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## Exiles, Creators, and Trailblazing Women: Hispanists at Wellesley College

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**Abstract:** Beginning with Javier Marías's two stays at Wellesley College—20 kilometers from Boston—and the reverberations of those experiences in his work, this study explores the world of the exiled professors who found academic homes at Wellesley between the Spanish Civil War and the mid-20th century. These arrivals were facilitated by the personal involvement of several Wellesley women, beginning at the end of the 19th century, with Spanish institutions that promoted the education of women and with the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*. Special attention is paid to the vicissitudes of the arrival of Pedro Salinas in 1936 and the need to cover Jorge Guillén's post during his sabbatical year (1951-52), which resulted in the hiring of Julián Marías as a visiting professor. The correspondence of Justina Ruiz de Conde (former Spanish department head), preserved in the College archives, illuminates lesser-known aspects of the lives of the Spanish intellectual exiles in the United States.

**Keywords:** Javier Marías, Julián Marías, Rosa Montero, Jorge Luis Borges, Pedro Salinas, Jorge Guillén, Justina Ruiz de Conde, Vladimir Nabokov, Amado Alonso, Wellesley College, Hispanism

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## 1. The Marías Family in Wellesley

The premature death of Javier Marías in September 2022 gave rise to multiple homages and commemorations of all kinds. The testimonies and memorialization of the Madrid writer lauded both the quality of his complex and much-admired work and his endearing personality. At Wellesley College he was remembered as a visiting professor in the fall of 1984. Javier Marías was 33-years old at the time and an emerging writer, a ‘young promise.’ He had published *Los del lobo* (1971) and three other novels, but the first of his works to attract broad acclaim would be *El hombre sentimental* (1986), for which he was awarded the Herralde Prize. It is not well-known that this residence at Wellesley College in the 1980s was not the celebrated author's first. The night following his birth in Madrid on the morning of September 20th, 1951, his father Julián Marías boarded a plane to come to teach at Wellesley for a year. At the time the philosopher was on the Franco regime's blacklist and banned from the Spanish academy. A few years later he would also be a visiting professor at Yale, but this residence during the 1951-52 academic year at Wellesley would be the first academic experience of Marías senior in the United States. Upon arriving at the university, he was satisfied to see that the library had 7 of his publications, as well as *La preocupación de España en su literatura*, the anthology his wife Dolores Franco had published in 1944 (Julián Marías, 1989, p. 16). Notably, one of the courses he would teach was on *Don Quixote*, which years later would also be taught by his—at the time infant—son. A month after moving to Wellesley, his wife and three sons—the infant Javier, two-year-old Fernando, and four-year-old Miguel—joined him there. In fact, in the summer of 1951 as he prepared his trip to America, Julián had consulted Justina Ruiz de Conde (1909-2000), a likewise exiled medievalist and head of the Spanish department at Wellesley during those years, about the possibility of his wife giving birth in America. This would have allowed the entire family to travel together at the end of August or beginning of September. He asked Justina to find out what this would cost,

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since he guessed that it would be very expensive.<sup>1</sup> By the 22nd of August it seemed that this had been resolved and Marías wrote to Justina: “Of course, forget the idea of an American birth. In Madrid everything will be better.”<sup>2\*</sup>

The Marías family lived in Wellesley during the wake of a terrible family tragedy: the death of their son Julián (1945-1949). As Julián Marías related years later in a text in homage to Justina Ruiz de Conde:

I thought that the arrival of Lolita and the children would help us to rebuild our lost happiness a little. I say this because two years earlier our first son Julianín, a fairly extraordinary creature of three and a half years, had died, and we were destroyed, desolate, leaning sorrowfully upon one another and forcing ourselves to carry on for our children. Justina knew about our situation and understood it immediately. Wellesley, due to the change it signified for us, a new and distinct world, helped us immensely and allowed us to sleep a bit. (Julián Marías, 1992, p. 154)

The time at Wellesley turned out to be soothing for Julián Marías, who was then 37 years old. Although burdened by the pain of his son’s recent death, he suddenly found himself enveloped in a new academic and personal space, and with a child of a few months. As he explained in his memoirs, “it was a time of serenity, almost of happiness” (1989, p. 27). Professionally, his status evolved from ostracized intellectual to highly regarded professor: he held a prestigious professorship—the Mary Whiton Calkins Visiting Professor of Spanish—and was treated as the prominent intellectual that he was.

During Javier Marías’s second residence at Wellesley, the exile-tinged atmosphere and circle of Hispanists who had welcomed his father were a thing of the past. The young Marías was popular in the United States of the mid-80s, partially due to the attention that Spain attracted in those years for its incipient democracy and the creative agitation of the *movida madrileña* (Madrid scene), a crystallization of the

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Julián Marías to Justina Ruiz de Conde, 7/3/1951. Wellesley College Archives. Going forward, unless otherwise noted, the letters cited here are held at the Wellesley College Archives (WCA).

<sup>2</sup> JM to JRC, 8/22/1951.

\* Editors’ note: Unless otherwise stated, all the original Spanish quotes have been translated specifically for this English version of the study. See the originals in 088-11/2023SP.

cultural opening of the *Transition*. To cover her sabbatical, the beloved and missed professor Elena Gascón Vera (1943-2021) organized an entire *annus mirabilis* for the department. In the fall of 1984, Javier would teach the course on Cervantes, where *Don Quixote* was read in Spanish in its entirety, as well as a course on translation.

Rosa Montero taught courses on journalism and contemporary Spanish women writers during the spring semester of 1985. At the time Rosa was a better known writer than Javier, with an important journalistic trajectory; she had been the editor-in-chief of the Sunday supplement of *El País*. She had published three novels and the first, *Crónicas del desamor* (1979), had been very influential.<sup>3</sup> Some months after her term at Wellesley in 1985, Montero published some impressions of her visit and her perceptions of the United States in *El País*. They were titled “Estampas bostonianas” (I, II y III) and they caused a certain uproar at the time. Her reflections on the United States, the town of Wellesley and Wellesley College explored recent personal experiences that in her opinion made United States culture not only different, but “strange”: “North Americans are Martians” (Montero, 1985, I). With no pretension to anthropological or sociological depth, the articles are perceptive, written in the familiar and confidential tone of a friend who returns from a trip and recounts her observations, although these seem often overly generalized and even unjustified. Elena Gascón Vera took offense at this and a few weeks later published an opinion article in the same newspaper titled “Glosa a las ‘Estampas bostonianas.’” She observed that in the recent articles her friend Rosa “sins by being excessively simplistic, one-sided and rash” (Gascón Vera, 1985). The disagreement didn’t prevent the writer from returning to Wellesley as a visiting professor in the future (spring of 1991); she has continued to maintain a cordial relationship with the institution, and the place and location continue to appear in her narrative and in her articles.<sup>4</sup> When years later the articles were republished with her other travel essays in a book whose title was inspired by those impressions published in the press—*Estampas bostonianas y otros viajes* [Bostonian

<sup>3</sup> The other two were *La función Delta* (1981) and *Te trataré como a una reina* (1983).

<sup>4</sup> Recently in *El peligro de estar cuerda* (2022), and the article in *El País Semanal* “Seguir” (March 25, 2023).

scenes and other journeys]—, the author noted: “After writing those articles I lived in the United States for another year and I think I came to know North Americans better. Today I see them as more complex, contradictory and diverse” (Montero, 2008, p. 35).

Javier Marías's relationship with Wellesley was also long and substantial. On the one hand this was due to biographical and personal links, that connected him with the experiences of his father's exiled generation. On the other hand, this visit meant a great deal for his creative itinerary and gave him the opportunity to teach, a skill that he had not cultivated excessively; at Wellesley this allowed him to delve more deeply into *Don Quixote*. Many years later, on the occasion of the IV centenary of Cervantes's death, he published his class notes: *El Quijote de Wellesley: notas para un curso de 1984* (2016).<sup>5</sup> The seminar on Cervantes that Marías directed had previously been taught by Jorge Guillén, Julián Marías, Justina Ruiz de Conde and Elena Gascón Vera, and continues to be offered today. Marías was not an expert on either the time period or on Cervantes, and he approached the experience with respect and humility. His book is a fine, intelligent and insightful read from the perspective of a writer who approached the text with an eye keenly focused on the evolution of the characters, the narrative construction, and the role of the translator who tells the story.

### 1.1. 6 Norfolk Terrace, a Building with History (and stories)

The apartment that the Marías family lived in during the 1951-52 academic year at 6 Norfolk Terrace was the one that Jorge Guillén had rented from the university. The memory of this place would grow in Javier's literary imagination over the years, becoming a suggestive invention forged by his admiration for Vladimir Nabokov and based on the conjectural presence of the Russian writer on the upper floor in a period prior to the newborn Javier's first months in the United States.

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<sup>5</sup> Although they finally appeared in print in 2016, he had written about the possibility of publishing them in 1999 (Javier Marías, 1999, p. 16).



**Image 1.** Vladimir Nabokov at Wellesley College, 1941-42  
(Wellesley College Archives, Library and Technology Services, Wellesley College).

The domestic itineraries of Nabokov and Guillén at Wellesley are relevant because beginning in the early 90s—during his stay as guest professor and onwards—Javier Marías created an almost novelistic fabulation in which the apartment at 6 Norfolk Terrace became a mythical enclave in his creative biography, a half-lived and half-imagined space that connected him with his family, with the cultural heritage of the Spanish Generation of '27, and with his admired Nabokov. The author described it this way:

But I did not know all this with my own eyes until 33 years later, when by an incredible chance I was invited to teach at that same university for a semester, and I also learned that the house in which I stayed was the same one in which I had lived when less than a child, in the first year of my existence. And I learned even more: the poet Jorge Guillén had lived in that house before, and Vladimir Nabokov had lived on the floor above when he had not yet published—and who knows if he was already writing or plotting—his most famous novel, *Lolita*, both professors of Wellesley around the middle of the century. Space is capable of creating the illusion that time has been nullified, and in the same way that when we return to a city that has already faded from our memory, we have the impression that in reality we have not yet left it and the time in between is suddenly compressed or even canceled, so it is possible to imagine that all its inhabitants from different periods coexist simultaneously in the same place. And at the age of 33, I imagined the poet Guillén writing his verses of exile and perhaps hearing the footsteps of the Russian exile, who must have paced the room numerous times, impatient with my bellowing. (Javier Marías, 2002, p. 192)<sup>6</sup>

That fantastic space would become a kind of personal vortex that would accompany him for decades as a talisman, or, as he himself veiledly acknowledged in his book in homage to Nabokov, as a “biographical superstition” (Javier Marías, 1999, p. 17). A measure of the importance that Marías gave to that suggestive story of affiliation with Nabokov is that he never tired of repeating it over the years. The last reference found appears in an interview in *The New Yorker* with Jonathan Blitzer in 2016:

Javier, his two older brothers, and their mother moved to the American Northeast, where Julián taught first at Wellesley, then at Yale. Marías still remembers the house where they stayed in Massachusetts—Vladimir and Vera Nabokov had lived upstairs a few years earlier. (‘We didn’t coincide in time but, rather, in place,’ Marías said.). (Blitzer, 2016)

Although seemingly unimportant, it should be pointed out that Nabokov never lived there.<sup>7</sup> Only Guillén and the Marías family occupied this apartment. Nabokov arrived to Wellesley in the 1941-42 academic year with a one-year contract, and held a more stable yet not permanent position from 1944 to 1948, when he went to Cornell to direct their comparative literature program. During the 1941-42 academic year the Russian author lived in an apartment on 19 Appleby Road in Wellesley, but later moved

<sup>6</sup> The text, from 1992, was published for the first time in 1993, in *Literatura y fantasmas*. Years later, in 1999, he used a fragment of the same text in *Desde que te vi morir. Vladimir Nabokov, una superstición*. In 2002 it reappeared, this time in a volume published at Wellesley College: *Wellesley, recuerdo ileso* (Gascón Vera & Ramos, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Actually, Marías didn’t live there either during his second stay at Wellesley. His apartment in the fall of 1984 was located at 6 Horton House, 666 Washington St. not at Norfolk Terrace.



to Cambridge,<sup>8</sup> because beginning in fall 1942 he became a researcher at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard, where he studied butterflies. From that time on he came and went a couple of days each week—arriving at Wellesley after lunch and not returning to his house in Cambridge until after midnight (Boyd, 1991, pp. 36-60). He spent the summer of 1945 in Wellesley (when he quit smoking) and coincided—this time for real—with Jorge Guillén, who lived in the house next door.<sup>9</sup>



**Image 2.** 6 Norfolk Terrace, Wellesley, spring of 1952. From left to right: Juan Marichal and his sons Carlos and Miguel, Manuel Conde (husband of Justina Ruiz de Conde), Pilar Lago de Lapesa, Carmen Madinaveitia de Castro, Solita Salinas, Dolores Franco with Javier Marías in her arms and her sons Miguel and Fernando in front, Américo Castro and Julián Marías (Courtesy of Fernando Marías).

<sup>8</sup> To 8 Craigie Circle, not far from where Borges lived some years later (22 Concord Avenue), during the academic year 1967-68.

<sup>9</sup> Guillén at 11-A Abbot Street and Nabokov at number 9.

The truth is that Marías Sr. had a much less idealized vision of the Norfolk Terrace apartment than the one his novelist son would develop years later; he referred to it as “neglected, with worn furniture” (1989, p. 14). At the end of Marías's stay, as Guillén prepared to return to Wellesley in September 1952, he confessed to his colleague Ada Coe that he was worried about the condition he would find the apartment in and that his daughter Teresa was going to help him fix it up: “and with her I will try to reorganize those rooms, which must have been left—poor things!—very dismantled.”<sup>10</sup> We can imagine that the presence of his daughter Teresa Guillén would also help him emotionally. Exploring the correspondence between Jorge Guillén and Justina Ruiz de Conde, we observe that the poet had been particularly interested in having Julián Marías and his family occupy that apartment—which he had rented from the university—since he would be absent during the 1950-51 academic year: if he hadn't sublet it, he would have lost it.

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After an absence of two consecutive years, Guillén's return could not have been an easy one. His wife Germaine Cahen had died at the end of 1947 and in April 1950 his father had died in Spain. In December 1951 Pedro Salinas died, followed by Amado Alonso in May 1952. Claudio, their youngest son, was studying in Europe and Teresa, the eldest, had married Stephen Gilman (1917-1986) in 1943; he had been a disciple of Américo Castro at Princeton. Upon returning from the Second World War, he also taught there between 1946 and 1948; it would be his first academic position in a long and successful career that he developed especially at Harvard, from 1957 until his retirement in 1985 (Arbona Abascal, 2022, p. 2).

In December 1951, at the end of the first semester, the university newspaper published a profile of Julián Marías:

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<sup>10</sup> JG to AC, 6/21/1952.

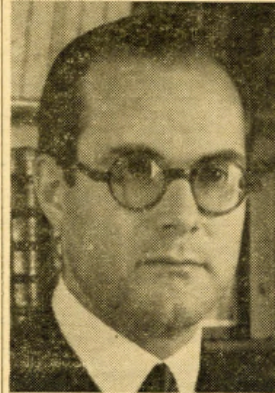
## MARIAS WILL LECTURE ON ORTEGA'S THOUGHT TO '55 COMP CLASSES

Senior Julian Marias, Mary Whiton Calkins Visiting Professor of Spanish, will address two freshman English composition classes on Saturday. Marias, a close associate of Jose Ortega y Gasset, will discuss the philosophical background of Ortega's thought.

The professor, who has been associated with Ortega for nineteen years, explains that Ortega has a distinct philosophical background, and that his book, "Revolt of the Masses," which the two sections are studying, is rooted in this metaphysical system. It is an exposition of his philosophy and his ideas on human life and on political and vital reason.

Senior Marias, who now resides with his wife and three small children at 6 Norfolk terrace, came to Wellesley from Madrid, Spain. He is a philosopher and author, and an authority on Unamuno, a Spanish philosopher of the generation of 1898. Co-founder with Ortega of the Instituto de Humanidades in Madrid three years ago, he is now a professor there as well as associate director. He came to the United States for the first time in September, and was joined recently by his family. His youngest child was born in Spain on the morning of his departure by plane for the Americas.

In 1947 Marias received from the Academia Real Espanola the Fastenrath Prize for his book, *Miguel de Unamuno*. Among his noted works are his books on philosophy, and his two on Ortega y Gasset, *Ortega y la Idea de la*



Julian Marias

*Razon Vital*, and *Ortega y Tres Antipodas*. In addition, his articles on Barroja, Unamuno, Valle-Inclan, Maejtu, Antonio and Manuel Marchado, and Ortega y Gasset are included in the *Diccionario de Literatura Espanola*, which was published under his editorship.

Here at Wellesley he teaches courses to advanced and graduate students in Spanish American literature, the works of Cervantes, a survey of Spanish literature, and Spanish civilization.

Image 3. Julián Marías in *Wellesley College News* (December 13, 1951, p. 8).

There we find what undoubtedly must have been the first appearance of Javier Marías in the media: "His youngest son was born in Spain the morning of his departure by plane to the Americas" (*Wellesley College News*, 1951, p. 8). Javier Marías was about three months old at the time and his brothers called him "the little American." The same issue of the university newspaper that included that brief report about Julián Marías reported the death of Pedro Salinas in Boston, on December 4 at the age of 59. We know from Salinas's letters that the philosopher visited him in the hospital often during those last weeks: "Marías comes frequently; lively, talkative and friendly" (Salinas & Guillén, 1992, p. 587). We also know from them that in the first months of 1951, the year of his death, Salinas was personally involved in the search for a replacement for Guillén for the 51-2 academic year and that Julián Marías was not his favored candidate. But let's start at the beginning: Salinas's arrival in the United States.

## 2. Pedro Salinas at Wellesley, “A Being from Another World”

The arc of Salinas's relationship with Wellesley spanned virtually his entire time in America, from the invitation he received from the University at the end of 1935 until his death in Boston in December 1951. The Salinas who arrived at the American college was a 44-year-old man at a satisfying moment in his professional career: he was settled in Madrid and recognized in Spain as a professor, poet and academic administrator of the first order, connected with the best of the country's intellectuals, and had a splendid professional resume. He had already published several well-received books, he was an outstanding professor who collaborated with leading institutions, and in 1932 he was charged with opening the Universidad Internacional in Santander, a product of his own personal vision. Two of his most important books had been published: *La voz a ti debida* (1933) and *Razón de amor* (1936). He had been married since he was 23 to Margarita Bonmatí, and lived with her and their two children in an apartment on Príncipe de Vergara Street in Madrid; however, his marriage had become unstable, and upon arriving at the bucolic Wellesley College campus he found himself alone and disoriented.

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**Image 4.** Anita Oyarzábal and Pedro Salinas at Wellesley College, 1937  
(Wellesley College Archives, Library and Technology Services, Wellesley College).

In order to understand Salinas's presence at Wellesley, we need to go back a few years, to August 1932. On that date he met Katherine Reding (1897-1984) at the Madrid Residencia de Estudiantes.<sup>11</sup> Because of what it would mean for his personal life, I can't think of a better way to gloss the episode of their meeting than with some verses from Salinas himself in *La voz a ti debida*: "Amor, amor, catástrofe. / ¡Qué hundimiento del mundo!" [Love, love, catastrophe. / What a collapse of the world!]. She had traveled to Spain that summer to work on her doctoral thesis and was taking Salinas's class on the Generation of '98. Katherine Reding, who was 35 years old and had been a professor of Spanish at Smith College (MA) since 1930, spent the summers

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<sup>11</sup> Whitmore after her marriage in 1939.

of 1932 and 1933 and the academic year 1934-35 (from July to July) in Spain directing Smith's program in Madrid. The idyll that began that summer between the poet and the doctoral student would mean that, between 1932 and 1937, Salinas's life and poetry revolved around his American lover, with correspondence continually crossing the Atlantic in both directions, and personal meetings when their calendars allowed.

The relationship with Katherine Reding would be transmuted into poetry in three fundamental books, particularly the first, *La voz a ti debida*, written in the heat of romance, with poems from the period in which they met. Published in December 1933, it is considered a “poetic diary” of the beginning of the relationship with his lover (Escartín Gual, 2019, p. 168). Perhaps that is why the idealization of the beloved in these poems is so notable. *Razón de amor*, published in 1936, seems more reflective, but it examines the same relationship and draws on their experiences together as well as the material that emanates from the letters they exchanged. For this reason, Salinas confessed to Reding: “all the poems in this book have been written in a state of total collaboration, of togetherness in soul, that wasn’t possible in the first [book]” (P. Salinas, 2002, p. 287). *Largo lamento*—which was not published during the poet’s lifetime—was written mostly between 1936-37 and can be considered the part of this amorous trilogy conceived at Wellesley. He finished it during the summer of 1937 (P. Salinas, 2013, p. 25). Here the poetic gaze is projected on the end of the relationship and there is space for memory, for bitterness over the separation, and even for recriminations. We know from Katherine Reding herself that it refers to a very painful period for both of them (Garriga, 2013, p. 100).

Unfortunately, Salinas’s exquisite love poetry was not the only result of this infatuation. On the 27th of February, 1935, Salinas’s wife—knowing of her husband’s relationship with the American professor—threw herself into the Tajo River in Aranjuez, but was rescued alive. The suicide attempt convinced Reding to end the relationship, although Salinas objected. She wrote about this moment in a note that accompanied

the letters she had received from the poet and deposited at Harvard's Houghton Library in 1979, with the stipulation that they not be opened to researchers for 20 years:

Nothing was ever the same again. The commotion returned me to reality. I realized the character of our relationship and I felt guilty. I was doing harm to others [...] But not so for Pedro. Margarita had survived. He didn't see any reason for us to separate.

I couldn't understand Pedro's reaction to that tragic event. He didn't seem to see any conflict between his relationship with me and that with his family. He loved them, was responsible for them and never contemplated abandoning them...but he needed me. I was his muse, his great passion, and for him I was as necessary as they were. (P. Salinas, 2002, p. 382)

After the death of Salinas, his friend Guillén was instrumental in convincing Katherine (now Whitmore) of the convenience of this donation. We know this from the correspondence that she maintained with this other Spanish poet between 1945 and 1983 (Garriga, 2013). When Salinas's letters to Katherine Reding became public in 1999, the open secret of his time at Wellesley—at least during the first year—was confirmed.

In August of 1932, the same month that he met Reding, a decree founding the Universidad Internacional in Santander was published and Pedro Salinas was named its General Secretary. This project of Fernando de los Ríos (1879-1949), Minister of Public Instruction of the II Republic, had actually been inspired and proposed by the poet. The first courses at the Magdalena Palace were inaugurated in July of 1933, and Salinas was there in the summer of 1936 when war broke out and his trip to the United States was imminent.

At the end of 1935 Salinas had received an invitation from Wellesley College to teach in the Spanish department during the academic year 1936-37; he was to hold the Mary Whiton Calkins Chair during one year as a distinguished visiting professor. The reports collected by the department before contacting Salinas in 1935 reveal that they sought for the position someone who could become integrated into the academic

community and who would participate in the mission of the college beyond work in the classroom. In the University's archives we can see that the department director, Alice Bushee—who was retiring at the end of the 1935-36 academic year—as well as Ada Coe, the professor who received him upon his arrival, had solicited advice about good candidates for this position. Three letters survive. Two are from the Sweeney sisters, Mary and Nora.<sup>12</sup> Mary Stedman Sweeney (1891-1974), who was the same age as Salinas, had been affiliated with the Residencia de Señoritas since the 1920s (Cueva & Márquez Padorno, 2015, pp. 42-45) and with the International Institute for Girls in Spain (later Instituto Internacional) and sent her letter from Bryn Mawr, where she was a professor. Like Wellesley or Smith, it was one of the highly-reputed universities for women known as the “Seven Sisters” (Mt. Holyoke, Smith, Barnard, Vassar, Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe and Wellesley). Mary Sweeney had very good things to say about Pedro Salinas. She mentioned his administrative work in Santander and knew from American students' reviews that he treated them tactfully and that his classes had been successful. She had coincided with him at professors' teas and his presence had always been an agreeable one. She also mentioned Américo Castro, and related a positive anecdote about his personal dealings with Navarro Tomás, to offer another perspective to Miss Bushee, who thought he wasn't very sociable. Both Castro and Navarro Tomás, like Salinas, had previously taught courses for foreigners at the Residencia de Estudiantes. Mary Sweeney ended her letter with the suggestion that the linguist Samuel Gili Gaya also be considered as a candidate—he had been her professor in Spain as well as at the Spanish Language School in Middlebury, which he had briefly directed.<sup>13</sup> Her sister Nora also gave splendid references for Salinas, and although she hadn't studied with him, she had heard American students speak about his classes with enthusiasm. He had an attractive personality and “has a genuine interest in foreigners.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> On the affiliation of three of the Sweeney sisters (the third was Louise) with the Instituto Internacional, see the complete history written by Carmen de Zulueta (1984, pp. 256-259).

<sup>13</sup> MS to AB, 11/14/1935.

<sup>14</sup> NS to AB, 12/5/1935.



The third letter arrived from the Spanish department of Smith College, addressed to Ada Coe, the incoming department head. It was written by Caroline B. Bourland, head of the department at the time, and who, in addition to being a friend of Katherine Reding's, had been her roommate in Madrid during the summer that she met Salinas. She presented the three candidates in order of preference: Salinas, Dámaso Alonso, and Gili Gaya, although her preference for Salinas was obvious. She praised his teaching and his pleasant personality. Alonso also had good qualities as a professor and was agreeable, but seemed "less sociable and approachable" to her than Salinas. She added that someone had used the adjective "huraño" [aloof] (she wrote the term in Spanish) to refer to him. A few lines later, Bourland slipped in that Dámaso Alonso was "always a little worried about his digestion, and would adapt himself less easily than Salinas." Gili Gaya was said to be clear, but not eloquent and furthermore, he had already had so many experiences in the United States that it would be more difficult to tempt him.<sup>15</sup>

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If we imagine Salinas at the center of the Madrid cultural scene, with his responsibilities in Santander and at the height of his powers, it is difficult to understand how he could have abandoned so much so abruptly—unless one considers that his wish to continue the relationship with Katherine Reding was central to his decision. Wellesley and Smith, where she worked, are some 140 kilometers apart. In March of 1936 he told his friend Guillén about his trip and how much it appealed to him even though he had to leave so much behind in Spain, but didn't mention his lover: "Because apart from America's attractiveness I love the chance to save myself from this Hispanic environment, more poisonous each day, more strewn with hatred and resentment, more hostile to noble discernment and to joyful work. I have the impression that everything will get even worse, and this trip is a true salvation, that's how I see it" (P. Salinas & Guillén, 1992, p. 171). It appears that he was not wrong about that.

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<sup>15</sup> CB to AC, 11/17/1935.

Margarita and the children moved to Algeria temporarily with her family, and they would travel to Wellesley to be with Salinas in the fall of 1937. In truth, Margarita continued to be very hurt by her husband's infidelity and until the summer of 1937 it wasn't clear that she and the children would reunite with him in the United States (Escartín Gual, 2019, pp. 119-121). The absence of his family during that first semester facilitated Salinas's visits with the Smith professor, although in the spring of 1937 she insisted that their relationship end (Garriga, 2013, pp. 142-143). Reding spent the academic year 1937-38 in Mexico and it appears that in June 1938 she sent him a letter in which she spoke of her friend Brewer Whitmore, who like herself was a professor at Smith College, and who she ended up marrying.

### 3. Wellesley College

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Wellesley is a women's university that was founded in 1875. Like similar colleges that were founded during those years, its mission was to offer young women an advanced education comparable in quality to that received by men. The department to which Salinas arrived in 1936 was small. Alice Bushee had just retired and it was populated by three professors: Ada Coe and Helen Phipps, both Americans, and the Spaniard Anita Oyarzábal. The department, as well as the university, were connected to pedagogical initiatives in Spain due to the fact that many women linked to the college were involved in the activities of the International Institute for Girls in Spain from its beginning.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> This Institution, founded at the end of the 19th century by the married couple Gulick to foment the education of girls in Spain, developed close ties with the Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios e Investigaciones Científicas, the Residencia de Señoritas and the Instituto-Escuela.



**Image 5.** The professor Katharine Lee Bates in Seville  
(Wellesley College Archives, Library and Technology Services, Wellesley College).

One of these women was Katharine Lee Bates, professor and head of the English department at Wellesley for many years, celebrated above all for having written the poem “America, the Beautiful.” A frequent traveler to Spain, she participated in the administration of the Institute when in Madrid, as well as from Boston.<sup>17</sup> In her diary entry for October 27, 1913, during one of her stays in Madrid, Katherine Lee Bates wrote: “Today I met a saint, Don Francisco Giner de los Ríos, in his Libre Enseñanza school”.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, this note appeared in her reference diary, so there was only room for a couple of lines each day. We don’t know what the American professor and

<sup>17</sup> She also wrote a book about her trip to Spain in 1899: *Spanish Highways and Byways* (1900). Some of its chapters had appeared earlier as the author’s chronicles from Spain in *The New York Times*.

<sup>18</sup> In Katharine Lee Bates Papers, 3P-Bates, Box 3, Folder 5, File: “The Reference Diary 1912-1926”, p. 301. Wellesley College Archives.

the founder of the most influential and innovative pedagogical organization of the time in Spain, the Institución Libre de Enseñanza (ILE), discussed. Surely Bates and Giner recognized one another that day as accomplices and allies, both dedicated to innovative pedagogical projects that shared philosophical approaches from both sides of the Atlantic. It is nevertheless revealing that in the years 1875, 1876 and 1877 Wellesley College, the Institución Libre de Enseñanza and the International Institute began their respective journeys (Ramos, 2022). It so happens that a few days after Salinas arrived at Wellesley, at the opening ceremony of the semester (*Convocation*, the Saturday before classes began) he was given the cap and gown of Katharine Lee Bates, retired in 1925, “Because his own in Madrid had been stolen when his apartment had been ransacked while he was teaching at the summer school in Santander. The Civil War had begun.”<sup>19</sup>

At Wellesley, the educational model strived for academic sophistication and to provide opportunities for leadership and power to women (somewhere between utopian and revolutionary for the time). In fact, a new university president was inaugurated that year. Salinas told Margarita: “the president is new,<sup>20</sup> like me. Everyone is surprised because she is very young, 36 years old. It’s a very important position because she directs the entire College, both its administration and its teaching. [...] I see all of this as a savage, it entertains me at times, and at times it bores me and I feel a bit alone” (P. Salinas, 2007, pp. 61-62). Given his origins, this environment undoubtedly made an impression on Salinas, who shortly after his arrival wrote to his spouse: “You can’t imagine how very strange it is to find myself the only man among so many women. I feel like an intruder, a being from another world. And instead of making me feel proud or vain this exceptional condition intimidates me and makes me feel small” (2007, p. 61). The transition wouldn’t have been easy for a man

<sup>19</sup> Spanish Department records, WCA.

<sup>20</sup> Mildred H. McAfee (1900-1994) was President of Wellesley College between 1936 and 1948. During the 2nd World War she took a leave (1942-45) to direct WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), a group of more than 80,000 women Navy reservists.

who arrived from a country with patriarchal customs, where he had been in charge of important cultural institutions, had enjoyed the confidence of the Minister and was also valued as an author as much as for his administrative abilities. Now, recently arrived at a college near Boston, he was simultaneously trying to rebuild his marriage and continue his relationship with his lover. Meanwhile, the country he left behind was bleeding to death in a fierce civil war.

Apart from his academic responsibilities, Salinas's life in Wellesley was peaceful; this was the first thing he noted to his wife in his letters to her just after his arrival:

So here in America, a febrile country of vertigo, velocity, etc., as they say, I find myself much more tranquil, with less noise, less nervous excitation than in Alicante, for example, where people go to relax. This is, without a doubt, a country of contrasts, none greater than that between the immense city, the automobile traffic, which is inconceivably enormous, and these little towns to which it seems the 20th century has not yet arrived. I'm enjoying this very much, Marg, almost more than New York. Wellesley is so charming! (PS to MB, October 7, 1936). (P. Salinas, 2007, p. 64)

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Knowing what we do now of his relationship with the Smith professor, it is tempting to think that the two contrasted cities, New York and Wellesley, serve as a subliminal metaphor for the two women who shared his affections: the lover and the wife. For example:

How pleasant the return to Wellesley is, after the tumult of New York! The two Americas! And I confess that the America of New York enlightens me, it is wonderful, but I feel less drawn to it than to Wellesley, with its peace and serenity. I was in love with cities before, but now I feel distant from them, I don't know why. And New York was not bad at all this time. (PS to MB, 10/19/1936) (P. Salinas, 2007, p. 67)

Independently of this ambivalence and almost indecision between the bustle of the city and the peace of suburbia, his perceptions of the United States are not very different from those of other cultivated European travelers of the time: there is an aesthetic fascination that includes the novelties of industry (landscapes, cars, neon lights, skyscrapers...) but that coexists with a certain ethical disapproval (materialism, superficiality, lack of historical depth, childishness...). In time and after his trips to Latin America, especially his long stay in Puerto Rico, Salinas's reticence towards North

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Exiles, Creators, and Trailblazing Women: Hispanists at Wellesley College

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American culture led him to a greater appreciation of Hispanic culture. His high regard for the shared Spanish language, in spite of national divisions, was reinforced during his Latin American journeys. Upon returning from one of these trips in 1939 he wrote to Guillermo de Torre, who lived in Buenos Aires:

You, my friend Torre, living in a great Spanish-language city, don't realize that those of us who live in a country with a strange language experience a kind of double exile. We are unknown, as writers. And as soon as one leaves, and immerses oneself in the Hispanic linguistic world, one returns to the normal environment of our literary identity. Those 6 weeks wandering through air where Spanish is spoken have encouraged me a little and distracted me from my worries, of which we will speak later. (P. Salinas & de Torre, 2018, p. 162)

During those first months in the United States, Salinas worked on his participation in the celebrated Turnbull Poetry Lectures, which have taken place at John Hopkins since 1891. Between the 26th of April and the 4th of May he gave his 5 lectures in English, under the title "The Attitude Toward Reality in Spanish Poetry," which were later published in the book *La realidad y el poeta*.

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Due to his previous invitation by Wellesley, Salinas was one of the first intellectuals to leave Spain after the beginning of the war. In his case, the trip had already been planned—but he soon perceived, with amazing clairvoyance, that his stay would be a defining and perhaps permanent one. On March 7, 1937, he wrote from Wellesley to Germaine Cahen, wife of Jorge Guillén:

I live as in a nightmare. I am pained by everything about Spain: first of all, the national, the general. But how I am tortured by the thought of our disbanded group of friends! God knows for how long! This summer, one afternoon at the Magdalena, sitting with Margarita in the meadow, one of those splendid afternoons they have there, I had a sensation that I will never forget: of farewell. I realized that we were saying goodbye to something, to many things, to a life that could never return. Neither the country, nor Madrid, nor the people will ever be the same. Our life, fatally split in two: we know how yesterday was, and of tomorrow we know nothing. (P. Salinas & Guillén, 1992, p. 178)

The war would convert what was meant as provisional into permanent, and what began as an exciting personal adventure into an inexorable destiny, as he confessed to his wife: "Going to live in a new country, or creating a new social and

professional position, looking for a new spiritual atmosphere, is very hard at my age, and in my state of mind. I came to America, or rather, I decided to come to America, as if on a recreational trip, out of spiritual curiosity. And suddenly it has become an obligation for me, a sort of workplace” (PS to MB, 04/18/1937) (P. Salinas, 2007, p. 90). But as he wrote to his friend Guillén upon the proclamation of the Republic in Spain, “neither by temperament nor by conscience can I remain apart” (P. Salinas & Guillén, 1992, p. 130) and soon he would make public statements clarifying aspects of the war for the college community. On March 17, 1938, he spoke at a dinner lecture at Wellesley on “The Struggle between Past and Present in the Spanish Civil War.” The discussion was led by the new university president, who, according to records, had to intervene repeatedly to restore order due to the angry protests of a professor from the German department.<sup>21</sup> That same month, on March 30th, *The New York Times* published his letter to the editor criticizing some laudatory comments about Franco that had been made by the cardinals of Boston and New York (P. Salinas, 1938).

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<sup>21</sup> Spanish Department records, WCA.



**Image 6.** Pedro Salinas in 1939 (Middlebury College Special Collections, Middlebury, Vermont).

The final year of the war, 1939, was a difficult time for Salinas. Upon the fascist triumph, a ministerial order on July 29th banned him from university teaching in Spain, as revealed by an official document:

The disaffection of the mentioned university professors with the new regime implemented in Spain is public and notorious, not only for their actions in the areas that have suffered Marxist domination, but also for their persistent anti-national and anti-Spanish politics in the times preceding the Glorious National Movement. The evidence of their conduct, harmful to the country, makes judicial guarantees, which otherwise constitute the fundamental condition of any prosecution, useless, and for this reason, this Ministry has decided to permanently separate them from service and from the ranks. (Otero Carvajal, Núñez Díaz-Balart et al., 2006, p. 300)



At the end of 1939 Margarita was diagnosed with breast cancer, which she died of in 1953. Also, in March of that year, Katherine married Brewer Whitmore, 11 years her senior (Salinas was 6 years older). Brewer died in a traffic accident in 1943.

Salinas's professional trajectory in America was not limited to Wellesley. His reputation and contacts led to new possibilities that began to arise soon after his arrival to the United States. We just mentioned the prestigious Turnbull conferences, which were so well received that Salinas combined his teaching at Wellesley with weekly teaching at Johns Hopkins University during the academic years 1937-38 and 1938-39. In 1940 he left Wellesley definitively for Baltimore, where he was a professor until the end of his life—except for breaks to teach at the Universidad de Puerto Rico between 1943 and 1946 for various trips to Latin America and other parts of the United States. He explained his reasons for going to Johns Hopkins to Jorge Guillén in a letter from November 1939: although he wouldn't earn much more, Wellesley had become too small for him; he had too few colleagues and he thought that his work in Baltimore would be more stimulating. In addition, he would have Leo Spitzer as a colleague, and the city was three hours away from New York and 45 minutes from Washington (P. Salinas & Guillén, 1992, p. 210).

Juan Centeno offered him his other great professional opportunity in the United States, beginning in the summer of 1937: to form part of the faculty of the Spanish Language [summer] School at Middlebury College in Vermont. This academic institution had an important place in the professional and personal life of Salinas in the United States. The summer school was an oasis that permitted many exiled professors and their families to meet with friends and colleagues for 6 weeks in the mountains of Vermont. They taught Spanish classes there and organized activities for the students, who committed to speaking this language during their entire stay. The professors escaped the heat of summer at their habitual residences and earned an extra salary as well. In his memoirs, Jaime Salinas, son of the poet, wrote about that atmosphere as he recalled his first years' stays at Middlebury with his parents and

sister Solita, accompanied by the Spanish academic diaspora: “Those summers, especially the first ones, when we still thought we would return to Spain soon, I lived happily because I felt at home” (J. Salinas, 2003, p. 122). We have heard similar commentaries from the children of other exiles who coincided there, such as Teresa and Claudio Guillén and Laura García Lorca. The place earned endearing nicknames that were very freely translated from its name in English to Spanish toponyms with classical echoes,<sup>22</sup> such as “Villamediana” (José Fernández Montesinos) or “Entreburgos” (Jorge Guillén). Pedro Salinas called it “the second Magdalena” and it’s not difficult to understand why.

The Middlebury school was greatly influenced by Krausist ideas from the beginning, due to the formation of the director of the first school (of German), as well as the liberal educational background of the first to be responsible for the Spanish school, Julián Moreno-Lacalle and José Martel (Véquez, 2017, pp. 168-172). This Krausist substratum favored, here as well, ties to people affiliated with the Institución Libre de Enseñanza. These exiles, who had strong personal and philosophical connections with the approaches of the ILE and related entities (Junta para Ampliación de Estudios, Centro de Estudios Históricos, Residencia de Estudiantes, Residencia de Señoritas, Universidad Internacional), found that this summer work at the Vermont school allowed them to continue applying a pedagogy and a way of conceiving university teaching together with colleagues who had also tried to change the rigid, traditional and straightlaced methods of the Spanish academy (García-Velasco, 2015, pp. 73-75). It was about sustaining the flame of a shared cultural project in which they had participated for decades and which was now decomposing in Spain (Véquez, 2017, p. 176).

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<sup>22</sup> We owe to Martín de Riquer the unforgettable “Cambridge de Indias” to name the city that hosts Harvard University (Lapesa Melgar, 1995-96, p. 81).

During the summers of 1939, 1940 and 1941, when Salinas went to teach in California, his family would go to Vermont without him; Jorge Guillén would take over his position as professor at Middlebury in 1939. As had occurred earlier with the Spanish lectureship at the Sorbonne, and the following year at Wellesley, Guillén occupied the position that his good friend Salinas had vacated. We know that when Salinas died, Johns Hopkins offered the vacant chair to Guillén, who nevertheless preferred to remain at Wellesley.<sup>23</sup>



**Image 7.** Pedro Salinas and Jorge Guillén.  
Pedro Salinas Papers (MS SPAN 100 [1191]). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

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<sup>23</sup> JG to JRC, 5/26/1952. It seems that he also received an offer from Berkeley the previous year (Letter from JG to JRC, February 9, 1952).

#### 4. The Machinations of the “Prodigal Grandfather”<sup>24</sup>

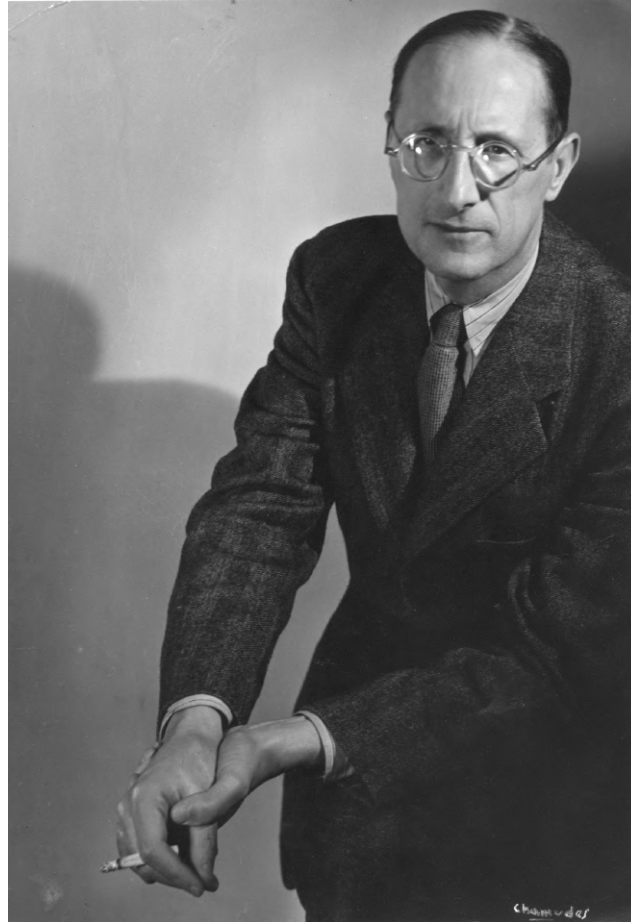
The happy arrival of Julián Marías to Wellesley in 1951 was preceded by a frenetic and agitated search for a possible substitute for Guillén, whose leave had been extended to cover the academic year 1951-52. The episode illustrates the importance of the informal networks that subtly determined the configuration of Hispanicism in the Spanish departments of American universities in the mid-20th century. It also shows a certain controlling attitude on the part of Pedro Salinas towards the department he had left behind. Sixteen years later, some of the same characters involved with the hiring of Salinas in 1935 would reappear.

Since the incorporation of Pedro Salinas to Wellesley in 1936, his substitution by his friend Jorge Guillén in 1940 (who completed his academic career there when he retired in 1957) and the incorporation of Justina Ruiz de Conde in 1941, the department began to occupy an important place in the social network of Spanish hispanists exiled in America. The presence of Amado Alonso at Harvard between 1947 and 1952 reinforced the synergies between the two most significant departments in the Boston area and with others in the Northeast where there was also a Spanish presence. Américo Castro was at Princeton from 1940 until 1953 (previously in Wisconsin, 1937-39), Ferrater Mora at Bryn Mawr from 1949, Ángel del Río at Columbia University until 1954 and Fernando de los Ríos at the New School of New York until the end of the 1940s. Federico de Onís was at Columbia until 1953, Luis Cernuda at Mount Holyoke from 1947 to 1952, Laura de los Ríos Giner at Barnard—with a stint at Wellesley as professor at the end of the 40s—and Francisco García Lorca, first at Queens College and from 1955 at Columbia. Joaquín Casaldueiro and Vicente Gaos were at Smith College from 1931 and from 1948 to 1950, respectively. We have already spoken of Juan Centeno’s presence at Middlebury as director beginning in 1931.

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<sup>24</sup> This is how the same Salinas presented himself at his last Wellesley conference (April 20, 1951), a few months before his death (P. Salinas, 1983, p. 434).

We know that in January 1951 Guillén wrote from Berkeley to Justina Ruiz de Conde, head of the department at the time, to let her know that Raimundo Lida<sup>25</sup> would not be available to take his place at Wellesley. Guillén was irritated by the fact that Lida hadn't informed him of this earlier: "He was sorry as well, but he is tethered to two masters: the Colegio de México and the *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*. Lida, or the eternal victim," commented Guillén with certain irony.<sup>26</sup>



**Image 8.** Jorge Guillén. Photo by Chamudes  
(Wellesley College Archives, Library and Technology Services, Wellesley College).

<sup>25</sup> Raimundo Lida had left Argentina for Mexico as an exile from Peronism. There he founded the *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, sponsored by the Colegio de México. In 1953 he substituted for Amado Alonso at Harvard. Alonso, who had been his professor in Buenos Aires, had also abandoned the country because of Peronism.

<sup>26</sup> JG to JRC, 1/30/1951. This is not the only irony in this situation. In an earlier letter, when he suggested Lida as a possible candidate to Ruiz de Conde, he was more caustic and warned her jokingly: "There is only one inconvenience for the rest of the Department and I ask you to keep it in the utmost reserve: Raimundo Lida is a man of the first order. For God's sake, don't let it be known! Say that he is nothing more than María Rosa Lida's brother" (JG to JRC, 1/7/1951).

At the beginning of this same year, Ruiz de Conde offered Salinas the opportunity to cover Guillén's second absence. Between the months of January and March of 1951, Pedro Salinas resisted the possibility of returning to Wellesley, mostly for economic reasons.<sup>27</sup> He had hoped to be able to combine this substitution with teaching at Harvard, but the offer from Amado Alonso, which finally arrived in March, was not satisfactory either. Besides, traveling back and forth from Cambridge would be taxing. After his own refusal, Salinas involved himself energetically in the search to cover his friend's position—in a way that was surprising for someone who had abandoned the department so long ago. The nostalgia for his years as a cultural administrator in the first half of the 30s in Spain appears not to have dissipated; or was it, perhaps, the wish to keep under his tutelage a department governed by women? So, on April 11 he wrote to Justina Ruiz de Conde to tell her that Dámaso Alonso had suggested Francisco López Estrada ("The other candidates I spoke to him about also seem to be good"), although Salinas was in favor of contacting José María Valverde.<sup>28</sup> He requested that the head of the department discuss this with him "when I go there, so as not to precipitate anything (my emphasis)," referring to his visit to the department to give what would be his last lecture, "Debt of a Poet," on April 20, 1951. In it, he shared the secrets of his own poetic creativity and explained how he transformed external reality into verse. In a way, it was the application of the method in *La realidad y el poeta* to his own poetry. His use of some specific examples allows us to understand how his viewpoint and sensibility lyrically transformed what he saw and experienced, particularly in the new environment of the United States.

<sup>27</sup> PS to JRC, 2/7/51, 3/5/51 and 3/7/51.

<sup>28</sup> José María Valverde (1926-1996) taught Spanish at the University of Rome between 1950 and 1955. Later he was a professor of Esthetics at the Universidad de Barcelona, until he abandoned the position in 1964 in solidarity with professors in Madrid who were expelled for political reasons (José Luis Aranguren, Enrique Tierno Galván and Agustín García Calvo). His academic exile led to teaching positions in the United States and Canada.

#### 4.1. Jorge Luis Borges and Wellesley: “Garden of Forking Paths”

It is very probable that during Salinas’s visit he heard that on the 7th of April Jorge Luis Borges had sent a peculiar letter of acceptance to the department from Buenos Aires. In this missive he expressed interest in the vacant position and he offered to teach: “Through Miss Mary Sweeney, I have learned that my name has been proposed as a visiting professor for the chair taught by Jorge Guillén at Wellesley College. I am honored that you have thought of me. I accept, in principle, but I dare to solicit some details about the materials I would teach, lodging, etc.”<sup>29</sup> Four days after Salinas’s visit to Wellesley (April 24), we learn from the letter he sent to his friend Guillén that, with the help of Amado Alonso, he was able to retract the ‘offer’ that Mrs. Sweeney had sent to Jorge Luis Borges (P. Salinas & Guillén, 1992, p. 571). In his letter, Salinas called Borges “a professional enemy of Spanish literature,” citing Amado Alonso, and he referred to Mary Sweeney as “the empty-headed Miss Sweeney.”<sup>30</sup> Let us remember that 15 years earlier she had been one of the people consulted by the head of the department before hiring Salinas, and had given him good references. In his biography of Borges, Marcos-Ricardo Barnatán notes that Mary Sweeney contacted the Argentine writer in the name of the College (Barnatán, 1995, p. 348).<sup>31</sup> Due to her affiliation with the Instituto Internacional, Sweeney was known by local hispanists, but didn’t work for the university.<sup>32</sup> There is no evidence that the department offered the position to Borges. It is more probable that Mary had spoken to him of the possibility and the writer had decided to write. “I have learned that my name has been proposed”

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<sup>29</sup> JLB to JRC, 4/7/1951.

<sup>30</sup> “The comic episode is that due to a giddy mistake on the part of the very good and empty-headed Mary Sweeney, Justina received a letter of acceptance (just like that, no less) from Jorge Luis 14, to whom she (Miss Sweeney) had written. Fortunately, Amado said very clearly that he is a professional enemy of Spanish literature, and that he could not be given any course in it. It is a small inconvenience, among others, for a Spanish professor!” (P. Salinas & Guillén, 1992, p. 571).

<sup>31</sup> It is also incorrect that the position was finally given to José María Valverde, “recommended by Dámaso Alonso” (Barnatán, 1995, p. 348).

<sup>32</sup> In one of those exquisite ironies of literary destiny, it was Salinas who introduced Mary Sweeney to Amado Alonso when he still lived in Argentina. He asked him for help with a trip she was making to Latin America, during which she would visit Buenos Aires, “facilitating access to people she desired to meet, in addition to sharing with her his personal experience of so many years in Argentina” (Salinas, P., June 21, 1938). *Carta a Amado Alonso*. Papers of Amado Alonso (Box HUGFP 80.10 Box 3. Pusey Library. Harvard University). It is not unreasonable to think that it was Amado Alonso himself who introduced Borges and Nora Sweeney.

is very different from having received a formal invitation from the department to teach. The same vagueness about the nature of the invitation—from someone as surgically precise with language as Borges was—is found in a letter that the Argentine wrote five days later to none less than Amado Alonso: “Mrs. Justina Ruiz de Conde, of Wellesley College (Massachusetts) invites me, *it seems* (my emphasis) to hold the position that until now has been filled by Jorge Guillén in that College”<sup>33</sup>. When this incident occurred, Borges lived with his mother and he made a living giving private lessons and sporadic conferences while the Perón regime, to the alarm of intellectuals, was growing ever closer to totalitarianism. For Borges, the situation had become notably complicated with the arrival of Peronism. As he explained in “Autobiographical Notes”:

In 1946, a president whose name I do not want to remember came into power. One day soon after, I was honored with the news that I had been “promoted” out of the library to the inspectorship of poultry and rabbits in the public markets. I went to the City Hall to find out what it was all about. “Look here,” I said. “It’s rather strange that among so many others at the library I should be singled out as worthy of this new position.” “Well,” the clerk answered, “you were on the side of the Allies—what do you expect?” His statement was unanswerable; the next day, I sent in my resignation. (Borges, 1970)

It is not surprising that in these circumstances Borges would cling to the confidence of a person external to the department to obtain a job outside the country and that he would venture to offer his services to Justina Ruiz de Conde. In fact, the author didn’t leave the area of Buenos Aires and the Río de la Plata between 1924 and 1961 (Williamson, 2004, p. 347).<sup>34</sup> When Borges wrote his letter to the department, he did not yet have a global reputation. He had written two notable story collections, *Ficciones* (1944) and *El Aleph* (1949), but public recognition did not arrive until the second half of the 1950s. With Perón no longer in power, he was named Director of the Biblioteca Nacional, and was awarded the Premio Nacional de Literatura in 1956 and the Prix International Formentor in 1961.

<sup>33</sup> Borges, J. L. (April 12, 1951). *Carta a Amado Alonso*. Papers of Amado Alonso (Box HUGFP 80.10 Box 1. Pusey Library. Harvard University).

<sup>34</sup> He finally arrived to the Boston area in 1962, when Raimundo Lida received him at Harvard. He returned in 1967-68 to impart the Norton Lectures. At the time he lived with his new wife, Elsa Astete, on Craigie Street in Cambridge. They had married in August of that same year. Juan Marichal (Salinas’s son-in-law, by the way) was department head at the time and was displeased with the not-infrequent absences of the Argentine writer (Williamson, 2004, pp. 370-377).



It occurs to me to venture a few hypotheses to explain the hostility of Salinas and Alonso towards the Argentine writer.<sup>35</sup> In the case of Alonso, his reticence may have resulted from a text that Borges wrote for the journal *Sur* in 1941. His article was titled “The Alarms of Doctor Américo Castro” and it was a criticism of the book the Spaniard had just published: *La peculiaridad lingüística rioplatense y su sentido histórico* (1941). Borges had responded sardonically to the criticisms Castro had made there of Argentine linguistic usage of Spanish and criticized his zeal in warning of local deviations from the use of “correct” Spanish, which for the Spanish philologist and literary critic was the one from the Peninsula. Américo Castro set sail for Buenos Aires in 1923 to take charge of the recently founded Instituto de Filología at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. Amado Alonso arrived to Argentina in 1927, named by Menéndez Pidal from Spain to take charge of the same institute. Given that none of their predecessors had lasted more than a year in the position—including Castro (1923-24)—Alonso decided to try to subvert the understanding of philology as another “imposition” by the Spaniards and attempted to open the institute to Argentinian culture (Lida, 2012, p. 107). Certainly, Borges's rejection of any peninsular pretension of linguistic or cultural hegemony over the Americas came from long ago. In 1927 he had already responded in exasperation to a survey launched by the journal *Martín Fierro*, challenging an article that had appeared in *La Gaceta Literaria* of Madrid that claimed the Spanish capital was central for the culture of the Americas (Burgos Jara, 2021, pp. 88-89).

It seems that the friction between Borges and Amado Alonso over Argentinian Spanish was not as great as that between Borges and Castro, at least until the fateful review in *Sur*. Alonso had written extensively and admiringly about Borges’s narrative and in 1935 he dedicated his book *El problema de la lengua en América Latina*: “To Jorge Luis Borges, companion in these concerns” (p. 11).

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<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that Salinas maintained an affable and professional correspondence with Guillermo de Torre, Borges's brother-in-law (he was married to his sister Norah Borges). Due to his work for Losada [publishing house] de Torre was crucial for the dissemination of Salinas’s work in exile, given the poet's refusal to be published in Spain (P. Salinas & de Torre, 2018).

We also know that, posteriorly, Borges spoke publicly and very critically about Lorca, who was a personal friend to Salinas as much as to Guillén, and whom they admired greatly as a creator. It seems that, during his trip to Spain in 1924, Borges met Lorca through Guillermo de Torre and he must have had a good impression of him, because in June of the following year he published two of his poems in *Proa*. When Lorca visited Buenos Aires in 1933,<sup>36</sup> Borges's admiration appeared to have waned, perhaps because of the fascination that the Andalusian poet inspired in Pablo Neruda, Norah Lange and Oliverio Girondo (Williamson, 2004, p. 196). In one of the conversations he had with Richard Burgin during the months he spent at Harvard (1967-68 academic year), Richard commented that Lorca was idealized in the United States, and Borges replied: "I suppose he had the good luck to be executed, no? I had an hour's chat with him in Buenos Aires. He struck me as a kind of play actor, no? Living up to a certain role. I mean being a professional Andalusian" (Burgin, 1969, p. 93).<sup>37</sup> It wouldn't have helped that Borges explained that when he first read *El Quijote* (a course he would have taught at Wellesley) it seemed to be a bad translation of the English-language version.<sup>38</sup> Although these opinions about Lorca and *Don Quixote* were documented long after the Wellesley episode, we do not know if similar statements would have already reached the ears of the two suspicious Spanish professors. We do know that Salinas, at a meeting of the Modern Language Association (MLA) shortly before the episode of the letter, had responded to a statement of contempt by Borges towards the poetic form of romance, which he had described as "poor" (P. Salinas & Guillén, 1992, pp. 551-552).

<sup>36</sup> He ended up spending 6 months there, from October 1933 to March 1934. He had arrived in the wake of the success that *Bodas de sangre* was having since its premier in July in Buenos Aires by the Lola Membrives company.

<sup>37</sup> During this same visit (1968) he said this in similar terms in an interview with Rita Guibert: "García Lorca seems to me quite a minor poet. His tragic death has favored his reputation. Of course, I like Lorca's poems, but they don't seem to me very important. His poetry is visual, decorative, not entirely serious; it's a sort of baroque entertainment" (Burgin, 1969, p. 69).

<sup>38</sup> "When later I read *Don Quixote* in the original, it sounded like a bad translation from the English version to me" (Borges, 1970).

Two days after Salinas's remark about Borges to Guillén (April 26), he again insisted on his candidate for Wellesley and urged the department head to contact him. He thought the young professor would be interested in the idea. "If you decide in his favor, you should write to him immediately." Valverde was in Rome, about to receive his doctorate. At the end of the letter, in manuscript, Salinas repeated: "Valverde seems excellent to me."<sup>39</sup>



**Image 9.** Justina Ruiz de Conde shows Jorge Guillén her book *El Cántico americano de Jorge Guillén*, from 1973 (Wellesley College Archives, Library and Technology Services, Wellesley College).

Finally, in a letter dated May 10, 1951, Justina Ruiz de Conde informed Pedro Salinas that Julián Marías had accepted her offer. It seemed, due to the tone of the letter, that the department head was somewhat irritated by his interference: "As you have concerned yourself so much with the department's problems, I send you these

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<sup>39</sup> PS to JRC, 4/26/1951.

lines to say that Julián Marías has decided to come to Wellesley, that we are all happy, and so we cannot invite José María Valverde. Many thanks for your interest in what goes on in these parts.”<sup>40</sup> Guillén, who apart from suggesting Lida as a candidate stayed out of the discussion, was delighted with the hiring of Marías and he told Justina so: “I’m really very pleased to have the honor—seriously—of being replaced by my countryman—also from Valladolid!—, the best that we have today in the Hispanic world.”<sup>41</sup> In that last letter from Berkeley he also confessed that “I will be happy not to encounter the unbearable polyglot savant.” Was he referring to Borges? We believe so.<sup>42</sup>

This episode in the search to replace Jorge Guillén illustrates an aspect of Salinas’s personality that has also been referred to by Montserrat Escartín in her excellent biography *Pedro Salinas, una vida de novela*, as a penchant for control: “Although don Pedro’s relationships were characterized by kindness, service to others and a generous attitude, it is also true that this intellectual mixed altruism with the need to control, a kind of *benevolent tyranny*, which took a heavy toll on his most intimate relationships” (Escartín Gual, 2019, 429; italics from the original).

## 5. Coda

Notably, the paths of Julián Marías and Borges crossed very soon afterwards in Buenos Aires. Upon the end of the academic year 1951-52 at Wellesley, Marías’s wife and the three children returned to Madrid and Marías began a trip to Latin America, first to teach a course in Peru, and later to visit Chile and Argentina, where he arrived two months after the death of Eva Perón (Julián Marías, 1989, pp. 35-49). Since 1950

<sup>40</sup> JRC to PS, 5/10/1951.

<sup>41</sup> JG to JRC, 6/23//1951.

<sup>42</sup> Mostly due to where the quote appears in the letter: “I will try to see don Pedro Salinas’s text with all possible discretion. (I will be happy not to encounter the unbearable polyglot savant.)” (JG to JRC, 6/23/1951).

Borges had been president of the Sociedad Argentina de Escritores (SADE), and after the death of Evita he received an uncomfortable visit by a couple of policemen who insisted that he hang the dead woman's portrait in the halls of the Sociedad as a mark of respect. Borges's refusal must have had serious consequences, because when Mariás arrived the peronists had just forced the institution to close. Borges wasn't able to receive the distinguished visitor as he would have liked, and in his place the members of SADE ended up roasting a lamb at a nearby tavern. After dessert, a concierge helped them gain furtive access to the locale of the Sociedad de Escritores, which they visited late at night (Williamson, 2004, pp. 320-321).

Borges finally visited Wellesley on the 28th of November, 1967, and gave a talk in English about the life and works of Coleridge that he titled "Biographia Literaria," like the British poet's autobiography (*Wellesley News*, 1967, p. 1). Of Jorge Guillén, Borges always had admiring words. He confessed to Marcos-Ricardo Barnatán: "I would give up all of my poetry for one of Jorge Guillén's verses" (Barnatán, 1995, p. 368). It seems that they were in contact during Borges's stay in Cambridge in 1967-68 (Burgin, 1969, p. 69). Guillén had given the same Norton Lectures at Harvard 10 years earlier, during 1957-58, just after retiring from Wellesley; these were published in the book *Lenguaje y poesía*. Borges's lectures at Harvard underwent a tortuous process until their publication in 2000, with the title *This Craft of Verse*,<sup>43</sup> because they were lost for decades and could only be recovered from audio recordings.

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<sup>43</sup> *Arte poética*, in Spanish.



**Image 10.** Jorge Luis Borges, probably during his visit to Wellesley in November 1967 (Encyclopedia Britannica. Courtesy of Wellesley College, Wellesley Massachusetts).

A month after giving his last lecture at Wellesley, Pedro Salinas wrote to Justina Ruiz de Conde: “I’m still plagued by my rheumatism, which gets continually worse. I’m being seen by doctors, but nothing has helped so far.”<sup>44</sup> His problem, as was later discovered, wasn’t rheumatism, but a painful cancer of the bone marrow.<sup>45</sup> Although he didn’t teach, Salinas was in Middlebury during this last summer of his life, considerably weakened. A few months later—December 4, 1951—he died at a

<sup>44</sup> PS to JRC, 5/15/51.

<sup>45</sup> In 1984, Katherine Whitmore died of the same disease (Garriga, 2013, p. 148).

Cambridge clinic to which he had been admitted a few weeks earlier. In a note read at a meeting of the Northeast Modern Language Association shortly after Salinas's death, Ruiz de Conde explained that his illness had been a painful one and the patient had known there was no cure since a couple of months before the end; he regretted not being able to complete multiple literary projects that were in process. In her tribute, the medievalist noted:

Seen more closely, Salinas was a great man and a good man at that. He had all the qualities of the true intellectual and none of his defects: he had intelligence, the faculty of synthesis, fantasy, skills of observation, the ability to admire, judge, connect and surprise himself and others. [...] He was a genius, but he was human, he was good. Hence the irresistible charm of his personality. That's why it was so easy to get close to him.<sup>46</sup>

It is unsurprising to see in this panegyric some of the characteristics of the poet's personality that had already appeared in remote reports from 1935. Time passes and yet it doesn't, and Javier Marías's invitation to "imagine that all its inhabitants from different periods coexist simultaneously in the same place" is tempting. So, as Salinas poetically distills his pain at the break with Katherine Reding, Javier Marías fabulates his relationship with Nabokov, Jorge Guillén takes notes for *Lenguaje y poesía*, Justina Ruiz de Conde writes about secret matrimonies in books of chivalry and elegantly resolves academic melodramas. A little farther away, Julián Marías and Jorge Luis Borges share a barbecue in Buenos Aires, unaware of the intrigues of Salinas and Alonso.

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<sup>46</sup> JRC, "Pedro Salinas", p. 3. Read at the N.E. Chapter of MLA around date of Salinas death (3P-Ruiz de Conde, Justina: Salinas – Correspondence, WCA).

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