

BORGES'S TINKERINGS: CONCERNING
THE EVOLUTION OF "CALLE DESCONOCIDA"
(*FERVOR DE BUENOS AIRES*)

THE publication of Tommaso Scarano's *Varianti a stampa nella poesia del primo Borges* in 1987 marked an important step in the study of Borges's early poetry. For the first time it became possible to examine side by side the different versions of individual poems in his first three collections as they were modified in successive editions. Curiously, little advantage has been taken of this possibility. The first study of variants, relating to *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, was published by Gloria Videla in 1984, that is, before Scarano had laid the groundwork for any comprehensive approach. Her article and its conclusions must be the starting point for any subsequent work, but the fact that her analyses of "Atardeceres" and "Un patio" and other comments were based solely on the comparison of the texts as they appeared in original 1923 edition of *Fervor* with those of the 1974 *Obras completas*, i.e. without consulting the 1943 Losada edition of *Poemas (1922-1943)*, indicates the difficulties surrounding such an enterprise at that time. Scarano himself, at the beginning of his book, carries the enterprise forward, adding further valid conclusions to those of Videla and citing numerous examples based on his own work in support of them. But he was the first to admit that he had only scratched the surface of the issues involved and that subsequent progress could be made "soltanto da una attenta analisi delle trasformazioni subite dai singoli testi." (*Varianti* 18). This is surely correct. For, without criticizing in any way the pioneering work carried out by Videla and Scarano, it remains the case that, while both of them closely study the variants they document, they do not really relate them to the poems in question as individual literary artefacts. Ideally a poem is an organic whole; to omit or change any of its components may have important repercussions involving all the rest of them. For that reason, it is extremely useful to glance at the modifications which Borges made over time, especially to his early poems, and try to estimate the effect on them.

Of special interest are poems of which manuscript copies survive. Scarano is careful to make it clear that his collection of variants is based exclusively on printed sources, a fact which in no way seriously affects the value of his work. However, it happens that the Borges Collection gathered by Jared Lowenstein, its current curator, in the Alderman Library of the University of Virginia contains manuscripts of different kinds and dates of "Música patria", "Hallazgo", "Calle desconocida", "Ciudad", "Judería" and "La plaza San Martín", all from *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. Of these "Calle desconocida" is the most interesting, as being the only one in this group to survive in all editions of *Fervor*. We shall devote the present consideration exclusively to it. The manuscript version (Alderman call no. mss 10155 ac) reads:

~~Penumbra victoriosa acrece al día~~
 Acércase penumbra victoriosa sobre el día
 matices
 calmando los ~~colores~~ al respiro de su sueño
 lento, de rocío en la honda platería llena de la hora morena.

En esa hora de fina luz arenosa

pasos

mis ~~andanzas~~ dieron con una calle ignorada,

anchura

abierta en noble ~~extensión~~ de terraza,
 mostrando en las cornisas y en las paredes
 colores blandos como el mismo cielo
 que conmovía el fondo.

El avance de mi huella tropezosa

no me condujo a genérico destino:

sólo a su retrato (calle mía),

en perfecta concordancia de cariciosas rejas

con

por la vereda abundosa de palabras verdes

que recostadas en los jardines

saludaban la marcha melancólica de mi solitaria penitencia.

Penumbra de la paloma

hebreos

Llamaron los ~~judíos~~ a la iniciación de la tarde (colon deleted)

los pasos

Cuando la sombra aun no entorpece ~~la marcha~~

y la venida de la noche se advierte

como una música esperada

~~antes como advenimiento de música esperada~~

no como símbolo de nuestra esencial nadería.

~~que como enorme símbolo de nuestra esencial nadería.~~

Todo – honesta medianía de las casas austeras,

travesuras de columnitas y de aldabas

tal vez una esperanza de niña en los balcones –

vano corazón

se me adentró en el ~~corazón anhelante~~

con limpieza de lágrima.

Fue regaladora de anhelos tejidos en romance de miradas.

(Here page 1 of the mss ends. The note on de Quincey has been added at the foot of the page in Borges's later handwriting. Some, but not all, of the corrections are also in his later handwriting.)

(Page 2):

Habría sido volvedora a los ojos,

al

en busca del nombre ~~en el~~ corazón repiqueteado de ecos.

Quizá esa hora única

sion of having been written in Buenos Aires after the return of the Borges family in the Spring of 1921. There appears to be a small mystery here.

The manuscript itself is contained in a large stiff cardboard folder 50 × 39 cms in size, with a carefully attached strip of pink and black edging decorating the front. Glued to the front of the folder, inside this edging paper, is an oval piece of blue/green paper on which there is a quite large pen and ink drawing (by Norah?) of what appears to be the head of the young Borges. The folder is clearly intended to be the repository of a manuscript which was intended to be carefully kept.

The poem as originally printed in *Fervor* (1923) reads:

Penumbra de la paloma
 llamaron los judíos a la iniciación de la tarde
 cuando la sombra aún no entorpece los pasos
 y la venida de la noche se advierte
 antes como advenimiento de música esperada
 que como enorme símbolo de nuestra primordial nadería.
 En esa hora de fina luz arenosa
 mis andanzas dieron con una calle ignorada
 abierta en noble anchura de terraza
 mostrando en las cornisas y en las paredes
 colores blandos como el mismo cielo
 que conmovía el fondo.
 Todo – honesta medianía de las casas austeras,
 travesuras de columnitas y aldabas,
 tal vez una esperanza de niña en los balcones –
 se me adentró en el corazón anhelante
 con limpidez de lágrima.
 Quizá esa hora única
 aventajaba con prestigio la calle
 dándole privilegios de ternura
 haciéndola real como una leyenda o un verso;
 lo cierto es que la sentí lejanamente cercana
 como recuerdo que si parece llegar cansado de lejos
 es porque viene de la propia hondura del alma.
 Intimo y entrañable
 era el milagro de la calle clara
 y sólo después
 entendí que aquel lugar era extraño,
 que es toda casa un candelabro
 donde arden con aislada llama las vidas,
 que todo inmeditado paso nuestro
 camina sobre Gólgotas ajenos.

The final version, as it appears in the Emecé *Obra poética* (1923-1976) reads:

Penumbra de la paloma
 llamaron los hebreos a la iniciación de la tarde
 cuando la sombra no entorpece los pasos

y la venida de la noche se advierte
 como una música esperada y antigua,
 como un grato declive.
 En esa hora en que la luz
 tiene una finura de arena,
 di con una calle ignorada,
 abierta en noble anchura de terraza,
 cuyas cornisas y paredes mostraban
 colores tenues como el mismo cielo
 que conmovía el fondo.
 Todo – la medianía de las casas,
 las modestas balaustradas y llamadores,
 tal vez una esperanza de niña en los balcones –
 entró en mi vano corazón
 con limpidez de lágrima.
 Quizá esa hora de la tarde de plata
 diera su ternura a la calle,
 haciéndola tan real como un verso
 olvidado y recuperado.
 Sólo después reflexioné
 que aquella calle de la tarde era ajena,
 que toda casa es un candelabro
 donde las vidas de los hombres arden
 como velas aisladas,
 que todo inmeditado paso nuestro
 camina sobre Gólgotas.

Let us attempt to analyze the genesis and development of this poem. In *El tamaño de mi esperanza* (1926) Borges republished a short essay called "La pampa y el suburbio son dioses" which had already appeared in *Proa* (2.^a época, 15, 1926: 14-17). It seems to be a development of the idea advanced in "A quien leyere", the prologue (later dropped) to *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. There, writing of "los lugares que asumen mis caminatas" in "los barrios amigables", Borges affirmed "Aquí se oculta la divinidad, habla mi verso para declarar el asombro de las calles endiosadas por la esperanza o el recuerdo, sitio por donde discurre nuestra vida" (reproduced in *Variante* 67). In the later essay he asserted that the *llano* and the city outskirts were worthy of reverence since they constituted national totems or symbols. While the *llano* was already a "cabal símbolo", he declared, "las orillas" or "el suburbio" still constituted a "símbolo a medio hacer" (23), despite their presence in a number of early tangos and in the work of Fray Mocho, Félix Luna, Evaristo Carriego and Borges himself. He ends the first part of the essay with the statement: "Es indudable que el arrabal y la pampa existen del todo y que los siento abrirse como heridas y que me duelen igual" (24). In the second section he suggests that, although Argentines are by nature sceptics, one of the things that they believe in is "la dulzura generosa del arrabal" (25). He concludes: "De la riqueza infatigable del mundo, sólo nos pertenecen el arrabal y la pampa" (25).

This quaintly reverential love of the outer reaches of the city of Buenos Aires certainly imbues a number of early poems, including "Las calles" (*Fervor de Buenos Aires*), in which he describes his visceral love of "las calles desganas

del barrio" (in the first edition: "la dulce calle del arrabal"), "Barrio reconquistado" (*Fervor*), "Arrabal" (*Fervor*), "Cercanías" (*Fervor*) and others, including "Casi juicio final" in *Luna de enfrente*, which contains the lines

He conmemorado con versos la ciudad que me ciñe
 Y los arrabales que se desgarran.
 He dicho asombro donde otros dicen solamente costumbre.

"Calle desconocida" clearly belongs to this group of poems celebrating the streets of the outer city and the sensation of tenderness which they evoked in the young poet. But in this case there is a difference. By and large, there are three elements or motifs that distinguish this group of early poems. One is the conversion of the street-scene into a kind of *paysage état d'âme* which the young poet humanizes so that it can figure forth his mood. That mood is often one of what he calls, in an unpublished poem, "Villa Mazzini" belonging to the group: "Urgencia de ternura".¹ It was this emotivity and yearning for tenderness that Borges was referring to when, in the 1969 prologue to *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, he wrote that in the edition of that year he had "tachado sensiblerías". It was this that Guillermo Sucre correctly identified as "la poesía como transmutación de la realidad en una realidad interior y emocional" (32) noting that it marked his shift away from *Ultraísmo*. The second is the tendency, which emerged consciously in "La pampa y el suburbio son dioses", to see in the streets of the outer suburbs an emblem of *argentinidad* as Rasi, Olea Franco and Fariás have clearly perceived. In "Oda compuesta en 1960" (*El hacedor*) he was to write:

Patria, yo te he sentido en los ruinosos
 Ocasos de los vastos arrabales...

But thirdly there is already present, notably in the climax of "Calle desconocida" that "durable inquietud metafísica" which Sucre alludes to (33) and which was to become central to much of the rest of Borges's poetry.

Lyric poems often tend to be organized as climactic sequences, so that everything from the beginning leads up to the final image, the final line, sometimes even the last word. This is very much the case here. For most of the poem in its original form follows the pattern described by Olea Franco, creating a "visión intimista de la ciudad" (Olea Franco 129), using a "tono sentimental o 'confesionalista'" (128) in line with the other poems of *Fervor* which celebrate the *arrabal*. The atmosphere is one of soothing calm and synchronicity with the poet's mood. The dusk falls dew-like and the soft colors of the evening sky create in the distance an emotional effect. The quiet street forms a bond with the poet ("calle mía"); its stern window grilles seem "cariciosas", the lush green plants of the gardens seem to speak words which chime in with his lonely melancholy; the noble austerity of the unpretentious house-fronts, relieved by occasional "travesuras" have on him a moving effect. What is typical once more is the humanization of the elements which make up the scene. The

¹ See C. Jared Loewenstein and Donald L. Shaw, "Five Manuscript Poems by Borges in the Virginia Collection." *Convergencias hispánicas*. Eds. Elizabeth Scarlett and Howard B. Wescott, Newark, Delaware: Juan de la Cuesta, 2001: 141-58.

vocabulary: "cariciosa", "palabras", "saludaban", "honesto medianía", "travesuras" and especially the infelicitous "garganta herida" of the sunset combine to invest the scene with a mysterious life which seems to resonate in tune with the poet's deepest feelings. All this is quite familiar, including the "esperanza de niña en los balcones", which, like the "una que otra chicuela" who "sonríe su contento / de posibles piropos" in the unpublished "Villa Mazzini" or the "alboroto de chicas" in "Ultimo sol en Villa Ortúzar" (*Luna de enfrente*) functions to complete the humanization process. More interesting is the contrast between the comforting effect of the street-scene during most of the poem and the poet's uncomfortable realization at the end. This is the key to the whole poem. It illustrates exactly what María Contreras Bustamente asserts is characteristic of many of the poems of *Fervor*: "Las experiencias interiores del hablante se modalizan en dos actitudes fundamentales: una actitud afectiva frente a lo referido y una actitud reflexiva que se desarrolla a partir de la primera. La reflexión subordina a la emoción ya que el trabajo preponderante de sujeto es el análisis, la reflexión y la postulación de hipótesis sobre las materias que lo afectan" (21).

The manuscript version of the poem already has the tripartite pattern visible in the printed ones. The first 27 lines, that is, from the beginning to "con limpieza de lágrima", create the "paysage état d'âme". Lines 28 to 42, from "Habría sido volvedora a los ojos" to "era el milagro de la calle clara" express the poet's first conscious reaction. The last six lines (the poet's second, contrasting, response to the scene) break unexpectedly with the blend of lonely sadness and serenity which had prevailed so far and had produced something almost like an epiphany in line 42 marked by the word "milagro". There is an ironic reversal of insight: the poet becomes aware that what he has taken to be a moment at which, in the words of Olea Franco, he "alcanza en su interior la identidad plena mediante la percepción de los elementos del arrabal que le son agradables" (131), has been overtaken by one which carries with it a quite different level of understanding. We may speculate that this is what made Borges keep the poem in *Fervor* throughout all its editions, whereas others like "Ciudad" and "Las calles", which contain no such deeper vision, were eventually eliminated.

If it is true, as it certainly is, that the versions of the poem compared by Scarano in his 1989 article "permettono di misurare con gran precisione l'evoluzione del linguaggio poetico borgesiano" (576), in this specific case an examination of the manuscript version is even more revealing of the process of selection and modification of elements which took place, since it takes us back to the vital, initial, stage. The first printed text of "Calle desconocida" is already greatly reorganized, shortened and tightened up by comparison with the original draft. Forty nine lines have been reduced to thirty two, a more than 30% loss; and this in addition to lines already scored through after first writing. What has happened? We need, first of all, to look at the last part of the manuscript version to hazard a guess at the first critically important event in the course of the poem's composition. Up to the climactic section, the lines scored out on the manuscript represent simple *ripensamenti*. Thus, line 1, a static statement which originally read:

Penumbra victoriosa acércase al día

becomes:

Acércase penumbra victoriosa sobre el día

which has a different rhythmical pattern; but more importantly shifts the emphasis to the verb of motion, which now begins and strengthens the line. At the same time, the change illustrates the beginning of a process which Scarano correctly identifies in the later versions, noting that Borges tends consistently to eliminate or simplify certain examples of figurative language in order to make them more direct (1989: 582). The sense of *victoriosa* is deliberately (and perhaps unnecessarily) made more explicit. But, for the moment, the much more difficult and pretentious image of the third line “de rocío en la honda platería llena de la hora morena”, with its unhappy internal rhyme, is left standing. Similarly the alteration of

antes como advenimiento de música esperada
que como enorme símbolo de nuestra esencial nadería.

to

como una música esperada
no como símbolo de nuestra esencial nadería

(though Borges presently changed it back again in the first printed version, except for the substitution of “primordial” for “esencial”) goes towards simplification and directness of expression (“como” followed by the negative “no como”, instead of the more dubitative “antes como...que como”).

When we approach the end of the poem, the situation is quite different. First of all, the last of the three lines scored out:

un tímido mudo soy en la luz inaugural
de pundonorosos faroles. Eran el atajo parpadeante
llevadores a su historia desde el saber, a quien era.

hardly makes sense. In so far as it is comprehensible at all, it seems to be on the way to suggesting that Borges's initial intention was to end the poem on a wholly subjective note: the “milagro de la calle” may originally have had to do with providing some sort of short cut to a moment of greater self-knowledge. One may speculate that it would have been related to the earlier reference to a memory which comes from the depths of one's soul. But what seems more evident is that before Borges had adequately formulated this climax, he was struck by quite a different thought with a much more universal relevance, one which contradicts the relatively serene and (to use Olea Franco's word) “positive” tone of Borges's usual evocations of the *arrabal* and is related much more to the references in “A quien leyere” to “pena y dudas”. When we take this on board, we can see more clearly how the poem's tripartite structure is intended to work; that is to say, by means of an ironic interaction between the first two sections, in which the function of the second is to intensify the impact of the

first, with a culmination in "milagro", a word dense with positive meaning, and the climactic lines with their own culmination in "Gólgotas", than which we can hardly imagine a word with more negative associations. As would be the case later in some of Borges's best short stories, the last part comments ironically on what has gone before. Borello remarks in his essay on *Fervor*: "La 'manera' de ordenar el material narrativo de algunos cuentos y ensayos borgianos está ya allí en algunos poemas" (112). This is a case in point.

In the manuscript version the poem stutters into an introduction, essentially repeating itself. Still partially in the grip of his *ultraísta* notion (now rapidly fading) that the essence of poetry is metaphor and that the ideal metaphor should be new and striking, Borges strikes off three successive metaphors to convey the sensation of dusk arriving: I interpret them as follows:

1. The penumbra is victorious over the daylight.
2. It calms the breathing of the sleeping day.
3. It falls slowly like dew on the "silverware" of the gathering dusk.

Moving from the less complex to the more complex, they are plainly intended to reinforce one another and to prepare the reader for the reference which follows to the "fina luz arenosa". But we can see at once that the third one especially belongs to the category of the image which in the foreword to the original edition of *Fervor* Borges called "decorativamente visual y lustrosa" and which he wanted to avoid, in favor of imagery which is more "meditabunda". If we needed a specific instance of what he meant, here we have one. Another can be seen in the elimination of lines 33-36 of the manuscript version. Once more we see the young poet straining after visual effects which he later correctly judged to be unnecessary. Logical coherence was not a major requirement in *ultraísta* poetry; what mattered was the juxtaposition of strikingly novel images. We have just seen what the result can be like when success is not obtained in lines 1-3 of the manuscript version; we see it afresh in lines 33-36. Instead of interacting with each other to produce an effect of unexpected *goce estético*, they break discordantly with the pattern that Borges was intent on building up. The key word in this part of the poem, as elsewhere in *Fervor*, is "ternura". This is the gift of the early evening hour. It is associated with an intuition emerging from the depths of the poet's being to create the "miracle" alluded to in line 43 of the manuscript. The two images of lines 33-36, that of the hour "tyrannizing" the roadway and that of the trees looking like a wounded throat, are quite out of tune with the emotional atmosphere surrounding this section of the poem. The adjectives in the phrase "minuciosa de árboles ditirámicos" are forced and self-conscious, and the two concepts: the hour waiting for time to move away and the sun begging to meet with its soul (whose? that of the hour, the roadway or the sun itself?) are both far-fetched and irrelevant. The poem is clearly better without them.

In the first published version, then, Borges eliminated lines 1, 2 and 3 of the manuscript version and replaced them with the section marked "I" (i.e. lines 17-22) in the same version, the opening of the poem as we now have it. Taking his cue from the foreword, Scarano suggests (1989: 577) that Borges, despite the error which the quotation from de Quincey identifies, clung to the

image of the *paloma* because it was to be "il primo anello di una catena semantica costituita di termini di matrice mistico-religiosa, che attraversa tutto il testo." This might seem to be something of an over-statement. What is certain is that the substitution of the new opening for the old illustrates what Borges meant when he declared in the foreword that instead of gongorine and *modernista* inspired imagery, he wanted a kind that expressed "aventuras espirituales" (*Varianti* 68). The *aventura espiritual* in this case is the insight gained at the climax of the poem. Understandably, it is associated with light ("candelabro", "llama"). The function of the opening is to set on foot what is to become the contrast between the "penumbra / sombra", with its soft, soothing associations, and the bright (but consuming) flame of the candles, which turn into symbols of separate, individual, human lives burning themselves out, a process which Borges unexpectedly compares to that of Christ's crucifixion.

This is the most surprising image in the poem. Its significance seems to have escaped not only Scarano, but also Zuleta and Borello. Zuleta points out that in "La Recoleta" (*Fervor*) "la muerte está presentada como un reflejo de la vida que desaparece también al desaparecer ésta". He goes on "Si la visión de la muerte en la literatura española, desde Jorge Manrique hasta Miguel de Unamuno, proclamaba la vanidad de la vida o, al menos, se dolía de su precariedad, Borges procura invertir esta visión" (263). He suggests that in "Inscripción en cualquier sepulcro" (*Fervor*), the theme is that "el mundo no empieza con la vida individual... Los otros, los muertos, viven en nuestros pasos y nosotros viviremos en los pasos de otros", an idea which leads to the notion of "una solidaridad con los otros que va más allá de la muerte" (264). Zuleta's conclusion is that in *Fervor* "Borges se resigna a su destino humano y busca la dicha dentro de éste" (267). There is no such resignation in "Calle desconocida". Nor is there any sense that if (as Borges affirms in "La Recoleta") "sólo la vida existe", this idea points in a positive direction. In sharp contrast to the poems that Zuleta mentions, this poem presents individual lives as secret "Golgothas". For this reason alone it merits particular attention at the thematic level. Borello recognizes that the verb "entendí" marks the crucial shift in the poem. Before that, he suggests, the poem recounts "la extraña experiencia vivida por el narrador" (117), after which "el *entendí* va a proponer una explicación de la experiencia". But he fails to tell us the nature of the explanation, beyond clarifying that the expression "llamá única" refers to "la soledad de cada existencia" (117). The crucial importance of the word "Gólgotas" does not seem to have struck him. Scarano, on the other hand, as we have seen, is aware of a "mystical-religious" element in the moment of insight which the poem expresses. He refers correctly to the "esperienza profonda e particolarissima" which the narrator undergoes in the later part of the poem, but associates it with his first reaction to the street-scene, that which is "fatalmente destinata ad essere smentita" (1989: 581) by the second one. But when, having recognized that "una seconda esperienza annullerà la prima" (1989: 586), he sees it, like Borello, in terms of the solitude of the individual: "il 'candelabro', tutt'altro che simbolo di unione, è simbolo di isolamento e di incomunicabilità ... gli uomini vivendo non condividono un *unico* Golgota, non scontano *una stessa* Passione, ma ciascuno vive da solo la propria" (1989: 587). This is unquestionably the force of the expression "única llama", but surely the key-word at

the end of the poem is *Gólgotas*. In contrast to the serenity of the underlying vision of other poems in *Fervor*, this one transmits a vision of secret suffering.

The largest single section of the manuscript version which Borges subsequently eliminated is lines 10-16, and it is quite clear why. The most obvious reason is the laboured quality of the lines in question, with the infelicitous vocabulary: "huella", "tropezosa", "cariciosa" and "abundosa", the excruciatingly banal "calle mía", and the equally jejune conversion of the garden plants into "palabras verdes". It seems hardly credible that the Borges of *Fervor* could write such stuff. The same applies even more strongly to lines 28-30:

Fue regaladora de anhelos tejidos en romance de miradas.
 Habría sido volvedora a los ojos,
 al
 en busca del nombre en el corazón repiqueteado de ecos.

We notice that Borges had eliminated a reference to his "corazón anhelante", presumably in order to release the word *anhelos* for use here. This suggests that line 28 was intended to relate the visual impressions of the street-scene to the poet's yearning for love, but the connection is not all that obvious. Lines 29 and 30 appear to develop the idea: the idea seems to be that the street-scene would have moved the poet to look inwardly in search of the name of a (lost?) beloved (Concepción Guerrero?) among the echoes in his heart. The imagery is clumsily self-conscious and the meaning rather obscure. But we must remember that if the earliest date on the manuscript is correct (1919) this poem could be contemporaneous with his first published effort "Himno al mar" which came out in *Grecia* in December of that year. Does this early date explain why the manuscript has been so carefully preserved? Could Borges possibly have written this draft of "Calle desconocida" while he was still in Spain? Who can say. The other reason why lines 10-16 and 28-30 were eliminated has to do, surely, with their obtrusive confessionality, the stress on the poet's melancholy, "solitaria penitencia" and emotional longing reflected in the evocation of the street and its gardens. This is a prevailing feature of the poems on the theme of the *arrabal*. But once the subjective "un tímido mudo soy..." has been replaced with the more ironic conclusion, these earlier lines too must go. Lines 10-16 of the manuscript, together with what would have been lines 43-45 had they not already been crossed out, represent, in other words, survivals from the original thrust of "Calle desconocida" in which what it was intended to express was the consonance of the poet's mood with his surroundings. But the new ending changes that thrust. The climax is no longer about the poet, but about the lives of others. That is why the final, climactic word, the word to which all the rest of the poem leads, is "ajenos". When, much later, Borges moved it up several lines to replace "aquel lugar era extraño" with "aquella calle de la tarde era ajena", we can speculate that it was because he found it too emphatic. Originally it was a pointer, indicating to the reader the contrast between "our" thoughtless² steps and the places of suffer-

² The word "inmediato" of the manuscript is clearly a slip and was corrected to "inmeditado" in the first published version in order to create the climactic antithesis.

ing "of others" which we walk across. But Borges appears to have come to perceive that the contrast was already implicit in the adjective "inmeditado" and that it detracted from the impact of "Gólgotas", a far more effective climax-word.

In terms of structure, we notice that, on the manuscript, Borges initially marked lines 23-27 with a vertical line alongside them and the figure 2 beside it indicating that they should follow lines 17-22, the new opening. Lines 4-9 were to come after. Wisely, preparing the first printed version, he realized that lines 4-9 formed a sequence with the new opening, the "hora de fina luz arenosa" being that of the "penumbra de la paloma", while lines 23-27 were part of the street-scene. Thus the poem took on its final shape: first, the time in the late afternoon and the discovery of the street; then the "milagro de la calle"; and finally the understanding of what it really meant. The key to the poem, as we have already suggested, is the change of tone after line 43 of the manuscript. Everything up to that point leads up to the idea of the *milagro*. This is why the dusk carries with its arrival no suggestion of the *congoja/tristeza* (however attuned to the poet's mood) that we find, for example in "Campos atardecidos" and "Resplandor". There, according to Gloria Videla, the sunsets "son vistos como inútiles batallas entre el día y la noche, con intención renovadora que busca superar los delicuescentes crepúsculos modernistas y darles un valor dentro de la simbología borgeana: el de un inexorable fatalismo" (68). It is not clear that this is generally so. Rather, as Olea Franco suggests, what predominates in this group of poems is the idea of "la tarde...serena y sazónada bienhechora..." ("La plaza San Martín", *Fervor*). In any case, what happens in "Calle desconocida" is that initially the idea of the fall of night as a symbol of our being overtaken by death which reduces us to our primordial nothingness, is replaced by the comforting simile of nightfall as being like the "advenimiento de música esperada". It is an example of the synaesthesia (color here seen as sound) that Borges advocated in "Examen de metáforas" in *Inquisiciones*. Its function is to set the scene for the later "miracle" to take place. Thereafter the poet is present consistently ("mis andanzas"... "se me adentró"... "la sentí") but, as Videla perceives in "Un patio", finally "se atenúa la presencia del poeta-personaje y perdura la función del poeta-contemplador."

In essence, therefore, a comparison of the manuscript version of "Calle desconocida" with the first published version is illuminating in two different ways. On the one hand it shows us much more clearly than the variants of the published versions do, the process by which Borges broke free from *ultraísmo*. Some of the eliminated lines not only reveal, as all the critics have tended to emphasize, the shift away from aggressively vanguardist imagery, but also show us just how tawdry such imagery can be when it fails to work. We gain a fresh insight into why Borges abandoned it. But in addition we see a logically articulated poem take shape from a much more incoherent first draft. The later alterations do not alter its tripartite structure. Once more the poem is shortened, if only slightly, and shorn of some of its more self-consciously rhetorical features. In the first half we notice the loss of the concept of night as symbolic of our "primordial nadería", which Borges presumably came to see as unrelated to the poem's final theme. In fact, if we are afflicted with nothingness, the intuition of our lives as Golgothas loses some of its impact. We notice again the

operation of the process of simplification and explicitation which led from "penumbra victoriosa" to "penumbra victoriosa sobre el día", as Borges changes "fina luz arenosa" to "la luz tiene una finura de arena". Non-essential adjectives: "honesta", "austeras" and the expression "travesuras de columnitas", whose half-humorous tone now seems out of place, are pruned. Borges is aiming at directness, as we can see by comparing the slightly pretentious:

Quizá esa hora única
 aventajaba con prestigio la calle
 dándole privilegios de ternura

with

Quizá esa hora de la tarde de plata
 diera su ternura a la calle

Plainly the most important change is the removal of lines 22-26 of the 1923 version. Their function had been to intensify and bring to a peak in the word "milagro" the poet's initial response to the street-scene so that it could be replaced at the end of the poem by a contrary intuition. Evidently Borges decided that the contrast was too strong. The last part of "Calle desconocida" is in fact based on the shift from the self to the other. This is expressed in the final version by the opposition between the first person singular of "reflexioné" (replacing "entendí" – with a difference of emphasis) and the word "ajena" which introduces the notion of "las vidas de los hombres", characterized by bitter and lonely suffering, in contradistinction to the individual poet's "vano corazón", which is characterized by mere melancholy. By sacrificing lines 22-26 of the 1923 version Borges loses the contrast "milagro/Gólgotas" and greatly attenuates the shift from the self and its "hondura del alma", which becomes far less intrusive, to the other and life in general. The final version is much less explicit than before. Instead of statement ("lo cierto es que...", "Intimo y entrañable era...") Borges now relies on suggestion. The reference to the poet's self, his heart, is separated from his subsequent reflection about the other: "los hombres", by the four lines which momentarily transfer the reader's attention outward to the street, creating a psychic pause as the transition takes place. The effect is less dramatic, more meditative.

To conclude: "Calle desconocida" stands out from the other poems of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* because of the way its climax contradicts so much of what critics, from Zunilda Gertel and Guillermo Sucre to Víctor Farías have written about the *arrabal's* associations for the young Borges. But equally interesting is the process by which the poem took shape and then by degrees assumed its final form. By attempting to follow this process through, we can gain a little more insight into the evolution of Borges's view of what the poet should strive for.

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