Daniel Balderston,

Interviews with Borges.
Buenos Aires, August-September 1978

First conversation with Borges: 8 August 1978

DB: I would like to talk to you about your long-standing interest in Robert Louis Stevenson …

JLB: Ah, well. I think of Stevenson as a major writer. And I think that in a sense Chesterton was begotten by him. For example if you take the Father Brown Saga, and even if you take *The Man Who Was Thursday* and *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, though the plots may be better than Stevenson's plots, the whole thing happens in the same city, a kind of fairy London and that fairy London was invented or discovered by Stevenson when he wrote the *New Arabian Nights* around 1880. Stevenson invented the whole thing. If you take *The Suicide Club*, for example, or even *The Rajah's Diamond* which isn't as fine, you already are in Chesterton's London. And besides I think that Stevenson wrote finer English than Chesterton. Chesterton was sometimes rather blatant. He wrote at the top of his voice. With Stevenson, well, what he writes is more delicate, and there's a certain wistfulness about him, while in the case of Chesterton you may find Catholic propaganda or …

DB: As in the case of Chesterton's book about Stevenson, which starts out very well, but ends as propaganda.

JLB: That is a fine book. I think that those books that Chesterton wrote on other writers are very fine books … But Stevenson was a great writer. I wonder why he's disregarded today. You don't know why?

DB: Well, everyone has read him when young, and maybe tends to forget about him afterwards …

JLB: I think it may harm a writer to write books for children, because people think of him as being, well not child-like, but as being childish. I

think that has hurt Kipling's reputation also. So I think it's hardly wise for a writer to write books for children, because people think of him …

DB: Think of all of his work …

JLB: Yes, they forget the rest of his work, and they think, well, of course, Stevenson wrote *A Child's Garden of Verses*, he wrote *Treasure Island*, which is a very fine book by the way, but they forget that he also wrote *Weir of Hermiston* and *The Ebb-Tide,* and that very fine detective novel *The Wrecker* he wrote in collaboration with … [cannot remember]

DB: Lloyd Osbourne …

JLB: Yes, with Lloyd Osbourne, his stepson. One of the finest books I should say. And nobody seems to have read it.

DB: Well, I've read it several times …

JLB: Have you?

DB: And I'm also delighted with it.

JLB: The character of Pinkerton is the best picture of an American ever given. But not too unkind either … Then, when they're writing of San Francisco … Oh, such a fine book. Of course in *The Wrecker* you unhappily find what you find in many of Stevenson's books, that the plot isn't too good.

DB: Well, I find the plot of *The Wrecker* very interesting: it's rather formless at first, but then at a certain point, with the discovery of the photograph, I found it gripping until the end, more than a hundred pages later.

JLB: Yes. Well, generally speaking, of course Stevenson knew he could do anything with any plot. He just went ahead. Some of his books are rather plotless, or the plots are rather pointless.

DB: *The Dynamiter*, for example, or *The Wrong Box*.

JLB: Those books are hardly worth reading or hardly worth writing.

DB: They are amusing though.

JLB: Well, because he knew he could do anything. I mean, he felt that he was almighty and he knew that he could attempt anything. Very sure of himself.

DB: You've spoken about *The Wrecker* before, but you've never developed your reasons for judging it one of the finest books. What in that book would you point to as especially remarkable?

JLB: I think the characters. You can say the same thing of Wilkie Collins's detective novels. The characters are more important than the plot. In the case of Stevenson, the characters obviously are more important than the plot- in the case of *The Wrecker*, for example- far more important, far more meaningful. I remember another book of his- well, of course, I have read and reread *The Master of Ballantrae*, and *Weir of Hermiston* I should say is the finest book of all. I think his poems are very fine also.

DB: I'm not prepared to agree with you about that. I'm a great admirer of his prose …

JLB: But you don't like his poems? [Recites "Requiem."] That has a new ring to it. It doesn't sound like English, it sounds almost Scandinavian- the *i* sounds, "Glad did I live and gladly die/ And I lay me down with a will." Maybe there's something Scottish about it. [Long digression on Scotland, New England, etc.] So, you're writing an essay or a thesis?

DB: A thesis. On Stevenson and Borges.

JLB: I'm highly honored. I remember I wrote a small piece called "Borges and I," and there I wrote a list of things I liked; among them were the taste of coffee, the prose of Stevenson.

DB: The only writer you mentioned in that piece.

JLB: The only writer, yes. Well, when I was a boy I read *Treasure Island*. I have also read many books by a friend of Stevenson's, I've quite forgotten his name … Andrew Lang. He has a fine essay on Stevenson in that book called …

DB: *Adventures Among Books*?

JLB: Yes. And I think also that in *Essays in Little* there's something on Stevenson. They were close friends. And now people only remember Andrew Lang through his translations of Homer.

DB: People also remember his fairy tales.

JLB: Yes. A very fine writer. A very light touch.

DB: Stevenson had a very light touch too.

JLB: Yes, he had, yes.

DB: You've spoken of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* here and there as a detective story …

JLB: [Heatedly] No, no, no. What I meant was this. I've not spoken of it as a detective story. Of course it isn't, no. Let us say that the book was read as a detective story, so the end came as a surprise. For nobody could think of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde as being the same man. Besides, you are told that one is dark, that the other has a light complexion, and one is taller than the other. That makes all the difference.

DB: And older, also.

JLB: Yes. So that I think that the very surprising fact is that when the story has been taken to the cinema, they have never thought of having two different actors, so that no one could possibly guess the end of the story.

DB: But I wonder if there's anyone left in the Western world who would be so naive as not to know.

JLB: No, not if you change the names. Let's say the plot line is different, that you had two actors- two actors quite unlike each other- not called of course Jekyll and Hyde because that would give the trick away. No one could guess that the two men were the same … It's very strange. I have seen three or four films and they always make the same mistake: they have the same actor for the two parts, and then you see the change and you shouldn't be allowed to see it. You should have a story, like any other detective story, and then why on earth should you suppose that the two characters are the same man. No one supposes that. You'd be taken in, as everybody was taken in when the book was published … *Jekyll and Hyde* came before *The Picture* [sic] *of Dorian Gray*. And Stevenson wrote far better than Wilde. Wilde wrote a very decorative prose. Stevenson was a finer writer. Wilde knew it of course. Besides, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is full of padding. You don't get padding in Stevenson. He knew what he was doing. I remember that other poem of Stevenson's: "And the great woods are shrill. / So far have I been led, / Lord, by Thy will."[1] I like Stevenson as a poet… But Stevenson must have died quite a young man.

DB: He was forty-four.

JLB: Forty-four. At the beginning of a career. Of course, in those days forty-four was maybe what fifty-four is today, or sixty-four.

DB: But it was young. Everybody thought he died young.

JLB: He would have finished *Weir of Hermiston*.

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[1] From "Evensong", in Stevenson, *Works* (New York: Scribner's, 1906), XVI, 265.

DB: But have you read the projected plot of that?

JLB: Yes, I have.

DB: The projected ending of *Weir* is terribly melodramatic; it is just as well that the book ends where it does. It was to end with the father condemning the son to the gallows.

JLB: Yes. I suppose any reader would spot that from the beginning. He's a hanging judge. You know that will be the end. But I don't think that matters.

DB: It's worked out by a whole series of coincidences.[2]

JLB: Yes, I know. But in the case of Stevenson every sentence is so fine, the whole thing is a joy. Remember when he meets the girl, I think he wants to know whether she's capable of feeling, of thinking, or whether she was just an animal the color of flowers. I remember that sentence.

DB: It's when he sees here in church.

JLB: Yes. I also think of a very fine book of Stevenson's as being *The Ebb- Tide*. Do you think so?

DB: Yes. It's very much like Conrad.

JLB: It is. And it came before Conrad.

DB: Conrad obviously knew Stevenson's works backwards and forwards.

JLB: Do you know what French writer was very fond of Stevenson?

DB: Marcel Schwob was.

JLB: Yes, and André Gide.

DB: Oh, yes, I remember seeing some journal entries. He wrote …

JLB: No, wait a minute, it will come back to me. "Si la vie le grise"- grise is to make someone lightly drunk. "Si la vie le grise/ C'est comme … [unintelligible] de champagne." He wrote that of Stevenson.[3] Stevenson would have liked that. He was fond of champagne. I suppose Stevenson has given more happiness than any other writer. He's given happiness to thousands of people. And "Markheim" is a very fine story also.

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[2] See Colvin's note, XX, 153-57.

[3] Source unknown. Nothing remotely like this occurs in the editions of Gide's works which I have consulted. However, there are numerous references to Stevenson.

DB: I felt that it reminded me too much of *Crime and Punishment*, but that may not have been your reaction.

JLB: I wonder if Stevenson had ever read *Crime and Punishment*.

DB: He read it in French translation.

JLB: Well, but the whole thing's very different. [Goes on about Dostoevsky's careless style, and Dickens and Cervantes, and Twain and Kipling.]

DB: Well, ***Kidnapped*** is much the same [as *Huckleberry Finn*] too.

JLB: Yes, that's true.

DB: What would you say about *Kidnapped*? It's not one of your favorites, is it?

JLB: No, not too much. I think the essays are very fine. His theory of style. I don't think anybody could write, if he kept on thinking about the syllables and sounds [which Stevenson discusses in "Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature"]. If you're so self-conscious you couldn't write a line.

DB: But he has some very fine essays about literature which do not seem especially self-conscious.

JLB: I was just thinking of that particular essay on prose style. I think he takes a paragraph or a sentence from Milton and examines it. And he goes through all the sounds. I suppose Stevenson is right, some of that kind of thing is done unconsciously. Perhaps versifying cannot be done consciously either. I know that I have attempted verse, but I think you should let a thing write itself out. If you are worrying about the sounds, you are apt to add to the problem … [Long digression about the *Arabian Nights*.]

DB: What do you think of the relation of the *New Arabian Nights* to the Arabian Nights? Is there any?

JLB: Well, there is. Of course there is a relation. You have the Caliph and his vizir, and then you have Prince Florizel and Geraldine … and that's that.

DB: And from time to time they interfere in people's affairs, manage them. I think that's more noticeable, maybe, in *The Dynamiter*, where the vast number of incidents and plots all turn out to be managed by them, from the tobacco shop.

JLB: I don't know *The Dynamiter*. I thought it quite a bad story. You like it?

DB: I was amused by it.

JLB: Well, I was amused too, in a very mild way. The finest story is *The Suicide Club*, the finest of the set of stories. But *The Rajah's Diamond* is very inferior. And yet … they were all written by Stevenson. I remember a story called "The Story of the Fair Cuban."

DB: That's in *The Dynamiter*.

JLB: That's quite bad I'd say. I've forgotten all that. You see, I read all those books ever so long ago. I lost my sight for reading purposes in 1957 or so. And since then I haven't looked at the books. People come and see me and then they read aloud to me. So I live surrounded by books I can't read and yet I keep on buying books … [Digression about German encyclopedias, then about Anglo Saxon, then about the fact that the name California was taken from a romance of chivalry, then about the founding of Buenos Aires.]

DB: We were talking about Anglo Saxon. I was wondering if you remember Stevenson's interest in the Norse material also, in the *Fables*?

JLB: Of course I do. In one of the *Fables* we get the name of Odin. Do you remember? That's "Faith, Half-Faith and No Faith." Where the nightingale sings. Wait, not the nightingale, where the peacock sings.

DB: And one other story I'm very fond of is "The Song of the Morrow." Do you remember that?

JLB: Of course I do. I never could puzzle it out exactly, could you?

DB: Well, it's obviously a treatment of the idea of circular time.

JLB: Yes, but at the same time it's worded in such a strange way. Yes, of course I remember it.

DB: The old woman … the old hag on the beach.

JLB: Yes, and there's a king's daughter, no?

DB: Yes.

JLB: I remember that … Do you know where I found a refutation of circular time? In St. Augustine's *City of God* … [Etc.] The *Fables* are very fine, eh? We also have the emblems, I think they were illustrated by him.

DB: Yes, that Lloyd Osbourne did on his little press when he was a boy.

JLB: Oh, Lloyd Osbourne did that … Did you read that book on Stevenson by Stephen Gwynn? In the English Men of Letters series.[4]

DB: No, that's a book I haven't read.

JLB: I have it. I suppose there are many books on Stevenson. Andrew Lang wrote several essays about him.

DB: Have you read Leslie Stephen's essay on Stevenson?

JLB: He was the editor of the English Men of Letters series. [Goes on about Stephen without answering question] … I don't know if Andrew Lang wrote anything else on Stevenson. I don't think so. Now, Kipling has many references to Stevenson, especially in that book of his called *Something of Myself*, a sort of autobiography. There was hardly anything he wrote of himself … Now, here in this country I don't know if Stevenson is widely read.

DB: Well, I've noticed in the last few days that there are new translations and editions of some things.

JLB: Well, there should be.

DB: Also in French they're republishing a lot of Stevenson. They've published a translation of *The Wrecker* in French in the last two or three years.

JLB: Ah, but they should. One of the finest books. *The Wrecker*, yes.

DB: It hasn't been republished in English since about 1928.

JLB: Because everybody has read *Treasure Island* and that's that. *Treasure Island* was written in a short time. He wrote a chapter every day for Lloyd Osbourne. He must have been a charming man, Stevenson. Everybody liked him. He had a strange taste In French letters. He greatly admired Jules Verne, for example.[5] The English seem to admire French minor writers.

DB: Well, he admired Hugo.

JLB: He admired Baudelaire and I greatly dislike Baudelaire. I think he's just a French superstition… [The conversation wanders for a few more minutes, until the maid comes in to serve Borges his lunch.]

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[4] Stephen Gwynn, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Macmillan, 1939).

[5] This is not at all fair. Stevenson's review of a translation of some of Verne's stories is quite critical of Verne's pedestrian imagination.

Second conversation with Borges: 15 August 1978

JLB: [After talking for several minutes out of the blue about the disappearance of blacks from Buenos Aires after 1910.] I was thinking of that very strange remark you made about Stevenson the last time we met. You said that anybody would have guessed that Jekyll and Hyde were the same man. I don't think anybody would have guessed that. Have you ever suspected that Sherlock Holmes is really the Hound of the Baskervilles? Well, no, you haven't … Have you ever suspected that Hamlet may be Claudius?

DB: Well, not the first reader, but the second reader would know I think, because it immediately became the subject of sermons, and …

JLB: Yes, I know. That's why I said that. So when the subject is taken for a film, they should change the names and nobody would suspect anything. I mean, they have two… Here they made a film of it – they talked it over with me, they wanted me to write a script, I did[6]- but I told them I can give you a piece of my advice: Have two actors, one actor quite unlike the other to be Jekyll and the other to be Hyde, and then change their names also, and you could even change the whole plot. You would need a villain and then you would need somebody who's somebody else. And nobody could possibly guess. You would never guess that. That George Barrymore could be really William Powell -nobody would guess that. They're totally unlike each other. But it's never been done, I don't know why. They always insist on the transformation scene which is not important at all. That might be left out. When you know that one man becomes another, then you consider the whole thing becomes a trick, you don't believe in it. If you ever have anything to do with a film, firstly: avoid that trick, which is very ugly really you know, when you see a man who suddenly becomes very ugly … All that scene should be avoided. The whole thing is a trick and you can't believe in it. But you might have two actors, and then if at the end you are told that one is the other, you'd be thunderstruck. Of course the names must be changed because everyone knows about Jekyll and Hyde. Those strange names, by the way … Jekyll … I wonder if he invented it.[7] Of course all names are possible in English.

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[6] I do not know anything more about this project: whether Borges in fact wrote such a filmscript, whether the film was ever made, etc.

[7] Nabokov in his lecture on the novella says that the name Jekyll is of Scandinavian origin and means "icicle." See *Lectures on Literature*, (Fredson Bowers, ed. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovivh, 1980), p. 182.

DB: I think it's a Scottish name, but it's certainly not common.

JLB: Now Hyde is. Because remember that Stevenson met a Mr. Hyde, in the Pacific Islands, and that he wrote against him. Do you remember?

DB: Oh, part of the leper colony dispute? *Father Damien*?

JLB: Yes, that's it. He defended Father Damien against the Reverend So-and-so Hyde.[8] That's very strange, that he finally met Mr. Hyde … I wonder what I could say to you … Well, I've been reading and rereading Stevenson all along my too long life.

DB: When do you remember reading Stevenson first?

JLB: When I was a boy. I must have been about eight or nine I think. I remember the edition. There was a picture of -what's the name? On the cover there was a picture of John Silver. That must have been around… that was before 1910. I must have read those books when I was -I must have been eight or nine, I suppose, when I began reading Stevenson.

DB: *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*.

JLB: *Treasure Island* and the *New Arabian Nights*. Of course, when one is a child one accepts all things. One hardly judges a book. I mean, I read the novels of Eduardo Gutiérrez and. I thought they were quite as good as Stevenson …

DB: And when you, say you've been rereading Stevenson all along, do you remember particular points when you reread him?

JLB: Well, before I wrote that book called *Historia universal de la infamia*, well, I was "playing the sedulous ape" to Stevenson. Of course Stevenson had a very light touch, and I was rather heavy-handed. But Stevenson always wrote as if he were quite unaware of what fine things he was writing. I mean he wrote easily. He was never self-conscious. We would never think of him as being self-conscious. Maybe he was self-conscious.

DB: I think he was self-conscious in the early essays.

JLB: He must have been. But of course when he found his style, he went on. [Talks about Gibbon.]

DB: …Thinking back to that same period when you were working on *Historia universal de la infamia*.

JLB: [interrupting] Well, I was feeling my way to the writing of stories but I was too shy, so I began by writing a series of parodies, or I began

[8] See IV, 413-32.

by telling the truth and then I went on to invention, but I was of course -I think I said so in the foreword- that I was aping Stevenson and Chesterton. But Chesterton came from Stevenson.

DB: So you think of those two influences as being basically one?

JLB: Practically one, yes. But when I wrote that book I was striving after something which I haven't attempted afterwards: I wanted to be visual all the time, because I went to the cinema, and I wanted every page to be like a scene on the stage or on the screen …

DB: Or a cut …

JLB: Yes, that's what I wanted, but now I think it is better for a book not to be too visual. For example, today, when I write now I would never use colors. I don't want to be picturesque. I hate that kind of thing now. I try to be straightforward, and more or less neutral.

DB: Well, Stevenson comes out on both sides of that question, because on the one hand he says in "A Gossip on Romance" that there should be scenes which "stamp the story home like an illustration," and on the other, a few years later, he says in a letter to James, "Death to the optic nerve!," which I don't think you've ever cited [in print], but Bianco told me you once walked around quoting all the time.

JLB: "Death to the optic nerve." That's not too good a maxim, I should say.

DB: He said he had two maxims in mind while working on *Catriona* or *David Balfour*, "Death to the optic nerve," …

JLB: But of course if he said that it was because he knew that he stood in danger of being too visual, I think he was in a sense defending himself. Because if not, most writers don't have to say that. For example in the case of Henry James you never see anything, and I don't think he ever saw anything; I don't think he would have spotted one of his own characters on the street. The whole thing was -as they say in Scotland- very *innerly*. And the other maxim was …?

DB: The second one was "War to the adjective," which is always a good maxim, no?

JLB: Always, yes. I think that especially in the case of poetry that's all to the good. [Goes on about adjectives in Rossetti.]

DB: I wanted to ask about *Historia universal*, whether some of the interest you had at that time in Stevenson's style was due to conversations with Alfonso Reyes, who was here about that time …

JLB: Well, Alfonso Reyes is perhaps the finest prose writer in the language. I don't think the Spanish ever produced anybody like Reyes. Because Cervantes wrote quite badly. Quevedo wrote in a very stilted style. Contemporary Spanish writers are very poor. The fact is I hardly read any Spanish literature. Reyes wrote in a very fine style. And then of course the influence of England and of France … I knew Reyes personally. He was a very fine man. He translated Chesterton into Spanish.

DB: He also translated Stevenson … *Olalla*.

JLB: Ah yes, of course. I remember that story. It's not one of the best stories of Stevenson.

DB: No, but his translation is very good.

JLB: And it came from a dream, remember?

DB: Yes. And you know where the name comes from? Olalla?

JLB: It's a Spanish name.

DB: But it's not a very common Spanish name. It's a nickname for Eulalia which occurs in one of the pastoral episodes in the *Quijote*.[9]

JLB: I didn't know that. I thought of Olalla as being a Spanish name. So of course he must have found it there, because he must have read *Don Quijote* …

DB: Reyes makes a great number of references to Stevenson in his works.

JLB: Yes, but he said to me that he was a "clásico menor," he said to me once, because he thought maybe that I was overpraising Stevenson. And then in order to right that he said that. Stevenson was a "clásico menor," a minor classic.

DB: He especially admired the style of Stevenson.

JLB: Of course. Well, but in the case of Reyes, it's a great pity that he should not be given his due, since after all I think a writer should write a book, while in the case of Reyes, and of Groussac also, the only thing they left was their style. [Goes on about Reyes and Groussac.]

DB: What, other friends of the twenties and thirties do you remember talking about Stevenson and Chesterton with?

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[9] See *Don Quijote*, vol. I, chap. 11.

JLB: In the twenties? I wonder, because I knew Bioy Casares later on, and he is a. great reader of Stevenson and of Dr. Johnson also. But in those days, I wonder. I don't think Macedonio Fernández had any use for Stevenson. He greatly admired Mark Twain. He always liked to be reminded that he was physically rather like Mark Twain …

DB: What about Pedro Henríquez Ureña? He was interested in Stevenson; he wrote a few things about him.

JLB: He must have been. But I wonder if we spoke much about him. [Goes on to talk about Henríquez Ureña's difficulties in Spain and Argentina because he was always a foreigner, then about nationalism in Argentina and in the United States.]

DB: What about the *Antología de la literatura fantástica*?

JLB: I think that that book made for good. I think that that book is an encouraging book, because here everybody was writing more or less realistic stories, and then that that book showed them the possibility of something else. I think it had a great deal of influence on Argentine literature.

DB: Well, not only on Argentine literature … in the whole continent.

JLB: Perhaps. We worked on it very very carefully. Even those many short notes and paragraphs. We poured all that we had read into that book.

DB: You poured all you had read and yet I notice there are no Stevenson passages in there. There are in some of the other anthologies but not in that one. How do you explain that?

JLB: Perhaps we thought that no single story was very good. And yet we might have attempted "The Bottle Imp," for example.

DB: Yes, that's short enough.

JLB: Or "Markheim," though "'Markheim" is hardly a fantastic story.

DB: Or one that I'm very fond of, "The Merry Men." That's a bit longer though. I think that's quite a remarkable story.

JLB: Yes, I remember it now. I have all the stories here. Well, I think the finest story he ever wrote was "The Suicide Club."

DB: And that's not a fantastic story?

JLB: Well, it's different than a fantastic story. It's not fantastic in the sense of there being ghosts, for example.

DB: It's not fantastic within the bounds of the anthology, then?

JLB: No, it's not. But it is really a fantastic story, because it's not realistic. It's not meant to be taken realistically. And then the last story where the where the Prince kills the President of the Suicide Club is a fine story.

DB: "The Adventure of the Hansom Cab."

JLB: Yes, "The Hansom Cab," that's it.

DB: I was just rereading it last night …

JLB: I was rereading it about a fortnight ago. What a fine story it is. What a fine story. Then the fact of the duel being unseen. And then of the Doctor being there, Noel, a close friend of the President.

DB: One Stevenson piece you do include in the very next of your anthologies is a bit of *The Master of Ballantrae*, do you remember? In *Los mejores cuentos policiales*.

JLB: Yes, the dream. The dream about the murder in Rome.

DB: Now, I was interested in that because the anthology is called *Los mejores cuentos policiales*, and yet I think you're the only people who have ever noticed that that's a detective story, which it is.[10]

JLB: But it is a detective story, of course it is, Yes, perhaps we were, for all I know. And of course Stevenson was interested in them. He called them "police novels." Do you remember?

DB: In the epilogue to *The Wrecker*.

JLB: Well, *The Wrecker* is one of his finest books. I think people overlook it because it was done in collaboration with Lloyd Osbourne. I think it's overlooked because of that. Now, Bernard Shaw pointed out that the influence of Lloyd Osbourne on Stevenson was a good one, since Lloyd Osbourne made him stick to his plot …[11]

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[10] I was mistaken about this. Dorothy Sayers had already included the same excerpt in her 1936 anthology *Tales of Detection*, (London: Dent, 1963; Everyman's Library no. 928), pp. 49-52. In the introduction she calls the excerpt, which she entitles "Was It Murder?," "an excellent early example of the 'perfect murder' that seeks to baffle justice by escaping beyond the range or legal and material proof" (p. xiii).

[11] I have not found anything remotely like this in any of Shaw's works or letters, or in any of his biographies.

DB: … to a fairly rigorous one …

JLB: Yes, because if not …

DB: … a rather practical young man …

JLB: Yes. But he did no writing of his own, no?

DB: He did, later, but I haven't read it. It's supposed to be quite terrible. He wrote a great deal, long after Stevenson was dead…

JLB: I supposed I read on Stevenson, I read Chesterton's book, and then Stephen Gwynn's book. You know that book?

DB: No.

JLB: In the English Men of Letters series. He's a Scottish writer.

DB: I remember reading Janet Adam Smith's book, a biography.

JLB: That's a good book, no? And then Bioy had the first book to be written, the first one after the death of Stevenson. I don't remember the name of the author.

DB: A man by the name of Sir Walter Raleigh, of all things, I think.

JLB: Ah, well, of course. He wrote on Shakespeare also.

DB: It's just a lecture really, a very short piece.

JLB: And then I think Mr. George Moore must have written on Stevenson, but I think against Stevenson.

DB: What about the James essays on Stevenson?

JLB: Well, I think they're very good, no? They were close friends.

DB: Yes, and he wrote two or three essays.

JLB: Then Kipling, no, I think Kipling refers to Stevenson, but I don't think he ever wrote, well, Kipling never wrote essays as far as I know. He wrote newspaper articles and …

DB: Wells never wrote anything as far as I know.

JLB: And yet … Of course Stevenson was a finer writer than Wells. But Wells had a great imagination I should say. Don't you think so? I mean when Wells began writing, Wells began by being a young man of genius, and then he went on to being a mere journalist I should say, no? When he wrote his encyclopedias and histories of the world. [Goes on about rereading Wells, Cervantes, Eduardo Gutiérrez, and rereading in general.]

DB: About collaboration, since we've spoken about Stevenson's books with Lloyd Osbourne and also Stevenson's book with his wife, *The Dynamiter* …

JLB: I always thought that collaboration was impossible until I met Bioy Casares… A very important thing if you're writing in collaboration is that you shouldn't think of yourself and the other man, you should think of both as making a third man. [Goes on about his collaborations with Bioy. Calls *Un modelo para la muerte* "an awful book" in which "the plot is smothered under details and jokes, and jokes compounded out of jokes." Much later:]

DB: When you think, of the collaborations: that Stevenson did, you say the books are underrated because of the collaboration, and yet …

JLB: Yes, I think that people like to know whom they are expected to admire. If you read a collaboration, and you don't know, then you feel you can't tell whether the book is a good book or not …

DB: And yet, Stevenson's books with Lloyd Osbourne …

JLB: If you read a book written by a single author, then you know who's to blame or who's to praise.

DB: But the books he did with Lloyd Osbourne one thinks of as his, somehow. Don't you feel that those books came mostly from him?

JLB: They must have come from him.

DB: And then, the book with his wife is a weaker book, *The Dynamiter* …

JLB: Quite a bad book I should say.

DB: So one is content to think the weakness comes from her.

JLB: Maybe. She was older than Stevenson, no?

DB: Yes, eleven years older.

JLB: What a pity that Stevenson was not allowed to write poems about physical love. He would have done that wonderfully. Don't you think so?

DB: Yes, that's true, there's nothing at all.

JLB: The age did not allow him. The century wouldn't allow him. He would have written very fine erotic poetry, but he never did.

DB: He is supposed to have written an erotic novel which his wife destroyed.

JLB: I didn't know that.

DB: Something about a prostitute …[12] She was a sort of a censor, much like Mark Twain's wife.

JLB: Or much like Lady Burton.

DB: Yes, but not as bad. Because she also insisted on rewritings of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* to make it more moral.

JLB: Oh, did she? It's a pity, because that's the one fault of the book … They always make a mistake in the films -they make Hyde a very sensual man, while Stevenson insisted on his cruelty. He never said that he was sensual … In the first scene when Hyde tramples the child down … I think he said that the major sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost was cruelty. He never thought that sensuality was wrong. Stevenson in his own life was not a chaste man … Why should he be? … And yet in the films they always make Hyde go in for drunkenness and whore-mongering. It's not to be found in the book. That's never implied in the book, or said.

DB: One of the things in one of the James essays I remember is that James thought that Stevenson's life ended up eclipsing his work.

JLB: Perhaps.

DB: The danger of becoming a Figure … What happened with Stevenson's life in the mind of the public was that it exerted a kind of fascination: the sick man, the whole fascination of tuberculosis, and then the trip to the South Seas.

JLB: Yes, but the tuberculosis was not his choice, he's not to be blamed. On the contrary, that was his fate.

DB: But what do you think about the relation between a writer's life and work?

JLB: A writer's life may help him. It may be helpful. But he never went in for blustering as did Henley. I don't know why, I looked up in a book of verses of Henley and I found they were not good at all: "Out of the night that covers me, / Black as the pity from pole to pole, / I thank whatever gods may be / For my unconquerable soul."[13] Well, Stevenson never went as far down as that. Don't you find those verses are

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[12] George Hellman was the first, I believe, to come forward with this story in his *The True Stevenson* (1925), but the story has since been disproved by Furnas in his biography *Voyage to Windward* (New York: William Sloane, 1951), pp. 458-463.

[13] From Henley's poem "Invictus," as are the famous lines which Borges refers to next, "I am the master of my fate/ I am the captain of my soul."

very bad? He says, "whatever gods may be," that's a quotation, the only good thing, and then "I am the captain of my soul," how could anybody say that? He must have been a ridiculous person. And yet Kipling delighted in him, and so did Wells.

DB: What do you think of the plays they wrote together, Stevenson and Henley? Do you remember them?

JLB: Those plays are quite bad, I should say. Don't you think so? Very childish. It's a very strange thing. England produced -well, Shakespeare and so on- and yet in the nineteenth century the theater was nowhere until Ibsen and Shaw came along. And then Oscar Wilde. And even Oscar Wilde pandered to the mob all the time, I mean, very sick and sentimental. It's a very strange thing. The play was not taken seriously in England.

DB: Well, the writers thought of it as a way of making money. James thought of it that way too.

[Enter another visitor]: Buenos días, Señor Borges.

JLB: Well, another visitor is here. I'll have to leave you.

[After I turnerd off the tape recorder, Borges said goodbye to me, and, apropos of the visitor, who was from Paraguay, asked me if I knew the dictator of Paraguay. I thought he was referring to Stroessner, and said, "The present one?" He said, "No, no, the dictator of Paraguay, the one with the big saber cut on his cheek," and it turned out that he was talking about John Vandeleur, the ex-dictator of Paraguay, a character in "The Rajah's Diamond."]

Third conversation with Borges: 6 September 1978

DB: Quería preguntarle sobre un par de cosas de las que no hablamos las otras veces.

JLB: Sí, cómo no. Go ahead.

DB: En "A Gossip on Romance," que es uno de los ensayos, muy importantes para Ud. y para Bioy, hay una especie de dicotomía que se establece entre la importancia del personaje en la narrativa y la importancia de la trama.

JLB: Sí, recuerdo, sí. "A Gossip on Romance."

DB: Por los años 30 y los primeros años de los 40 eso parece influir en sus ideas de la literatura fantástica, ¿no?

JLB: Posiblemente. Recién estaba releyendo el libro de Bertrand Russell sobre Leibniz, *La monadología*. Dice que todo lo que le sucede a un hombre está en él, o como dice Heráclito, que el carácter de un hombre es su estilo. Entonces el ejemplo que da -que da Leibniz o que da Russell, no recuerdo bien -César atraviesa el Rubic6n, pero atravesar el Rulbicón es parte del carácter de César, y así era previsto por Dios. En una novela es lo mismo: lo que le sucede a un personaje -las aventuras de Alonso Quijano son atributos o adjetivos de él. Miré, I have dug up mi edición de Stevenson, ¿quiere verla? ¿Vamos a verla?[14]

[We go into the other room and look at the edition of Stevenson's *Works*.]

JLB: How good a writer he was, no? ¿No le parece? He wrote so generously about minor writers, about Jules Verne for example. I wonder if he knew how good he was.

DB: He gained the respect of writers he liked the most, like Meredith and James.

JLB: Meredith and James, of course, and Kipling.

DB: In another essay to which you refer rather often, he says, "These verbal puppets… are only strings of words and parts of books."

JLB: But I wonder if that is true. I don't believe that characters in fiction are only strings of words.

DB: It's literally true.

JLB: But of course somehow we have the illusion that even when we're not being told about them they go on existing. The same thing is true of their dreams, although those dreams may not be revealed to us. One thinks of characters as far more than strings of words. Of course they're actually strings of words. The art and the talent of the writer consists of making us feel that they exist, let's say, beyond these words. Don't you think so?

DB: Yes, and I think that's exactly the point that Stevenson had also. He said that there is an emanation from their maker, but their actual flesh and blood is just technical skill.

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[14] At the time of my previous visits, Borges's edition of Stevenson's *Works* (the Thistle Edition) was being stored at Emecé along with many of his other books, which would not fit into the apartment on Maipú after his divorce and the death of his mother.

JLB: The Victorians were very sceptical about language; they thought it was strange that living characters could be brought about by means of words. They thought of words as being very stiff and clumsy, no? But of course you're right, they are technically strings of words, but if the reader thinks of them as strings of words, then the writer has failed.

DB: So at the point, thinking of that quotation you would tend to react against it.

JLB: Yes. I think that, for example, if you read a book of illustrations, you may think of those illustrations as just added, that the characters are what they say, not what someone has imagined them to look like, and the proof is that most writers have greatly disliked their illustrators. [Gives examples of Meredith, Lewis Carroll, James.] I found a first edition of Stevenson with quite bad illustrations, the first edition of *Island Nights*' Entertainments. The illustrations are quite bad. It was published in 1893 or 1894, not long before he died. He died at Vailima, no? I found a delightful essay by Andrew Lang in a book of essays called …

DB: *Adventures Among Books*?

JLB: *Adventures Among Books*, yes. A long essay he wrote on Robert Louis Stevenson. It begins by some verses, "Tusitala, the teller of tales, / A wonder, a world's delight."[15] They were fast friends. Andrew Lang was a very fine writer also. And yet somehow he's vanished, eh? [Goes on about Lang.]… But I am very pleased that you should be writing this about me, because I owe much to Stevenson. And here people think of him as only writing books for children. Nobody thinks of him as being let's say a major writer. Though in France people do -André Gide did.

DB: Schwob did also.

JLB: Marcel Schwob did. Marcel Schwob is not thought of as being a major writer; he's a kind of curio, a curio of literature… Did you *read La Prensa* this morning?

DB: No.

JLB: Because there's a letter of mine. You know there's quite a campaign against me. I'm supposed to be a traitor. They've even asked a judge that I should be jailed for being a traitor, and tried. There's a very minor newspaper named *Crónica* which began attacking me about a

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[15] Borges has abridged the poetic lines considerably. These lines read: "Tusitala, the lover of children, the teller of tales,/ Giver of counsel and dreams, a wonder, a world's delight," in *Adventures Among Books* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1905), p. 41.

week ago and they've gone on with it every day. Then there was someone who defended me in the *Prensa* and I wrote a letter to him and it came out this morning.[16] I think of this whole thing [the conflict with Chile] as being -well, as I say in my letter- "un crimen y una insensatez," a crime and tomfoolery.

DB: The idea of having a war with Chile over some islands where no one could possible live anyway …

JLB: Of course. It might lead us to blue ruin. Well, we're already bankrupt. But the government seems bent on it. And maybe in Chile they also feel that way. Because here someone wrote an article that I had to answer in the *Prensa* saying that since most people wanted war, and since I had encouraged war by writing stories, stories abounding in knives and so on, and I answered, you can read the answer, it just came out this morning, I said you might as well accuse Robert Louis Stevenson of piracy on the high seas because his books abound in buccaneers. The same thing! That came out this morning.

DB: I'll pick up the paper.

JLB: Therein I spoke of Stevenson, you'll see …

DB: With regard to the epilogue to *The Wrecker* which we talked about a little before, which I think is a rather important document …

JLB: I don't remember it -you see I read these books when I had my eyes about me, but since I've been blind since 1956 or so, my memory is apt to betray me.

DB: It's the letter to Will Low from Stevenson explaining how they came to write the book in which he says that most police fiction is an ingenious piece of mechanism…

JLB: I remember that, yes. Lifeless, he says, lifeless is the word he uses, no?

DB: Yes.

JLB: And then he says that he wanted to make his characters alive and that he rediscovered what Dickens had already done when he wrote the…

DB: *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

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[16] See "Los hombres no se miden con mapas" (*La Prensa*, 6 September 1978, 1st. sec., p. 9) in reply to Manfred Schönfeld's article of 1 September 1978, "Borges y el crimen de la guerra."

JLB: Yes, I remember that now. But since I have the book here you can go get it. Yes, I remember. But I think that Stevenson was right. In most detective fiction the characters are, well, they're just puppets, no? You see the wires behind them.

DB: So there are two alternatives to take, either to write short stories, police or mystery stories, as you've done, or else …

JLB: There's another writer, a very important writer, Mr. Wilkie Collins. When you read Collins you think of the characters being alive, alive in the Dickens fashion. You think of them as being very much alive, and yet the plot is very ingeniously handled. [Goes on to condemn the crime fiction of Hammett and Chandler.] I think the detective of the book should not be realistic, is not meant to be realistic. The whole thing is meant to be artificial. You see that in the case of *The Wrecker* , in the case of Edgar Allan Poe. The whole thing is an invention; the whole thing is fancy work -very pleasant, and very striking fancy work –very pleasant, and very striking fancy work …

DB: I've noticed that there are some striking coincidences in the names of the characters in Stevenson and in some of your fiction. For instance, Brodie.

JLB: Brodie, that's true. Dean [sic] Brodie, of "Dean Brodie and the Double Life." But maybe… Well, since I always feel that I owe a great deal to Stevenson, I want to remind people of him, so I may use names that may send them back to Stevenson … Of course, Brodie is a common Scottish name, and I could have found any other. But I thought of Dean Brodie and the double life.

DB: But it ["El informe de Brodie"] does have something to do with the double life, doesn't it?

JLB: I wonder if it has; I don't know. Well, as I think of fiction as being reality, a field of history …

DB: Another one is Madden. You have Madden, the detective in "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," and Madden is Carthew's last alias in *The Wrecker*.

JLB: Of course. But I wonder there if I was aware of that, though I think I must have been. Those names are just lingering …

DB: That's a particularly wonderful name to have in a detective story, because that particular character does "madden" the reader, I think.

JLB: Yes. I like to use strange names … [Goes on about names.]

DB: One other thing I wanted to ask you about. I asked you before about a fable called "The Song of the Morrow."

JLB: I never understood that fable. I wonder if you could find it and read it. It's on the king's daughter and the sea-strand.

DB: Do we have time now?

JLB: I have time until a quarter past seven.

DB: Oh, fine. I can find it very quickly.

JLB: Can you? It's in the room. [We both go into the other room. When we come back Borges is talking about circular time.] I found a very fine refutation of the whole doctrine in *The City of God*, of St. Augustine. He wrote a whole book about it.

DB: In his time it was a very important heresy.

JLB: Yes, of course. But many people in Buenos Aires think that the whole thing was invented by Nietzsche, whereas the Stoics had it, since Pythagoras also. They knew all about it.

DB: Now, the reason I'm interested in this story is because there's something about the tone of it which is very much like your own, so that…

JLB: I hope so, I hope so.

DB: … so that it's sufficiently noticeable that I showed it to a friend who had never read any Stevenson at all, and he said, "huele a Borges."

JLB: No, on the contrary, no, más bien, "Borges huele a Stevenson." That would work out more logically. Unless of course it's circular time, in which case of course nobody knows who's the first.

DB: It's called "The Song of the Morrow": "The King of Duntrine …"

JLB: The King of what?

DB: Duntrine … D-u-n-t-r-i-n-e.

JLB: That's a fancy country, no? But you think of Ireland or Scotland, something Celtic. "The King of Duntrine had a daughter."

DB: "… when he was old, and she was the fairest King's daughter between two seas … "

JLB: ¡Qué lindo! " … the fairest King's daughter between two seas …"

DB: " … her hair was like spun gold …"

JLB: " … spun gold … "

DB: " … and her eyes were like pools in a river; and the King gave her a castle upon the sea beach, with a terrace, and a court of the hewn stone, and four towers at the four corners. Here she dwelt and grew up, and had no care for the morrow and no power upon the hour, after the manner of simple men."

JLB: "Power upon the hour … " Whatever all that may mean. Go ahead.

DB: "It befell that she walked one day by the beach of the sea, when it was autumn, and the wind blew from the place of rains; and upon the one hand of her the sea beat, and upon the other the dead leaves ran."

JLB: Ah yes, and then she meets an old hag, no?

DB: Yes… "This was the loneliest beach between two seas, and strange things had been done there in the ancient ages."

JLB: He says it like music, no? I mean, you have strange coming and going. "Between two seas." Wonderfully written. I wish I could write like that. I'll die never having been able to.

DB: "Now the King's daughter was aware of a crone that sat upon the beach. The sea foam ran to her feet, and the dead leaves swarmed about her back, and the rags blew about her face in the blowing of the wind. 'Now,' said the King's daughter, and she named a holy name, 'this is the most unhappy old crone between two seas."'

JLB: "The most unhappy old crone." Yes, I thought it was *hag* but it's *crone*.

DB: "'Daughter of a King,' said the crone, 'you dwell in a stone house, and your hair is like the gold, but what is your profit? Life is not long, nor lives strong; and you live after the way of simple men, and have no thought for the morrow and. no power upon the hour. 'Thought for the morrow, that I have,' said the King's daughter; 'but power upon the hour, that I have not.' And she mused with herself. Then the crone smote her lean hands one within the other, and laughed like a seagull."

JLB: "Laughed like a seagull." Isn't that wonderful, Isn't the whole thing wonderful. After Old English literature it's the only... Well, no. Go ahead.

DB: "'Home,' cried she, 'O daughter of a King, home to your stone house, for the longing is come upon you now, nor can you live any more after the manner of simple men. Home, and toil and suffer, till the gift come that will make you bare …'"

JLB: "Till the gift come that will make you bare." That's b-a-r-e?

DB: Barren, I suppose, or naked.

JLB: Ah, yes, of course, because a man is coming. Go ahead.

DB: " … and till the man come that will bring you care.' The King's daughter made no more ado, but she turned about and went home to her house in silence. And when she was come into her chamber she called for her nurse. 'Nurse,' said the King's daughter, 'thought is come upon me for the morrow, so that I can live no more after the manner of simple men. Tell me what I must do that I may have power upon the hour.'"

JLB: The King's daughter says that?

DB: To her nurse … "Then the nurse moaned like a snow wind. 'Alas,' said she, 'that this thing should be; but the thought is gone into your marrow, nor is there any cure against the thought. Be it so, then, even as you will; though power is less than weakness, power shall you have; and though the thought is colder than winter, yet shall you think it to an end.'"

JLB: "Power is less than weakness." How very strange.

DB: "So the King's daughter sat in her vaulted chamber in the masoned house, and she thought upon the thought. Nine years she sat; and the sea beat upon the terrrace, and the gulls cried about the turrets, and the wind crooned in the chimneys of the house. Nine years she came not abroad, nor tasted the clean air, … "

JLB: Yes, nine of course is a magic number. Well the whole thing is - like a spell. The whole thing seems to be very ancient, to have been given to Stevenson. To have been told and retold many times, you get that feeling, no?

DB: Yes, he was striving for that, and I think he got some of it from William Morris.

JLB: Yes, but I was rereading "The Wood at the World's End. " Those books by Morris are rather poor. What is wonderful in Morris are his first poems, no?

DB: "Nine years she came not abroad, nor tasted the clean air, neither saw God's sky."

JLB: "Neither saw God's sky." It would be impossible to do this into Spanish, no? You might be able to translate it into German, perhaps. But, not into French. He might have done it in some Germanic language, but not in a Romance language.

DB: "Nine years she sat and looked neither to the right nor to the left, nor heard speech of anyone, but thought upon the thought of the mor-

row. And her nurse fed her in silence, and she took of the food with her left hand and ate it without grace."

JLB. "And ate it without grace," yes… I think that we attempted doing this into Spanish with Bioy Casares, and that when we had "power upon the hour" we felt… very very helpless and very illiterate, no?

DB: "Now when the nine years were out, it fell dusk in the autumn, and there came a sound in the wind like a sound of piping."

JLB: " … piping … "

DB: "At that the nurse lifted her finger in the vaulted house. 'I hear a sound in the wind,' said she, 'that is like the sound of piping.' 'It is but a little sound,' said the King's daughter, 'but yet it is sound enough for me.' So they went down in the dusk to the doors of the house, and along the beach of the sea. And the waves beat upon the one hand, and upon the other the dead leaves ran; and the clouds raced in the sky, and the gulls flew widdershins. And when they came to that part of the beach where strange things had been done in the ancient ages, lo, there was the crone, and she was dancing widdershins."

JLB: "Widdershins." A fine word. Contrary-wise to clockwise, no?

DB: Yes… "'What makes you dance widdershins, old crone?' said the King's daughter, 'here upon the black beach between the waves and the dead leaves?' 'I hear a sound in the wind that is like a sound of piping,' quoth she, 'And it is for that that I dance widdershins. For the gift comes that will make you bare, and the man comes that must bring you care. But for me the morrow is come that I have thought upon, and the hour of my power.' 'How comes it, crone,' said the King's daughter, 'that you waver like a rag, and pale like a dead leaf before my eyes?' 'Because the morrow has come that I have thought upon, and the hour of my power,' said the crone, and she fell upon the beach, and lo! she was but stalks of the sea tangle, and dust of the sea sand, and the sand lice hopped upon the place of her. 'This it is the strangest thing that befell between two seas,' said the King's daughter of Duntrine. But the nurse broke out and moaned like an autumn gale. 'I am weary of the wind,' quoth she, and she bewailed her day. The King's daughter was aware of a man upon the beach, he went hooded so that none might perceive his face; and a pipe was underneath his arm. The sound of his pipe was like singing wasps and like the wind that sings in windles-straw; and it took hold upon men's ears like the crying of gulls. 'Are you the comer?' quoth the King's daughter of Duntrine.'"

JLB: "Are you the comer?"

DB: "'I am the comer,' said he, 'and these are the pipes, that a man may hear, and I hear power upon the hour, and this is the song of the morrow.' And he piped the song of the morrow, and it was long as years, and the nurse wept out aloud at the hearing of it. 'This is true,' said the King's daughter, 'that you pipe the song of the morrow; but that ye have power upon the hour, how may I know that? Show me a marvel here upon the beach between the waves and the dead leaves."

JLB: "Between the waves and the dead leaves."

DB: "And the man said, 'Upon whom?' 'Here is my nurse,' quoth the King's daughter. 'She is weary of the wind. Show me a good marvel upon her.' And lo the nurse fell upon the beach as it were two handfuls of dead leaves, and the wind whirled 'them widdershins, and the sand lice hopped between. 'It is true,' said the King's daughter of Duntrine; 'you are the comer, and. you have power upon the hour. Come with me to my stone house.' So they went by the sea margin, and the man piped the song of the morrow, and the leaves followed behind them as they went. Then they sat down together; and the sea beat on the terrace, and the gulls cried about the towers, and the wind crooned in the chimneys of the house. Nine years they sat, and every year when it fell autumn, the man said, 'This is the hour, and I have power in it,' and the daughter of the King said, 'Nay, but pipe me the song of the morrow.' And he piped it, and it was long like years. Now when the nine years were gone, the King's daughter got her to her feet, like one that remembers; and she looked about her in the masoned house … "

JLB: "Masoned house" sounds like Morris, don't you think so?

DB: Yes … " … and all her servants were gone; only the man that piped sat upon the terrace with the hand upon his face, and as he piped the leaves ran about he terrace and the sea beat along the wall. Then she cried to him with a great voice, 'This is the hour, and let me see the power of it.' And with that the wind blew off the hand from the man's face, and lo, there was no man there, only the clothes and the hand and the pipes tumbled one upon another in a corner of the terrace, and the dead leaves ran over them. And the King's daughter of Duntrine got her to that part of the beach where strange things had been done in the ancient ages, and there she sat her down. The sea foam ran to her feet, and the dead leaves swarmed her back, and the veil blew about her face in the blowing of the wind. And when she lifted up her eyes, there was the daughter of a King come walking on the beach …"

JLB: ¡Ay, qué lindo!

DB: " … Her hair was like the spun gold, and her eyes like pools in a river, and she had no thought of the morrow and no power upon the hour, after the manner of simple men."

JLB: And the whole thing goes on forever and ever.

DB: It's wonderful that he decides to stop right there.

JLB: Well, that's because the story is circular. ¡Qué lindo! Now, we translated , Bioy Casares and I, that story, if you could read it aloud to me, "Faith, Half-Faith … " I remember that peacock with the beautiful voice.

DB: [Reads "Faith, Half-Faith, and No Faith At All" with fewer comments along the way from Borges than with the previous fable. Borges comments on the Fakeer who performs miracles being in the same tale with the old rover who fights for Odin: "Why not have Odin and a fakir at the same time, since the whole thing is a fairy tale, a dream." He laughs at the lines about the priest who groans "like one with a colic" (XX, 185) and when the cards fall out of the fakir's sleeve, he comments, "like the evil Chinese, no?" He mentions that the tone of the story reminds him of Bunyan, and says at the end, when the rover goes off to fight with Odin:]

JLB: How well chosen is Odin, no? Because God would fall flat. While Odin has the right ring to it. Those are the *Fables*, then. When did he write them?

DB: Some of them seem to have been written in the early 1880's, at the time he was writing *Treasure Island*, because one of them, "The Persons in the Tale," is an interlude between two chapters of *Treasure Island*.

JLB: *Treasure Island* is a fine book also.

DB: But they weren't published until the year after his death. I don't think anyone knows exactly when they were written.

JLB: I found that book on Stevenson by Stephen Gwynn. And then of course the biography [by Graham Balfour] to be found in this collected works… Well, I thank you… Every time I speak of Stevenson, critics or people stare at me … But Chesterton was interested in him too, and I think Bernard Shaw wrote about Stevenson also.

DB: I'm not aware of anything …

JLB: Yes, I think in that book Short Stories, Scraps and Shavings, I think there's a paper on Stevenson in which he says that his best books were

written in collaboration with Lloyd Osbourne, who made him stick to his plots.[17] As to other writers, I don't know. But Chesterton wrote a very fine book on Stevenson.

DB: Did you decorate this edition with marginalia?

JLB: No, because when I got it my sight was already gone. I had another edition, but then I gave away the books. Those were full of notes. Little small blue books.18 It was a called something like the Apple, the Golden Apple or something.

DB: The only small blue ones I can think of are the Tusitala Edition, which I thought you may have had because of the *Ethical Studies* reference.

JLB: Yes, I had it. It must have been that one … Do you know a book by Stevenson which was translated into Spanish as *La resaca*?

DB: *The Ebb-Tide*.

JLB: *The Ebb-Tide*, yes. A very fine book. I have a friend who says it's one of the very finest novels he's ever read in his life. Very fine book… Well, do come back then. Thank you.

DB: Many thanks. Goodbye.

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[17] There is nothing of this nature in the Shaw book or elsewhere in Shaw's works to my knowledge.

[18] Borges certainly used to consult a copy of the Tusitala Edition, because of the description of the volumes as "small blue books," because of the references to *Ethical Studies*, and because of the reference page cited in "El seudo problema de Ugolino" (*La Nación*, 30 May 1948).