

UN SAJON 449 A.D.

Ya se había hundido la encorvada luna;
Lento en el alba el hombre rubio y rudo
Pisó con receloso pie desnudo
La arena minuciosa de la duna.

Mas allá de la pálida bahía,
Blancas tierras miró y negros alcores,
En esa hora elemental del día
En que Dios no ha creado los colores.

Era tenaz. Obraron su fortuna
Remos, redes, arado, espada, escudo;
La dura mano que guerrear pudo
Grabar con hierro una porfiada runa.

De una tierra de ciénagas venía
A ésta que roen los pesados mares;
Sobre él se abovedaba como el día
El Destino, y También sobre sus lares,

Woden o Thunor, que con torpe mano
Engalanó de trapos y de clavos
Y en cuyo altar sacrificó al arcano
Caballos, perros, pájaros, y esclavos.

Para cantar memorias o alabanzas
Amonedaba laboriosos nombres:
La guerra era el encuentro de los hombres
Y también el encuentro de las lanzas.

Su mundo era de magias en los mares,
De reyes y de lobos y del Hado
Que no perdona y del horror sagrado
Que hay en el corazón de los pinares.

Traía las palabras esenciales
De una lengua que el tiempo exaltaría
A música de Shakespeare: noche, día,
Agua, fuego, colores, y metales,

Hambre, sed, amargura, sueño, guerra,
Muerte y los otros hábitos humanos;
En arduous montes y en abiertos llanos,
Sus hijos engendraron a Inglaterra.

Borges

By now it had gone down, the sickle moon;
Slowly in the dawn the man, blond and blunt,
Trode with a tentative bare foot
The fine grains of the dune.

Far off, beyond the pallor of the bay,
His eye took in the blank lowlands and dark hills
In that first waking moment of the day
When God has not yet brought to light the colors.

He was dogged. His survival counted on
His oars and nets, his plough, his sword, his shield;
The hand that was hard in battle still was able
To carve with iron point a stubborn rune.

He came from a land of tidal swamps and marsh
To one eroded by relentless seas;
Destiny towered above him like the arch
Of the day, and over his household deities,

Woden or Thunor, whom with clumsy hand
He garlanded with rags and iron nails,
And on whose altar he would offer up
His animals - horses, dogs, fowls - and slaves.

To give a voice to memories or hymns
He coined laborious names and metaphors;
War was a coming face to face of men,
A crossing of swords, a colloquy of spears.

His world was one of wonders on the seas,
Of kings and wolves and an impervious Fate
Which grants no pardon, and of fearful spells
Lurking in the black heart of the pine wood.

He brought with him elemental words
Of a language that in time would flower
In Shakespeare's harmonies: night, day,
Water, fire, words for metals and colors,

Hunger, thirst, bitterness, sleep, fighting,
Death, and other grave concerns of men;
On broad meadows and in tangled woodland
The sons he bore brought England into being.

AR

The stooped over moon already under land;
The man, barefoot, blunt and blonde
Treaded with care in the dawn
On the dune's finely ground sand.

Off beyond the pale of the bay
He watched black hills and white shores
In that first hour of the day
When God has not yet brought colors to the fore.

He was stubborn. His fate hewn
By shield, sword, plow, net and oar
The hand that was hardened by war
Could carve with iron a stubborn rune.

He came from a land of bogs
To one gnawed by heaving seas;
Arching like the day above the fog
Destiny above him and above his deities.

Woden or Thunor whom with rags and nails
His clumsy hand would adorn
And on whose altar, as sacrifice to the veiled,
The lives of horses, dogs, birds, and slaves were shorn.

To sing glory to the memories he revered
He would mint laborious agnomens:
War was a meeting of men
As well as a meeting of spears.

His world was one of kings and wolves
Of magic on the waves
Of a fate that never forgave
And the sacred horror in the heart of the woods.

He brought the words that were essential
To a language that time would excite
Into the music of Shakespeare: day and night,
Water and fire, color and metal,

Hunger, thirst, bitterness, sleep and war
Death and all the other habits of men
In tangled hills and open fen
Through his sons did England soar.

MW



Poem and A.R.'s translation
from Borges, Jorge Luis.
Selected Poems, edited by
Alexander Coleman, Penguin