit to dream (80–81). The original word is “sjónhverfingar” which, while justifiably translatable as “optical illusions” or “magical deceptions,” contains the basic elements ‘sight-twistings.’ Gilchrist Brodeur translates it as “eye-illusions” (66) with no apparent intent to skew the interpretation. Kristal also says that Borges erases the divine by translating “þar Heimdall kveðja valda véum” as “where Heimdall lives” instead of “there Heimdall, they say, rules over sacred places” (174). While the latter is a closer translation, Gilchrist Brodeur translates with “Heimdallr, they say, Aye has his housing” (40). If Borges were influenced by the latter then he is not purposely erasing divine elements but simply accurately reproducing a precursor’s work.

found at the end of the earlier essay “Noticia de las kenningar,” (sic) that being Hugo Gering’s of 1892. Thus, throughout his career Borges mentions three translations but never an Old Norse-Icelandic edition of the text, despite several being available.<sup>8</sup> The two later translations, those of Gilchrist Brodeur, and Niedner and Neckel, both took as their source text Finnur Jónsson’s Icelandic edition from 1907 (xxi; 8).

Taking the list of dwarf names (familiar to fans of Tolkien for providing nomenclature for characters residing in his Middle Earth), which is the sixteenth verse in “Gylfaginning,” Borges’s main source becomes apparent.<sup>9</sup>

Finnur Jónsson (1907)	Niedner and Neckel (1925)	Gilchrist Brodeur (1916)	Borges (1984)
Nýi ok Niði,	Neu und Nid,	Nýi and Nidi,	Nyi y Nidi,
Norðri, Suðri,	Norder, Süder,	Nordri and Sudri,	Nordri y Sudri,
Austri, Vestri,	Öster, Wester,	Austri, Vestri,	Austri, Vestri,
Alþjófr, Dvalinn,	Aldieb, Dwalinn,	Althjófr, Dvalinn;	Althjófr, Dvalinn;
Nár, Náinn,	Nar, Na-inn,	Nár, Náinn,	Nár, Náinn,
Nípingr, Dáinn,	Niping, Da-inn,	Nípingr, Dáinn,	Nípingr, Dáinn,
Bífurr, Báfurr, etc.	Biwur, Bawur, etc	Bifurr, Báfurr, etc.	Bifurr, Báfurr, etc.

Niedner and Neckel’s attempts to elicit the etymology of the names by translating them with cognate morphemes from German takes them in a different direction from Borges’s work. Gilchrist Brodeur’s list is, on the other hand, almost identical to Borges’s. The only differences lie in Borges’s translation of the coordinating conjunction “and” and his removal of the letter “ý,” since such a letter does not exist in Spanish. We may satisfy ourselves that Borges is not using the Old Norse text of Finnur Jónsson directly, since Gilchrist Brodeur’s seemingly haphazard additions to his source—an “and” between “Nordri” and “Sudri,” semicolons

8 See, for example, Anthony Faulkes’ *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* for a brief summary of the 20<sup>th</sup> century editorial history (xxxiii–xxxiv). Faulkes’s edition, incidentally, which was first published in 1982, appears not to have influenced Borges and presents a slightly different text from that appearing in Borges’s translation.

9 Numbering of verses differs somewhat according to the edition and the manuscript upon which said edition is based.

following names such as “Dvalinn”—are carried over seamlessly into Borges’s translation.

Another clear sign of Borges’ reliance upon Gilchrist Brodeur is his omission of the final paragraph of *Gylfaginning*. The authenticity of this paragraph, in which following their lengthy discourse the Æsir decide to give the names of the characters in their stories to themselves (and thus falsely propagate belief in themselves as pagan divinities), is, like the prologue to the entire work, possibly a later Christianizing addition. It is included without comment in Gilchrist Brodeur’s source, Finnur Jónsson’s Icelandic edition, as well as in Niedner and Neckel’s German translation, but Gilchrist Brodeur sets it off with a statement in squared brackets concerning previous editions’ acceptance or rejection of the passage. Borges, presumably as a result of his paganist bias (Brljak 111), omits this paragraph, which is marked as optional by Gilchrist Brodeur, considering a Christian frame to interfere with the transmission of the pagan material.

Although Gilchrist Brodeur’s translation is clearly the main source, Borges was not working without an Old Icelandic text. Many terms used in *Gylfaginning* can either be considered proper names and thus untranslatable, or as constructs gaining deep significance from etymological resonances and the allusiveness of compounding, and thus capable of being rendered into other languages (in the case of Germanic languages much more easily due to cognates with shared roots) with a bit of ingenuity. Thus “Ginnungagap,” a type of primeval bottomless pit, is translated by Gilchrist Brodeur as “Yawning Void” (20) and then by Borges as “Gran Abismo” (30). In other cases, however, Borges shows a conservatism whereby Gilchrist Brodeur’s creative translations are implicitly shown to be superfluous. Gilchrist Brodeur translates “vitkar allir frá Vilmeiði” as “warlocks are of Wilharm” (since the Icelandic verb “meiða” means “to harm” and Gilchrist Brodeur presumably wishes to emphasise the insalubrious nature of the birthplace of the warlocks) (18). Borges translates the line simply as “los hechiceros [descienden] de Vilmeithi” (27) showing that he must have been looking at an Icelandic text as well as Gilchrist Brodeur’s. When the latter translates “Álfröðull” (from Finnur Jónsson’s text, 106) as “Elfin-beam” (84), Borges backtracks and laconically translates “Sólr.” The referent here is the “sun” (i.e. the wheel of elves, magical circular thing) and the Old Norse verse is preceded by a prose passage

where the “sól” is referred to directly (“sól” in Icelandic is feminine and the “-r” ending is a masculinizing addition of uncertain purport). Borges does not try to capture the poetic variety of the Old Norse text but reduces the synonyms, including the poetic compounds, down to the final meaning of the whole trope. In this he shows an extreme rejection of the word play of the poet in favour of the clarity of the transmitter of mythic material.

Having identified Borges’s source we can look more closely at his treatment of it. His handling of the prose is by and large a close literal translation.<sup>10</sup> Much the same can be said for the majority of the poetry. Nevertheless, considering Borges’s earlier fascination with kennings and his reduction of the poetic compounds just mentioned, an assessment of his treatment of the kennings present in the work is in order. Of the approximately sixty-six verses contained in *Gylfaginning* only three of them contain kennings. Two are the skaldic verses (the first to be quoted in the work as a whole) and one is an eddic verse. It should be noted that Borges translates the verses into prose, albeit italicized and set off from its surrounding text).

The first reads as follows (kennings and translations in italics):

Finnur Jónsson (1907)	Gilchrist Brodeur (1916)	Borges (1984)
Gefjun dró frá Gylfa glöð <i>djúpröðuls öðla</i> , svát af rennirauknum rauk, Danmarkar auka.; báru øxn ok átta <i>ennitungl</i> , þars gingu fyr vineyjar víðri vallrauf, fjogur haufuð. (12)	Gefjun drew from Gylfi gladly <i>the wave-trove’s freehold</i> , Till from the running beasts sweat reeked, to Denmark’s increase; The oxen bore, more- over, eight <i>eyes, gleaming browlights</i> , O’er the field’s wide booty, and four heads in the plowing. (14)	Gefjon sacó de Gylfi alegrememente <i>el tesoro</i> , hasta que el sudor de los animales que corren acreció el territorio de Dinamarca. Los bueyes tenían ocho <i>ojos, luces de frente</i> , sobre el ancho botín del campo, y cuatro cabezas en su tarea. (22)

<sup>10</sup> A full assessment is not possible here. Kristal’s observations, despite their flaws, show an insight into the overall tone of Borges’s work.

This verse, which explains the relocation of a clod of Swedish land and the mythical origins of Zealand in Denmark, is the first to appear in *Snorra Edda*. It is attributed to Bragi Boddason (mid-ninth century). “Ennitungl” (“forehead-stars”) is a compound word which functions like a kenning but gets placed in apposition to the overall meaning (“eyes”) in Gilchrist Brodeur’s translation, and then is dutifully reproduced in Borges’s own. When the referent is given the riddle is negated and the addition words become poetic adornment.

The interpretation of the kenning “djúpröðuls öðla” presents more difficulties. “Öðla” could be an adverb meaning “swiftly” or it could be a noun in the genitive (nom. “öðli”), and thus part of a kenning, meaning “of the fatherland.” “Djúpröðull” means “deep-circle” which at least one commentator has read as a kenning for a plough (Frank 109), which fits nicely with the rest of the verse—“the plough of the fatherland” is the plough that drags Zealand into existence. Since “deep” is associated with the sea there could, however (and possibly in addition), be the suggestion of an island (which could be deemed to be a circular object in the sea)—“the island of the fatherland” would also be Zealand. Gold or treasure might also be implied, since a circle can be the sun and “fire of the sea” (or in the case “sun of the deep”) is a commonly used kenning for “gold”—the “treasure of the fatherland” would once again be Zealand, a fertile and strategically important location.

Interpretative difficulties aside, it would seem to be this final reading which is taken up by Gilchrist Brodeur—“the wave’s freehold” is the sea (composed of “djúp” and “öðla,” “deep-fatherland”) and its sun (“röðull”) is treasure or a “trove.” Borges renders this simply as “el tesoro.” The debates over the interpretation of such cruxes in skaldic poetry requires a training that we can be fairly sure had not been available to Borges and so we may forgive him for sidestepping such issues. It is nevertheless noteworthy that even the opportunity to render Gilchrist-Brodeur’s translation of the kenning is passed over. This strongly suggests that the poetic conundrums which at one time preoccupied Borges had lost a great deal of their charm.

The following verse, also containing a kenning, presents a slightly different story:

Finnur Jónsson (1907)	Gilchrist Brodeur (1916)	Borges (1984)
Á baki léku blíkja, barðir váru grjóti, <i>Sváfnis salnæfrar</i> seggir hyggjandi. (13)	On their backs they let beam, sore battered with stones, <i>Odin's hall-shingles</i> , the shrewd sea-farers. (14)	Sobre sus hombros los diestros navegantes cargaron <i>las tejas de la sala</i> <i>de Odín</i> que habían pulido con piedras. (23)

This verse is inserted into the prose text in order to elucidate the fact that Óðinn's hall has shields for tiles. The fact is shown through the use of the kenning "Sváfnis salnæfrar" (that is, the hall-tiles of Sváfnir, which is a name for Óðinn) to mean "shields." The meaning of the verse, when unpacked, describes some Vikings protecting themselves from a barrage of rocks. Both Gilchrist Brodeur and Borges maintain the constituent parts of the kenning, rather than reducing it to its base meaning, since it is these that justify the inclusion of the text and not the final meaning. If only the final meaning were given, then the reader would not see the intervening steps which give sense to the verse within the context in which it is presented.

The final verse in *Gylfaginning* that contains a kenning is actually an Eddic verse, taken from *Völuspá*, a type of prophetic cosmogony. Although eddic poetry is much more restrained than skaldic poetry with regard to certain types of rhetoric, the odd kenning does appear (Clunies Ross 103):

Finnur Jónsson (1907)	Gilchrist Brodeur (1916)	Borges (1984)
Surtr ferr sunnan með <i>sviga lævi</i> , skínn af sverði sól valtíva; grjótbjörg gnata, en gífr rata; troða halir helveg, en himinn klofnar. (16)	Surtr fares from the south with <i>switch-eating flame</i> , On his sword shimmers the sun of the War-Gods; The rock-crags crash; the fiends are reeling; Heroes tread Hel-way; Heaven is cloven. (17)	Sale del sur Surtr con <i>una</i> <i>llama que devora</i> . En esa espada brilla el sol de los Dioses de la Guerra. Las rocas se rompen. Los demonios se retuercen. Los Héroes pisan el Camino del Infierno. El Cielo se parte. (26)

“Sviga lævi” means “the destruction of brushwood” and is a kenning for fire (see “perdición de los árboles” in Borges’s list in “Las kenningar”). Gilchrist Brodeur translates this by explicitly stating “flame” and giving it the attributive accompaniment of “switch-eating.” Borges’s translation gets rid of any mention of brushwood or switches leaving merely the sense of an intense fire. Again the riddling constituent parts of the kenning are collapsed.

Lynn and Shumway, in their article on Borges and kennings, ask “¿no debió irse desvaneciendo el interés exótico de estas amplias comparaciones según el Borges maduro empezaba a denunciar la falsa originalidad en las metáforas[?]” (129). They answer in the negative, but *La alucinación de Gylfi* suggests that had they followed the trail right to the end, they would have been obliged to answer in the affirmative. In his first writings on the subject Borges explicitly leaves out the kennings involving mythological references, passing over a large section of “Skáldskaparmál” when making his lists. This omission is mitigated when, as Lynn and Shumway rightly state, kennings come to represent for Borges “vías de acceso al mito” (130). By the end of his life, however, Borges could bypass that enigmatic pathway and go straight to the source. Perhaps also a more humble approach to his linguistic abilities contributed to this scaling down of his skaldic ambitions. In an interview with Daniel Bourne in 1980, Borges claimed to be “attempting Old Norse” and so although a younger Borges had pontificated on the best way to translate kennings, the older Borges looked back with a wry smile and contented himself with drawing the meanings from other talented individuals’ efforts.

In conclusion, Borges was early on attracted to Snorri’s work. His ambivalent attitude to it revolved around questions of poetic ingenuity. He lovingly collected kennings while criticising them as a sign of decadence and stagnation. Yet even early on he was making interventions into the material presented by Snorri, as we can see in his attitude to regressive definitions. The much later reference to this in “Undr” shows an acute awareness of his previous special uses (and abuses?) of Nordic material. In later life Borges returned to Snorri but this time with a new focus. While his approach, in particular translating from a translation, might not meet the exacting standards of professional academics in the field, Borges never claimed to be pushing the boundaries of research. His aim was apparently

to transmit myths and legends that had captivated him throughout his entire life. Creating novel imagery had given way to a desire to propagate age-old traditions and perhaps it was a mixture of a desire for clarity and humility in the face of the riddle of skaldic verse, which led him to forego the challenge of translating the building blocks of the kennings contained therein.

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