

Robert Mezey and Dick Barnes

*Eight Poems by Jorge Luis Borges*

*1. Rain*

Evening, a sudden clearing of the mist,  
For now a fine, soft rain is freshening.  
It falls and it did fall. Rain is a thing  
That no doubt always happens in the past.

Hearing it fall, the senses will be led  
Back to a blessed time that first disclosed  
To the child a flower that was called the rose  
And an extraordinary color, red.

These drops that blind our panes to the world outside  
Will brighten the black grapes on a certain trellis  
Out in the far, lost suburbs of the town

Where a courtyard was. The rain coming down  
Brings back the voice, the longed-for voice,  
Of my father, who has come home, who has not died.

## 2. *To Luis De Camoëns*

Without regret or anger, time shall burr  
The heroic swordblade. Penniless and sad,  
You sought the land you had longed for from abroad,  
Oh captain, so that you might die in her,  
With her. The flower of Portugal had died  
In the enchanted wilderness, and the tough  
Spaniard, who earlier had been driven off,  
Menaced again her unprotected side.  
I wonder whether, this side of that last  
River to cross, you humbly realized  
That that flag and those arms you had so prized,  
Lands of the East and West, all that was lost,  
Would live, aloof from men's inconstancies,  
In your *Æneid* of the Portuguese.

### 3. *Blind Pew*

Far from the sea and from the lovely war  
(For so love praises most what has been lost),  
This blind, foot-weary pirate would exhaust  
Road after English road or sodden moor.

Barked at by every dog from every farm,  
Laughingstock of the young boys of the village,  
He slept a poor sleep, trying to keep warm  
And freezing in the black dust of the ditches.

But in the end, on far-off golden beaches,  
A buried treasure would be his, he knew;  
This softened some the hardness of his path.

You are like him—on other golden beaches  
Your incorruptible treasure waits for you:  
Immense and formless and essential death.

#### *4. Allusion To A Ghost Of The Nineties*

Nothing is left. Only Muraña's knife.  
Only the brief account in the grey twilight.  
I don't know why he haunts me night after night,  
That murderer I never saw in life.  
Palermo was meaner then. The yellow wall  
Of the jail loomed above the outskirts slum  
And the mud streets. Through that jungle he started from  
Wandered the squalid knife, as shadows fell.  
The knife. The face has long since been erased,  
And of that mercenary, whose cold trade  
Was simple courage, everything has decayed  
Except a flash of steel and a dim ghost.  
And though it blacken marble, let time's flame  
Spare Juan Muraña's hard, unyielding name.

**5. *In Memoriam A. R.***

The vagaries of chance or the precise  
Laws that govern this dream, the universe,  
Permitted me to walk our mortal course  
A pleasant part of the way with Alfonso Reyes.

He knew the art, completely known to none,  
Not Sinbad nor Ulysses nor their hands,  
Of sailing from one land to other lands  
And living everywhere like a native son.

If memory sometimes pierced him with its arrow,  
He worked that violent metal into song,  
The noble alexandrine, stately, slow, and long,  
The fourteen-syllable threnody's burden of sorrow.

In all these ardent labors he was aided  
By human hope, and by its light got written  
The sturdy verse that still is not forgotten,  
And Spanish prose refreshed and renovated.

Beyond My Cid, off to the war again,  
And the great herd that hopes to remain obscure,  
He tracked the fleeting prints of literature  
Down to the meanest slums of our thieves' jargon.

In Marino's gardens, equal in their beauty,  
He tarried awhile, but deep inside him stirred  
Something essential and deathless that preferred  
The trials of scholarship and sacred duty.

Or say, rather, that he preferred to tend  
The gardens of meditation, where Porphyry

Set in the midst of darkness and lunacy  
The Tree of the Beginning and the End.

The indecipherable providence  
That metes out the extravagant and the stark,  
Gave most of us the sector or the arc,  
But to you, Reyes, the whole circumference.

You went in search of the sadness or élan  
Hidden by frontispieces and renown;  
Like Erigena's God, you wished to be no one  
So that you might at last be every man.

What brilliance your style attained, that precise rose  
Unfolding in delicacies and plenitude;  
To the Lord's wars the ancestral soldiering blood  
Raced back once more, making a joyful noise.

Where can he be (I ask), my Mexican friend?  
Does he now contemplate, with all the dread  
Of Œdipus before the Sphinx, the unswayed  
Archetypes of the Face or of the Hand?

Or does he wander, as Swedenborg prayed to do,  
A world more real and closer to perfection  
Than this one, which is scarcely a reflection  
Of that high welter and heavenly hullabaloo.

If (as the arts of lacquer and ebony show)  
Memory shapes its intimate Eden, then  
There are already in glory better men,  
A better Cuernavaca and Mexico.

Only God knows the colors destiny  
Presents men's eyes beyond the ephemeral;

I walk these streets, thinking of death, and still  
Very little from that world reaches me.

I know just one thing. That Alfonso Reyes  
(Wherever the waves have carried him), awake,  
Eager as always, will happily undertake  
The laws and mysteries of another place.

Let us yield up to the matchless and diverse  
The bays and songs of triumph and renown;  
And let no tears of mine defile this verse,  
Which our commemorating love sets down.

## **6. *A Key In Salonika***

Abarbanel, Farías or Pinedo,  
Persecuted and driven out of Spain  
By the unholy Inquisition, still retain  
The key to a certain dark house in Toledo.

All liberated now from hope and fear,  
They look at it in the last light of day:  
Its bronze speaks of the past, the far away,  
Old fires, and quiet suffering year by year.

Now that its door is fragments, it has thinned  
To a cipher for the Diaspora, for the wind,  
Like to that other key of the Second Temple,

Which someone flung up when the Roman legion  
Fell on the Jews to make them an example,  
And which a hand reached down for out of heaven.



7. *Snorri Sturluson*  
(1179 - 1241)

You, who left to posterity an unsparing  
Tribal mythology of ice and flame,  
You, who made fast in words the violent fame  
Of your forebears, their ruthlessness and daring,

Were stunned to feel, as the mythic swords towered  
Over you one evening, your insides churning,  
And in that trembling dusk that bides no morning  
It was revealed to you you were a coward.

Now in the Iceland night the heavy seas  
Tower and plunge in the salt gale. Your cell  
Is under siege. You have drained to the lees

A shame never to be forgotten. Now  
The sword is falling above your pallid brow  
As in your book repeatedly it fell.

## **8. *Rafael Cansinos-Assens***

The image of that people, stoned or scorned,  
Immortal in their endless martyrdom,  
Kindled a kind of sacred dread in him  
As he sat sleepless and the candle burned.  
He drank like one who drinks a noble wine  
The Psalms and Canticles of Holy Scripture  
And came to feel, that sweetness and that rapture  
And, above all, that destiny were his own.  
Israel called him. In an intimate hush  
Cansinos heard her as the prophet heard  
On the secret mountaintop the unseen Lord  
Speaking in tongues of flame from a burning bush.  
Oh may his memory stay with me forever.  
I leave the rest for glory to uncover.