

Jorge Luis Borges:

An Inventory of His Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Borges, Jorge Luis, 1899-1986
Title:	Jorge Luis Borges Collection
Dates:	1922-2004 (bulk 1922-1975)
Extent:	1 box (.42 linear foot)
Abstract:	The Jorge Luis Borges Collection comprises drafts, sketches, notes, and some correspondence produced by Borges between 1922 and 1975, as well as a translation by Norman Thomas di Giovanni.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-0453
Language:	English and Spanish
Access:	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Purchases and Gift, 1974-2022 (R14410, 2022-07-0001-P)
Processed by:	Bob Taylor, 2012
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

Jorge Luis Borges was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina on August 24, 1899, to Jorge Guillermo Borges Haslam and his wife Leonor Acevedo Suárez. Borges grew up in a bookish and genteel household, in which memories of family history and accomplishments were strong. From his paternal grandmother Fanny Haslam he learned to speak and read English, and even as a child he had a strongly-developed interest in literature, language, and the written word generally.

In 1914, the Borges family settled in Geneva, Switzerland, where Jorge Luis and his sister Norah continued their schooling. Jorge Luis continued to read widely, learning French and German, and, in 1918, receiving the baccalaurèat from the Collège de Genève. At the end of the First World War the Borges family did not immediately return to Argentina but spent several years in Spain. In Madrid, Borges became involved in the avant garde Ultraist movement, the seeds of which he took back with him to Argentina.

In 1921, Borges began the short-lived broadsheet poetry serial publication *Prisma*, following in 1922 with *Proa*, the second series (1924-1926) of which contained contributions by Borges in all but one of its fifteen numbers. Later in the decade he was a frequent contributor to *Martín Fierro*, and, from 1931, the journal *Sur*.

Throughout the 1930s Borges pursued a career in literary journalism, writing poetry, short stories, and essays. From 1938 he was a cataloger in a branch of the Biblioteca Pública de Buenos Aires, a position that, it is said, permitted him ample time to work at his career as a literary writer.

During the 1940s, Borges embarked on a career as a public speaker and teacher, while continuing with his writing. During that decade his two best-known titles, *Ficciones* (1944) and *El Aleph* (1949), both collections of short stories, were published. With the consolidation of political power by Juan Perón in Argentina in 1946 Borges was forced from his position in the Buenos Aires library. Quixotically, Perón's gesture had the effect of promoting Borges as a spokesman for Argentina's political opposition.

By the 1950s, Borges's impaired vision was rapidly failing, and he was obliged to live with his mother so she might act as his secretary. With the ouster of Perón in 1955 Borges was named director of Argentina's Biblioteca Nacional, and as the culmination of growing regard for his work on the international scene he was in 1961 the co-recipient (with Samuel Beckett) of the Prix International. "As a consequence of that prize," Borges said, "my books mushroomed overnight throughout the western world." Concurrently with the Prix International Borges was named to the Tinker Chair at the University of Texas, leading to a lecture tour of the United States.

Through the 1960s and beyond, as he was better-known and increasingly widely-read, Borges traveled and lectured extensively. In 1967, Borges, working with the American scholar Norman Thomas Di Giovanni, began a project of translating his works into English. The program of translation, which began with a bilingual edition entitled *Selected Poems, 1923-1967*, continued until 1972. On the domestic political front, the return of Juan Perón from exile and his election to the presidency in 1973 led to Borges's immediate resignation as director of the Biblioteca Nacional.

His 1967 marriage to Elsa Astete Millán failed after three years and Borges turned once again to his mother as secretary. Following her death in 1975, María Kodama became Borges's secretary. In the last years of his life he bequeathed his literary properties to her, and shortly before his own death in Geneva, on 14 June 1986, Borges and Kodama were married.

Sources:

Loewenstein, C. Jared. *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Jorge Luis Borges Collection at the University of Virginia Library*. Charlottesville, Va. : University Press of Virginia, 1993.

Wall, Catharine E. "The Jorge Luis Borges collection at the University of Texas at Austin" in *Latin American Research Review*, v. 36, no. 3 (2001).

Williamson, Edwin. *Borges, a Life*. New York : Viking, 2004.

Scope and Contents

The Ransom Center's collection of manuscript material created by Jorge Luis Borges represents the years 1922 to 1975 and is arranged in three series: I. Works, II. Notebooks, and III. Correspondence.

Series I. Works, 1926-1967, 1983-2004 embodies several essays, two short stories ("Emma Zunz" and "Los Rivero"), two poems ("Mateo XXV : 30" and "Texas"), and several literary fragments. Additionally, an unpublished manuscript translation of Borges's poetry collection "La Cifra," translated into English by Norman Thomas di Giovanni, is also present.

Series II. Notebooks, 1949-1960 contains five notebooks used by Borges to draft imaginative works and essays, as well as to set down ideas and themes for future development. Several works by Borges that appeared in *Sur* during the 1950s are found here in draft form, including "Sobre don Segundo Sombra" and "Parábola del palacio." The first four notebooks are in Borges's own hand; the last, dating from 1955 and later, was largely dictated by Borges to his mother.

Series III. Correspondence, 1922-1975, is small, and in it four missives from Borges to others are found. The earliest of these, from 1922, is a note written to accompany two signed presentation copies of the broadsheet *Prisma* sent by Borges to the poet Ricardo Molinari. The Ransom Center also holds the broadsheets. Another early item, a 1929 note to Ulises Petit de Murat, is bound in a notebook of Petit de Murat's manuscript poems. Also found in the notebook is Borges's transcription of Robert Browning's poem "Memorabilia."

Related Material

The Ransom Center holds the two signed numbers of *Prisma* mentioned above, as well as all the fifteen issues of the second series of *Proa*. The Center further holds an extensive collection of Borges's other published work, including holdings of the three serial publications (*Prisma*, *Proa*, and *Martín Fierro*) closely associated with his career. The Center's Edward Larocque Tinker Collection also contains publications concerning Argentine (and other Latin American) literature and history. The university's Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection has other significant holdings in these areas.

Significant Borges collections are found in the Colección Jorge Luis Borges of the Fundación San Telmo in Buenos Aires and in the University of Virginia Library's Special Collections Department. The former has major holdings of Borges manuscripts, and the latter collection embraces an exhaustive library of published editions.

Separated Material

Sound Recordings were transferred to the Ransom Center's Sound Recording collection and are described individually in a list at the end of this finding aid and in a [searchable database](#)

Index Terms

People

Di Giovanni, Norman Thomas
Petit de Murat, Ulises, 1907-1983
Romero, José Luis, 1909-1977
Tinker, Edward Larocque, 1881-1968

Subjects

Argentina--Intellectual life--20th century
Authors, Argentine--20th century

Document Types

Drafts
Notebooks

Series I. Works, 1926-1967, 1983-2004

- The Achievements of Walt Whitman. A typescript transcription of Borges's January 10, 1962 talk at the University of Texas, with handwritten corrections and additions. Signed by Borges. 10 p., 1962 **Container** 1.9
- La Biblioteca de Robinsón. Borges's handwritten discussion of the question (in translation) "what three books would you take to a desert island?" 3 p., undated **Container** 1.1
- Blak [sic] (1757-1827). Handwritten collection of quotes from the works of William Blake, giving bibliographical citations to their appearance in print. 2 p., undated **Container** 1.2
- Carta a Güiraldes y a Brandán, en una Muerte (ya Resucitada) de Proa. Draft of a letter published in the last issue of Proa, January 1926. 4 p., 1926? **Container** 1.3
- La Cifra. Unpublished manuscript of Borges's poetry collection translated into English by Norman Thomas di Giovanni, 1983-2004 **Container** 1.19
- [Draft of a film outline]. Unpublished handwritten draft of 12 lines, beginning "A. Puede ser bailarina ...". At end is found a note of explanation of the purpose of the outline by Borges's intended collaborator José Luis Romero. Latter note is dated at "Adrogué, 1953." 1 p., 1953? **Container** 1.4
- [Edda Snora Sturlusonar]. Six lines from foreword of the Prose Edda; in English, on the verso of Borges's calling card (Jorge Luis Borges / Maipu 994), undated **Container** 1.5
- Emma Zunz. Typescript short story, with numerous handwritten revisions by Borges. Verso of last leaf bears handwritten note from Borges to "querida Cecilia." 5 p., undated **Container** 1.6
- Mateo XXV : 30. Borges's handwritten draft of the poem, omitting the lines preceding "--Estrellas, pan, bibliotecas orientales y occidentales." Draft includes variants for certain phrases and indicates a transposition of two lines. 1 p., 1953? **Container** 1.7
- Poemas. Page proofs, 1959 **Container** 1.17
- Los Rivero. Short story manuscript, handwritten by Borges, and with his revisions in text. 4 p., 1950? **Container** 1.8
- Texas. Borges's fair copy of the poem (2 p.), signed by Borges at foot of second leaf. Accompanied by fair copy in hand of Elsa Astete Millán Borges and also signed by Borges (1 p.). Also present are Edward Larocque Tinker's handwritten "literal translation" into English, as well as Tinker's handwritten recollection of his luncheon with Borges and his wife in New York on December 1, 1967, 1967? **Container** 1.9

Series II. Notebooks, 1949-1960

- Lanceros Argentinos de 1910 [notebook] Collection of disbound leaves from various notebooks. Includes draft Prólogo for Borges's 1949 edition of Thomas Carlyle's *De los Heroes* and Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Hombres Representativos* (8 p.). Also notes on various philosophical and religious questions (8 p.). (18 p. total, including covers), 1949? **Container** 1.10
- Cuaderno Avon. Gray notebook containing essays by Borges: *Historia de Caballero*, *El inglés de Chaucer*, *Essay on Mark Twain*, incomplete essay on Sir Thomas Malory. (10 p.), 1950-1951? **Container** 1.11
- Cuaderno Avon. Red notebook with contents: *Destino Escandinavo* [draft of essay in *Sur* issue 219-220, enero-feb. 1953] (4 p.), "His signature in runic letters is woven into the text ..." [1st line of English essay] (2 p.). *Sobre don Segundo Sombra* [draft of work in *Sur*, 217-218, nov.-dic. 1952] (3 p.), Other drafts on Germanic history, Juan Muraña, astrology, the four classical elements, draft of letter re *Manual de Zoología Fantástica*. (21 p. total), 1952? **Container** 1.12
- Cuaderno Avon. Green notebook containing *Paradiso*, XXXI, 108 [draft of essay in *Sur*, 231, nov.-dic. 1954] as well as other essays on Juan Escoto, Francis Bacon, Los gnósticos, Místicos del Islam, Dialogue between Bodhidharma and the emperor of China, Bertrand Russell. Brief index at end by Borges's mother, Leonor Acevedo de Borges. (22 p. total), 1954? **Container** 1.13
- Cuaderno Avon. Red notebook with handwritten drafts in the hand of Acevedo de Borges. Included are chapters of Leopoldo Lugones and of *Parábola del Palacio* [the latter published in *Sur*, 243, nov.-dic. 1956], along with unpublished manuscript drafts identified in index notes at end as *Thorkelin y Beowulf* and *Las Runas de Beowulf*. A few pages are in Borges's hand; index on back cover. (66 p. total), 1955-1960? **Container** 1.14
- Folio with pressed flowers on the cover. Original folder that contained above listed notebooks, undated **Container** 1.18

Series III. Correspondence, 1922-1975

Subseries A. Borges Outgoing, 1922-1975

Autograph note signed to Ricardo Molinari. [Buenos Aires], Bulnes 2216, marzo 1922. (1 p.) Note to accompany signed presentation copies of the two published numbers of Borges's Ultraist broadsheet Prisma. **Container**
1.15

Autograph note to Ulises Petit de Murat [Buenos Aires], 1929? (1 p.) Bound with: Petit de Murat, Ulises. Manuscript notebook containing poems, some untitled, and poetic ideas. Includes Borges's handwritten transcription of Robert Browning's Memorabilia. (35 p.) **Container**
1.16

Autograph postcard signed to Cecilia [Ingenieros] [Buenos Aires] Maipú 994, 19 de abril de 1946. (1 p.) Borges seeks on behalf of Los Anales de Buenos Aires, a contribution from Ingenieros "sobre los Estados Unidos o sobre la danza o sobre ambos temas ...". **Container**
1.6

Typed letter signed to John O. Kirkpatrick, Buenos Aires, March 6, 1975. (1 p.) Borges responds affirmatively to Kirkpatrick's request that the Ransom Center be permitted to publish Borges's sonnet Texas in a pamphlet issued in conjunction with the 1975 Austin meeting of the Manuscript Society of America. **Container**
1.9

Subseries B. Other Correspondents, 1974-1975

Typed carbon copy letter, John O. Kirkpatrick to Borges, University of Texas, Austin, 12 November 1974. (2 p.) Kirkpatrick seeks Borges's permission to publish the sonnet Texas. See Borges's reply above. **Container**
1.9

Typed letter signed, Norman Thomas Di Giovanni to John O. Kirkpatrick, St. Andrew's, Fife, Scotland, 23 February 1975. Comments regarding the intended publication of Borges's Texas.

Sound Recordings List

- C 2041 : audiocassettes : Jorge Luis Borges Lecture on Walt Whitman
- R 0076 : reel-to-reel audiotapes : Jorge Luis Borges Lecture
- R 1583 : reel-to-reel audiotapes : Jorge Luis Borges Lecture
- R 1584 : reel-to-reel audiotapes : Jorge Luis Borges Lecture on "Don Quixote"
- R 3224 : reel-to-reel audiotapes : Conference on Leopoldo Lugones, Reel 1 of 3
- R 3225 : reel-to-reel audiotapes : Conference on Leopoldo Lugones, Reel 2 of 3
- R 3226 : reel-to-reel audiotapes : Conference on Leopoldo Lugones, Reel 3 of 3
- R 3227 : reel-to-reel audiotapes : Press Conference with Jorge Luis Borges
- R 3228 : reel-to-reel audiotapes : Interview with Jorge Luis Borges in Spanish
- R 3229 : reel-to-reel audiotapes : Unknown