BORGES: THE INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

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I.

Borges' stories and poems are so loaded with the paraphernalia of learned writing–footnotes, quotations, constant discussion of other people's books–that they seem to have been written by a man whose only real experience comes from books and who has never set foot outside a library. The image of Borges as a bookworm is not only prevalent among naîve readers (those who claim he is not human enough as if reading and writing were predominantly animal activities); it has been fostered by Borges himself. On many occasions, he has insisted on the fact that he is more a reader than a writer and has worked hard to perfect the image of a dutiful and happy bookworm. In the famous piece, "Borges and Myself," he had expressed the wish to exist only as a perceiver of reality, not as an originator of it, anxious to live laterally (that is, vicariously) in works done by others. The *locus* is well known:

> Spinoza held that all things try to keep on being themselves; a stone wants to be a stone and the tiger, a tiger. I shall remain in Borges, not in myself (if it is so that I am someone), but I recognize myself less in his books than in those of others or than in the laborious tuning of a guitar.[1]

A similar thought can be found in the epilogue to *Dreamtigers*:

> Few things have happened to me, and I have read a great many. Or rather, few things have happened to me more

> worth remembering than Schopenhauer's thought or the music of England's words.[2]

The last version (so far) of the same concept can be found in one of his latest book of poems, *Elogio de la sombra* (*In Praise of Darkness*):

> Let others boast of pages they have written,
> I take pride in those I've read.[3]

The poem was written in 1969, and its title is, of course, "A Reader."

In talking about his life in the very revealing, very reticent, "Autobiographical Essay" (1970), Borges has condensed the image of a man without a life of his own:

> If I were asked to name the chief event in my life, I should say my father's library. In fact, sometimes I think I have never strayed outside that library. ("Essay," 209)

That image of Borges as a permanent inhabitant of an imaginary library (the actual library owned by his father was sold long before Borges began to write in earnest) may be allegorically right but it does not cover the whole reality of Borges' life and work. As important as his readings for the actual production of his work, was the permanent and renewed contact with a few key persons in some of the most decisive periods of his life. His texts were actually planned and began to be written as a consequence of endless conversations with people as challenging and original as his own father or one of his father's friends, Macedonio Fernández, or Borges' most important disciple and collaborator, the novelist Adolfo Bioy Casares. Without attempting to destroy the image of Borges as a bookish writer, a man who only can reach life through the opaque medium of the printed page, in this paper, I would like to show how much of his writing depends on another, earlier form of poetic composition: the art of talking. In a sense, this most bookish of all authors, a man who almost claims to have been born inside a library of "infinite English books," whose first regular job (at 39) was as a clerk in a modest Buenos Aires library and who reached the peak of his career when appointed Director of Argentina's National Library (at 56); this writer who cannot be conceived in any

other literary context but a post-Gutenberg one, and is seldom photographed without a background of endless printed spines, is *also* (and perhaps *foremost*) a great talker, an oral writer whose infinite verbal drafts had been rehearsed in long, intense, permanent conversations. His increasing blindness (he is the sixth generation of Borges to be thus afflicted) forced him since 1956 to rely not only on reading but also on talking about the books he had not been able to read for himself in the last twenty-five years.

Although Borges as a literary text conforms strictly to the image of the happy bookworm, Borges as the author of the text is much closer to the orality one associates with ancient literatures. The text belongs entirely to the Gutenberg world but the man who wrote (or dictated) it may have been one of Socrates' companions.

II.

It all began with father. A lawyer and a teacher of psychology, Father had a good library, mainly of English authors, and was fond of reading poetry and philosophy to his son. In his "Autobiographical Essay," Borges recalls:

> His idols were Shelley, Keats and Swinburne. As a reader, he had two interests. First, books on metaphysics and psychology (Berkeley, Hume, Royce, and William James). Second, literature and books about the East (Lane, Burton, and Payne). It was he who revealed the power of poetry to me—the fact that words are not only a means of communication but also magic symbols and music. When I recite poetry in English now, my mother tells me I take on his very voice. ("Essay," 206-207)

Through Father, Borges (or Georgie, as he was called at home) learned to handle and love books. But he learned more: he learned that books are machines to read, instruments for a decoding operation which involves more than just transforming the printed signs into concepts or images. He learned (through his father's devotion to poetry) the magic dimensions of words and, especially, the music of its sounds. He learned to recognize and love their aural quality. Thus, while officiating in the temple of books, he was never confined to

the prison of the written, mute signs. Father taught him also to think: that is, to code and decode words for the tantalizing possibility of their logical permutation. In the same "Autobiographical Essay" Borges would recall that his father

> ...without my being aware of it, gave me my first lessons in philosophy. When I was still quite young, he showed me, with the aid of a chessboard, the paradoxes of Zeno—Achilles and the tortoise, the unmoving flight of the arrow, the impossibility of motion. Later, without mentioning Berkeley's name, he did his best to teach me the rudiments of idealism. ("Essay," 207)

Like a magician, Father opened to the child the worlds of verbal music and thought. An echo of that double initiation can be found in today's Borges' literary activities. The poems he began writing when he was a child, now fill his hours of blindness and loneliness with their incantatory magic: he is still faithful to a particular use of language that allows words to retain in the printed page their phonetic and aural qualities, to fall into patterns of rhythms and matrixes of aural associations. He is a master in the combinatory art which now helps him to "write" or "compose" in his mind; that is: to juggle sounds into patterns that can be later stored in the memory until a friendly amanuensis would copy them in writing.

And thoughts, of course. He learned with Father the art of coding and decoding concepts, of playing with them the rigorous game of logic. Borges' texts (poems, essays, short stories) are saturated with the game of philosophical discussion. Perhaps the most memorable (because of the unexpected place in which it is located) is the conclusion of "Death and the Compass."

As you may recall, the protagonist (a detective called Erik Lönnrot) has finally discovered with the help of a plan of the city and a compass, the exact location where the murderer (Red Scharlach) plans to dispose of his fourth and last victim. He had also discovered (a bit too late) that the victim is to be none other than himself. His logic has led Lönnrot to the final point in the geometrical labyrinth created by his enemy. He is going to be killed but before, he will have one last

chance: to correct his mistake and win the philosophical debate. And now to the text:

> For the last time, Lönnrot considered the problem of the symmetrical and periodical deaths.
> "In your labyrinth there are three lines too many," he said at last. "I know of one Greek labyrinth which is a single straight line. Along that line so many philosophers have lost themselves that a mere detective might well do so, too. Scharlach, when in some other incarnation you hunt me, pretend to commit (or do commit) a crime at A, then a second crime at B, eight kilometers from A, then a third crime at C, four kilometers from A and B, half-way between the two. Wait for me afterwards at D, two kilometers from A and C, again half-way between both. Kill me at D, as you are now going to kill me at Triste-le-Roy."
> "The next time I kill you," replied Scharlach, "I promise you that labyrinth, consisting of a single line which is invisible and unceasing."
> He moved back a few steps. Then, very carefully, he fired.[4]

How many times in the game of real life (not in the game of fiction Lönnrot and Scharlach are playing) Georgie did play with Father, over a chessboard as geometrical as the city of "Death and the Compass," this game of the labyrinth, of Zeno's paradoxes? How many times did Father and son rehearse Berkeley's and Hume's game of the unreality of time and space, of the tantalizing concept of a world made of appearances: a world Borges later tried to recapture in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"? We will never know. What we know is that before becoming Borges' texts, these concepts, these games, were played endlessly by Georgie and his father.

But Georgie inherited more than the habit of poetry reading and philosophical games from Father. Don Jorge had always wanted to be a writer and, despite his extreme modesty ("My Father was such a modest man that he would have liked to be invisible," his son tells us), his literary ambition followed him well into maturity. He wrote sonnets, some short stories, one play and a book of essays, which he never collected in book form. The only work he published was a novel, *El Caudillo*, set in his native province of Entre Ríos at

the time of his birth, and printed privately in Spain, 1921. Total blindness alone forced him to give up writing. But already the ambition to be a writer had become the ambition to make his son a writer. Georgie's vocation was only the reflection and the confirmation of Father's frustrated vocation. If we accept, as Sartre confesses in *Les mots* (and in doing so, he speaks for all of us) that we write *in imitation*, then it is true that Father is to Georgie what grandfather Schweitzer is to the child Jean-Paul: the Pygmalion, the Svengali who awakens the hidden gift.

In the same "Autobiographical Essay," Borges would later recall the tacit terms of the contract he was engaged to fulfill:

> From the time I was a boy, when blindness came to him, it was truly understood that I had to fulfill the literary destiny that circumstances had denied my father. This was something that was taken for granted (and such things are far more important than things that are merely said). I was expected to be a writer. ("Essay," 211)

The consequences of this contract had already been analyzed by me in some other occasion. Now it will suffice to indicate that the contract was the logical outcome of those readings of poetry, those philosophical games over the chessboard.

III.

The second great interlocutor Borges had was Macedonio Fernández. (For the sake of concision I omit now another very important one he met in Spain, Rafael Cansinos Assens. But that is another story.) Macedonio, as everybody calls him, was Father's exact contemporary. They were both born in 1874, met while attending Law School at Buenos Aires and graduated together in 1898. From 1903 until the time, in 1914, when the Borges moved to Europe for a long sojourn, Macedonio Fernández used to see Don Jorge quite often. But at the time, Georgie was too young to have been able to understand, and perhaps enjoy, Macedonio's peculiar turn of mind. They became friends at the time of the Borgeses' return from Europe, in 1921. The "Autobiographical

Essay" recalls thus the meeting:

> Perhaps the major event of my return was Macedonio Fernández. Of all the people I have met in my life—and I have met some quite remarkable men—no one has ever made so deep and so lasting an impression on me as Macedonio. A tiny figure in a black bowler hat, he was waiting for us on the Dársena Norte when we landed... Paradoxically, Macedonio was an outstanding conversationalist and at the same time a man of long silences and few words. We met on Saturday evenings at a café—the Perla, in the Plaza Once. There we would talk till daybreak, Macedonio presiding. As in Madrid Cansinos had stood for all learning, Macedonio now stood for pure thinking. At the time, I was a great reader and went out very seldom (almost every night after dinner, I used to go to bed and read), but my whole week was lit up with the expectation that on Saturday I'd be seeing and hearing Macedonio. He lived quite near us and I could have seen him whenever I wanted, but I somehow felt that I had no right to that privilege and that in order to give Macedonio's Saturday its full value I had to forego him throughout the week. ("Essay," 227)

From then on and for almost a decade, Georgie sat at Macedonio's feet, listening hard to his gnomic metaphysical speculations, adding some view of his own and working assiduously to transfer them into print. The same "Autobiographical Essay" recalls the general format of these Saturday conversations:

> At these meetings, Macedonio would speak perhaps three or four times, risking only a few quiet observations, which were addressed—seemingly—to his neighbor alone. These remarks were never affirmative. Macedonio was very courteous and soft-spoken and would say, for example, "Well, I suppose you've noticed...?" And thereupon he would let loose some striking, highly original thought. But, invariably, he attributed his remarks to the hearer. ("Essay," 227)

When I first met Borges in 1945 he was not then seeing much of Macedonio but he still had the habit, picked up from his master, of attributing to his interlocutors his best thoughts. He would look straight into your face and say, "Of course, as you know...," Or, "I'm sure you've already come to the conclusion..." He made you feel so intelligent that one's reaction was of terror. Now, increasing blindness and

the fact that he can only communicate through speech, has made Borges less willing to wait for the interlocutor's acquiescence, and has helped us to settle back into our normal mediocrity.

But to return to Macedonio. He had always been interested in philosophical speculation, and although his thoughts were not original (in the sense that they had already been anticipated by professional thinkers) he was original in having generally found them on his own. As Borges indicates in the "Autobiographical Essay,"

> Later on, Macedonio actually read Hume, Schopenhauer, Berkeley and William James, but I suspect he had not done much other reading, and he always quoted the same authors...he also believed that the discovery of truth was quite easy. He once told me that if he could lie out in the pampa, forgetting the world, himself, and his quest, truth might suddenly reveal itself to him. He added that of course it might be impossible to put that sudden wisdom into words. ("Essay," 229)

There was precisely the rub. Although Macedonio wrote many books, he published in his lifetime very few, and of those only at the instance of friends (such as Borges) who took upon themselves the task of putting together the manuscript pages and editing them. After his death in 1952, the zeal of his son, Alfonso de Obieta, had succeeded in collecting several volumes of his complete works. But Macedonio was not primarily a writer. He was a conversationalist. "For all his brilliance" (Borges has said in the same "Autobiographical Essay"), I don't think Macedonio is to be found in his writing at all. The real Macedonio was in his conversation" ("Essay," 228). That was the Macedonio who taught Borges to read and to talk.

> Before Macedonio, I had always been a credulous reader. His chief gift to me was to make me read skeptically. At the outset, I plagiarized him devotedly, picking up certain stylistic mannerisms of his that I later came to regret. I look back on him now, however, as an Adam bewildered by the Garden of Eden. His genius survives in but a few of his pages; his influence was of a Socratic nature. I truly loved

> the man, on this side of idolatry, as much as any. ("Essay,"

Some of the work done by Borges in the twenties shows the Macedonio imprint. At least two of his more ambitious "metaphysical" articles–"The Nothingness of Personality" and "Berkeley's Crossroads"–were admittedly written on the margin of (as he phrased it then) "lucid discussions" with Macedonio. Those articles reflected Macedonio's own peculiar readings of the idealist philosophers and his conviction that we live in a dream world and are made of such stuff as dreams are made on. Years later, Borges would develop his idiosincratic readings of the same authors and would produce, in "New Refutation of Time" (1947), his own version of idealist philosophy. But everything had its roots in the Saturday's meetings with Macedonio.

How did Macedonio react to this idolatry? He acknowledged it, but with a very curiously ironic smile, visible in a text he wrote in 1941 and which has been ignored by those who try hard to ignore Macedonio's friendship with Borges. It is a mock autobiographical note and it begins:

> I was born a true Buenos Airer and in a year very 1874. Not then but very soon I began to be quoted by Jorge Luis Borges with so little modesty for praise that because of the terrible risks he took with his enthusiasm, I began to be the author of the best things he had produced. I became a *de facto* talent, by overcoming, by usurping his work. What an injustice, my dear Jorge Luis, poet of "El truco" and "General Quiroga Rides to His Death in a Carriage," the true master of the time.[5]

Borges could not have accepted then that evaluation. For him, Macedonio was the first man, a true rustic Adam. In a speech he made at Macedonio's funeral in 1952, he recalled:

> In those years I imitated him to the point of transcription, of passionate and devoted plagiarism. I felt then: Macedonio *is* metaphysics, he *is* literature. Those who preceded him could shine in history but they were only first-drafts of Macedonio, imperfect preliminary versions. Not to surrender to that cannon would have implied an incredible negligence. (*Narradores*, 54)

Yes, Macedonio was his Socrates but as Plato outgrew Socrates and in his writings achieved a distinction Socrates had never dreamt of, Borges has outdistanced Macedonio. Precisely because Borges became a master of the art of changing conversation into writing. Because he was, he is, primarily a writer.

IV.

And now Bioy Casares. Borges' shadow has loomed so large over Bioy's works and achievements that only recently the maturity and originality of the disciple's fictions has begun to be appreciated by an increasing audience and even by the critics. Borges met Bioy around 1932, through the good offices of Victoria Ocampo. At that time, Borges was already thirty-two and one of the leading Argentine poets. Bioy was only seventeen. He had begun his literary career by writing short stories in a dreamy, surrealist vein. His family wanted him to be a success and asked Victoria to find him a mentor. Borges was selected because he had already been recognized in the *Sur* group as the master he was soon to become.

Borges and Bioy began seeing each other regularly. In a few years, time they even started to collaborate in earnest. Their first joint venture (according to Bioy's reminiscences) was a pamphlet on yoghurt written specially for the Casares' dairy firm. Soon they were engaged in more demanding enterprises; writing in the present tense, Bioy would recall:

> We plan a story we never write, which is the germ of *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi* [Six Problems for Don Isidro Parodi], about a German philanthropist, Dr. Praetorius, who by hedonistic methods–music, ceaseless games–murders children.[6]

In the "Autobiographical Essay" Borges had attempted to define their very peculiar relationship:

> One of the chief events of these years–and of my life–was the beginning of my friendship with Adolfo Bioy Casares. (...) It is always taken for granted in these cases that the elder man is the master and the younger his disciple. This may have been true at the outset, but several years later, when we began to work together, Bioy was really and secretly the master. He and I attempted many different literary ventures. We compiled anthologies of Argentine poetry, tales of the fantastic, and detective stories; we wrote articles and forewords; we annotated Sir Thomas Browne and Gracián; we translated short stories by writers like Beerbohm, Kipling, Wells, and Lord Dunsany; we founded a magazine, *Destiempo*, which lasted three issues; we wrote film scripts, which were invariably rejected. Opposing my taste for the pathetic, the sententious, and the baroque, Bioy made me feel that quietness and restraint are more desirable. If I may be allowed a sweeping statement, Bioy led me gradually toward classicism. ("Essay," 245-246)

It would be possible to attribute to Borges' own modesty this apparently extravagant praise of a writer not only fifteen years his junior but also more limited in his literary powers and resources. But a careful reading of the work produced by both separately and jointly tends to confirm Borges' assertion. If at the beginning, Bioy was understandably very much under Borges' guidance, as soon as he mastered his own style he began to influence Borges in a very decisive manner.

If it is rather obvious that some of Bioy's best pages reveal the imprint of Borges' teachings, less evident (although not less real) is Bioy's mark on some of Borges' stories. Thus, I believe it is necessary to underline now this dialogue of texts that the works they published during the forties and fifties especially so telling document. It is not out of friendship that Borges introduces Bioy at the beginning of "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius". It is safe to assume that many of the most fruitful inventions Borges conceived in those years matured in conversations with Bioy. To a French interviewer (the indefatigable Jean de Milleret) Borges once admitted that to talk to a friend is an active form of laziness. For him, talking to Bioy must have been (and still is) the equivalent of practising orally what he was later going to write or dictate. To a point, his relationship with Bioy mirrored the one he had, as a young man, with Macedonio.

But with a difference. Borges never collaborated with Macedonio in a joint literary venture. With Bioy they not only compiled anthologies (of Argentine poetry and fantastic

literature, with Silvina Ocampo; of detective stories and extraordinary tales, on their own), annotated and translated some classics, but created two totally new writers: Honorio Bustos Domecq and his faithful disciple, B. Suárez Lynch. In explaining his collaboration with Bioy, Borges had this to say in his "Autobiographical Essay":

> I have been often asked how collaboration was possible. I think it requires a joint abandoning of the ego, of vanity, and maybe of common politeness. The collaborators should forget themselves and think only in terms of the work. In fact, when somebody wants to know whether such-and-such joke or epithet came from my side of the table or Bioy's, I honestly cannot tell him. I have tried to collaborate with other friends some of them very close ones but their inability to be blunt on the one hand or thick-skinned on the other has made the scheme impossible. ("Essay," 247

The fact that Borges and Bioy not only managed to make the collaboration possible but that they created two new writers is perhaps due to Bioy's extraordinary insight into Borges' mind and whims. By being at the same time a good disciple and a subtle but firm master, Bioy was perhaps chiefly responsible for Bustos Domecq's existence. In the "Autobiographical Essay," Borges has reminisced about the day Bustos came into being:

> It was at some point in the early forties that we began writing in collaboration—a feat that up to that time I had thought impossible. I had invented what we thought was quite a good plot for a detective story. One rainy morning, he told me we ought to give it a try. I reluctantly agreed, and a little later that same morning the thing happened. A third man, Honorio Bustos Domecq, emerged and took over. In the long run, he ruled us with a rod of iron and to our amusement, and later to our dismay, he became utterly unlike ourselves, with his own whims, his own puns, and his own very elaborate style of writing...For many years, the dual identity of Bustos Domecq was never revealed. When it finally was, people thought that, as Bustos was a joke, his writings could hardly be taken seriously. ("Essay," 246)

Readers couldn't be more mistaken. Because "Bustos Domecq" or *Biorges*, as I prefer to call him, is one of the great unsung Argentine writers. He is more than a joke. As Alfonso Reyes was one of the first to point out, "Bustos Domecq" handled language with a freedom and inventiveness that went further than both Borges and Bioy had ever dreamt. Besides, *he* is more irreverent, more experimental in his handling of spoken speech, more adventurous in his exploring of the possibilities of parody and in his using social and political satire. Some of the stories not yet collected in book form, such as "El Hijo de su amigo" ["His Friend's Son"] (1952) and "la Fiesta del Monstruo" ["The Monster-fest"] (1955), strip bare the surface of Argentine's reality to expose its sordid and nightmarish realities. To truly understand some of Leopoldo Marechal's chapters in *Adán Buenosayres* (1948) or some of Cortázar's novels (*The Winners*, 1961, and *Hopscotch*, 1963) it is useful to look first at Bustos Domecq. Today, some of Argentine's newest writers (such as Jorge Asís in *Los reventados*, [The Busted Ones] (1974), are following Bustos Domecq's footsteps.

V.

Out of laziness (according to his quoted statement to Jean de Milleret) Borges seems to have spent a considerable part of his time talking about his writings instead of writing them. Perhaps. But the talking has been essential for the existence of the text we now call Borges. It is possible to locate in one of Borges' most famous stories (*the* most famous), "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," the exact moment and place in which talking becomes composing; that is: writing. It is a very well-known passage but I would like to read it today not as it was written (as an introduction to the incredible adventure the story later tells) but as a vivid presentation of Borges and Bioy as dramatis personnae caught in the act of writing:

> I owe the discovery of Uqbar to the conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopedia. The mirror troubled the depths of a corridor in a house on Gaona street in Ramos Mejía; the encyclopedia is fallaciously called *The Anglo-American*

Cyclopaedia (New York, 1917) and is a literal but delinquent reprint of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1902. The event took place some five years ago. Bioy Casares had had dinner with me that evening and we became lengthily engaged in a vast polemic concerning the composition of a novel in the first person, whose narrator would omit or disfigure the facts and indulge in various contradictions which would permit a few readers—very few readers—to perceive an atrocious or banal reality. From the remote depths of the corridor, the mirror spied on us. We discovered (such a discovery is inevitable in the late hours of the night) that mirrors have something monstrous about them. Then Bioy Casares recalled that one of the heresiarcs of Uqbar had declared that mirrors and copulation are abominable, because they increase the number of men. I asked him the origin of this memorable observation and he answered that it was reproduced in *The Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*, in its article on Uqbar.[7]

It wouldn't be necessary to read any further. We now know that Bioy's quotation of that *Encyclopaedia* is the starting point of a passionate search for the missing text which constitutes the story's subject. We also now know—that is: on this side of the printed page, in what Borges has called the "mere" reality we all share—that the real *Anglo-American Cyclopaedia* never carried an article on Uqbar; that Bioy could never have quoted that passage because it is actually a distorted quotation from another of Borges' stories, "The Masked Dyer, Hákim of Merv," published in *A Universal History of Infamy* (1935) (it is attributed there to an Easter source); that the search for the missing text never occurred in real life; that "Tlön" is not an article but a fiction. But we also know now that conversations similar to the one recalled at the beginning of this story happened not between the characters named "Bioy" and "I" in "Tlön", but between our good old friends, Borges and Bioy, without any quotation marks whatsoever. The novel they were discussing on that imaginary occasion might have been the same Tlón story, or (as Suzanne Jill Levine has advanced in a Ph.D. dissertation) Bioy Casares' second important novel, *Plan de evasión* or *A Plan to Escape*. Perhaps. But what is essential to

our argument today, is that in that first paragraph of "Tlón," we have the precise missing link needed to complete our search: "Bioy" and the "I" of the story are permanently caught in the exact moment in which an idle conversation begins to turn into the seed of a text. Words set free by the flow of the mind and the warmth of literary exchange, began to condense in phrases. The flow of conversation is stopped: an irrefutable part of writing, in the form of a half-remembered quotation from an imaginary book, is inserted into the surface of the text we are reading. The incrusted text refers to reproduction, either by reflexion (mirrors) or by coitus. But both forms of reproduction serve in the story as masks for another not less abominable mechanism of multiplication: writing. Because writing is but reproduction, it consists, as Borges has always said, and Derrida has proved, of the inscription of a text over the surface of another.

With the help of Bioy, and reaching the plenitude of his fortieth year, Borges had achieved what had only been sketched in his conversations with Father and his speculations with Macedonio: the total rendering of conversation into writing, the reproduction in another medium of what had been freely and challengingly created in dialogue. Georgie (as Father called him) or Jorge Luis (as Macedonio called him) has become finally Borges, as Bioy always calls him. The son, the disciple, is now and forever the master.

NOTES

1. "An Autobiographical Essay," in *The Aleph and Other Stories*, translated by Norman Thomas di Giovanni and the author (New York: Dutton, 1970), p. 152. This will be quoted as "Essay," with the page following.
2. *Dreamtigers*, translated by Mildred Boyer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), p. 93.
3. "In Praise of Darkness," translated by Norman Thomas di Giovanni, in *Prose for Borges*, published by *Tri-Quarterly*, no. 25 (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 143.

4. "Death and the Compass," translated by Donald A. Yates, in *Labyrinths* (New York: New Directions, 1962), pp. 86-87. This book will be quoted as *Labyrinths*, with the page following.
5. Cf. Emir Rodríguez Monegal: *Narradores de esta América*, vol. II (Buenos Aires: Editorial Alfa Argentina, 1974), p. 55. This text will be quoted as *Narradores*, with the page following.
6. Cf. Adolfo Bioy Casares: "A Chronology," in *Review*, 15 (New York: Center for Inter-American Relations, Inc., 1975), p. 37.
7. "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," translated by James E. Irby, in *Labyrinths*, p. 3.

THE ROSE IN BORGES' WORK

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Like Saint Casilda's skirt, Borges' writings are full of roses. At first sight less impressive than some other of his themes, or perhaps considered prestigious but somehow wasted by centuries of use and misuse, little or no attention has been paid to them. Borges' last book of poems impelled me to move backward and zigzag in time and take a look at these flowers in order to reach the deep, unending rose of 1975.[1]

I sincerely think that their proliferation results from Borges' love for the rose as a perfect manifestation of beauty. Then it becomes clear why his only offer to the beloved woman is "the memory of a yellow rose/ seen at sunset" years before she was born; we understand too that he is so grateful "to the divine/ labyrinth of causes and effects/ ...for the mystery of the rose/ that lavishes its color and doesn't see it," and that now he can say: "I repeat that I have only lost/ the vain surface of things./ The comfort comes from Milton and is valiant,/ but I still think about letters and roses."[2]

The feeling goes farther, however. The rose, one of the natural wonders Adam found in Paradise, as many other "beloved things," is now inaccessible in its primal meaning, even if, from time to time, Borges recovers it by listening to the reviving rain, even also if he thinks himself "unworthy of.../ the invisible roses" and able only to smell "a murky rose of darkness."[3]

Naturally enough, the rose becomes intermingled with different strong impressions and emotions, and represents

different things in Borges' works through images and comparisons. He can say as early as 1926 that a patio is "like a firm rose under the growing walls," or decide after the suicide of a young writer that his comrades only can speak about "the dishonor of the roses that didn't know how" to stop him. Fire, another gift Borges is grateful about, has, among its multiple forms, the aspect of a rose. And if for one of his ancestors the definitive, ecstatic instant on a battlefield is a rose, what he himself sees in nightmares is an "insensate rose."[4]

The queen of flowers reappears again and again associated with the themes which attract Borges the most. Time has left him only a "dull rose": the "vain hank of streets that repeat the preterit names" of his kindred. The chaotic universe seen through the Aleph shows "a sunset in Querétaro which seemed to reflect the color of a rose in Bengal." His interest in Platonic concepts leads him to say that "in the letters of rose is the rose", and on *malevos* he says that, if their legends are as "a dull rose," the *tango* keeps them alive as a "burning rose". Coming back once more to the idealism of Berkeley, he affirms that plenty of things forgotten by us exist for God, as "the symmetrical, momentary rose/ that chance gave once to the occult/ crystals of the childish kaleidoscope." The conviction that words cannot give the reality of things but only add new and imperfect forms to the universe–so beautifully presented in "The Other Tiger"–is repeated as a revelation in "A Yellow Rose," where the flower demonstrates to a dying Marine that "it was in its eternity and not in his words, and that we may mention or allude to but not express, and that the tall, proud volumes that cast a golden penumbra in an angle of the room were not–as he has dreamed in his vanity–a mirror of the world, but only one more thing added to the world." Precisely because of this Borges doesn't dare to sing "the unattainable rose" and speaks of it painfully, using literary or philosophical allusions, and only from time to time allowing himself the opportunity of a more natural way of expression; but he had sung with decision the hypothetical rose "that Milton put near his face,/ without seeing it."[5]

The essay "The Metaphor" included, with some contemptuous bias, a long list of comparisons where women and roses had been placed together. He couldn't refrain, however, from using the rose to symbolize the attitudes, characteristics or perfection of some writers: Poe wasn't blinded by "the resplendent metal/ nor the sepulchral marble but by the rose"; the style of Alfonso Reyes is a "precise rose"; the inner meaning of Joyce's intentions is like an unreachable rose "in the center of his labyrinth." And when Borges praises the German language, that he learned with such difficulty, he establishes what each author writing in German gave to him; Gottfried Keller, the Swiss born poet and novelist, deserves a very special place among them because of a rose left "in the hand of a dead person who loved it." But what no critic must forget is what Borges says about the terribly sad destiny of the great poets because on them "gods threw/ the inexorable light of glory, that looks at the entrails and counts the cracks,/ of glory, that at last shrivels the rose it reveres."[6]

Adding Borges' love for the rose to his "persistent inclination to theological difficulties" we are ready to look at another kind of rose. The first time Borges mentions the Persian poet and Sufi master Farid-al Din Attar (d. 1220) is in the initial page of "The Approach to Al-Mútasim" (ca. 1936) and in the footnote that ends this story-essay to explain a possible relationship between a fictitious novel and Attar's real *Parliament of the Birds*. It is important to remember that in a moment of the mystical quest for the Simurgh–the central motif of the *Parliament*–the nightingale passionately sings its love for the rose and is rebuked by the hoopoe; it is also important because, even if Borges didn't then pay attention to that aspect, later he remembered it, as can be seen in the pages dedicated to the Simurgh in *Manual of Fantastic Zoology* (1957), and came back to some expressions of the above mentioned fragment in his last book.[7]

In his poem "About Hell and Heaven" (1942), Borges tells us that "God doesn't want/ to exhilarate the merits of the just/ ...the depths of the Rose"; although it is evident that this rose is being used in a theological context, we are

not too sure if Borges is thinking about Dante's symbols only or if he is already under the influence of Sufistic imagery. By 1947 we find clearly Sufistic roses in "Averroes' Search" and "The Zahir." The first short story includes a conversation between the philosopher and his two friends Abulcasim and Farach in a garden, and they speak about those flowers. Farach informs his guests that there is a description of "an excellent variety of the perpetual rose... whose petals... exhibit characters that say: 'There is no other god as the God. Mohammed is the apostle of God.' "In a broad way, that is the pantheism of which Annemarie Schimmel speaks in her *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*: "The eye of the mystic... sees traces of eternal beauty everywhere"; but in a more restricted sense she had said earlier: "Every flower in the garden becomes, for the mystic poets of the late twelfth century, a tongue to praise God; every leaf and petal is a book in which God's wisdom can be read, if man only looks." At the end of "The Zahir", the rose reappears with an even more specific meaning. The narrator, bewitched by a coin that forces him to think almost only about it, twice muses that the man who has seen the Zahir will soon see the Rose, and finishes the story with these words: "In order to be lost in God, Sufis repeat their own name or the ninety-nine divine names until they don't mean anything. I long to travel that Path. Perhaps I will finish by wearing out the Zahir by force of thinking of it and thinking of it again and again; perhaps behind the coin God will be." The Rose to which the Zahir can lead a man is God, the Everlasting Rose that the Prophet loved to the point of deserving the epithet of "nightingale of the Eternal Garden," for he disclosed to the faithful some of its mysteries; it is the "cloud of roses" or the "marvelous red rose" of which Ruzbihan Baqli (d. 1209) spoke; or, as a late Dard (d. 1785) says: "From every form in this worldly rosebed pluck nothing except the rose of the vision of God."[8]

Around 1958, Borges remembers the Sufistic roses anew and by means of them he refers in a general way to style and themes in Sufism. "Limits" alludes to a Persian poet: "Your voice will never return to what the Persian/ said in his language made of birds and roses"; a distich of "To Wine" recalls the rose among other Sufistic symbols, but eludes any specification of authorship: "In the impetuous stanzas of the Sufi/ you are the ruby, the rose, the scimitar." At some moment of the second half of the sixties, Borges wrote a poem called "1964"; the thirteenth line of its first sonnet reads: "One symbol, one rose, tears you." I wonder if this rose intends to evoke something it is said happened during the execution of the Sufi mystic Al-Hallaj in 922: "When people began to throw stones at him, Shibli [one of his friends]... threw a rose, and Hallaj sighed. Asked the reason for his sigh, he answered: 'They don't know what they do, but he should have known better.' And the saying 'the rose, thrown by a friend, hurts more than a stone' has become a Turkish proverb."[9]

In *The Deep Rose*, Borges' last book of poems, the Sufistic flower is present again. In a passage of "To the Nightingale" he says:

> The Mohammedan
> dreamt of you led away by ecstasy
> your breast pierced by the thorn
> of the sung rose that you redden
> with your final blood.

If not the voice of Attar's nightingale—"I think of nothing but the Rose; I wish nothing but the ruby Rose"—, we hear there at least an echo; and the rebuke of the hoopoe—"The love of the face of the Rose has merely driven thorns into your heart"—is transformed into the attribute of the longing nightingale's passion.[10]

The mystical flower pervades the poem "The Unending Rose" (p. 155) and becomes its nucleus:

> At the five hundred years of the Hegira
> Persia watched from its minarets
> the invasion of the lances of the desert
> and Attar of Nishapur looked at a rose
> and said to it with a tacit word
> as one who thinks and not as one who prays:
> —Your vague sphere is in my hand. Time
> bends both of us and ignores us both
> on this evening of a lost garden.

> Your slight weight is humid in the air.
> The unceasing high tide of your fragrance
> rises to my old face that is declining
> but I know that you are farther than the boy
> who saw you imperfectly through plates of a dream
> or here at this garden on a morning.
> The whiteness of the sun might be yours
> or the gold of the moon or the vermeil
> firmness of the sword after a victory.
> I am blind and know nothing, but foresee
> many more paths. Each thing
> is infinite things. You are music,
> skies, palaces, rivers, angels,
> deep rose, unlimited, intimate,
> that the Lord will show to my dead eyes.

Borges, who had forgotten the rose of Attar in his "Approach to Al-Mu'tasim," had there meticulously recorded a circumstance now thought to be uncertain, but that indicates "the rank he was given in the spiritual tradition of Iran" (Schimmel, p. 303): Attar was killed by the invading Mongol soldiers of Genghis Khan's son, when Nishapur was spoliated. In the poem, Borges, to whom violence is horrifying and who is convinced that intellectuals and men of spiritual values are perhaps its favorite victims—as "The Secret Miracle," "Deutsches Requiem" and "Conjectural Poem" show—, doesn't directly come back to the possible legend. He creates, instead, an anticipatory situation which subtly combines allusions to the longing and searching Attar, whose works "treat the perpetual movement of the soul toward its origin and goal" (Schimmel, p. 305), allusions to Sufism in general, and somehow allusions to himself.

In imminent danger, the old Attar, who had sung the rose almost as much as the nightingale, meditates in front of the terrestrial mirror of God's face looking at it with his inner sight, because 'looking' is "one of the central topics of mystical love experience" and the mystic "completely absorbed in his love contemplates... in the beloved only the perfect manifestation of divine beauty"; but Attar feels he is far from the rose, "which is as distant from him as God himself." He then tells the flower that he is blind—if it be a physical

feature, I never found it in relation to Attar—and knows nothing, peculiarities that, following a commonplace of Sufi," literature, could express the idea that he considers himself still unregenerate and unable to recognize true reality, or, as Attar said in one of his quatrains, "My whole life has been spent and with this weak reason I have learnt/ this much alone: that I still know Him not." The end of the poem, however, even if it reminds us of Sufistic pantheism, reminds us too of concepts dear to Borges, and, what is much more important at a pure lyric poetic level, of Borges' everlasting and deepening love for the rose. So Attar's last act of confidence, that could be illustrated with words of Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273)—"The man of God is beyond infidelity and faith"—would be in some way also appropriate for Borges.[11]

An unceasing emotion with aesthetic overtones, an intellectual curiosity always alert, a theological preoccupation accentuated during these last years, obvious affinities with Sufism and Sufis and lack of affinities with the atrocious world in which he lives, are the different steps that led Borges to the deep rose of 1975. He, as Nizami (d. 1209), perhaps found that under the tongue of the fellow poets of Persia "lies the key of the treasure,"[12] and he has given us the pleasure of enjoying, if not a new quest for the Simurgh, at least a progressive variety of roses that at the end becomes *his* Rose.

NOTES

1. Jorge Luis Borges, *La rosa profunda*, Emecé, Buenos Aires, 1975.
2. J.L.B., "Two English Poems", II (*El otro, el mismo*, Emecé, 1969, p. 18); "Otro poema de los dones" (ibid., p. 203); "Un ciego" (*La rosa profunda*, p. 103).
3. J.L.B., "Adrogué" (*El otro, el mismo*, p. 110); "La lluvia" (ibid., p. 75); "On his blindness" (*El oro de los tigres*, Emecé, 1972, p. 33); "El ciego" (*La rosa profunda*, p. 100).
4. J.L.B., "Fundación mítica de Buenos Aires" (*Luna de enfrente y Cuaderno San Martín*, Emecé, 1969, p. 92); "Barrio Norte" (ibid., p.

123); "A Francisco López Merino" (ibid., p. 119); "Otro poema de los dones" (*El otro, el mismo*, p. 203); "Las ruinas circulares" [1940] (*Ficciones*, Emecé, 1956, p. 63); "Pàgina para recordar al coronel Suàrez, vencedor de Junin" [1954] (*El otro, el mismo*, p. 29); "Efialtes" (*La rosa profunda*, p. 143).
5. J.L.B., "La noche cíclica" [1940] (*El otro, el mismo*, p. 20); "El Aleph" [1945] (*El Aleph*, Emecé, 1957, p. 165); "El golem" [ca. 1958] (*El otro, el mismo*, p. 47); "El tango" (ibid., pp. 51 y 51); "Cosas" (*El oro de los tigres*, p. 57); "Una rosa amarilla" [ca. 1960] (*El hacedor*, Emecé, 1967, pp. 31-32); "La rosa" [1970] (*Fervor de Buenos Aires*, Emecé, 1970, p. 47); "Una rosa y Milton" [ca. 1958] (*El otro, el mismo*, p. 115).
6. J.L.B., "La metáfora" [1926? 1953?] (*Historia de la eternidad*, Emecé, 1953, pp. 72-73); "Edgar Allan Poe" (*El otro, el mismo*, p. 159); "In memoriam Alfonso Reyes" (ibid., p. 90); "Invocación a Joyce" (*Elogio de la sombra*, Emecé, 1969, p. 116); "Al idioma alemán" (*El oro de los tigres*, p. 81); "A un poeta menor de la Antología" [1953] (*El otro, el mismo*, p. 27).
7. J.L.B., "Prólogo" a *Discusión* (Emecé, 1957, p. 61); "El acercamiento a Almotásim" (*Historia de la eternidad*, pp. 135 y 144-145). Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (Doubleday and Co., Garden City, New York, 1964, p. 108). J.L.B., "El Simurg" (*Manual de zoología fantástica*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 1957, pp. 134-135).
8. J.I.B., "Del infierno y del cielo" [1941] (*El otro, el mismo*, p. 22); "La busca de Averroes" (*El Aleph*, p. 94). Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1975, pp. 309 y 308). J.L.B., "El Zahir" (*El Aleph*, pp. 112 y 113). Schimmel, op. cit., pp. 22, 222, 229, 376.
9. J.L.B., "Límites" (*El otro, el mismo*, p. 42); "Al vino" (ibid., p. 171). Schimmel, op. cit., p. 309. Idries Shah, op. cit., pp. 113-114. J.L. B., "1964" (*El otro, el mismo*, p. 175). Schimmel, op. cit., pp. 68-69.
10. J.L.B., "Al ruiseñor" (*La rosa profunda*, pp. 49-50). Idries Shah, op. cit., p. 8. Schimmel, op. cit., p. 307.
11. Schimmel, op cit., p. 290. Idries Shah, op. cit., p. XV. Apud Cyprian Rice, *The Persian Sufis* [1964], George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1969, p. 84. Apud Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* [1914], Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1963, p. 95.
12. Apud Idries Shah, op. cit., p. XI.

LOVER OF LABYRINTHS

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Borges is, above all else, a lover of labyrinths, a contemporary Daedalus, constructing an intricate world in which reality gives way to unreality, and unreality, in turn, becomes real. His is a world in which all paths turn back upon themselves; there is no escape:

> "They knew it, the fervent pupils of Pythagoras:
> that stars and men revolve in a cycle;... this writing hand
> will be born from the same
> womb; and bitter armies will contrive their doom.

(The philologist Nietzsche made this very point)...

> It returns, the concave dark of Anaxagoras; in my human flesh, eternity keeps recurring, and an endless poem, remembered or still in the writing...
>
> They knew it, the fervent pupils of Pythagoras...."[1]

For Borges, as for Nietzsche,

> "All things themselves are dancing.... Everything goes - everything comes back - eternally rolls the wheel of being. Everthing does - everything blossoms again - eternally runs the year of being.... In every now, being begins; round every here rolls the sphere there. The center is everywhere. Bent is the path of eternity."[2]

Borges does not offer us a very optimistic picture of the world and of our condition in it. The labyrinth is not simply the mosaic dance floor in front of the Cretan palace on which dancers performed the spring dance of the partridge. More than that, the world itself is a mosaic and we are all dancers, caught in the labyrinth. We come from nowhere and we go

nowhere. Our life is an empty dance reflected in an infinite hall of mirrors. Unlike Theseus, we have no thread to guide us through the labyrinth. We cannot identify the real, we cannot distinguish the genuine from the illusory, there is no good or bad or right or wrong, nothing to fight for, nothing to fight against. "One destiny is no better than another."[3] No justice rewards our struggles. There is no good to triumph in the end. There is no end. It is all a dance on an infinite mosaic floor beneath a spinning mirrored sphere.

It is my intention to explore Borges' presentation and discussion of the labyrinth within which we find ourselves, to juxtapose his discussion of the poet's response to the labyrinth with that of Martin Heidegger and, finally, to argue that Heidegger's view of the poet is superior, maintaining that, in the end, Borges' love of labyrinths, which is perhaps his greatest strength, is also his ultimate weakness.

We begin to appreciate the complexity of Borges' work when we understand that the labyrinth is indeed more than a mosaic dancing floor, more than a collection of bewildering, twisting underground passageways. Borges' labyrinth is nothing less than language itself. Language itself is inextricable, bewildering, a perplexity, a maze.

The inability of language to grasp the genuine is suggested in "A Yellow Rose":

> "Then came the Revelation. Marino *saw* the rose as Adam might have seen it in paradise. And he sensed that it existed in its eternity and not in his words, and that we may make mention or allusion of a thing but never express it at all; and that the tall proud tomes that cast a golden penumbra in an angle of the drawing room were not - as he had dreamed in his vanity - a mirror of the world, but simply one more thing added to the universe."[4]

In "Parable of the Palace" he again offers his melancholy recognition of the inevitable defeat of all poets.

> "The poet was the emperor's slave and died as such; his composition fell into oblivion because it merited oblivion and his descendants still seek, and will not find, the word for the universe."[5]

All language ultimately fails; it does not deliver us from itself. Language is a closed labyrinth within which, and by means of which, we dance.

But still there is no reason to despair just because language reveals itself to be a hall of mirrors; it remains a limited, finite labyrinth—we may still our voice, lay down our pen, and step off the dance floor at any moment into a silent, but nonetheless real, world. Or can we? Borges is not so naive. Not only is language a human construction; more importantly, the world we imagine to be "out there," beyond the dance floor, is itself only an interpretation, a human construction. The world, the room within which you are sitting, is an interpretation, a poem. There is no world but that which shines in and through the mirrors of language. The labyrinth is, then, complete and inescapable. Which is to say, there is no stepping off the dance floor.

Borges urges us to extend Norwood Hansen's famous maxim that "all perception is theory-laden" (meaning that there is no "pure" inductive base from which science may proceed) to the more general assertion that "all perception is language-laden." There is no world but that which shines in and through the mirrors of language. The labyrinth is, then, complete and inescapable. It is the English Department—more than the Physics Department—which is the broker of the world. They are the dance-masters, and there is no way in which we may sit out the dance.

In his essay "Kafka and his Precursors," Borges notes that the voice of Kafka may be recognized in texts from diverse literatures and periods, among them: Zeno's famous paradox against movement, the parables of Kierkegaard, and Browning's poem "Fears and Scruples." Reflecting on these "precursors," each of which resembles Kafka, but none of which resemble each other, Borges observes:

> In each of these texts we find Kafka's idiosyncrasy to a greater or lesser degree, but if Kafka had never written a line, we would not perceive this quality; in other words, it would not exist. The poem "Fears and Scruples" by Browning foretells Kafka's work, but our reading of Kafka perceptibly sharpens and deflects our reading of the poem.

> Browning did not read it as we do now.... The fact is that every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future.[6]

Note the clear recognition that without the labyrinth of language which Kafka constructs in his works, we would not *perceive* this quality. But more than that, note the further recognition that if we did not perceive it, "it would not exist." Like Daedalus, Kafka constructs a labyrinth which "modifies our conception of the past as it will modify the future."

In an essay entitled "Avatars of the Tortoise," Borges considers this theme more directly. The tortoise to which the title refers is the tortoise of Zeno's second paradox. The swift Achilles cannot overtake the slow moving tortoise who has a head start of ten meters:

> "Achilles runs those ten meters; the tortoise one. Achilles runs that meter; the tortoise runs a decimeter. Achilles runs the decimeter; the tortoise runs a centimeter. Achilles runs the centimeter; the tortoise a millimeter. Fleet-footed Achilles the millimeter; the tortoise a tenth of a millimeter. And so on to infinity."[7]

Among the avatars of embodiments of this paradox, Borges notes the third man argument of Aristotle, (if A and B are related by virtue of C, then (A+B) and C must be related by D, and so forth *ad infinitum*), Agrippa, the skeptic, who "denies that anything can be proven, since every proof requires a previous proof,"[8] Sextus Empiricus, who argues that "definitions are in vain, since one will have to define each of the words used and then define the definition."[9]

From these, and others, Borges is led to suggest that "the vertiginous *regressus in infinitum* is perhaps applicable to all subjects."[10] Looking at Zeno's paradox and its heirs, he concludes:

> "Let us admit what all idealists admit: the hallucinatory nature of the world. Let us do what no idealist has done: seek unrealities which confirm that nature.... The greatest magician (Novalis has memorably written) would be the one who would cast over himself a spell so complete that he would take his own phantasmagorias as autonomous

> appearances. Would not this be our case? I conjecture that this is so. We... have dreamt the world. We have dreamt it as firm, mysterious, visible, ubiquitous in space and durable in time; but in its architecture we have allowed tenuous and eternal crevices of unreason which tell us it is false."[11]

In the later collection entitled *A Personal Anthology*, of which Borges says "My preferences have dictated this book. I should like to be judged by it...,"[12] the theme continues. In a poem entitled "The Moon," Borges tells of one man's heroic project. He conceived a plan of "ciphering the universe in one book." To this end he:

> built his high and mighty manuscript,
> shaping and declaiming the final line.
>
> But when about to praise his luck,
> He lifted up his eyes, and saw
> A burnished disc upon the air; startled,
> He realized he'd left out the moon.

Reflecting on this tale, Borges concludes:

> Though contrived, this little story
> might well exemplify the mischief
> that involves us all who take on
> the job of turning real life into words.
> Always the essential thing gets lost. That's
> one rule holds true of every inspiration.[13]

It is, of course, apparent to even the most untutored of readers, as it is to Borges himself, that these are not new ideas. A sense of the frailty of human understanding dates back at least to the pre-Socratics. (One recalls the sophist Gorgias who claimed: "Nothing exists. Even if anything does exist it is inapprehensible by man. Even if anything is apprehensible, yet of a surety it is inexpressible.")[14] Indeed, an awareness of the dilemma which all human beings face as agents trying to know the world, which itself is altered by their very knowing it, has been shared by most modern thinkers since Kant. Nonetheless, for much of the twentieth century, western thought has fallen back into a naive realism accompanied by a rather crude empiricism. It is only within the last twenty years that the western mind has begun to work its

way back to the insights to which Borges has devoted so much of his life's work. Only lately have we seen again the labyrinth. In the late 1950's, philosophers of science began rejecting empiricism's claim of direct access to the real, and suggesting instead that human knowledge is far more complex and circular. One may see this development in the work of Norwood Hansen,[15] who maintains that observations are not "pure," that there are no "brute facts," that reality does not "lie there" for the taking. On the contrary, all observation is "theory laden," which is to say that theory does not follow upon observation so much as it precedes (and hence influences) observation. In the words of Borges, "Our eyes see what they are accustomed to see."[16] Thomas Kuhn agrees, arguing that historically relative paradigms, "ways of seeing the world," structure our experience, and that there are no criteria for adjudicating the claims of alternative paradigms. One might extend the list of scientific critics of empiricism to include still others, such as Stephen Toulmin, Michael Polanyi, or Paul Feyerabend, but the above should suffice to make our point. If these scholars are correct, the foundations of empiricism must lie in ruin. We can no longer naively assume direct access to reality. We have lost the thread; there is no escape from the labyrinth.

Of all the critics of naive empiricism, perhaps the most eloquent is Martin Heidegger. Like Borges, Heidegger concludes that, "to go straight to the things cannot be carried out."[17] It is assumed by many, observes Heidegger, that science has an immediate grounding in things which affords it, "a direct transition and entrance to them starting out from everyday representations." And yet, "there always remains the possibility that we only exchange subjective pictures of things with one another, which may not thereby become any truer because we have exchanged them continually."[18] Recognizing that "things stand in different truths," that the "description of things and their interdependence corresponds to what we call 'the natural conception of the world,'' and that "what is 'natural' is not 'natural' at all," which is to say not "self-evident for any given ever-existing man," it follows that, "the natural is always historical," and hence that "the

question 'what is a thing?' is a historical question."[19]

Given the historicity of our knowledge, and the consequent limitations of all science and objectivity, we are driven to ask with Heidegger,

> "Is science the measure of knowledge, or is there a knowledge in which the ground and limit of science...are determined. [If so] is this genuine knowledge necessary for a historical people, or is it dispensable or replaceable by something else?"[20]

We need go no further to establish our claim that Borges and Heidegger have much in common. They share a humility which frees them from the presumption that human knowledge can grasp the real. Moreover, they hold a common conviction that the world is not what we see it to be. What is it then which separates Borges and Heidegger, and how am I to substantiate the claim I made earlier that Heidegger's view of the poet is superior, and that in the end Borges' love of labyrinths is not a strength but a weakness. And why is it that I wish to second the self-judgment which Borges makes at the conclusion of his prologue to *A Personal Anthology*, "I know now that my gods grant me no more than allusion or mention."[21]

For Borges, the poet is the caller of the partridge dance, the master of ceremonies in the hall of mirrors. For Heidegger on the contrary, the poet is one who names the "holy," i.e., that which lies beyond the labyrinth. In his commentary on Hölderlin's poem "Homecoming" (which title refers precisely to the human struggle to escape from the labyrinth), Heidegger identifies the poet's task as that of letting "the heavenly share itself out."[22] It is the task of the poet to help the holy illumine the spirit of men "so that their nature may be open to what is genuine in their fields, towns and houses."[23] To do this, the poet must come forth, must struggle out of the labyrinth, to stand in the presence of the genuine. For Heidegger, mankind is being's co-respondent, but we are often forgetful, losing our way in the labyrinth. It is the poet's task to call us forth, out of the labyrinth. The poet seeks to come home, to emerge from the labyrinth into the

light of the genuine. Here we see more clearly the distinction between Borges and Heidegger. Borges is a skeptic. He embraces that skepticism, fundamental to all sophists, which maintains that wisdom is the acceptance of our ignorance. Heidegger, on the contrary, is a philosopher—one who recognizes, but does not accept, his ignorance, and hence who is sustained by a "love of wisdom." Heidegger and Borges are one in their joint recognition that we humans are not wise. The difference between them lies in the fact that Borges accepts the limitations of the human condition while Heidegger does not.

The resignation, characteristic of Borges, which is the subject of my criticism, is apparent in "Inferno I, 32" in which Borges tells the story of a leopard locked in a cage, to which God spoke the following words:

> "You live and will die in this prison, so that a man I know of may see you a certain number of times and not forget you and put your figure and your symbol in a poem which has its precise place in the scheme of the universe. You suffer captivity, but you will have given a word to the poem.

Borges goes on to tell us that the leopard understood his fate and even accepted it:

> And yet, when he awoke, he felt merely an obscure resignation, a gallant ignorance, for the machinery of the world is overly complex for the simplicity of a wild beast.

Borges then draws a melancholy parallel:

> Years later, Dante lay dying in Ravenna, as little justified and as much alone as any other man. In a dream, God revealed to him the secret purpose of his life and labor.... Tradition holds that on awakening he felt he had received and then lost something infinite, something he could not recuperate, or even glimpse, for the machinery of the world is overly complex for the simplicity of men.[24]

We may further distinguish Borges and Heidegger in reference to Nietzsche. Both quote Nietzsche and cite his influence in their work, but Heidegger is a true student of Nietzsche and Borges is not. We began our essay recalling, as does Borges himself, Nietzsche's eternal return: "All things themselves are dancing [think here of the labyrinth] ...everything

goes, everything comes back, eternally rolls the wheel of being...."[25]

This is the lament of the defeated Zarathustra of book three; the Zarathustra who has succumbed to the spirit of gravity (reason); the Zarathustra who has fallen from the tightrope into the labyrinth and has abandoned hope of the *ubermensch*, resigning himself instead to the eternal passages of the labyrinth. It is this Zarathustra of book three who concludes, as does Borges, "I love you, O eternity."[26] But there are four books to Zarathustra; the story does not end with book three, with the defeat of Zarathustra. There is the joyful Zarathustra of book four, the Zarathustra who reasserts the struggle for the overman and who, in our terms, continues the struggle to emerge from the labyrinth.

Heidegger's refusal to resign himself to the inevitability of falsehood is suggested in his discussion of the poet's "care." For Heidegger, as for Borges, "that which remains (that which stands forth) is established by the poet."[27] But it is not mere whim or caprice that guides the poet's hand, not the idle desire to simply add one more mirror to the hall of mirrors. Rather, for Heidegger there is a clear recognition (which I do not detect in Borges) that the poet's mirrors reflect something beyond themselves: "That which supports and dominates the existent in its entirety [the labyrinth] must become manifest. Being must be opened out, so that the existent may appear."[28] It is the task of Heidegger's poet to stand between that which lies beyond the labyrinth and the labyrinth, between Being and its expression in existents. "...in this Between it is decided who man is and where he is settling his existence."[29] Hence, for Heidegger, the poet's task is monumental, it is to bring the labyrinth closer to the genuine.

Precisely for this reason, Heidegger knows a "care" of which Borges is not cognizant. Heidegger's poet, like Borges', must ultimately become a mirror—he cannot be the window, (the transparency that would allow escape from the labyrinth), that he wishes to be. But he dedicates his "mirror" to reflecting the genuine, and not merely to reflecting the reflections. And precisely because of this dedication, he fears

that the dweller in the labyrinth may mistake the mirror for that of which it imperfectly speaks. Heidegger is concerned to preserve not the truth of illusion, as is Borges, but the illusion of "truth."

In conclusion, we must ask, is the poet the dance master, singing for the partridge dancers beneath the mirrored sphere? Or is he or she struggling to bring the labyrinth closer to the genuine? It is the question posed earlier by Heidegger: "Is this genuine knowledge necessary...or is it dispensable?" For Heidegger it is necessary; for Borges, it is dispensable. Borges' poet is a dancer, delighting in the illusions of the hall of mirrors. Heidegger's poet is a marcher, dedicated to escape from the labyrinth.

Heidegger's poet is one who loves truth, who would escape from the labyrinth. Borges, on the contrary, loves illusion and delights in compounding it. He is indeed a lover of labyrinths, a dancer in the hall of mirrors.

NOTES

1. Jorge Luis Borges, "The Cyclical Night," tr. Alastair Reid, *A Personal Anthology*, ed. Anthony Kerrigan (New York, 1967), pp. 155-156.
2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in The Portable Nietzsche, tr. and ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1954), pp. 329-330.
3. Jorge Luis Borges, "Biography of Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829-1874)," tr. Anthony Kerrigan, in *A Personal Anthology*, p. 164.
4. Jorge Luis Borges, "A Yellow Rose," tr. Anthony Kerrigan, in *A Personal Anthology*, p. 83.
5. Jorge Luis Borges, "Parable of the Palace," tr. Carmen Feldman Alvarez del Olmo, in *A Personal Anthology*, p. 88.
6. Jorge Luis Borges, "Kafka and His Precursors," tr. James E. Irby, in *Labyrinths*, ed. Donald Yates and James E. Irby (New York, 1962), p. 201.
7. Jorge Luis Borges, "Avatars of the Tortoise," tr. James E. Irby, in *Labyrinths*, pp. 202-203.
8. Ibid., pp. 204-205.
9. Ibid., pp. 205.

10. Ibid., p. 207.
11. Ibid., p. 208.
12. Jorge Luis Borges, "Prologue," in *A Personal Anthology*, p. ix.
13. Jorge Luis Borges, "The Moon," tr. Edwin Honig, in *A Personal Anthology*, p. 196.
14. Milton C. Nahm, *Selections from Early Greek Philosophy* (New York, 1964), p. 233.
15. See, for instance, *Patterns of Discovery* (Cambridge, 1965).
16. Jorge Luis Borges, "The Modesty of History," tr. Anthony Kerrigan, in *A Personal Anthology*, p. 179.
17. Martin Heidegger, *What is a Thing?*, tr. W. B. Barton and Vera Deutsch (Chicago, 1967), p. 27.
18. Ibid., p. 12.
19. Ibid., pp. 39 and 43.
20. Ibid., p. 10.
21. Jorge Luis Borges, "Prologue," in *A Personal Anthology*, p. x.
22. Martin Heidegger, "Remembrance of the Poet," tr. Douglas Scott, in *Existence and Being* (Chicago, 1949), p. 241.
23. Ibid., p. 252.
24. Jorge Luis Borges, "Inferno I, 32," tr. Anthony Kerrigan, in *A Personal Anthology*, p. 80.
25. Zarathustra, pp. 329-330.
26. Ibid., p. 340.
27. Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," tr. Douglas Scott, in *Existence and Being*, p. 280.
28. Ibid., p. 281.
29. Ibid., pp. 288-289.

JORGE LUIS BORGES AND ADOLFO BIOY CASARES: A LITERARY COLLABORATION

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Literary collaborations are rare at any time and in any place. In the area of Hispanic letters, you probably couldn't reach your ring finger counting them off, no matter which side you started from. Surely in the history of Spanish American literature there has been no more important and, at the same time, less studied collaboration than that of the two Argentine writers, Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares. Borges (b. 1899), one of the most acclaimed authors of our century, and Bioy (b. 1914), a generally underrated novelist and short story writer, have published together more than a dozen books—some of these signed with their own names and others published under pseudonyms. These works together constitute an immensely rich contribution to Argentine literature and are as well a testimony to the shared dedication to literature of these two men, a dedication that has lasted now for some thirty-five years. To describe the nature of the Borges-Bioy collaboration and to indicate certain characteristics of their joint work are the modest aims of this paper.

I.

Linking Borges and Bioy from the very outset of their friendship has been their fascination with literature—with books and their plots, literary genres and their forms, philosophical ideas and their literary expression, good taste and bad taste. Today, when they get together (it has always been thus) there arises almost predictably a humorous mood that promptly begins to flourish in both men; and this mood develops,

as likely as not, into a tone of satire. Their conversation is flavored with this tone, as are their books. The targets of the pen of H. Bustos Domecq (the pseudonym with which they have signed most of their satirical works) have been almost invariably *porteño* types (or, perhaps better expressed, *porteño* poses), drawn from the most sophisticated levels of Argentine society, and also, persistently, figures of the Buenos Aires literary world.

How did this singular literary friendship begin? In an essay prepared for the special number of the *Cahiers* of L'Herne (Paris, 1964), Bioy Casares has evoked, in the following manner, his first encounter with Borges.

> I believe that my friendship with Borges started with our first conversation, dating from 1931 or 1932, when we were travelling between San Isidro and Buenos Aires. Borges was then one of our most celebrated young writers and I was a young fellow with one book published in secret and another one under a pseudonym. On being asked about my favorite authors, I took over the conversation and, defying my shyness which usually prevented my uttering a single coherent sentence, I launched into the praise of a third-rate poet who edited the literary page of a Buenos Aires newspaper. Perhaps to freshen the air, Borges broadened the question:
>
> "Of course," he granted, "but beyond so-and-so, whom do you admire, in this century or in any other?"
>
> "Gabriel Miró, Azorín, James Joyce."
>
> What could be done with such an answer...? Borges said something to the effect that only in authors given over to the charm of the word did young people find literature in sufficient measure. Then, speaking of admiration for Joyce, he added:
>
> "To be sure, it's a show of good will, an act of faith, a promise. The promise that they (he was referring to the young) will like him when they get around to reading him."
>
> From that time I have the vague recollection of walks among houses in the suburbs of Buenos Aires or around the country houses of Adrogué and of endless, intense conversations about books and the plots of books. I know that one afternoon in the neighborhood of the Recoleta (cemetery) I told him the idea of my *Perjurio de la nieve*, a tale that I wrote many years later, and than on another afternoon we arrived at a vast house on Austria Street, where I met Manuel Peyrou and we listened reverently to a phonograph record, *La Mauvaise prière*, sung by Damia.[1]

These recollections are revealing. With a fifteen-year advantage on him, Borges began as a kind of teacher or mentor of Bioy. Yet there was a genuine exchange of ideas and opinions between the two. One notes, for example, that the plot idea that Bioy described to Borges (which in 1944 would become an intriguing novelette under the title Bioy mentions) was picked up by Borges and, together with the physical presence of Bioy, was incorporated into the first page of Borges' celebrated story, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," published in 1940. Not only that, Borges subsequently employed the same idea in yet another narrative—"La forma de la espada," which appeared in 1943.

Borges, in turn, affirms that he learned from Bioy. In his "Autobiographical Essay," published in 1970 in *The New Yorker* and included in the collection of English language translations of Borges stories entitled *The Aleph and Other Stories: 1933-1969*, Borges states:

> One of the chief events of these years—and of my life—was the beginning of my friendship with Adolfo Bioy Casares. We met in 1930 or 1931, when he was seventeen and I was just past thirty. It is always taken for granted in these cases that the older man is the master and the younger his disciple. This may have been true at the outset, but several years later, when we began to work together, Bioy was really and secretly the master. He and I attempted many different literary ventures. We compiled anthologies of Argentine poetry, tales of the fantastic, and detective stories; we wrote articles and forewords; we annotated Sir Thomas Browne and Gracián; we translated short stories by writers like Beerbohm, Kipling, Wells, and Lord Dunsany; we founded a magazine, *Destiempo*, which lasted three issues; we wrote film scripts, which were invariably rejected. Opposing my taste for the pathetic, the sententious, and the baroque, Bioy made me feel that quietness and restraint are more desirable. If I may be allowed a sweeping statement, Bioy led me quietly toward classicism.[2]

Their first collaboration—if not strictly literary, at least vaguely related—was a pamphlet that extolled the

virtues of a certain dairy product of the La Martona firm, a business owned by the Bioy Casares family. Bioy recounts the undertaking in the following manner:

> In 1935 or '36 we went to spend a week at an *estancia*, in Pardo, for the purpose of writing in collaboration a commercial booklet, presumably scientific, on the merits of a more or less Bulgarian dairy product...That pamphlet represented for me a valuable apprenticeship; after composing it I was a different writer, more experienced and more astute. Any collaboration with Borges is the equivalent of years of work.[3]

In 1936 they founded the magazine *Destiempo*. Bioy recalls: "The title [Out of Step] indicated our desire to separate ourselves from the superstition of the age. We objected particularly to the tendency of some critics to overlook the intrinsic value of a work and spend their time on aspects that were folkloric, telluric or related to literary history or sociological disciplines and statistics. We felt that the precious antecedents of a school were at times as deserving of oblivion as the probable or inevitable trilogies on the gaucho, the middle-class seamstress, etc."[4]

Among the contributors to the magazine were Alfonso Reyes, Pedro Henrlquez Ureña, Jules Supervielle, Xul Solar, B. Fernández Moreno, Silvina Ocampo (Bioy's wife), and others. According to Bioy, "Only once did it achieve a notable sale: the Sunday it was hawked at a rugby match:

> Compre el *Destiempo*, el *Destiempo* revista para el asiento"[5]

II.

The first truly literary work composed by Borges and Bioy was published under the now notorious pseudonym of H. Bustos Domecq, a pen name made up of the family names of great-grandfathers of each—Bustos on Borges' side, Domecq on Bioy's. It is a detective story—a brilliant detective story—entitled "Las doce figuras del mundo" ("The Twelve Figures of the World"). In his "Autobiographical Essay" Borges recalls the circumstances:

> It was at some point in the early forties that we began writing in collaboration—a feat that up to that time I had thought impossible. I had invented what we thought was a quite good plot for a detective story. One rainy morning [Bioy] told me we ought to give it a try. I reluctantly agreed, and a little later that same morning the thing happened. A third man, Honorio Bustos Domecq, emerged and took over. In the long run, he ruled us with a rod of iron and to our amusement, and later to our dismay, he became utterly unlike ourselves, with his own whims, his own puns, and his own very elaborate style of writing."[6]

They published the story in the Argentine literary magazine *Sur* in 1941. Later they composed five more problems for their detective, Don Isidro Parodi, a *porteño* barber who operated with the obviously ironical disadvantage of being an inmate of the penitentiary on Las Heras street. But when it was discovered at *Sur* that the Bustos Domecq name concealed a collaboration, no further Parodi stories were accepted for publication on the grounds that the stories had no true author and this constituted a serious lack of respect. Bioy was eventually obliged to pay for the printing of the first edition of the six collected detective stories, which appeared in 1942 under the title *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi*. Subsequently, crime fiction historian and critic Ellery Queen would include it in his *Queen's Quorum* as one of the one hundred most important volumes of detective fiction of all times. (A curious footnote: the entire extensive body of work of Ellery Queen has been the product of two cousins writing in collaboration.)

In the *Six Problems* satire dominates. Satire is indeed, as we have noted, the most consistent tone of all the Borges-Bioy writings. The name of the detective——Parodi——insinuates a parody. But Borges denies that they had that in mind, claiming that they were merely looking for a common Italian name for their character, since that would be the most appropriate one—ironically—for a "viejo criollo." Be that as it may, these detective tales offer a parody of the traditional "gimmick" of the limited detective. In this type of fiction we have had blind detectives, deaf detectives, crippled detectives, detectives who never leave their armchair or their teashop to

solve their cases, detectives in love or otherwise incapacitated. Don Isidro, as misfortune would have it, is in jail.

But the satire is double. Within the framework of the play with the traditions of the detective story the authors have created a series of amusing caricatures of certain *porteño* types. In "The Twelve Figures of the World," the comically depicted personality is that of Aquiles Molinari, an aspiring dandy and hopelessly pompous journalist who covers sports for a *porteño* newspaper (and works afternoons for the Department of Sanitation). The satirical tone is communicated as much in the language as in the characterization of Molinari. Consider the following example. (Molinari has come to consult with Don Isidro in the latter's cell—number 273—in the penitentiary.)

> ...Don Isidro paid no attention to him and returned to his preferred state of animosity. He expressed his opposition to the Italians, who had infiltrated everywhere, without respect even for the National Penitentiary.
>
> "It is now full of foreigners of the most questionable background and no one knows where they're coming from."
>
> Molinari, nationalistic without effort, agreed with this complaint and said that he was fed up with Italians and Drusos, not to mention the English capitalists who had filled the country with railroads and refrigerators. Only yesterday he had entered the Los Hinchas Pizzeria and the first person he had seen was an Italian.[7]

In 1945 Borges and Bioy published two slim, almost clandestine books: *Un modelo para la muerte*, a detective tale, and *Dos fantasías memorables*, which was a volume containing two fantastic narratives that the authors published under the name B. Suárez Lynch, another pseudonym made up of grandparents' names. They were private editions of some 300 copies each. In a sense, the texts themselves were very private. The two books are filled with linguistic gags and absurdities in large part intelligible only to the authors themselves—particularly in the first of the two mentioned. Borges notes: "This one was so personal and so full of private jokes that we published it only in one edition that was not for sale."[8]

The fondness of Borges and Bioy for detective fiction and fantastic literature bore other fruits. In 1940, with Silvina Ocampo, they published their *Antología de literatura fantástica*,[9] an extremely important book in the formation of the general Spanish American concept of the nature of fantastic literature. That concept would not be derived from German fantastic tales, nor from the Spanish or the Oriental, but rather from those written in the English language: Wells, Chesterton, Kipling, Beerbohm, Poe and Bierce.

In passing, we might note a judgement that Bioy offered in his prologue to the anthology. (Borges, Bioy and Ocampo had tossed a coin to determine who would write the prologue: Bioy lost.) In 1940, when Borges had written only three of his celebrated "ficciones," Bioy was able to write the following—a statement surprising in its accuracy and insight:

> With the "Acercamiento a Almotasim," with "Pierre Menard," with "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," Borges has created a new literary genre, that is derived from both the essay and prose fiction: they are exercises of incessant intelligence and felicitous imagination, totally lacking in padding, totally free of human, pathetic, or sentimental qualities and destined for intellectual readers, for students of philosophy, virtually for specialists in literature.[10]

As anthologists, Borges and Bioy published two collections of detective stories: *Los mejores cuentos policiales* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1943) and a second selection with the same title in 1951. In the first volume we find expected names: Poe, Doyle, Chesteron, Phillpotts, Knox, Berkeley, Queen and Simenon. But there were also surprises—Borges' and Bioy's "discoveries": Hawthorne, Stevenson, London and Apollinaire. There were also three Argentines: Carlos Pérez Ruíz, Manuel Peyrou, and Jorge Luis Borges, of course, who included his admirable "La muerte y la brújula," a story he had written the year before. In the second selection more contemporary and more American writers appeared: Irish, Carr, Kelemen, Faulkner. Borges and Bioy took these projects very seriously. I have a copy of the first collection in which Bioy has written in the names of the trans-

lators of these detective tales. In addition to Borges and Bioy themselves, translations were done by Xul Solar, Silvina Ocampo, Leonor Acevedo de Borges (Borges' mother), and Alfonso Reyes.

In 1945 Borges and Bioy also established with the Emecé publishing company in Buenos Aires a detective novel series, "El Séptimo Círculo," that consisted of mainly English-language works that they selected and prepared—with the collaboration of many friends—in Spanish translation. They had some difficulty convincing Emecé people that the books would find a large audience. But they persisted and began in February of 1945 with Nicholas Blake's *The Beast Must Die*. The series, which continues up to our day, has proven to be the single most successful venture Emecé has ever undertaken.

Toward the end of the 2940's, an early stage in their literary collaboration came to an end. They were writing no more stories together. In an interview with Nestor Ibarra, published in the L'Herne *Cahier* in 1964, Borges explained it in this way:

> "obviously in a way we were writing for each other and since all this was carried off in a mood of joking, the stories became so complicated and so baroque that a sort of Algebraic power was achieved: a joke squared, a joked cubed...Finally we gave up writing because we realized that it was difficult and perhaps ever impossible for us to wrie in any other fashion and the one we had evolved was quite painful, especially for the reader."[11]

Apparently, Bustos Domecq had passed away. Borges recalls one occasion when he resurrected him. He commented to Murat: "Once, in one of my stories, I worked in some traits that belonged to Bustos Domecq or Suárez Lynch. It was as if, in a way, he were a third person."[12]

So indeed it was. Whenever the two men sat down to write, there would appear quite predictably the jokes, the word play, the exaggerated style. It was as if each one, in spite of himself, were trying to outdo the other. They fenced with witticisms. Bioy has declared in astonishment that when they are working together, Borges' ideas arrive at the rate of about fifty per minute. But they tired of the game.

III.

Then later, during the most trying years of the Peronist dictatorship, H. Bustos Domecq returned. Between 1952 and 1955 Borges and Bioy published three new prose pieces under this pseudonym. "De aporte positivo,"[13] from 1954, reveals the same Bustos Domecq style and satirical tone. It is a typical sketch of no special importance. The other two stories, on the other hand, published in Montevideo, offer something new and surely stand among the best as well as the least known of the works written in collaboration by Borges and Bioy. We find in them a biting sarcasm and mordancy that now reflect an unmistakeable political awareness. The first of these is "El hijo de su amigo,"[14] published in 1952, and the second, entitled "La fiesta del monstruo,"[15] appeared in Montevideo in September of 1955, only days after the overthrow of the Peronist regime. The two pieces constitute a bitter attack on the abject general demoralization of the final years of Perón's rule.

Alfred J. MacAdam, the first critic to publish an analysis of these stories, holds the opinion that they constitute the most significant writing that Borges and Bioy have accomplished together. MacAdam considers that "El hijo de su amigo," "perhaps the best, from a literary standpoint, of all their collaborations, represents the culmination of a study of the sordid Celinesque circumstances that characterize, for the authors, contemporary Argentina."[16]

MacAdam's judgement reinforces that of Emir Rodríguez Monegal, director of the magazine *Número*, who, in a brief prologue to the first appearance of that story, wrote as follows:

> By means of a monologue that holds back no infamous deed, no betrayal of a friend, no act of blackmail, there is delineated a society complacent in its degradation. The anecdote (a person drives the son of his friend to suicide) is trivial; the setting (the small world of a movie studio) is perfectly drawn. But the important thing here is the treatment. Everything is presented through the language: moral shabbiness, despicable behavior, ridicule are expressed in the turn of a phrase used by the narrator, by his

> syntactic preferences. An explosive comic tone, the obvious ridiculousness of the plot does not manage to conceal the bitterness that lies below these exercises. That bitterness denounces one other aspect—more intimate, more necessary—of the *porteño* character.[17]

With respect to "La fiesta del monstruo," MacAdam states that "it represents an unreal world from a perspective that reveals its inhabitants as subhuman and grotesque beings. The reader, it is presumed, is outside the world of the text, in the position of any reasonable man in relation to any satirical work. It is from his reasonable point of view that the spectator can perceive in detail the horror that that world of repression constitutes. The world that one considers internal and psychogenic in Kafka in Borges and Bioy Casares' reality is palpable. But, as does Kafka, they dilute the horror of their vision with a macabre humor.[18]

This observation is very accurate. Borges himself has described their style of composition as a blend of Alfred Hitchcock and the Marx Brothers.

After the overthrow of Perón, Borges was named director of the National Library in Buenos Aires, and Bustos Domecq once again went into retirement. Then, in 1967, the two friends published *Crónicas de Bustos Domecq*,[19] a collection of twenty new essays, almost all dedicated to satirizing various aspects of art and criticism. Bustos Domecq figures in the book's title, but for the first time the authors signed the work with their real names. And thus began a new stage in the collaboration. Despite their having attached their names to the book, one must keep in mind that the "author" of the work—as always—is neither Borges nor Bioy. The prose style is unlike that of either writer. The author is, in fact, the "third person" that Borges referred to.

These new prose pieces by Bustos Domecq are delightfully mocking commentaries and comical glosses on the "modern" culture in which we are immersed. They are much more readable than the first books that the collaboration produced and less mordant than the satires dealing with the Peronist era. Bustos Domecq's chronicles are, in fact, something

quite new. And nowadays, critics seem disinclined to impugn the merits of the pieces by claiming that they are lacking in seriousness simply because two authors contributed to their composition. Several extremely intelligent and interesting reviews of this book have already appeared. Jaime Alazraki, for example, published an excellent study of Bustos Domecq in the January-May 1975 issue of the *Revista Iberoamericana*.

Thus it would appear that the enigmatic, evasive character of this unusual author is capable of evolving and, in a way, materializing. This is surely an indication that he has some sort of independent existence. Moreover, all but a few of his short pieces are now back in print. I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that Bustos Domecq is emerging and taking his place among us as a genuine literary figure.

As I have stated, literary collaborations are rare, and important ones are even scarcer. But I think we are in the presence of one of them.

In these pages I have tried to offer a general and necessarily summary glimpse at the work of the Borges-Bioy collaboration. I have not touched on all their books. Elsewhere, attention needs to be given to their film scripts,[20] their superb anthologies of poetry,[21] and of fantastic sketches and fragments drawn from the literature of the world.[22] But for now my hope is only that these comments may serve as an introduction to the work of one of the most original Spanish American writers who ever existed.

NOTES

1. Adolfo Bioy Casares, "Lettres et amitiés," *Jorge Luis Borges* (Paris: *Cahiers* de L'Herne, 1964), p. 12. This translation and all others from French and Spanish are mine.
2. "An Autobiographical Essay," *The New Yorker*, September 19, 1970, p. 86.
3. Adolfo Bioy Casares, pp. 12-13.
4. Ibid., p. 13.
5. Ofelia Kovacci, *Adolfo Bioy Casares* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Culturales Argentinas, 1963), p. 8. The ditty, loosely translated, goes:

"Buy *Out-of-Step*, Buy *Out-of-Step*,/ To keep your seat from getting wet."

6. "An Autobiographical Essay," p. 86.

7. *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi* (Buenos Aires: Sur, 1942), p. 19.

8. "An Autobiographical Essay," p. 87. New readers may now have the opportunity to puzzle at leisure over these two books. Popular editions of each have appeared recently in Buenos Aires.

9. *Antología de la literatura fantástica* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1940).

10. Ibid., p. 13.

11. "Entretiens avec Napoleon Murat," *Cahiers* de L'Herne, p. 378.

12. Ibid.

13. *Buenos Aires literaria*, añe II, No. 17 (Buenos Aires, febrero de 1954), pp. 61-64.

14. *Número*, No. 19 (Montevideo, abril-junio, 1952), pp. 104-119.

15. *Marcha* (Montevideo, 30 de setiembre de 1955), pp. 20-21; 23.

16. Arthur J. MacAdam, "El Espejo y la Mentira, dos cuentos de Borges y Bioy Casares," *Revista Iberoamericana*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 75 (abril-junio, 1971), p. 365.

17. *Número*, pp. 99-100.

18. MacAdam, pp. 370-371.

19. Buenos Aires: Losada, 1967. The English translation is: *Chronicles of Bustos Domecq* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1976).

20. *Los orilleros. El paraíso de los creyentes* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1955).

21. *Antología poética argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1941); *Poesía gauchesca* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1955).

22. *Cuentos breves y extraordinarios* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Raigal, 1955).

Panels

PANEL I: BORGES AND CHESTERTON

Enrique Anderson-Imbert,
Robert Gillespie, Robert Scholes

Moderator: Nancy MacKnight

MacKNIGHT : From your left to right: Professor Robert Gillespie from Colby College, who teaches in the Department of English there. He has numerous publications, many poems, and among his articles is one on "Detections: Borges, and Father Brown." Next is Professor Anderson-Imbert from Harvard. He is the Victor S. Thomas Professor of Hispanic-American literature at Harvard. And he has numerous publications, more than twenty books, fiction, essays, literary criticism, and anthologies, and he also has an article on Chesterton and Borges. And finally, Professor Robert Scholes, who is professor of English at Brown University. He has many publications which have to do with the theory of fiction. And he is also book review editor of the journal *Novel*. Professor Anderson-Imbert will speak first. Our procedure for the evening will be that each one of the panelists will make a presentation, a very short presentation, which we hope will then generate discussion. So, Professor Anderson-Imbert.

ANDERSON-IMBERT: In 1935 Borges wrote: "I am Chesterton's most devoted reader."

The following year, when Chesterton died, Borges stated in a fervent essay: "I think that Chesterton is a first-rate writer of our time."

Almost thirty years later he was still saying: Contemporary English literature has not yet produced a writer comparable with Chesterton."

Borges' admiration for Chesterton implies an aesthetic affinity. But as soon as we look into that aesthetic affinity we discover an ideological incompatibility.

Take for example the use of sophistry by both authors.

There are at least two possible ways of evaluating sophistry.

Some teachers of rhetoric in Ancient Greece claimed that metaphysical problems are insoluble and better left alone. According to those Sophists our knowledge can only be subjective. As Protagoras put it, "Man is the measure of all things."

Plato and Aristotle attacked the Sophists by calling them tricky reasoners who deceived and misled the people.

Ever since then the Sophists have had a bad press, and now the word 'sophistry' means fallacious reasoning.

We can say that Chesterton and Borges are sophists in the popular sense. Both play with ideas in which they do not believe and use arguments that are more clever than sound. But if we define 'sophistry' as a theory of knowledge, Chesterton was not a sophist, while Borges certainly is. What at first seems to be an affinity, therefore, is really an incompatibility.

Chesterton, being a Catholic, had faith in an objective truth: the truth taught by the Catholic Church. From Chesterton's point of view, modern philosophy was a web of sophisms, and he thought it amusing to entangle modern sophists with their own kind of sophistry.

Borges, being a skeptic, does just the opposite. From his point of view the metaphysical and religious cosmogonies, including the Catholic one, are subjective poems. Borges enjoys reducing them to absurdity; and in order to do so he resorts to all kinds of sophisms.

The incompatibility between Catholicism and skepticism can be illustrated by comparing Chesterton's short story "The Honour of Israel Gow" with Borges' essay "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins."

In Chesterton's story Inspector Craven from Scotland Yard arrives at the strange castle of Glengyle, where a crime has just been committed. He feels bewildered when he finds heaps and heaps of dust, broken glass, sticks of wood, bits of iron, loose candles, and other debris.

It is a chaotic display of objects. By no stretch of fancy can the human mind classify them! The good sophist Father Brown suggests different ways of connecting those objects; after each suggestion, however, he dismisses it as false. Because—the little priest says—all systems of classification are fallacious. The truth will come from God, not from human logic. I quote:

> Ten false philosophies will fit the universe; ten false theories will fit Glengyle Castle. But we want the real explanation of the castle and the universe.

Keeping in mind the distinction that Chesterton makes between the plural 'theories' and the singular 'truth,' let us turn to the radical skepticism of Borges' essay. I quote:

> It is notorious that there is no classification of the universe that is not arbitrary and conjectural. The reason is very simple: we do not know what the universe is. . . . It is possible to go even farther; it is possible to suspect that there is no universe in the organic, unifying sense conveyed by that ambitious word. If there is a universe, its purpose remains yet to be conjectured; it remains yet to be conjectured the words, the definitions, the etymologies, the synonymies of God's secret dictionary.

To Chesterton, a universe where things multiplied themselves without a purpose would be "like the dream of an atheist."

Borges, an atheist, envisions a universe exactly like that, as labyrinths multiplying themselves within other labyrinths.

Both Chesterton and Borges are sophists. But Chesterton was a realist. God is real, the world is real, human knowledge is real. Chesterton's sophistry served as a mere rhetorical device. Conversely Borges is an idealist. God is a superfluous hypothesis, the world is chaotic, the only truth within our reach is the agreement of the thought with itself. Borges' sophistry

springs from the same source as that of Protagoras' "Man is the measure of all things."

That is why Borges never pretends to be objective, not even when he plays the role of literary critic. His essays do not intend to project an objective thought. He reads only books which give him pleasure, and writes about them as he pleases. The charm of Borges' literary criticism is that it sheds more light on Borges than on the books that he is talking about. In talking about Chesterton, for instance, he shifts the emphasis from Chesterton's Catholicism to Chesterton's sophistry because this is what interests him most. The result is a new Chesterton. I quote:

> Poe and Baudelaire decided to create a frightening world; it is only natural, then, that their work should be prodigal in horrors. In my opinion, Chesterton would not have tolerated the imputation of being a contriver of nightmares . . . but he indulges in atrocious observations. He asks: Is there by chance a man with three eyes, or a bird with three wings? . . . he speaks of a jail of mirrors; of a labyrinth without a center; of a man devoured by robots; of a tree that devours birds and then grows feathers instead of leaves. . . . And so on and so forth.
>
> These examples, which could easily be multiplied, prove that Chesterton restrained himself from being Edgar Allan Poe or Franz Kafka, but something in the makeup of his personality leaned toward the nightmarish, something secret, and blind, and central.

When Borges assumes that Chesterton restrains himself from being Poe or Kafka, he, Borges, projects his own atheistic world view into Chesterton's fictions. Chesterton, being a religious man, thought that the real world, such as we see it everyday, is wonderful enough. His short stories suggest mysteries, but all of them end by reassuring the reader with real and rational solutions. Why? Because God has created a real world and has put in its center a rational man. Only the world of an atheist—thought Chesterton—is fantastic. Consequently Chesterton did not write fantastic stories, as Borges does. The "atrocious observations" that Borges enjoys in Chesterton's stories are not signs of a tendency toward the creation of a frightening world, but a kind of poetic sophistry.

This poetic sophistry consists in using fantastic tricks to prove that a godless world would be grotesque. In like manner Goya, a rationalist man of the Spanish Enlightenment, painted in his *Caprichos* the nightmares, monsters, horrors and superstitions which possess a man when he renounces reason.

MacKNIGHT: Thank you very much, and thank you for your excellent English. Professor Gillespie.

GILLESPIE: In the essay in *Other Inquisitions* called "On Chesterton," Borges says that in Chesterton's mystery stories involving the priest Father Brown, what purports to be "explanations of a demoniacal or magical sort" are always replaced by "solutions of this world." Borges calls this "an essential form, not a rhetorical device." We know that Borges first read Chesterton while he was still in his teens, and we know from Borges' comments elsewhere in *Other Inquisitions* that Chesterton influenced him. I think that Borges is attracted to Chesterton because he discovered something of his own "essential form" in Chesterton's Father Brown stories.

Crime in Chesterton is invariably an offense against God, or the Catholic church or religion—that is, crime is sacrilege, and all Chesterton's criminals are Antichrists or pagans or heretics. Father Brown is the best individual for detecting these criminals because, a priest, he is equipped by training and by experience to deal not only with the secondary problem of crime in society, but with the primary problem of sin in the universe. The crimes in these stories are not so often crimes against humanity and society as they are actions symbolic of evil. Although there are many murderers, they are less criminals than they are wicked jokesters or pranksters representative of malign forces in the world; and Father Brown's solutions are less interesting than the process of solving an apparently chaotic, meaningless, mysterious, cruel, sometimes wry universe. Father Brown, an unprepossessing, round, dough-like little body, is a believer in magic and mystery, who detects evil-doers by reason and by faith both, and by a middle sense, intuition, which keeps reason and faith from becoming antagonistic. Still, he manages to produce the

most mundane and naturalistic solutions to crimes. The complicated murder of a free-thinking journalist in the story called "The Quick One," for instance, appears to have a religious motive, but the motive turns out to be merely a threatened exposure of the secret agreements between liquor salesmen and hotel proprietors. In the story called "The Blast of the Book," it is revealed that the mysterious disappearance of five men is merely a prank played by a secretary on his employer to get the employer to pay more attention to him.

If Chesterton's rational solutions often seem to be anticlimactic or simplistic considering the supernatural appearances of the crimes, his mysteries are not. His mysteries are complex and marvelous, and I think it is Chesterton's ability to construct genuinely demoniacal or magical mysteries, and not the "solutions of this world," that most appealed to Borges and affected his own stories of mystery and crime detection.

In Chesterton's "The Blue Cross," the great French detective, Valentin, observes that "the criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic." And in "The Honour of Israel Gow," Chesterton's Flambeau, a man who was a criminal before he became a policeman, says that as a criminal he "always made up the story myself, and acted it as quick as I chose. This detective business of waiting about is too much for my French impatience." In "The Secret of Father Brown," the priest explains that he solves all the murders he investigates because "it was I who killed all those people . . . I had planned out each of the crimes very carefully . . . And when I was quite sure that I felt exactly like the murderer myself, of course I knew who he was." He does this, Father Brown says, "as a sort of religious exercise." Chesterton's mysteries are so good precisely because it is the criminal in him that is the artist. The criminal, the man of unreason, the heretic, or the demoniacal or rebellious outlaw, is at work constructing a labyrinth of mystery. When the detective, who is the critic, a man of reason who is also a priest, reveals how he discovered his way through the labyrinth, and reduced the miraculous to the manageably mundane, the stories purport

to prove the superiority of a mind imbued with faith to science or skepticism or rationalism.

Chesterton makes mysteries in the first place, therefore, to reveal the true workings of the universe. These explained mysteries, because they *are* explained, are no longer mysteries, but instead are treated by Chesterton as revelation or as truth. In the second place, the stories control personal demons as they pull back from symbolic shapes to religious exercises to formulas for self-discipline in Christian society. As Father Brown says of himself, a person's "only hope is somehow or other to have captured one criminal, and kept him safe and sane under his own hat." This ability to feel like a criminal, according to Father Brown, "solves the whole problem of time and sin. It gives a man his remorse beforehand." Each Father Brown story explains, as Borges said, "an inexplicable event by reason alone," but this highest reason is "not precisely reason, but the Catholic faith." The measure of Father Brown's success is that he managed to convert the great criminal, Flambeau, from a life of crime: that is, he managed to enter Flambeau's mind, to make him know *why* he was a criminal, and helped Flambeau to keep himself sane under *his* own hat, too. The little priest and Flambeau (the Torch) are mirror images. That is probably the sort of thing Borges had in mind when he said that what defines Chesterton's nature is a "precarious subjection of a demoniacal will."

In Borges' stories, there is something awfully familiar about those symbolic shapes and spiritual exercises, and those villainous identities that merge with the identities of a victim or a pursuer. In Borges' stories, as in Chesterton's, it is always a "criminal" who is the *creative* artist and the detective who is the *critic*, the one who spies out or appreciates the pattern. Each character is really one of Borges' multiple personas; one of Borges' masks is criminal, another is victim, another is pursuer. The criminal-artist has the imaginative power to create mysterious labyrinths by his actions. The detective-critic tries to enter into the criminal intelligence, tries to feel the mind that we might think of as lit, as Father Brown put it, "only by the red light from below."

The detective tries to feel or does feel the fiendish, heathenish, unconscious impulse that is forever thrusting out, exploring identities or religious or philosophical ideas for making order in the universe.

But in Borges, the merging or exchanging of identities is far more serious and disturbing than it is in Chesterton, because power roles reverse themselves, and the mystery genre ironically gets turned on its head. Detectives get killed, as Lönnrot does in "Death and the Compass," and criminals go "free" of all but self-punishment—although that is the worst kind, as happens with John Vincent Moon in "The Shape of the Sword." In Borges there is no punishment by an ethical society. There is no clear triumph of God, or Christ, or church, or faith, or reason either. There is neither rightness nor order restored. There is only a philosophical exploration through the mazy forms of time and personality. Identities, like good and evil, melt into one another. Borges' mind is like one of Chesterton's rogues' minds. It is woven not only out of elaborate schemes but out of all sorts of secret languages and signs and wordless pictures which are the names of nameless things. He is the worst sort of man that the world knows; he is the wicked mystic.

In Borges, it is less an act of justice than it is an act of appreciation which tests the validity of the criminal's creative action, because Borges believes that art is not a mirror or judgment of the world, but the creation of new possibility within the world. Unlike Chesterton's explained solutions, Borges' finest mysteries are unresolvable by reason, though they still, like miracles, compel belief. In a way far more powerful and disturbing than Chesterton's, they also are stories of marvelous truth, marvelous revelation. But then, which Borges is it that finally reveals truth: the criminal, the victim, or the detector? Borges' ironical experimentation with the mystery genre is creation of new possibility within the universe; but irony is also prankish disbelief, which negates the creation and identity, and forces the process of confrontation with the reality of the self to begin all over again.

MacKNIGHT: Thank you, Professor Gillespie. And now Professor Scholes.

SCHOLES: Thank you. I've always wanted to be at a panel where one of the speakers got up and said, "Actually, I agree with you other fellows." I can almost do that. I do not have any prepared remarks, and I hope you will bear with what I have to offer.

I came to the panel with several questions in my mind. They involve the paradoxes in the relationship between Borges and Chesterton; paradoxes which Anderson-Imbert and Gillespie have explored, it seems to me, very clearly, fluently and cogently. One is: How does this skeptical Argentinian writer have what we so obviously recognize as an affinity with a Catholic Englishman? How can we account for that? And how is it that someone who is a writer of major world caliber can express such a benign interest in a writer who has been a rather minor figure within English literature? There are questions that I had in mind coming to the panel. Professor Anderson-Imbert suggests to us that the resemblance that we see in Borges and Chesterton is a superficial resemblance, based on a sort of sophistical manner to be found in both writers, but that they are separated by the deep differences between Catholicism and skepticism. And I think that if you apply that to the other question, why is one one of the major world authors and the other one a minor English writer, you would have to say that there is some implication that it is better to be a skeptic than a Catholic in the twentieth century.

I wonder about that. It seems to me that if you go far enough into either skepticism or Catholicism, you get into places that are frighteningly similar. They may be enemies of one another, but they are similar because the same questions are being taken very seriously. Obviously, there are a lot of positions between real skepticism and real Catholicism where those questions are not being taken seriously. Though I'm not entirely satisfied with the explanation that Borges is better because he is a skeptic, I can see that the skeptic has con-

siderably more options. He isn't tempted to fall back on God as a *Deus ex machina* in his work, which the Catholic obviously is.

The other question, why does Borges take such an interest in Chesterton, why does he like it, what did he find in it? is one that I think the Gillespie's paper has touched upon even if he didn't go all the way in answering it. We have other experience of major writers who find minor writers interesting and try to build them up. James Joyce was very fond of claiming his French predecessor to be Benjamin B. Constant, for instance. I think that even in the few examples that we have directly before us, the texts mentioned by both Anderson-Imbert and Gillespie, we can see that there are parallels between Chesterton and Borges which are superficially very, very close: the same kind of gimmicks, the same kinds of paradoxes, similarities in the images. The difference seems to be, as Gillespie has suggested, that in some way, the power in both works comes from something demonic, something anti-Catholic, anti-rational, and something which is created as opposed to critical and opposed to rational. Chesterton makes the Bible the ultimate voice in his own work, the voice of the irrational, equivocal, of Father Brown, whereas the strength in the work is that fulfillment of the demonic, satanic, criminal element. And the suggestion is that Borges went the further step and embraced the criminal position in some sense, and therefore achieved a kind of inspiration from a deeper level. The ability to take the detective story model and not associate yourself with the detective, not credit the model as an explanation of the universe, to say God's not in his heaven, all's not right with the world, and the detective will not always solve the crime, and if he does, that may be a disaster also: that provides the writer with more strength now, in the twentieth century anyway, because it suggests a world that we do feel that we know and experience in a way that perhaps in the thirteenth century we wouldn't have. I don't know whether these gentlemen would feel I have mispresented their positions or not, but it seems to me that the questions that I came with were pretty closely answered by those two papers, which I thought exemplary in their gravity and

their acumen.

MacKNIGHT: Thank you very much. He not only agreed with them but summed them up and synthesized them and went further for us. We are very grateful for those remarks. I think our panelists would be willing to answer questions from the audience.

DISCUSSION

QUESTION: I would like to ask Professor Gillespie what he thinks the relationship of sin in Chesterton is to any possible element of sin in Borges. Do you think there is a concept of sin operating in Borges?

GILLESPIE: I may say, right from the outset, that's an awfully good question if only because I seem to have led myself into that spot by what I've been saying. I think I'm probably treating Borges as much more of a religious writer than I really want to sound as if I am. But I don't think that Borges ever really deals in terms of sin; he doesn't think in terms of sinful action and sinful natures. I think he's thinking much more in terms simply of power, intellectual power; and that intellectual power is often something that comes just from the position that is adopted, just as one philosophical position or one speculation might be a more powerful one than another. I think that those things are just rational, and not to be connected at all with the sense of religion or sin.

SCHOLES: Your questions and answer made me think of the problem which I was thinking of when Professor Anderson-Imbert spoke also. If you say that Chesterton believes that there is an ultimate reality and Borges does not, I think that there is a further question that needs to be asked. It seems to me, from a rather careful reading of Borges' use of the notions of reality and the use of the word "real" in his work, that he believes, too, that there is an ultimate reality and that the purpose of literature has something to do with getting to that ultimate reality. The difference is that he doesn't feel that it's already known. He doesn't feel that the means for getting at that reality are accessible. And therefore he produces the kind of writing which is supremely, relent-

lessly, remorselessly speculative and attempts in some way to adumbrate, to shadow forth, perhaps allegorically, a notion of what that ultimate reality is. If it's an allegory, it's an allegory that is not meshed back into the pre-existing system. It is an attempt to use allegorical methods but looking in the other direction, not back towards something known but out toward something unknown, with the belief that the unknown is there and is, in some sense, if unknowable, very important to him.

ANDERSON-IMBERT: The idea of sin implies the idea of God. Sin is any violation of God's law. This theological notion of "sin" is alien to the thinking of Borges. Borges is an atheist. He does not believe in the existence of a personal creator of the universe. Nor does he seem to believe that the universe has a purpose. Even if it had, we could never know it because reality itself—as Borges would say, following his master Kant—is unknowable. We only know phenomena that arise in our own individual consciousness. Each person, in accordance with his conscience, judges what is good and what is evil. And for Borges the good is that which favors the free activity of the personal consciousness, and the bad is what hinders it. Chesterton, being Catholic, can conceive of intimate failings of moral conscience; that is, of treacheries, disloyalties, disobedience, or cowardice that a man commits against the moral law which he himself has inscribed upon his consciousness. For a long time I supposed that Borges' moral values arose from his epistemological idealism, from his temperamental individualism, and from his political liberalism. But Borges is a poet, not a philosopher, and we should not expect to find in him a logical system of ideas. Borges contradicts himself, he indulges in sophistry, he cultivates ambiguity, and in the end leaves us perplexed by statements that mingle poetry with metaphysics. At times he seems to believe that consciousness is not individual but collective; that the personality, far from constructing a cosmos, dissolves in chaos; that there is no hero capable of singular exploits for the simple reason that there is no singular or single man: all men are fused into one identity.

SCHOLES: Well, we're getting a lot of exercise here. I can accept most of what Professor Anderson-Imbert says, but it seems to me that there is something that needs to be said on the other side. I don't believe, even now, that Borges gives us a value-free universe. It's possible to say that he doesn't make much of the idea of sin in a negative way, but that is not to say that he doesn't present models of good behavior in his work or present notions of things that are admirable, deeds that are admirable, actions that are admirable, various kinds of ways of behaving that are admirable. You can take many cases of them; you could, perhaps, even tabulate them and see what they reveal. In some cases, it seems to me these are very simple, very traditional values. He believes in physical courage. He admires strength, he admires generosity; and most of the values that you find in *Beowulf* or *The Battle of Malden* or *The Seafarer* are, in fact, values that Borges himself admires, and his work presents examples of both in the essays and in the fiction. But I don't think it's a world of pure mentality or pure skepticism at all. I think there are values there, but where they come from I'm not certain, and I don't know whether one ever has to say where values come from.

[Two comments from the floor bring out the ethical force of Borges' writing.]

ANDERSON-IMBERT: I agree with you. I'm afraid I haven't managed to express myself clearly. I tried to answer the question of the young lady who spoke first: I thought she was concerned with the problem of sin. Now you are speaking not of sin, which is a theological term associated with the idea of an absolute God, but of a personal ethic based on one's relative, subjective values. So I agree: in this sense I do not deny that Borges is an ethical man. One can lead a life that is very upright, very virtuous, very exemplary, very admirable, without necessarily believing in absolute ethical values.

[A comment from the floor to the effect that good and evil can be used by a writer as artistic conventions.]

GILLESPIE: I think that is the sort of line I was arguing, because he's turning good and evil into an aesthetic proposition. So if you're just using it to write a story of his ideas; I don't think that cancels out an ethical position a man may have, personally, as a human being. I think he's simply using it. That's where I get the idea of the two sides of the argument; the victim and the victimized or the criminal and the detective. I think those things could be translated into good and evil, and they probably are in Chesterton. Chesterton's good and evil, his truth and falsehood, his God and devil—all power, in Chesterton, comes either directly from God or from the devil. I think Borges uses all those ideas, he uses those propositions, but I don't think he treats them in any normal sense as sin, or directly in any ethical sense. We may get something out of this, but I don't know that that's what he's really concerned with. I don't think that he lets his criminals go, either. Even if the criminal wins out, or if he kills somebody off and gets off free, he invariably suffers. If you're looking for some form of punishment as a way of verifying the author's ethical positions, that would work for me. Nobody ever gets off quite free. The people who do get away keep on continuously, endlessly repeating their crimes.

PANEL II: ON TRANSLATING BORGES

Willis Barnstone, Alan Dugan, William Ferguson, James Irby, Robert Lima, Donald Yates

Moderator: James Hayes

HAYES: In one sense the translator performs the most thoroughgoing kind of literary criticism possible, for he makes an evaluative judgment not only about every word and phrase in a given text but also about the text as a work of art. Considering the infinite number of variables in this process, I think Richards once called translation "perhaps the most complex type of event yet produced in the evolution of the cosmos." So in order that we may cover this subject completely in the next ninety minutes I would like to begin by introducing our panel in alphabetical order:

WILLIS BARNSTONE: Professor of Comparative Literature and Latin American Studies at Indiana University. His areas of interest are in poetry, theater and photography. He has published seven books of poetry and he has translated (*Greek Lyric Poets*, *The Song of Songs*, Saint John of the Cross, Antonio Machado, and Mao Tse-Tung.

ALAN DUGAN: His first book of poems won the Yale Younger Poet's Prize, the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize in 1962. He received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1962 and in 1972. He has been a visiting lecturer in poetry at several colleges in the U.S.A. He is associated with the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown as staff member for poetry. In addition to *Poems* in 1961, he has published

Poems II in 1963, *Poems III* in 1967. His *Collected Poems* were published in 1969 by Yale University Press and by Faber and Faber, London, in 1970. In 1974 he published *Poems IV*.

WILLIAM FERGUSON: Professor of Spanish at Boston University. He has done considerable work on the poetry of Fernando de Herrera. He has published articles on some North American poets. He has published two books of poetry, one, *Dream Reader* and the other, *Light of Paradise*; both in 1973.

JAMES IRBY: Professor of Spanish and Portuguese at Princeton University. He has published articles on Cortázar, Onetti, and the influence of Borges, on García Márquez and on Cabrera Infante. He has also done a study on the influence of Faulkner on four Latin American novelists.

ROBERT LIMA: Professor of Spanish and Comparative Literature at Pennsylvania State University. He has published a book on the theater of García Lorca and Ramón del Valle-Inclán. He was responsible for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Breton's first manifesto on surrealism. He headed the proceedings and supervised a color film of the Congress. His poetry and translations have appeared in prominent journals. He was awarded the Cintas Fellowship in poetry in 1971.

DONALD YATES: Professor of Latin American Literature at Michigan State University. He has several works on fantastic literature in South America and on detective novels. He has articles and translations on *Denevi*, *Bioy Casares*, and *Bustos Domecq*; also on *El Caballero de Olmedo*.

I think, since it seems likely that we will spend more time on poetry than on prose, perhaps we could get some of the questions on prose out of the way. And if you have pressing questions, I wonder if you could wait until toward the end of the session to present them. We're already pressed for time so remarks which are informal anyway will be postponed. So to start off, Professor Yates, could you comment

on Borges' beginnings in English prose translation?

YATES: Borges came into English translation on the wings of the detective story, because the first story of Borges ever published in the English language was his story *Garden of Forking Paths*, and that was in translation by Anthony Boucher, formerly detective fiction reviewer for *New York Times Book Review*, and was published in 1948. That's the first publication date for Borges in English—August of 1948, in an International Detective Fiction issue. It was a story that had won a runner-up prize in Ellery Queen's annual contest for best detective stories. It was a first for Borges but the second was a while in coming, because immediately after the success of "The Garden of Forking Paths" in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, Anthony Boucher translated a story which I think is superior. Both are dazzling but the better story in my estimation, is "Death and the Compass." Boucher translated it right away and sent it to Ellery Queen, but Frederic Dannay, who edits the magazine (that's one half of the collaboration of two cousins, two New York cousins who have written all the Ellery Queen books), rejected "Death and the Compass" as being perhaps too fancy for the average reader of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. However, the story rejected by Ellery Queen imposed itself because of its brilliance, and Anthony Kerrigan came across the story and translated it on his own, and it was published in the *New Mexico Quarterly*, in 1949, I think, in Kerrigan's translation. Out of the blue, a woman by the name of Mary Wells, whom I've never met, came across two of Borges' stories, "Examination of the Writings of Herbert Quain"—Quain as you recall was involved in writing detective fiction also, by coincidence—and another short story called "Lottery in Babylon," and she submitted those to James Laughlin, who was the philanthropist publisher who heads New Directions: Anthology Number II, which came out, I believe, around 1950.

In 1950, Dudley Fitts published the translation of Borges' "The Zahir." In 1951, Borges reached print in book volume outside Argentina for the first time, and this was in French. In 1951, his *Fictions* was published in Paris under

the sponsorship of Nestor Ibarra and Roger Callois. In the 50's, then, people became aware gradually of Borges, and stories which hadn't been published began to appear in translation during the mid 1950's. Julia Palley did "Deutsches Requiem." Harriet De Onís did "The Secret Miracle." A man by the name of Villacaña did "The Waiting" for *Americas*, a magazine published by the Pan American Union. Anthony Kerrigan, who was a faithful follower of Borges, did, in a private edition, a translation of "Three Versions of Judas." And in 1954 Ann Arbor, I came across Borges for the first time in a class given by Enrique Anderson-Imbert. One of the texts was *La muerte y la brújula*, a miscellaneous collection of Borges' tales. In that text I came across "Death and the Compass," and my life has never been the same since then. It was a detective story, and I was prepared for a detective story because the previous main bifurcation of my life occurred when I was thirteen and read Ellery Queen's *Chinese Orange Mystery*, and my life was given a new direction. So this bifurcation set me on a chase for the man who could conceive and write that extraordinary story, "Death and the Compass." I wrote to Borges immediately and said, "May I translate this story?" He wrote back very kindly on a sheet of graph paper, a page torn out of his typical composition notebooks, I found out later, and said, "Certainly; go right ahead." I translated the story and wrote back and said, May I translate more stories, and may I translate your *Six Problems for Don Isidro Parodi*, (a book of detective stories that he wrote with Bioy Casares)? He wrote back and said, "Please do, I'd be honored." So I began translating Borges' "Death and the Compass," "The Garden of Forking Paths," and "Emma Zunz" in the mid-50's also. The Germans came into the picture now and published *Labyrinthe* in German translation in the late 1950's. That was the second volume of Borges' writings in print outside Argentina. In 1958, James Irby, who was writing his dissertation with Anderson-Imbert on the structure of the stories of Borges, and I were exchanging letters, and I told him that I had a contract with James Laughlin and New Directions, to do a collection of Borges' prose writings in English, and I was looking around for all the

best translations and was going to throw them in with my own and do some that hadn't been done yet, and put together a book. And Jim wrote back and said, in an offhand way, "Well, I have a few translations here of my own. Would you like to have a look at them? I said, "Certainly."

A week or so later, I got in the mail a huge wad, a package of practically all of Borges' prose fictions, that Jim had translated with no intention whatever of publishing them. He was translating with meticulous care and love every story of Borges. Why? For the purpose of getting inside his style, getting inside his technique, getting inside his sensibility to language. And they were excellent translations. So I sat down and dashed off a letter and said, "Jim, let's do the book of Borges' stories together." So he joined me in the contractual arrangement with New Directions and as the years rolled by I sent him my translations, he corrected them, sent them back; he sent me his, I corrected them, sent them back. We used about five translations already existing, Dudley Fitts, Harriet De Onís, Anthony Kerrigan, and so forth. And we passed those back and forth, polishing them and getting permission from the authors to include our suggested changes.

And the world kept spinning, and in 1961, before we got our book out, Borges was awarded the Formentor Prize for literature in a meeting of international editors in Spain, in Mallorca. He shared the prize with Samuel Beckett. It was a $10,000 prize and half went to each writer. Well, this was an extraordinary occurrence for the world, since the world as a whole wasn't prepared for understanding who this man was and what he had written. So while our book was still nearing completion, Anthony Kerrigan was contacted by Grove Press, which wanted to do an edition in England and an edition in the States along with other publishers who were going to do an edition in Italian and in German, and so forth, of one of Borges' books. They picked *Ficciones*. So Kerrigan busily went to work on *Ficciones* while Jim and I were working on a book that we were going to entitle *Labyrinths*, which was a selection of what we thought were Borges' best stories from all his books, from *Universal History of Infamy*, from *Ficciones*, from *The Aleph*, from *El hacedor* (*Dream-*

tigers), and so forth. Kerrigan farmed out his translations to a lot of friends, and went to work on some himself, and he finished his book very quickly. His book was finished almost at the same time that we finally got the last pieces of *Labyrinths* put together, and the books came out almost simultaneously. It was a perfect collision course. But I think it was probably for the best that it happened that way, because one book by a relatively unknown Argentine writer in translation may not have attracted too much attention, but two books by this gentleman at the same time caught everybody's attention, and the reviews were widespread. The reviews were extremely favorable almost always; the books were reviewed together. That was 1962, and since then, Borges, who taught one semester at Texas in 1961 and 1962, was asked by the University of Texas Press to give them a book to translate. He gave them his most recent book which was called in Spanish *El hacedor*, which they translated as *Dreamtigers*. That came out in 1964. In 1967 and 1968, Borges returned to the States as a teacher. He went to Harvard where he gave a series of lectures on poetry. And at Harvard the next important encounter between Borges' prose and the American reading audience, or the English reading audience, occurred when he met Norman Thomas DiGiovanni. DiGiovanni threw aside all other projects and said to Borges, "I am at your disposal as a translator. Please use me for anything in which I can be of value to you." Borges said, "Well, fine."

Norman Thomas DiGiovanni moved from New England to Buenos Aires and for three to four years, I believe, was at Borges' side as his secretary, as his companion, and as his joint translator. Out of that collaboration of translators, Borges as a translator and author, DiGiovanni as a translator, came a series of six books—it will soon be seven, I think—published by Dutton. Norman arranged a contract between Emecé, Borges' publisher in Argentina, the *New Yorker* magazine and E. P. Dutton Publishers. The *New Yorker* got first refusal on all new stories of Borges in translation that were coming from Argentina and Dutton got the chance at the first English publication in book form. Out of that collaboration has come *The Universal History of Infamy*, *The Aleph and Other Stories 1933-1969*, *Dr. Brodie's Report*, *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, *Selected Poems*, published by Delacourt, and most recently, *The Chronicles of Bustos Domecq*, which came out just this month. That, in ten minutes, is the publishing history of Borges.

HAYES: Staying with prose for a few more moments, James Irby has done a great deal of work on the stories of Borges. Could you say something about any special problems that you have in translating prose, particularly Borges' prose?

IRBY: Well, first of all, the period of Borges' work that is primarily represented in *Labyrinths* is that ranging from the late 1930's to the mid-50's which is extremely rich reading, and I know that Borges subsequently has viewed his prose style in that period as excessively ornate or excessively mannered, and has, both in his subsequent writing and in his remarks to translators, recommended, or has favored, I should say, a less mannered style. And when working with DiGiovanni in Buenos Aires, translating for the first time some of the works that belong together of the period, he favored a more transparent form of expression. Borges' prose is often filled with sudden leaps, as I was trying to say earlier today, sudden deviations, heterogeneous contacts I once called them. I think that he would like that to be smoother now.

Well, at the time that I undertook to do the translations that appear in *Labryinths*, I was under the circumstances that Don Yates has just mentioned. I sat down and started working on a doctoral dissertation with a great deal of ambition, and I wanted to devise theories of Borges' work and his language as well. And so, engaged in this academic activity, I was inclined to try to be literal and to reproduce, as best I could understand them, the manner, shifts, and surprises, and extraordinary leaps which I found in his prose. I think, looking back upon those translations that I did many years ago, I now find them overloaded with Latinate diction—which is, to be sure, a very distinctive trait of Borges' Spanish. But by the nature of the languages, the respective natures of the English

and Spanish languages, the Latinate diction has a different value in English. Abstract terms of Latin origin, even of an elevated sort, in Spanish are more concrete in their connotation than their cognates are in the English language. It is easy to recognize the cognates because they are from the same Latin origin and they have essentially the same meaning; but their value in English is different. And if I were doing these translations now, I would moderate that aspect of them, but perhaps—this is conjecture of course—not as much as I think Borges would like. Now, I recognize that there has been a change in his style and in his aesthetic. Perhaps because I identify myself with a whole literary education which came out of reading and rereading and studying Borges, I want to adopt a style more in line with his present preferences.

To change the perspective a little bit, I've not done much other translating, certainly hardly anything that I've ever published. I have attempted a few times to translate some other Latin American writers, both in Spanish and in Portuguese, of a very different kind, that is, very different from Borges. And I think, on the basis of that limited comparative experience, that Borges is not as difficult to translate as many other writers that I can think of. I don't know exactly why this is so. An immediate reason that suggests itself is the presence of English in his life from the very beginning of his language learning experience, and it is as if that experience plus the other languages that he learned at an early time have given—this is a conjecture on my part—his prose a kind of universality, as if he were leveling out or eliminating certain differential traits in Spanish and combining those which can be combined with compatible traits in other languages. This is perhaps not very clear, but as if there were a kind of underlying text which is universal in nature. In trying to render that, in prose at least, one is not faced with the kinds of problems that one finds, for example, in trying to translate the Brazilian writer Guimarães Rosa, who is, roughly speaking, kind of a Joyce of the Portuguese language, who I think, unless one is a genius, defies all translation.

I think that Borges' prose, which has its problems of course, is not anywhere near as difficult to render. One does not have to transpose in order to obtain an effective English version. Of course it is very learned, particularly in the period that I'm referring to. Therefore, I think one should acquire a fairly good working knowledge of etymology because, as I tried to point out in the preface that I wrote for *Labyrinths* in 1962, he will often obtain very surprising effects by reminding you, by placement and choice of words in context, of the original etymological meaning, in such a way that both the customary senses and the lost or forgotten or semi-obliterated etymological meaning function in the text. That duality, that simultaneity should be preserved if possible. Therefore one has to be frequently a dictionary. And then, of course, the internal problems, or the repeated problems, of proper names and literary allusions, some of which may be overlooked. It's very hard always to identify them; some of them have been invented. I think that's sufficient for the moment.

HAYES: Maybe it's best to go from the general to the particular, as far as poetry is concerned. Professor Ferguson, could you comment on the *Selected Poems*?

FERGUSON: Yes, I think that has to do with what Jim Irby has just been saying about the problem of etymology, looking at an example that was introduced by the flyer for this symposium. I remember a conversation with Jack Murchison, who was Borges' secretary in the winter of 1967-68 at Harvard, about Borges' use of the word *laterales* in a description of houses: *casas laterales*. Jack didn't really know what it meant, on a denotative level, and neither did I; but the word had a kind of etymological depth which we could easily feel—*casas laterales* must be rows of houses which stretch off to both sides, or perhaps houses which are in themselves long and low. The question was whether a translator should attempt to resolve the difficulty of sense; my position was that he should not, since *casas laterales* is no less Latinizing and mysterious in Spanish than *lateral houses*

in English. The problem with a translation such as *houses that stretch off on both sides* is that it sidesteps the purposeful difficulty that existed in the original. It happens in the prose, too, as in one of my favorite phrases from Borges, "la unánime noche," from the famous beginning to "Las ruinas circulares," "The Circular Ruins." I believe it was you who translated that in *Labyrinths*, wasn't it, Jim? You used the words *unanimous night*, perhaps because although at first they didn't seem to read right to an English ear, they were no less unexpected and strange in Spanish. I think the word *unanimous* is treasured by both of us in that context because of its etymological depth; it simply has to open up for the reader, because there's no everyday meaning of "unanimous" that we can apply to the night; we are literally forced to hear it as meaning 'one-souled.' This word was bargained away in Norman Thomas DiGiovanni's translation of the story. I believe it came out as "all-encompassing," because Norman, with Yankee practicality, asked "What does this word mean?", and if the story is faithful to the fact, Borges said modestly, "I don't know."

But you asked me about the *Selected Poems* that DiGiovanni was in charge of. It was a remarkable experience to work on that volume because it was certainly the most *organized* job of its kind I had ever seen. DiGiovanni had the engaging idea that a poem could be summed up in a prose paragraph. Now most of the translators, myself included, seem to believe that the ideal translation is a poem in its own right; so that the idea of working from a prose summary seemed odd, to say the least. I can think of only one English-language poet of importance who ever worked this way—William Butler Yeats—and he's ordinarily taken as the exception that proves the rule. Poets just don't work that way; but there we were. With DiGiovanni it was a question of bargaining; he'd give you one participle if you took out one noun, that kind of thing. (Everyone knows that the best poems are written by committees.)

This procedure also occasioned a purification of the Spanish texts—"purification" was DiGiovanni's word, and we were never entirely sure what it meant. I'd like to illustrate by means of an anecdote; I think it may have bibliographical importance, and I submit it to you for what it may be worth. I happen to be responsible for introducing DiGiovanni to the concept of meter in poetry. He showed up one midnight in 1968, very upset, and demanded to know what iambic pentameter was; I explained that it was supposed to have five beats; he demurred; so we talked about it at length and when he left he was more or less satisfied. Two or three nights later he was back, more upset than before: "Bill, when I translate Borges' lines they don't come out to five beats. What shall I do?" We discussed it all again; and at length he decided, all on his own, that the way to make the verses come out right in English was to convince the author to rewrite them slightly in Spanish.

My question is: how many of the revisions in *Selected Poems* are of this nature? I think it's possible that the author who sits in front of us today may be unable to distinguish a clear division between lines which were bargained for and lines which grew naturally in their own soil. But the question is so fascinating that I think it can't remain unanswered for very long.

Apart from the obvious disadvantages of the prose versions of these poems (and the patent impossibility of translating poetry at all), it must be admitted that the prose versions helped us. I would like to mention one translation in particular, by Robert Fitzgerald, which unquestionably deserves to be called a poem in its own right. Fitzgerald, whom I greatly admire, as I think we all do, had produced an earlier English version of the same poem, and it was a perfectly respectable rendering except that there were errors of fact; for example he thought that the word *sur* in the title ("La noche que en el sur lo velaron") referred to the south of Argentina, when in fact, as it was explained to him later, it meant the south side of Buenos Aires. I don't remember Fitzgerald's first title; the second time around it was "Deathwatch on the Southside," and it comes out as a very great poem in English, I believe, just as the poem is undeniably great in Spanish. In this case Fitzgerald was certainly helped by the tireless DiGiovanni and his immense devotion to the

project. Even though DiGiovanni's own ear was not especially good, I think, by keeping after Fitzgerald and asking him to re-think every line he was instrumental in helping a very talented poet write one of the best poems he's ever produced.

In sum, I would say that apart from the obvious difficulties I've mentioned, *Selected Poems* represents a real milestone in translations of Borges' verse.

HAYES: The phrase, the comment came up, "The poem works." And Professor Barnstone, could you say something on this: Is Borges' poetry effective? Does it work in English? If you can preface that with anything else, please do.

BARNSTONE: I'm tempted to tell other anecdotes about that. I had a book that came out in 1959 that Norman Thomas DiGiovanni had edited. We were talking then about hexameters rather than pentameters. And we did fight and bargain about each line, and he got to the proofs before I did, and I really don't know how much of the final version he altered. Whatever one's notions of translation, the relentless kind of bullying intensity of DiGiovanni in trying to seek the best possible translation is extraordinary, new and admirable. Now I want to make a few professional remarks on three aspects of translation: the legal, the personal, and the technical.

Legally, there is one thing we must always remember when interested in translating: the rights. And the rights, in Borges' case, as in the case of so many writers, are hopelessly tangled, and not always to the benefit of the writer. I mention, for example, Solzhenitsyn and García Lorca, because I think they are two writers who have been brutally limited in their diffusion because of rights. Harper and Row must publish a translation they don't like because of the question of rights. New Directions has exclusive rights for most of García Lorca's poems and simply will not allow other books to come out or any complete single books to compete with the very small *Selected Poems*. In translating Borges or anybody else, this very notion of one person's style being imposed on the author for life in another language is a very questionable and complicated problem.

Secondly, the personal part which is nicer. When *La rosa profunda* first came out in Buenos Aires, I bought a copy and was very excited about the poems; by complicated arrangements, I did get the right to publish them in magazines. I spent about twenty hours on each poem. I would start at eight o'clock in the morning and finish a first draft about midnight. By about four in the morning, I'd collapse and wake up again very early in the morning and start again. This went on except for trips across the street to read them to Borges. And Borges was, as always marvelous. As you probably know, he doesn't own any copies of his books. He doesn't own his complete works. I remember he was debating whether he should take a copy of his complete works to the United States. He told me later that he decided not to. When I read him the poems, I read them first in Spanish. Everyone knows his extraordinary, selective memory. His memory is not very good, however, for his own poems and when I would read them to him, he'd comment, " Qué lindo!" Since he heard those with the wonderful objectivity of hearing someone else's poems. Of course, his comments were extremely useful. His lexicon tended, as Jim Irby has suggested, toward the Anglo-Saxon. If I used *patio* he would say "yard" was better.

At the beginning, I translated poems, as in the past, using mainly exact rhymes, but throwing in some off-rhymes. I remember one day we read some poems and I couldn't find a word to rhyme with Whitman, which is hard. Borges found there were only two words that would rhyme with Whitman in Spanish. The next day I had supper with Borges' editor. He said, "You know, Borges really would like you to find more exact rhymes." He was absolutely right. I want to mention briefly the question of whether one should or should not use rhyme in translating a poet who uses rhyme in the original.

I think years ago we felt this was, perhaps, a mistake; many people did. People tended to impose whatever was their style, or the current style, upon the original poet, think-

ing it would be a tremendous limitation and distortion of the original if one had to use rhyme or any other very disciplined device. My experience, and I think the experience of many people, has been quite the opposite: the more strictures you have imposed upon yourself, somehow the more your imagination is free to find new solutions, perhaps solutions closer to the original than you would otherwise find. I had this experience when I translated Theobald's *Bestiary* from medieval Latin. I did a prose version first that was unreadable and flat. When I did it in rhyme, as in the original, it was certainly improved. It had humor and some good qualities. Since then, I've translated rhyming poems in full rhyme.

One last matter: Irby's remarks on the universality of Borges' poems. The poems' universality may seem to remove them from our time. The poems are very much of our time and not of our time. Borges is not afraid to use the whole kingdom of the Spanish language. In translating Borges, we have a problem: Do we translate him into American English of 1976, or do we translate him into English-American, meaning a language which somehow corresponds fearlessly to everything available in English: His poems are so modern and yet so ancient that we should simply seek the fullness of the Spanish language in English. We may end up writing poetry which isn't completely of our decade; but then, Borges does the same thing in Spanish. Then we'll have greater fidelity. Moreover, by doing so we may expand the English language, which is what translation always does, and discover new ideas about how good poetry can be written in English. As for effectiveness—to go back to the original question of Borges in English—like the Bible, like other great writers, the universality saves him. There is no question that Borges works extremely well in English. Borges would say it works better in English than in Spanish. Borges does translate very well, and this is proven by the many readings of his poems around the country and the extraordinary response by the audience.

HAYES: Thank you. Mr. Dugan, tell us about some of the specific problems that you personally have encountered and perhaps, also, some of the rewards, in translating Borges.

DUGAN: I think that Borges is relatively accessible when translated, given the general problems of translation as an impossible craft. Because much of Borges' writing is cosmopolitan in inspiration, because so many of the poems depend on a literary past which is accessible across the language barrier, I think that a lot of his poems come through into English and American English with some fidelity. It's also true that a large number of his poems deal with metaphysical conceits, with metaphysical play, and the poems in this sense generally make an intellectual point. In other words, they do not depend so much on the sonic values of language or what we call poetic-poetic poetry. Rather the poems have as their organizational point an intellectual point or a metaphysical point which is played upon. This is translatable. However, what we do lose is the particular flavor of the Spanish, because so much of Spanish and so much of English is just incompatible, with two different worlds of reference, as we all know to our sorrow who have attempted to translate anything. It's also true that the poems which are either about historical characters or invented historical characters are accessible because of history, or history as play. So that's one point at which Borges' work becomes relatively accessible to translation.

The other is the simplicity of his Spanish. He writes as simply as possible about very difficult matters. This is even true in his earlier verse which he complains about now for its ornateness. But it is not as ornate as much of the verse in Spanish which I have read. As a matter of fact, when he speaks about somebody like Machado in this context, it is entirely too easy for his Spanish to be eloquent. So the artistic ambition to reduce eloquence to more or less plain statement while nevertheless dealing with highly complicated ideas is something that works also in English and in American English. In my own case of translating Borges, I figured out that I always failed because I do not speak Spanish fluently; and I went through the committee business with Norman Thomas DiGiovanni also. Each poem of Borges that I translated, I think was the result of at least a ream of copy paper, and letters going back and forth between myself and DiGi, so that I have a feeling that my own translations are

rather banal and a product of quibbling. The only time I felt rather good, after going through all this interminable haggling with DiGi over a particular word, was on sitting back and getting a rush of pseudo-creativity, of feeling myself into a specific poem in the presence of a huge pony, a huge bunch of literal translations, and then getting the feeling. But those were the poems that I didn't publish in the book, precisely because they were too far away from a literal translation and too far into an independent creation. That is always the agony of translation. In one's efforts to be true to Borges, to make the translation a tribute to another man's creative genius, how much do you subordinate yourself, if you do subordinate yourself, the translator? Then you don't really feel the full impact of the emotion of the poem. If you do feel the full impact of the emotion of the poem, then you write a different poem. So there's the fundamental paradox of the translator's dilemma. Those are my opinions at the moment.

HAYES: This has nothing to do with the difficulty of the question, but in twenty-five words or less, could you give us your philosophy of translation? Tell us about your approach to translating.

LIMA: I'll preface my remarks by revealing that I came to Borges, somewhat ironically, through the Army. Out of desperation during basic training at Fort Dix, I sought an outpost of civilization and culture in those wilds of New Jersey; I was fortunate to find the small post-library. It was there that I came across a few of the items which Donald Yates mentioned, the early bibliography of Borges in English. So I discovered Borges by chance in a random library, and in translation. Eventually, upon leaving the service, I pursued his work further through the originals. Although I first read his prose, when I became involved in the New York City poetry movement of the early 1960s, among the things that I found myself doing was the reading and translating of Borges' poetry. I read those pieces at the Café Cino, Tenth Street Coffeehouse, "Les Deux Megots" on Seventh Street East, and at the Judson Memorial Church. Some of these translations appeared in *Chicago Review* in the summer issue of 1964.

These were pioneer efforts on behalf of Borges the poet. I've been translating his poetry intermittently since those days and publishing it in various good but non-paying journals. I'm sad to admit that Borges has not made any money from our association but proud of the fact that neither have I.

While Borges has been served financially by the many editions of his works in English, too often the latest publications have done a great disservice to his reputation. The most blatant savaging of his originals occurs in *Selected Poems*, wherein the editor did literal *prose* versions of the poems and passed these on to poets who knew little or no Spanish for re-processing into poems in English! The obnoxious process is proudly detailed by the editor in the book's introduction. To my knowledge, I was the only reviewer who decried the procedure and its results.

This brings me to the matter of originality and translation. The masterful Spanish architect Antoni Gaudí once remarked that "Originality is the return to origins." The translator can be original but only is his creativity valid if it is an outgrowth of its source. The translator has no right to take a new route under the guise of fidelity; he must approach any author's writings with respect and with insight into what the originals mean. The personal quirks of the translator cannot be allowed to intervene lest the resultant version reflect possession rather than service. Rather, the translator must dispossess himself to the extent that it is possible to do so in any collaborative effort, putting aside his subjective nature in order to make a valid incursion into the "poem itself." It is, however, desirable and necessary that personal intuition play an important role in the selection of words, phrases and structures towards a fortunate rendition into the new language of the original work.

Nowhere is the process I've just outlined more necessary than in the context of Borges' works. My translations of his poems are attempts towards this ideal. I have begun by translating only the poems that I find stimulating—intellectually or emotionally; of his poems, I like most those that are universal, least those that are autobiographical or wholly indige-

nous to Buenos Aires and environs. It is a matter of personal preference and has nothing to do with the intrinsic value of the rejected poems. I believe that a successful translation of any work can only come about if the original means something to the translator beyond the first level of communication; only then can the interpreter convey the original's special quality and depth of meaning. If he has succeeded, his translation will win kudos from critic and public alike, as well as reward him with a very special sense of satisfaction; that feeling is prompted by the knowledge that the translation has served not only to promulgate a worthy talent (that of the creator) but also to give evidence of the translator's ability to enter into communion with another mind. This carries a special satisfaction when the author is Borges.

DUGAN: There has to be a compatibility of minds, I think; in the case of Borges the speculations he deals with had roughly been in the air before he was translated. All our speculations about the nature of reality, about the nature of time; everything that we've been speculating on since the Einsteinian Revolution in physics achieves a focus in Borges' work, so that when we read some of the speculatings in Spanish, one has the reflection, "Oh, yes, I was thinking about that, too. Now I can probably say that in English." What I'm trying to say is that Borges' metaphysical speculations strike directly to the heart of modern preoccupations.

HAYES: Thank you, Professor Dugan.

COMMENT: I understand that when *The Aleph* was published they refused rights to re-translation of certain stories that DiGiovanni wanted to do?

YATES: No, that's not true. New Directions, which published Borges first in English translation—the translations which are drawn from four different volumes—wanted to make an arrangement with Dutton, which wanted to publish *The Aleph* separately, to give them the rights to publish the hardback and let New Directions publish the paperback of the same book. That arrangement, which apparently was one between businessmen, between publishers, was rejected by Dutton. I know nothing about the restrictions on Garcia Lorca.

LIMA: I could speak to that for a second, because at one time I was involved with Putnam in a project to do the selected works of Lorca in English; we tried every possible angle to get the rights from New Directions, to no avail. They had been promising a similar edition for years, but to date it has not been published. So I think that what Willis said a moment ago about New Directions and the hold that they have on certain authors is true and, consequently very sad.

COMMENT: Laughlin has been a major force in disseminating modern literature.

YATES: And Laughlin has no objection whatever to letting individual stories be published in other anthologies and so forth.

DISCUSSION

QUESTION: It is said that the bane of a U.N. interpreter's existence is the translation of humor, and that the first thing he wants to know from the Ambassador from Lower Slobovia is, "Are you going to put a funny story into your major speech this afternoon?" And as soon as he has determined that he is going to tell a story, he wants to know what the story is, and he immediately gives up on trying to translate it into the other language, and instead goes to a typical story in the new culture, the target language, and substitutes that for the old, having given up trying to go from one culture to the other in humor. Well, gentlemen, aren't you also giving up to some extent in going from one to the other, and aren't you really creating a new humor or a new poem or a new entity which really is only an approximation of the one that you were dealing with in the first place?

DUGAN: You know, the thing is that with Borges that kind of humor or wit is accessible, because the wit is very close to high seriousness—which it is. After all, you can read Borges' metaphysical jokes with a perfectly straight face or else you can break up in laughter, depending on how you feel at the moment. That goes over perfectly into American English. I've heard translations of Borges' poems read to audiences

in colleges: one audience would take a poem with a straight face, the next audience would break out laughing. But they would both be essentially indicating the same thing, a very deep appreciation of that fine line, something that's so new, so true that it's funny.

QUESTION: How about Professor Barnstone on San Juan de la Cruz? Doesn't that hold a very special problem? I must admit I have not read your translations of San Juan de la Cruz, but doesn't that present a different kind of problem from the one just cited? Are you satisfied with this as a very loyal, shall we say, interpretation?

BARNSTONE: I think you're getting into general problems of fidelity, and obviously some people are more faithful than others. But in all cases it's extremely subjective, because the best translation is counterfeit. It's a fake, it's a phony. But that's all right. Languages are different. Sounds are not the same in other languages; and if one accepts this and attempts to find some kind of good creative equivalent, then we can be satisfied with our counterfeit. If it's a bad counterfeit, if it doesn't work, it's really not been faithful in the deepest sense of being faithful to the quality of the original. It's not for me to say whether St. John works in English, but I think one has an advantage in being a translator, too, because there is a process of correcting there. Sometimes you have advantages, and it may come out even again. The very fact that you're selecting a poet, or selecting poems from a poet, is already an advantage on your part.

ALAZRAKI: I would like to ask a question to the people who have worked in translation. In Borges, there is a unique problem, that I'm not sure the translators are aware of. And I'll start by saying that just recently the *Journal of Style* devoted an issue to innovative stylists. One of the targets of the issue was to define, perhaps, the underlying qualities of each of those styles. A key to Borges' style is found in his familiarity with the literary traditions of both Spanish and English. I think that many things that are revolutionary in Borges in the Spanish language are perhaps a tribute to the

English language, and unavoidably, they are lost. Is there a known solution to the problem in question? Is there any way to cope with the fact that perhaps the English reader is condemned not to perceive those revolutionary elements of Borges' prose in the Spanish language?

DUGAN: That's a good problem. The only way to solve it would be by using a trick. That would be to make the English translation sound like it did in Spanish. But it is a basic problem. Style is always lost in translation. In Borges' case, the innovation in language can't come through in the translation. You are correct.

COMMENT: May I say something to that? Two things that it suggests to me: One is that I think that the precision, the compactness of Borges' prose and poetry are more known in the English language and have become more a part of the modernity of the English language than they were in Spanish. But when one attempts to deal with the subtleties of current, everyday speech, it's another matter. I became particularly aware of this when I read the translation of another Argentine author a number of years ago, of Cortázar's *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*). Part of the charm and novelty of that book is the very ear he has for the speech of Buenos Aires, for using it for different kinds of humor, mainly intellectual humor. And I think that it's fresh in the Spanish language, and that a Spanish-speaking reader from another country could appreciate it very well. In translation, the colloquial parts of *Rayuela* become much flatter than they are. And I don't think there's any way that that can be solved, really.

ALAZRAKI: Perhaps the answer would be the answer that Borges himself has repeated: Actually, really, any good work always survives bad translations. He has talked about Góngora and Quevedo. . . .

BARNSTONE: I think that we are very fortunate we have the English language to translate into. If Borges had written in English we'd have to find a translator for him to Spanish. Only Borges could do it. And it's possibly partly because he does often use the Shakespearian sonnet in Spanish,

which is rare. He also has this mixture of the specific and the abstract, and English is a very concrete language.

LIMA: Willis, on the other hand, not too long ago, I was sent a poem by Eliana Rivero to translate for this conference, the "Circular Poem" for Borges, and the poem ends with the words "solo, sola." Now I challenge anyone to translate "solo, sola," those two separate words, into two words in English. You end up with "alone," you see. So we lose the whole matter of gender. The word becomes neutral. So although we are fortunate, as Willis says, that we have English, in this particular case, we also have those limitations.

COMMENT: I just wanted to suggest that perhaps an alternative would be an annotated version of the translation. The words have different alternatives, and why did you select one particular one to make it come to life? This would heighten the innovations and the style.

COMMENT: The matter of humor has come up several times and I noticed that at least in one story, in *Labyrinths*, "Funes el memorioso," a long passage in the original, which had to do with flowery Spanish rhetoric, was eliminated from the translation. I don't know exactly who did it. It was an excision of at least a page.

IRBY: In *Labyrinths*? I translated it. I don't remember eliminating anything.

YATES: I've looked at the book many times. I realized that a sentence was left out in "The Garden of Forking Paths," but I'm not aware of anything left out in "Funes."

PANEL III: BORGES: PHILOSOPHER? POET? REVOLUTIONARY

Jaime Alazraki, Jorge Luis Borges, Eugenio Donato, Emir Rodríguez-Monegal, Donald Yates. Final remarks: Dean Gordon Haaland

Moderator: Stephen Weber

WEBER: I have looked forward to this panel for a long time. My anticipation has grown as the symposium on and with Borges has unfolded. We have a chance this morning for a quiet conversation with one another, a chance to let the panelists exchange ideas, a chance for some clarifications, some criticisms, some supporting comments, whatever seems appropriate to them and to you. Let me begin by introducing the panelists. On my far left, Donald Yates; next to Donald Yates, needing obviously no introduction, Jorge Luis Borges; on my right, Jaime Alazraki; next to Jaime Alazraki, Emir Rodríguez-Monegal; and finally, on the far right, Eugenio Donato. We thought it might be appropriate if we began this morning by asking each of the panelists whether now, after spending several days together, they have some comments they wish to make to one another, some reflections on their experience of the symposium, or some questions for one another, and having done that, we will then turn to you and ask you the same questions. Let's begin with Mr. Yates.

YATES: A question arose in yesterday's session on translation that I think touches on a very interesting point. Jaime Alazraki brought it up in the form of a question and we didn't have a chance to expand on it. Jaime has a book on

Borges' prose style, and his questions was: 'Is this peculiar feature of Borges' style in Spanish, which is its close, if not secret, marriage with English language rhythms and English language syntax–not lost when it comes back in the translation?'' The question really was never answered, and I thought it was worth developing, so I guess that my question would be to Jaime: In the process of studying Borges' styles, what do you think are the features of Borges' style that are *not* involved with the English language, and, secondly, is this feature of close kinship with English rhythms picked up again by the translators (because I don't think there's any guarantee that it ever is)? Is my question clear, Jaime?

ALAZRAKI: Yes, very clear. In fact, I thank you for asking this question, because I think it will make a good subject for discussion. Borges' prose has been to me a literary revolution, and I believe that everybody acknowledges this fact: a revolution in the prose of the Spanish language. Yes, I think that what surfaces from reading and probing Borges' prose is the realization that Spanish, until him, had its revolution in poetry with Rubén Darlo and *modernismo*. We know that, Neruda, Vallejo, Paz, and Borges himself saw in *modernismo* and in Darlo's poetry the tool with which they were able to write the later poetry we know today in contemporary Spanish-American literature. After years of debating the merits of *modernismo*, we accept this fact today as a truism. When we come to the prose written during the same period, we find that their fiction–novels and short stories–was too concerned with beauty, sensory impressions, verbal rhythms, and artistic transpositions. The narrative, among the modernist fiction writers, was often a pretext to just create highly embellished prose, sometimes heavily florid, others, over-burdened with rhetoric. This type of flaunty prose had a negative influence on the writers who wrote fiction immediately after *modernismo*, and was of little value to the writers who are writing today in Latin America. From the standpoint of form and style, there was a definite vacuum in Spanish American fiction, and this may partially explain the fact that prose fiction came to its full maturity later than

poetry. I believe that it was Borges who filled this vacuum. He faced first the question of the peculiarities in the Spanish spoken in Latin America. "What distinguishes the Spanish we speak from the Spanish spoken in Spain?"–he asked early in 1927. His answer was that it is only a certain nuance, a certain tone, but clear enough that one can hear in it what was idiosyncratic about an Argentine or a Mexican. His first three books of essays are perhaps the best testimony of the kind of prose Borges *didn't* want to write. But in them, and in the next two collections, he set out to study the ailments that incapacitated Spanish from being the effective literary instrument he sought. He asked the forbidden question–"How can we create a pliant and hopeful Spanish which would be in harmony with our own landscape and our own ways and our professed faith?" To the old concept of style which identified ornamentation with style, Borges contrasted a new, and indeed revolutionary, concept of style. He said: "Total invisibility and total effectiveness are the twin perfections of any style." To me, this is the key to his revolution in the Spanish prose. Now, going back to Donald Yates' question, which I think deserves further exploration. When we move to the English language we find that those attributes Borges sought for Spanish prose were already part of English prose at least since the turn of the nineteenth century. English and American literature created this linguistic tool much earlier, and because Spanish didn't have it you often hear translators saying that it is easy to translate Borges into English. I think this is a kind of naive way of recognizing that something new has happened in Borges' Spanish, because before him, just think about translating Quevedo's prose or even some of the nineteenth century. Spanish fiction writers–they were all trying to imitate the models set during the seventeenth century. Once Borges is translated into English, some of his innovations in the Spanish language are lost, because we enter into a language which has already achieved in its prose some of Borges' achievements. In fact, English has been often for Borges a model for the Spanish he set out to forge. When the American journal *Style* was planning an issue on innovative stylists in American and European literature and I was asked

to write the piece on Borges, my problem was to explain to the American reader the extent of Borges' innovations in Spanish prose, because I felt that much of what he did was lost in the English translations, much as those translations are often excellent.

YATES: I presume, Jaime, when you speak about 'economy' you mean something that comes down simply to the length of sentences or the length of paragraphs or the length of the stories themselves: an economy of conception?

ALAZRAKI: No, I don't mean that type of economy. It is the economy of means for expressing an idea, thought or feeling. In Borges' prose, one feels that nothing is lacking and nothing is excessive. I think that in his prose everything functions like living cells—each one performing a defined function. Before him, you find that Spanish prose was overloaded with words which were like dead cells, doing nothing for developing the given idea or thought. Economy in that sense.

YATES: Economy, then, in some way that is effectiveness. Perhaps no longer or shorter in length.

ALAZRAKI: Right, it has nothing to do with that. I mean the two things, one dependent on the other—effectiveness and economy.

BORGES: I would like to make a remark. Alazraki has used the image of the cells. Now that was used, I suppose invented, by Groussac when he was talking about the prose style of Ricardo Rojas. Now, I don't think I have done any revolution. I think that my prose style comes from those two writers I have most read in Spanish: Paul Groussac and Alfonso Reyes. But, fortunately, I am very happy to think that people think that I have done it. But really I think of myself as a disciple of Paul Groussac and of Alfonso Reyes, who said to me, "Groussac told me how to write Spanish prose, but that's all." Thank you very much.

RODRIGUEZ-MONEGAL: I'm sorry that Borges anticipated my objections. I'm very sorry because I like to disagree with you, and unfortunately it will have to be some other time. Now I think that the gist of the problem is that, in the

first place, Borges is absolutely right. Paul Groussac and Alfonso Reyes did Borges before Borges. Unfortunately for them, Borges did it better. And doing it better, he changed Groussac and Alfonso Reyes into Borges precursors. And now only his generosity and his wonderful memory keeps them alive. This is unfair to both of them because Groussac was one of the greatest stylists in Argentine literature. I would say a few words about him because it's not a very well-known name. Groussac was a Frenchman. He came to Argentina; I think it was some political problem. He began writing in French in Argentina, and finally he invented a language which was French—the French in the sense of economy, the French in the sense of logical syntax, the French of subtlety, of touch, the French understatement, which is what we find in Borges, although because of some confusion, people believe he comes from England. Actually there are very few English writers that write that way. I should say that Wilde perhaps, and Bernard Shaw, both Irishmen, and, in the eighteenth century, of course, you have Swift, you have Goldsmith. But in the English, as has been proved again and again, language can become elaborate. We think of Dickens, Thackeray, Meridith, Henry James, Hawthorne. You won't find Borges in them; only in some occasional pieces. What actually happened was that Borges went to Geneva and learned French there, and the syntax is mainly French with some touches of Groussac. And, of course, then Alfonso Reyes. Alfonso Reyes was a Mexican who learned Spanish in Spain and Mexico, but he also translated some of the prose writers in English that are more congenial to Borges and of course to Alfonso Reyes. He translated Sterne; he translated Chesterton. So you see, what we are talking about really is not a language or a source, a linguistic source, but more a textual source. It's the meeting of people like Sterne and Swift in the eighteenth century, and Chesterton, Wilde, Shaw, Groussac, Reyes, etc., in Borges' creation of style. And there were of course some Spanish writers. Not all Spanish writers write like Gabriél Miró, a celebrated stylist like that, or like Galdós, a prolific writer. No, no; Azorin, for instance, was a very good example of concision—perhaps too concise, if you are interested in anything

else but concision. So my argument will be that the strangeness of Borges to readers of the Spanish language, who do not know their English literature and hardly know the English, is because they know that he has an English grandmother and that he's always quoting English writers, and that he occasionally lapses into English in conversation, etc. But I think he is very much in the tradition of style that brings together the best of certain trends in English, in French, and even in Argentine literature. We have some examples: Sarmiento, for instance, I think is very much in Borges' tradition. I don't know if you will agree with me; I hope you won't so that we will have an interesting discussion, and then I will get the embrace that he still owes me in this conference. [Laughter.]

WEBER: Jaime, would you wish to respond?

ALAZRAKI: Yes, I would like to say a few words on that. Yes, no doubt there are some antecedents until one comes to Borges. I think he would say, as he has, "Everything I did was already in such and such author. . . ." Of course, Borges was not alone in this endeavor, in the same way that Dario was not alone. But I believe that what Sarmiento did for Spanish prose in the essay form in the nineteenth century, Borges did in the twentieth century for prose fiction. And regarding the cases of Groussac and Reyes, yes, there is no doubt about their accomplishments and one has no choice but to believe Borges regarding his having learned from them. But Reyes wrote very little fiction and although he has some fine stories they are not enough to make him the modern master Borges is. In the prose of Groussac, on the other hand, much as it was a condensed and cleansed prose, I don't find a single line that could match the prose of *Ficciones*. As Amado Alonso has shown, more than an innovator, Groussac was a guardian of correction, not a minor merit in a language that was so much misused and squandered. One can also answer Borges with his own words: "Every writer *creates* his own precursors and his work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future." So Borges, if you had not written what you did, we would not perceive this quality you attribute to Groussac. The fact remains that

Spanish American writers writing before Borges were not listening to themselves. They were writing, rather, in a nineteenth-century Spanish that already Spaniards were growing very restless about. And one has not to talk about *La gloria de don Ramiro*. Most of Argentine fiction, with obvious exceptions, was written in an artificial, contrived language in which Argentines could not hear themselves. If one can agree with Borges that he learned a great deal from Reyes and perhaps from Groussac, it must be acknowledged at the same time that only with his prose one can hear for the first time "a tone," a language suitable for writing good fiction. And this is what, I think, eventually fascinated most Latin American writers of today. How can one explain, otherwise, that for Fuentes the new Latin American novel starts with Borges? And that García Márquez, who has openly declared his dislike for Borges' work, has also expressed his great admiration for him and his fascination for "the violin he uses to express his things"? Cortázar summed it up for everybody when he said: "Borges has marked us all." Even in Sábato's *Sobre héroes y tumbas* we see Borges walking the streets of Buenos Aires and becoming one more fictional character among the others; and I think that what Sábato is saying there is that Borges' passage through the pages of one of the fairly representative novels of contemporary Latin American fiction becomes a sort of symbol, a *lapsus linquae* through which Spanish American fiction of the last decades acknowledges its debt to Borges.

RODRIGUEZ-MONEGAL: Yes, but Jaime, the problem is that they are two different statements. One is what kind of precursors Borges has, and I was denying this easy association with the English language. The other is the extent of Borges' revolution, and in that I think we both agree, and disagree with Borges, because the fact that Borges uses, let's say, Sterne and Chesterton, Groussac and Reyes to create—what? Prose? Not just prose; fiction. The fact that his prose is the prose of fiction which, as everybody knows, is not just fiction in the ordinary sense because it uses techniques and the style of the review, of the essay, of the philosophical hoax, etc., makes this revolution of Borges so im-

portant for all the people who can relate to it. But here we have problems. One is the origins of writers as Borges' precursors. The other is Borges' revolution. As I said before, it wasn't that Borges was a creator of a revolution in the art of telling his stories; and this has perhaps been acknowledged even by people who will never acknowledge it. And I think you were very right in mentioning the obsessive presence of Borges in Sartre. But I think Donald's question was more specific, and this is what has brought us to this point. And he was trying to find a way of solving the problem of how to translate Borges into English. This is a very tricky problem because the easy translator will say, "Well, he has an English syntax, and then I am going to translate it literally." Now what happens? It doesn't work. "I am going to translate word by word." And it doesn't work. And so, to rewrite Borges in English means that you have to know that he is not an English writer in Spanish, despite the fact that he may think in English. He may have been reading English all the time, but when the *man* Borges becomes the *text* Borges, something strange happens. And this is what I am interested in analyzing. What happens when the man Borges becomes the text Borges? The text Borges is Spanish—or Spanish American. The man may be from Northumberland, or even from Portugal, from Brazil, from Argentina, from Uruguay, from all over the world; the text is Spanish. Because the text is not only made by Borges, but it is made by everybody. It preceded him and continues to exist after him. This is what I think must be happening. And the text Borges exists only in Spanish. What we have in other languages is translation, but this betrays.

WEBER: Eugenio Donato.

DONATO: At the beginning of my talk, I had to preface it by saying, "I feel odd man out," and after this discussion on the question of style, I have to say again, "I am odd man out," because my concerns are not in that direction. All I can say at this point is, again, my impression of these past few days from an outsider's point of view, since, as I said the other

day, I am not a Hispanist and I have not written on Borges. However, looking at the program here, I notice that the title of this program was supposed to be "Borges: Philosopher, Poet, Revolutionary." And yesterday the talk of Borges was entitled, "A Simple Man of Letters." And the question remains to me, how can a simple man of letters be a philosopher? Or, can one philosophize by simply being a man of letters? I do believe (I'll just say this and we can discuss it, if you wish) that for many of us, the problem of Borges has been precisely that his meditation on language, on the act of being a simple man of letters, has made him develop in his writings a problematical representation which remains for many of us at the heart of the philosophical questions raised by the literary text. In so doing, whether he wants to admit that he has had an influence on them or not, he has created a certain genre and, among the non-Spanish writers that certainly have been influenced by him—take the late works of John Barth, for example—and in all their work you again have something (Professor Monegal used the expression "the prose of fiction") where you develop eventually the fiction of prose, and by developing the fiction of prose, you again have a problematic of textuality. And in so doing, to many of us, the great merit of somebody like Borges has also been to open up texts not only in the future, to open up texts not only at the level of critical thought, but also to open up texts in the past. Borges was one of the first people in the critical arena, for example, to write on Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pècuchet,* and Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pècuchet* perhaps is at the level of the problematic of the text. Also a text of a precursor in which then the name of Borges itself appears. I'll just simply say what was interesting to me in that area of Borges which is *not* my concern: that perhaps in listening to all of my colleagues, beginning with the paper of Professor Monegal on the way the man Borges, as he put it, can become the text Borges, the question that I felt the speakers were groping toward, was: How will the text Borges be written in a history of Literature? This is again the problem: that his name will be inscribed in one particular way in a history of Spanish literature or a history of Latin American literature; it will be inscribed in a

different way in a history of Literature (without any qualifications). What struck me is that perhaps the great innovation of the work of Borges is that somehow he has managed (and here I am thinking again of what Irby said about Nietzsche and Ecco—that he has perhaps managed, through a will to signification, in defining the shape which that particular chapter of literary history is going to take. For in a very curious way, all of the critical questions that arose, from which the task developed to write this chapter of literary history, were already, at the beginning, given by the texts of Borges himself.

WEBER: Do you wish to respond, Borges?

BORGES: Yes. I wonder if there is any difference between the style of narrative and the style of essay. In my case there isn't. Why should we think of the style of a story as being different from the style of an argument? I think we are making things more than they are. As to my style, I suppose the style is the same, whether I'm writing poetry, whether I'm writing a tale, whether I'm writing an essay. I don't think I'm writing in three different styles, because that would be preposterous. For example, if I have taken my style, let us say, more or less from Groussac and from Reyes, the fact that they wrote but little narrative is, as you say, irrelevant. Because, after all, what is style? You frame a thought, then a sentence, then you go on. For example, Groussac wrote *Caláquila*; in the case of Reyes, Reyes wrote the narratives. I don't think there's any need to think that what I have done is revolutionary. I was just following their tradition in Spanish, and, of course, I was thinking back on my English masters; I was thinking back on Chesterton or Shaw, on Kipling, and—why not?—on the eighteenth century also, on Boswell. So I don't think that what I have done is as important as you think. I think you are all committing a very generous mistake, but I'll be found out at any moment. But thank you.

WEBER: Jaime, you haven't had much chance to respond to questions. Do you wish to say something in reply to Borges?

ALAZRAKI: Yes, perhaps this is true indeed, that there

is not much difference when one moves from Borges' prose in the essay to his short stories, and perhaps it's also true that if we acknowledge that Reyes was an excellent essay writer, then perhaps those elements were already in the prose of Reyes. I think that what made, Borges, the whole difference is the fact that, perhaps following a similar procedure, you demonstrated that you can write great fiction, which is certainly not the case of Groussac, and I'm not sure it's the case of Reyes, no? That perhaps the same element or germ that is in those previous writers—it becomes in your writing great fiction, great narrative. And that's what triggers the effect that you have had, and not Reyes or Groussac, on writers like Garcia Márquez or Cortázar or Cabrera Infante, no?

RODRIGUEZ-MONEGAL: It's very embarrassing to disagree with everybody, but at the same time, it's very tantalizing and challenging. I think that in the first place, Borges' modesty prevents him from acknowledging the revolution he has achieved in the Spanish language, Spanish prose fiction, the essay; and so this is something he will never agree with. We may torture him with Chinese tortures, Argentine or Uruguayan tortures, even American tortures, Michigan State University tortures, and we will never make him acknowledge that he is the leader of a successful revolution. So I'm going to drop that and attribute it to modesty. On the other hand, I think that when we talk about style, style is one of the most vague words unless we are using it etymologically as the instrument with which we make incisions. But when we complicate the word 'style' with the word 'genre' then we are totally lost. Because we are trying to talk simultaneously about the style of Borges as if Borges had only one style, and we are talking about the plurality of genres while we note that Borges had different styles and different genres in different types of his writing. And let me quote from one instance of this, of his only statement about genres. When he had the accident in 1938, and when he recovered from the accident, and thought that his mind had been affected, he had told us (and I'm ready to believe him always when he tells things in print) that he was afraid he wouldn't be able

to write, and because of that he tried to write a short story, because that was a genre in which he hadn't produced very much, and so if he failed, nobody would notice it. And he did. He wrote "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quijote." As you know, it's one of the most original and revolutionary, and perhaps *the* most revolutionary of all his writings in the sense that it is a short story and also an article, a review, a defense, a parody, a satire, and all that we heard James Irby show so beautifully yesterday. But the key element of this anecdote is that Borges himself was acknowledging in 1939 the existence of different genres, and that some writing could take different forms. I think that this is obvious because genre is a convention. Genre is simply a literary form of a certain period that readers and writer make a kind of pact to use and exchange. But of course Borges, even in accepting that he was using a certain genre, was destroying the genre by using the techniques of the essay. I think this is why now he pretends he has forgotten everything and he doesn't remember that he once talked about genres and now he just has 'texts'. And I agree with him because finally when you leave the teachers and professors and critics and panelists aside, the only real thing you have is texts. If we can have a prose poem in verse; why not have a short story that is basically an essay? And I think that Borges now, in his infinite wisdom, is right. What we have now is somebody writing to persuade us about something. It may be a poem; it may be a short story; it may be an essay; it may be a text. That all is exactly the same. It's a form of persuasion: somebody talking to somebody to make him believe something.

YATES: Borges has given a statement repeatedly to this effect: that he doesn't believe in required reading; he doesn't believe in obligatory reading. This goes back, I think, to his earliest years when his father counseled him, "You have the run of this library of books." (His father's library of English books principally, his library in the family home on Calle Serrano.) "Read what you want. If you start a book and you don't like it, don't continue. Put it down and try something else." Borges has said again and again, even for his students at the University of Buenos

Aires, that he doesn't believe in requiring them to read any given text. You may not be ready for it; it may not be ready for you. In any case, if it doesn't give you pleasure, put it down and try something else. This is a hedonistic principle, if you will, and at the same time, I'm using "hedonism" in a non-derogatory sense. Borges' writing, I'm convinced—because I've heard him over the last several months repeatedly refer to the process of composition—Borges' writings are also the product of periods of intense pleasure and satisfaction. Writing has been a pleasure for Borges. He writes about the things that have given him pleasure. If he reads a book on philosophy and finds one idea that charms him, he remembers that one idea and the rest of the book drops over the edge and into oblivion. If he reads a short story by Stevenson and recalls a particularly exciting or moving conflict or drama or plot element, he remembers that, and the rest takes its place in the wings some place; it's not important. When he comes down now to writing, he's going to write about things that are pleasurable to him. He enjoys thinking about them and he enjoys playing with them. Some of these ideas come from books of philosophy; some of them come from metaphysical treatises; some of them come from Chesterton; some of them come from Wells, from Wilde, and he puts them all together, and is writing about that which is pleasurable to him. This is where I think the idea of genre disappears. Borges doesn't need to be aware of it. I don't think that it's even significant. What he's writing about is all of these things that are pleasurable to him. I think it's that simple.

RODRIGUEZ-MONEGAL: I'd like to respond to that. What do you expect us, as critics, to do with that pleasure? There is one thing that we have learned from Borges is that when you commit, whatever it is—pleasure, greetings, feelings, life, self—to text, the text takes a life of its own and begins an intellectual life of its own. And in the name of pleasure that he may have had in writing, you cannot deny the life that the text has, since the very problematic of Borges *is* the problematic of that dissemination of the text.

YATES: I don't think that anyone will argue with that; that's true.

BORGES: When I publish something, I do my best to forget it. Having written down something, when it is published, then I go on to do something else. What happens to the text is of no importance whatever to me. Of course I prefer people to like it; I prefer people to get some enjoyment out of it. And of course if they want to do that, they can analyze it, but that, I should say, is a rather dreary thing to do.

RODRIGUEZ-MONEGAL: It is what you give to us critics for our own pleasure, because, you see, the paradox is that we have here one single person in front of us, but at the same time, as a text he is so many different things. I mean as a person, he has a right to forget his texts, but, as a text, when we talk about Borges as a text, we cannot let Borges as a text forget anything. We are here like vampires. We treat him with respect and we love him. But we are desperate readers that cannot escape the spell of the text. We keep reading and re-reading it, quarreling among each other, going back to the text to see if we can find a drop of blood left. We were talking about the monkey and the inkpot. Well, we are the monkey of the inkpot; we are the ones that are waiting for Borges to finish with the inkpot and then we just jump into the inkpot and drink what was left in the dregs of the inkpot. And of course it's terribly embarrassing to talk with him, who has such a natural, simple, real relationship with the text, when we have it very distorted. We come out of our graves at night. We are pale, we are weary; we are boring Borges, boring you, boring everybody! [Laughter]

BORGES: I have been a critic. I think of criticism as being a recreation in the case of, let's say, Coleridge or Shakespeare. Now as for analyzing: I don't think that's any good. That's a very sad game. I have tried that. Now I don't think I will do it over again. Taking a text to pieces: there's something saddening about that. And as for counting words, what we call "structures," all those things are, of course, meaningless; I won't do them now. I think now I'm an older and perhaps a wiser man, or at least I'm a tired man. I write because I have to write. I enjoy the writing and I would like other

people to enjoy what I have written. If they enjoy a page of mine, then that is a sufficient reward. My place in the history of literature? What on earth can a man care about that? Nothing whatever. How can anybody care about the history of Spanish literature, Spanish American literature, world literature? Those things are trifles. I suppose that a grown man wouldn't have to go in for that kind of thing. But at the same time I have to thank you for the trouble you are going through, but really all of these things are so irrelevant to me. At the same time, I know I should be very thankful to you.

YATES: The question is a very good one, and I'll throw it out and hope that Jaime or perhaps Emir will respond to it. The Borges fans, you and the audiences that have turned out for his lectures between the west coast and this distant corner of Maine are special. I don't know if James Joyce fans get together and do this, or John O'Hara fans get together and do this. And I don't know what other writer draws people out of their graves at night to come and to circle around and feed on the body. I think that the basic question is this: How has Borges managed to write so many pages that mean so many things to so many people? Because that's why we're all here. I can't figure it out.

RODRIGUEZ-MONEGAL: Just one word. It's there. You don't have to prove that. It's either there and it's easy to see, or it isn't, and no matter how many vampires get together, it is so. Borges is Borges. He has created things that say different things to millions of people. That is what being Borges is about. We can try to explain, but it's a hopeless case. I think you realize it. . .

YATES: That's the response I know that Borges would like. "It's just there and that's enough. Let's not spoil it by examining it."

ALAZRAKI: Yes, I would like to say that one must try to go beyond that mere recognition, or else, what are we doing here? The situation reminds me of a social gathering in San Diego in which Herbert Marcuse was present. The subject of discussion was Balzac, and different people were trying to define good reasons as to why Balzac was a great writer. One

reason given was that Balzac was a great writer because he offered an x-ray of the social structure of nineteenth-century France. Other people were saying that Balzac presented an unconscious image of the class structure of French society during his time (the Soviets think also that Balzac is a very important writer on that account alone). And then Marcuse, who was listening silently, was finally asked: "What do you think, Herb?" We all expected a full elaboration of the Marxist thesis but then he simply said, "I think Balzac is a great writer because he knew how to write." [Laughter] In the case of Marcuse, that was the best possible thing he could have said, but one must seek to overcome such generalities. I believe that one possible answer to Borges' impact on contemporary letters is his condition of a classic of modern times. In his work he has absorbed the most memorable traditions in Western literature, he has rescued and reintegrated them into a text which is new and old at the same time. Like Pierre Menard he is a twentieth-century reader who reads anew Western literature, and, as John Barth put it, "writes original work of literature, the implicit theme of which is the difficulty, perhaps the unnecessity, of writing original works of literature." The new stems from the old, but the old is understood in a way it could not have been understood in its time. Borges became a modern master not only because he wrote remarkable work but also because he opened new roads into the seemingly exhausted map of twentieth-century fiction. He stimulates and appeals the way a classic writer does.

YATES: Gene Bell has written an essay in the *Nation* for February 21st called, "Borges: Literature and Politics North and South," where he attempts to give some ideas on why Borges has been so popular in the 1960's, and why he has been so in North America and in northern Europe. He was tending to the question of why Borges is popular now, which suggests the possibility that Borges may not be as popular in the 1970's, or may drop out of sight in the 1980's. But my suspicion is that that's not going to happen, any more than Dante drops out of sight and we don't see him for a decade, and then he comes back. Dante's firmly fixed in the constellation. I appreciate and sympathize with the tentative answers that you've given as to why Borges has achieved popularity to the extent that he has. There is something that Borges is aware of, because he's written about it, but he may not realize it's important in his work. I'm speaking of the inconclusiveness of what he writes, the ambiguity of what he writes, the sense that his stories seem to offer or tell you something for which he withholds the last insight; the curtain drops before the characters finally commit suicide or kill one another or have an argument and head off to have a duel. This inconclusiveness, I think, leaves things open for the reader. A reader of Borges who is a writer himself, who knows a great deal about writing, is Vladimir Nabokov. He said something once what I think was meant to be a criticism of Borges, but I think it's going to end up being one of the greates accolades to Borges, Nabokov said, "When Vera [his sister] and I first discovered Borges, we were enormously excited. We couldn't stop talking about Borges. We went out and bought all his books and sat down to read them. And we were so elated. We felt that we were on the veranda of a huge mansion, ornate, with many rooms and cellars and stairways and balustrades, building up and up. And we kept reading and kept reading, and finally we decided that there was only a veranda and no mansion." I think it was meant to indicate some kind of poverty in Borges. "We were on the veranda. . . ." Borges gives us a veranda. But the house—we the readers build the house.

WEBER: Before we ask members of the audience whether they have questions. I wonder if Señor Borges has questions for any of his critics.

YATES: Friends.

WEBER: Friends and critics.

BORGES: I suppose that I can only say that I am amazed. Because really, when I wrote, I never thought anybody would read what I was writing. I was a secret writer for years and years. I was taken aback and very happy when I found out that I had sold 39 copies of a book in a year. And now it

seems that *more* than 39 copies have been sold and are being sold all over the world. And this, of course, comes to me rather late in life, and so I am grateful, because I thought of myself as a lonely man, and it seems that I wasn't a lonely man, that I was ringed in by those far-away invisible friends, and this morning I have another proof of that. After the many observations made this morning, I would like to make a single one about the fact of the prose of fiction. [Robert] Louis Stevenson pointed out that the problems of an historian, when he writes his history, are exactly the same as the problems of the fiction writer because, after all, they are telling a story. And whether the story be about imaginary men, how to dream a man, or about historical characters, the problem is the same. I repeat, I am greatly indebted to Groussac, who was an historian, since to be an historian is to use a narrative style, and since I took, let us say, more or less my style from him, well, he was also telling a story. The fact that he was telling the story of the true foundation of Buenos Aires or, let us say, of different periods in Argentine history, and I was telling stories of my dreams, makes for no essential difference whatever. And I am glad to find this morning another link between Groussac, whom I never knew, and myself. And I suppose that would stand for Reyes also. But somehow I find that major writers are not read. People stare at me, for example, when I speak of Chesterton, when I speak of Stevenson. And yet, it's very strange or very uncomfortable that those very nice people are reading me. And that, of course, I certainly can't understand. That's all I have to say.

WEBER: Thank you. Would you please identify to whom you are addressing your question?

DISCUSSION

QUESTION: Yes. To Professor Yates. I'm still interested in the initial question, because it was never answered. It seems that if Borges' style of English is clear, and calls little attention to itself, and if it's true this was the intention of Borges, in essence the translation of Borges would betray it rather

than afford further clarification.

YATES: A translation *can* be a further clarification, or a translation can be a partial or total obfuscation of the original. Since there is no platonic model of this language called English, but rather, the individual language of the translator, the fate of the translation depends on the capacity and the talent and the resources of the translator.

QUESTION: Wouldn't there be a good translation if the author participated?

YATES: No, the author's participation is no guarantee of a good translation.

QUESTION: Little is said about Borges' style except in translation, and in that sense Borges is better understood in English.

YATES: I don't think anyone ever understands the intention of a writer—either reading him or translating him.

BORGES: Those general problems hardly exist. The problem of translation—the only problem is translating a particular sentence. We should take a particular verse or a particular paragraph and see how it can be translated. Because the whole problem of how our writers should be translated, or translating Borges into English is, I should say, meaningless. There's no such problem. The only problem is the problem involved in any particular paragraph or in any particular verse and, as no examples are being used, I think that the whole thing is in a sense meaningless. Because there is no problem whatever about the way men should translate, but there is a problem as to this line or that line, this paragraph or that paragraph. The rest, I should say, is meaningless. At least I don't understand it myself. I have undertaken many translations. I have translated Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, Kafka and so on. And I have not thought about the problem of translating Virginia Woolf, Kafka or Faulkner in Spanish. I have thought of the particular page before me, and the best way in which I could do it. I don't think you need a general theory of translation. Of course, a theory of translation may be amusing, and why not be amused by it? But

when you have to translate something, you have to tackle a very real problem, you don't have to go in for the fine distinctions between one language and another. You know Spanish; you know Engish. Well, then you have to find out the right version for this or that sentence. That's all. All the rest, I should say, may be amusing, but it's irrelevant. Well, that's what I wanted to say.

QUESTION: Very heavy emphasis has been placed on the communication of feeling in Borges' work. I would like to ask Borges how he thinks about the communication of knowledge, as distinct from feeling. I understand that surely the work of any artist is involved with both knowledge and feeling. But there has been such a heavy emphasis on the importance of feeling in his work. I wonder if he would comment on how he thinks of his works in relation to the communication of knowledge.

BORGES: Well, I suppose the communication of knowledge should be easy, since, let's say, books of metaphysics, books of philosophy can very fairly be rendered into other languages. Now, of course, as for the case of emotion, there, I suppose, the thing is far harder, since you have to take into account that the connotations of the words are utterly different in different languages. And then you also have to take into account the rhythm of the sentence, and then you have to find the right rhythm. In my case, I don't think there is any knowledge to be translated, but there is something far harder. And that would be, for example, emotions, dreams, memories, tales—those things the translator has to work out of himself. I do not think there is any rule to doing that. I am very well satisfied with my translators. Of course, in the case of my poems, they have recreated them, and that is as it should be. And I suppose in the case of my tales, they have also been recreated, but of course in a lesser way. I have to be thankful to them, because sometimes they have made quite good poems out of my poor poems, and, as people always suppose that all successes are due to the writer and not the translator, I get the credit for that. I wonder if I've really understood your question; or would you care to repeat it? Because I'm not sure that I've gotten to the heart of the matter.

QUESTION: I was not really asking the question in the context of translation; I was asking the question in the context of your interest in the response of your readers and in the emphasis you place on the emotional content.

BORGES: Writing is to be enjoyed. Other things belong to the history of literature but not to literature itself. And there's something I may recall today. Nobody thought of writing history of literature before Francis Bacon. Francis Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning* wrote down—and he did not know the evil things that might come out of that—he wrote down that we had histories of wars, of empires and so on, why not have histories of the arts? Well, he wrote that down, and he wrote no more about it. Well, here we are. We are the victims of Francis Bacon.

WEBER: Another question?

QUESTION: Yes. I want to address my question to Borges, and perhaps his friends if they want to comment after this. It has to do with your interest in cinema, Borges. We know that you reviewed several movies in the past, and we know that you like to go to the cinema, though you do not see the images too well. We read, in the introduction to the collection, *The History of Infamy*, that some of those stories were written following your interest in the film of von Sternberg. And my question is this: Have you, after that collection, consciously tried to write some scenes that are visually appealing following the technique of cinema? I am thinking, for example, of the ending of your "Conjectural Poem," in which the victim Laprida sees the shadows overtaking him and his persecutor is about to kill him. I thought in the beginning of that poem that it looked like the presentation of the set-up of a cinematic scene, and I'm mostly thinking of the end of the story, "El fin," "The End," where you see Martin Fierro coming as a dot on the horizon, enlarging as he comes closer. Were you, in those passages or others, subconsciously or consciously thinking of cinematic technique?

BORGES: I think vivid visual scenes came long before

the cinema. You find them in the sagas, for example; in the Icelandic sagas they are found all the time. You find them, let's say, in historians. And then, I should say, you find them in Hugo; you find them in Stevenson; you find them in Chesterton. You don't have to wait until the cinema comes along, since you are getting them all the time. I do not see why a story should dispense with visual images. Of course, the thing can be done. I remember that very fine novel, *Adolphe*, by Benjamin Constant, where there is nothing visual. Or I remember, for example, certain tales; certain novels by Henry James where many things happen, but they seem to happen in a kind of haze: nothing visual is given us. While in the case of Stevenson, and in the case of Dickens also, and again in the case of Kipling, we are given visual imagery all the time. But I think visual imagery is allowed, and of course it came long before the cinema. In fact, I should say it was one of the classic elements of poetry and of narrative. Though in my case, that fact may have been stressed because I was very apt to have seen films, because I was very fond of films, especially of Westerns, since I think that Westerns and also gangster films somehow were preserving the epic. Since poets in our time have forgotten their epic duty, that kind of thing was done by Hollywood, let us say, for the whole world. Why did people all the world over think of cowboys, think of the western plains? Why? Because in those films they got the epic quality, the epic flavor that was being denied them by poets who were complaining of being unhappy or who were merely wallowing in sunsets and that kind of thing. Well, I think we should be grateful to the cinema, also. Well, I think I have answered your question fairly, sir.

QUESTION: In a letter that Unamuno wrote to a Latin American friend, whose name I don't remember, he says, "Give my greetings to your comrades, and especially to Borges." And I wonder if you could say some words about your relations wtih Unamuno?

BORGES: We exchanged some letters. As a writer, I am not too fond of Unamuno. He wrote in a very crabbed style. Of course, he was trying to be Carlyle, but I don't think he

succeeded. There is something in Unamuno that I can't understand. The fact that he stood in need, I suppose you could say thirsting, hungering for personal immortality. Now I cannot understand that. He wants to go on being Miguel de Unamuno: a very strange wish. But he had that wish. And as myself, I hope rather for oblivion, I hope to be obliterated. So all that Unamuno wrote of immortality is something that I cannot understand. He said, "God is a producer of personal immortality." In that case, God should be hated, or should be denied. Of course, I know that Unamuno was one of the few men who were thinking in Spain. This, I suppose, is true. He was thinking all the time, I should say, to no great purpose. He was always trying to think in a pathetic way. And, being very pathetic myself, I dislike other people to be pathetic.

WEBER: Allow me; I want to impose on you a question of my own. Yesterday afternoon, I asked you where, in your judgment, a book should lead, and you said, "To happiness." Now, many people who discuss writing and the challenge of writing suggest that an author has a greater responsbility than simply amusing and pleasing his audience. That is, that not only do things lead to books, as you said, but that books lead to events and change the human condition. And I wonder how you respond to that view of the writer's responsibility.

BORGES: I think happiness is far more important than politics or our opinions. After all, opinions are rather selfish, and happiness, if we can get it, is essential to us. Or, I should say, not happiness (because that may be unobtainable), but the hope of happiness. Perhaps the serene and quiet hope of happiness. As to my duty as a writer, I think I have solved that problem. Everybody knows where I stand politically. No one can doubt that in my country, or perhaps beyond my country. But when I am writing a poem, when I am writing a tale, I think that my opinions should not be allowed to intrude in the tale or the poem. For tales and poems are dreams, and dreams of course are far more important than opinions.

WEBER: Thank you. Are there any other questions? Do

any of the panelists wish to make any concluding remarks? If not, Gordon Haaland, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, would like to make some concluding remarks.

HAALAND: I think it's somewhat ironic, although perhaps quite appropriate, that after all the discussion on Borges from the critics and scholars, the last few words are left to just the reader. This is perhaps particularly appropriate when the focus of the symposium is on "simply a man of letters." This conference has introduced me to Borges, for when the symposium was first announced, I first read Borges. Not being a scholar of literature, and thus required to be a critic, I can give a simple testimonial. And I think I've found a friend. One does not readily forget Borges; I think I understand him better by the opportunity to listen yesterday to the discussion on words, and the focus on words makes me understand, I think, a little better the use of short story or poem as a way of communicating to me as a reader. There was a phrase from one of his poems which struck me, and I think it has been particularly interesting to listen to the discussion this morning because of the protestations of our friend in terms of his own place in the world of literature and the future he sees for his own work. If you will bear with me, he says, "I imagine in the dawn, I hear a worn murmur of multitudes, faltering, fading away. / They are everything that has loved me and forgotten; / Space, Time, and Borges now are leaving me." I prefer a paraphrase which he himself gave us yesterday. I unfortunately could not hear the attribution, but to violate literature somewhat, I would simply say that the gods have given us Borges in order for succeeding generations to have something to think about.

I would like to thank you all on behalf of the university for joining with us during these three days. I trust that you have found it to be as fruitful and interesting as I know I have. I want especially to thank those of you who participated, who presented, who joined with us in a tribute to a great writer, to someone whom I trust we all do enjoy. I appreciate those of you from the Midwest having brought this weather with you. Most of all, I want to thank our signal friend, the

individual who has made, I think, this whole thing such a great success, Señor Borges, for joining us. I do appreciate again, the honor that you have brought to this institution and the opportunity that we have had to celebrate these days with you. Thank you all and I wish you all a good trip back.

Reading

BORGES IN THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Georgette M. Dorn
Specialist in Hispanic Culture
Latin American, Portuguese, and Spanish Division

Borges recorded for the Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape of the Library of Congress in two separate sessions on November 3 and 15, 1958 at the United States Information Service Laboratories in Buenos Aires. Borges first visited the Library in 1962, when he came after his triumphal teaching tour at the University of Texas, where he had taught courses on Lugones and Argentine poetry, and gave lectures on Walt Whitman, Macedonio Fernández, and Cansinos Asséns. Borges, the extraordinary conversationalist and wit, felt at home at the Library, a gigantic labyrinth with seemingly endless honeycombs of book-stacks, an octagonal Main Reading Room with its own alcoves and galleries, and the wonderful hidden circular staircases and patios. Borges spoke about infinite book-shelves and of all books becoming one book.

During his next visit in 1968, he had occasion to listen to his recording. He remarked that it was indeed a marvel to be able to listen to one's own voice; it made us all feel timeless. Borges went on to say that "time is circular and everything that happens has happened before and will happen again."

Borges felt that he was in very good company in the Archive. At this point, it is perhaps appropriate to consider briefly the genesis of the Archive. Contemporary Latin American Literature is well represented in this unique collection of the Library. With the cooperation of 270 poets and prose writers, the Archive preserves for posterity and for current researchers, the voices of these writers on magnetic tape.

The first writer to record for the Archive was the Uruguayan poet Emilio Oribe, who passed through Washington in 1942. He recorded a then recently written poem entitled "*Oda al cielo de la Nueva Atlántida,*" dedicated to Archibald MacLeish, who at that time was Librarian of Congress. A year later, Andrés Eloy Blanco recorded "*Pintame angelitos negros*" and six other compositions.

By 1944 the Library had begun to formulate a program to gather English-language recordings read by the poets themselves. The Hispanic Foundation (now called the Latin American, Portuguese, and Spanish Division), also set out to assemble, albeit slowly, poetry recordings from the Hispanic world. Basically, prominent poets who happened to visit the Library were recorded. In this manner, on Christmas eve of 1946, Pedro Salinas read before the microphone his poem "*El Contemplado*," which was inspired by the sea surrounding Puerto Rico. Five years later, the recording was to play an important part on the day Salinas was buried in San Juan. A record issued by the Library of Congress with the cooperation of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, was played over the island's radio stations. From all accounts, this proved to be indeed a moving experience.

Juan Ramón Jiménez and Jorge Guillén contributed long readings in 1949, and so did Jaime Torres Bodet, among others. Gabriela Mistral read for the Library in 1950. This recording is the only one extant by the Chilean poet.

The initial recordings were done at the Library's own laboratories. By 1951 it was apparent that the Archive was acquiring many major figures, but it was growing ever so slowly. The Library was able to secure the assistance of the United States Information Service and Cultural Affairs offices

in Barcelona, Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro, and Port-au-Prince and thus was able to acquire recordings by Catalan, Portuguese, Brazilian, and Haitian poets.

Gradually, scholars, writers, and critics became aware of the potential of this collection. It was realized that haphazard recording would not lead to a well-balanced collection. The decision was then made to form an integrated Archive of literature of the entire Hispanic culture area, which would include not only poetry but also prose selections read by the authors themselves.

The Hispanic Foundation, with the aid of the Rockefeller Foundation, undertook a special project to obtain recordings of writers in selected areas of Latin America. Francisco Aguilera, then curator of the Archive, made his first acquisitions trip in connection with this project in 1958. He visited Argentina, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay. The criteria established for inclusion in the Archive were based principally on recognition of the writer by critics, award committees, professors, the media, and the public. Latin American critics and jounal–ists have been very cooperative. The literary establishment of the countries Aguilera visited were impressed by the Library's undertaking. Names such as Mistral and Jiménez were symbols with well-defined meaning in the Hispanic world. The success of the first trip, during which 68 authors recorded, proved that this would be a worthwhile avenue for further acquisitions. Similar trips to other countries were contemplated. It was during the 1958 trip that Jorge Luis Borges read more than a score of his poems for the Archive. Others recorded at the same time were Rafael Alberti, Victoria Ocampo, Miguel Angel Asturias, Roa Bastos, and many more.

This success provided the needed momentum for continued support from the Rockefeller Foundation. Two more acquisitions trips (in 1960 and 1961) brought the total of authors represented in the Archive to 218. After 1961 the Library continued recording authors who came to the Library or to the Washington area. In recent years Octavio Paz, Camilo José Cela, Pablo Neruda, José Donoso, Carlos Fuentes, Juan Goytisolo, and Julio Cortázar were among those

added to the collection.

A *Guide* to the Archive was prepared and published in 1974, containing brief bio-bibliographical material on each author with a short evaluation, appended to which is a complete listing of his contributions to the Archive. The listing indicates the length of the recording, and where the selection was taken from. All these data are also available in the individual notebooks prepared by the Archive staff, for each author and located in the Latin American Division. All these tools of research are widely used by students, professors, and others interested in literature.

By choosing authors who are well-known, as well as others at the beginning of their careers, the Archive contains a panorama of contemporary Luso-Hispanic literature. It presents an important source for research, as the spoken word provides a new dimension to literature. Three of the recordings have been issued in the form of long-playing discs: *Pedro Salinas' El Contemplado*; *Gabriela Mistral Reading Her Own Poetry*; and *Two Colombian Poets: Eduardò Carranza and Germán Pardo García.* A fourth record of readings by Julio Cortázar is now in preparation.

At the present time the Archive continues to develop in new directions. Through the assistance of the United States Information Service and the Library's Office in Rio de Janeiro, the Archive has been enriched by twenty-three of the most representative Brazilian authors, such as Carlos Drummond de Andrade, João Cabral de Melo Neto, Vinícius de Morães, and Henriqueta Lisboa. This is a continuing project. A similar undertaking has recently been formalized with the USIS in Mexico City, to record writers residing in Mexico. Thanks to this Mexican connection, the voices of José Emilio Pacheco and Alvaro Mutis were recorded. There are further plans to implement programs such as the above with the University of Puerto Rico.

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We shall now hear the voice of Borges in selections from his recording to the Archive. These are poems about Argentina and about Buenos Aires, through which one can feel the Argentine essence, or Argentina's essence through the eyes of

Borges. In these poems we find recondite neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, *arrabales*, patios, little stores or *almacenes*. The verses are peopled with knife-wielders or *cuchilleros*, and one can almost hear the plaintive cords of a tango or a milonga. Borges' deep love for the essence of Argentina is apparent, transcending his despair for the country's crazy politics, from the painful birth-pangs of the nineteenth century, to the tortuous recent past and present. Borges said in *Nuestro pobre individualismo*, that "For the European the world is a cosmos in which each individual has a definite place and purpose; for the Argentine it is chaos." [O. I., pp. 52-53]. He goes on to explain that the Argentine is generally an individualist whose hero is the man who fights alone, a man of the caliber of Martín Fierro, Juan Moreira, or Hormiga Negra.

Borges analyzed the Argentine theme in his own work stating in 1964, that "For many years, in moods now happily forgotten, I have tried to portray the flavor, the essence of the neighborhoods of Buenos Aires; naturally, I used many examples of the local idiom and did not shy away from words like *cuchillero*, *milonga*, *tapia*, and others, and have thus written those unforgettable and now forgotten books...." [*Discusión*, 1964]. Borges the person is very much like his work. In certain portions of his work the Argentine essence is palpable.

The theme of violence, the perpetual violence of being an Argentine, and the Argentine's admiration for courage, come alive in Borges' poetry and prose. The knife duel must be fought to redeem oneself. The transplanted *gaucho malo* of the pampas becomes the *compadrito* (sharpie) of the *arrabales* of the sprawling city on the banks of the River Plate. There is also the factor of cyclical time; the infinity of streets where one wanders back and forth through time and space: "*Detrás de las paredes recelosas/ El Sur guarda un puñal y una guitarra,*" or as at the beginning of that same poem, *El Tango*:

> *Dónde estarán?pregunta la elegía*
> *De quienes ya no son, como si hubiera*
> *Una región en que el Ayer pudiera*
> *Ser el Hoy, y Aún y el Todavía.*

The eternal gaucho with his knife and his reincarnation in the *compadrito*, are both symbols within their own circumstances. They have lived, have fought with the knife or lance; they have died, but their ghostly shadows remain with us as in: "*Un recuerdo imposible de haber muerto/ Peleando en la esquina de un barrio.*" [El Tango]. Everything turns around and around in circles and cycles, the earth, the sky, the big city with its neighborhoods, the people, in a gigantic merry-go-around, while the cords of the tango provide the background to the cycles of dreams within dreams.

The knife-wielder (*cuchillero*) becomes the culminating symbol of courage. His creed is to be ready to kill and to die [*Evaristo Carriego*, p. 155]. His roots disappear in the depths of the history of an earlier Argentina, torn by civil strife, where civilization fought the battle against barbarism, in the words of Sarmiento, through the first half century of independence. Some of Borges' own forebears on the Argentine side of his family, were protagonists in several battles of the wars of independence and in others which Federalists fought against Unitarians. In *Noche cíclica* he names some of these ancestors who come alive in his vignettes of Argentine history: "*De mi sangre Laprida, Cabrera, Soler Suárez/ ....Nombres en que retumban (ya secretas) las dianas,/ Las repúblicas, los caballos y las mañanas,/ Las felices victorias, las muertes militantes.*"

Borges immortalized one of his great-grandfathers in *Página para recordar al Coronel Suárez, vencedor en Junín* (a cavalry battle fought in 1824 in the Peruvian department of Junín, between the liberation army of Bolívar and the Spaniards). In the poem the battle becomes eternal, timeless. There is no need for soldiers and trumpets, the combatants are perceived in cyclical time as two civilians who stand on a streetcorner and berate the tyrant who happens to be ruling at the time.

Another ancestor, Francisco Laprida, a signer of Argentine independence, epitomized the tragic fate of the eternal Argentine in *Poema conjetural*. Laprida dreams of being a man of laws, a man dedicated to books, but he cannot escape the fate of the Argentines. He also is compelled to wield a knife. Embroiled in the Federalist-Unitarian conflict of the 1820's, he flees towards the South and is assassinated by Aldao's *montoneros*: "*Al fin me encuentro/ Con mi destino sudamericano./ A esta ruinosa tarde me llevaba/ El laberinto multiple de pasos/ Que mis días tejieron desde un día de la niñez.*" The cold iron of the lance penetrates Laprida's chest and a knife slits his throat. Laprida, like most Argentine heroes in Borges, met his inescapable fate in the South. The knife, the South, the duel unto death, are all recurring themes in the poems and stories dealing with the essence of being an Argentine. Courage in confronting inevitable fate becomes the highest virtue. In *El General Quiroga va en coche al muere*, we read, "*Ir en coche a la muerte iqué cosa más oronda!/ El General Quiroga quiso entrar en la sombra/ Llevando seis o siete degollados de escolta.*"

Borges does not idealize violence either for the galloping horsemen of the nineteenth century, or for the dwellers of the *arrabal*. He simply presents the gaucho, the *compadrito*, the heroes of Argentine history acting out their fate within the context of their environment.

In his poems about Buenos Aires Borges again is completely identified with his work. The city is Borges and viceversa. All things are one thing and all souls one single soul. He says in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*: "*Las calles de Buenos Aires/ ya son la entraña de mi alma.*" The real and physical city is used as a point of departure into metaphysics. "*A mí se me hace cuento que empezó Buenos Aires:/ La juzgo tan eterna como el agua y el aire,*" constitutes an apt Borgesian vision of the city.

COMMENTARIES ON FIVE POEMS

Jorge Luis Borges

"The Tango"

The poem is called "The Tango," but I suppose that is not the real subject. The real subject would be a kind of elegy for the generations of hoodlums of the outlying slums. These men led very hard lives; they were ignorant; they were poor; they were brutal perhaps. But since they had no faith, since they did not believe in God, since they never thought about that kind of thing, they evolved for themselves a faith of their own. That faith was the old faith, the faith the Norsemen had and the Saxons had also—the faith of courage: the fact that it was sufficient for a man to be brave. And I know that they held true to that faith. I give two names there. One of them is a hoodlum of my side of the town, the north side, Urańa. The other, a man from the south side. Those men were true to their faith. I mean, their lives, I suppose, were petty. Perhaps their lives must have been mean. They were very poor lives, very hard lives, and yet they held to that one faith, to that idea that a man should be brave. And that in itself is a kind of religion, I suppose, for men who are incapable of any other faith. Then I thought of those men living and dying, perhaps dying in knife duels. And what was left of them? Nothing was left of them but a kind of, let us say, happiness, a kind of courage that you get not in the tangos of today, of course. Those are, let us say, sentimental, or respectable; or somehow silly, I should say. But the first tangos, and above all, the *milonga*—the *milonga* that gave you,

with only a few notes, what the *milonga* had to give you: the idea that in spite of many things a man could be happy and a man could be brave. You got that in the music of the *milonga*. So when I wrote that poem about "The Tango," I was thinking of the strange fact of those generations of men having suffered, having killed, having died, and now all that remains of them are those strains of music which may mean little or nothing beyond our country, but that we Argentines feel. We feel a bit of something intimate and personal. Our lives are, of course, far different. We hardly know how to handle a knife. I suppose we would be hard put to it, if it came to a standup duel with knives. But still we feel that is somehow our symbol. We may not be as brave as those men were. I suppose we know far more things than they did, but still they had the faith—the faith, I should say, of happiness; a faith in happiness, and too, a faith in courage, and that is what we find in the music of the *milonga*.

"General Quiroga Rides to His Death"

That translation is a fine translation, but a fine translation of a bad poem. I don't like it personally. I wrote it years and years ago, and now it seems to have been written by somebody else. It comes back to me like a bad memory. What can I say about it? I took a story; the only, let us say, borrowed thing about it comes from Sarmiento's *Facundo*, of course. But he had written it out in perfect prose, and I wrote it down in quite bad verse, full to the brim of local color. However, something comes through, I hope. Something came through to you—it hardly comes through to me. The idea of a man walking into his death, the idea of an assassination being made into a suicide. That is to say, the idea of what Quiroga did when he walked into his death and when he was assassinated by a gang ordered by Rosas. He knew he was going to die. That is to say, his fate was not the fate of a fool who rushes into death. It was somehow the death of a man who chooses death; the death of a man who felt that being killed in that way, that being killed, let's say, in a stagecoach, that being shot to death, was perhaps the best ending for his life.

And it was the best ending since it was a dramatic ending. When we think of Quiroga, we do not think about the landowner or the *caudillo* over the landowners; we don't think of the landowners who made themselves into *caudillo*, and who were, I suppose, more or less like Cartillas or like Ramirez or like Bustos or like any of the others. We think of the man who is granted by his gods a very dramatic death. And who had another piece of good luck: he had the good luck to have his death told forever by Sarmiento. When I wrote the poem, I was only, as I said before, playing the sedulous ape to Sarmiento. But somehow Quiroga comes through. Quiroga even comes through to me, though I dislike the poem now, though had I written it this morning I would have torn it up, of course. But still he comes through, at least in the English translation, and I do think it betters the poem. Thank you.

"Conjectural Poem"

This is a fine translation of a quite fine poem, I should say, though I shouldn't say so, of course. When I wrote it, it was a contemporary poem. I mean, the poem was read as referring, not to Francisco Narciso de Laprida, but as being a very actual poem, since I wrote it when the dictatorship began. Those things could be published then, perhaps not afterwards. And it was published in *Sur*. There was a newspaper or so who shied at publishing it, but in *Sur* they published it quite courageously. Of course, Narciso de Laprida stands for my country, stands for what we all felt. There is a moment when he says he speaks of the barbarians. Well, we know who the barbarians were. They stood for a dictatorship far more barbarous than the gauchos of the civil wars. And then, there is a moment when Narciso de Laprida says, "I stand face to face with my South American destiny." And that is the way we felt. We had played at being Europe; we had played at being Paris. We thought of South America as being something, let's say, a long way away from us. And yet, South America was there around the corner. And it came with a vengeance, as we felt. So that Francisco Narciso de Laprida, the fact of being overtaken by his South American destiny, stood (and

that was the way all readers thought about it) for our country, and of course also for myself, since we all felt the horror of the dictatorship, the dictatorship that was to come back and that we would have seen very happily ousted by a military coup in my country. That is one of the ways in which you can read the poem. But let us suppose we forget all about that very saddening experience, the history of the Argentine Republic of the 20th century, and go back to Laprida. Then, the poem is a poem about him also. When I wrote it, I was of course, as you must have been aware, I was of course taking Browning as my model. I thought of Browning's dramatic lyrics. In those lyrics, a man speaks out and what he says is not what he might have said, but what his thoughts and his feelings are. And then I thought, "Here I have a very strange thing. Here I find I have Dr. Francisco Narciso de Laprida. He has been defeated in battle. He's trying to save his life. He knows he's being pursued, and that he will eventually have his throat cut for him. What could he be made to think at that moment?" I suppose in real life you think of his safety. But in that poem he was allowed to see the thing as it really happened, as it symbolically happened. Then he must have felt about the strange fact of having lived in order to be a civilized man, of having lived for the study of laws and codes, and then, to find barbarians at his heels, gauchos at his heels. And then, at the same time, he would feel that it was the shape of his destiny, that his destiny had been molded in order that he should have that brave death, that awful death. And so, in the end, we find him returning, we find him going to the image of the circle, the circle that closes even as those pursuers are closing in upon him. The circle closes, the last moment comes, and then he feels the lance's thrust, and then the intimate knife across his throat. Then the poem stops; because the poem is, let's say, a monologue in the manner of Browning; because the poem is simply what the man felt before his throat was slit. We may suppose here (the poem is called "Conjectural Poem"—that means I was not too sure of how the thing really happened, and I don't suppose it really happened in that way); well, the

poem closes when the man is killed, because after that, the man dies. And so the poem ceases with the man's death. Perhaps the poem goes on, but it goes on in eternity or in another world; or perhaps, I suppose, it goes off into nothingness.

"A Page to Commemorate Colonel Suárez, Victor at Junín"

"The dictator's shadow falling over the land." When I wrote that poem, it was political, it was contempoary. Everybody knew what I meant. I was speaking, not of Rosas (my kinsman, by the way). I was speaking of the other Rosas—the other, whose name I cannot repeat, because why should I sully my mouth repeating it? Everybody knew what I meant. So that poem was a contemporary poem. And in the end, the reader is made to feel that. Because when I am writing that poem about what happened in Peru way back in 1824, then my great-grandfather's shadow comes to me, or rather (because that would be rather dramatic), something in my blood tells me what I would really be feeling: the fact that the battle for freedom is not something that has happened and that is over; the battle is going on. And at the time that I was writing the poem, the battle was not a battle between horsemen on a plain in Peru. It was really the fact of a country under a shameful dictatorship. The real battle was being fought by civilians dying in prison, by two men mocking at some picture in a street. That was the real thing. Well, you might think of the poem in that way, and when I wrote it, I was thinking about it that way. But I was also thinking about one Isidoro Suárez. And I thought of his life. I thought how he had fought for many years in our wars of independence. How, like many other Argentines, he went from Buenos Aires. How he fought for the freedom of Chile. How he fought for the freedom of Peru. How, after that, he fought in the last battle—in the battle of Ayacucho, and how, after that, he had to go back to his country, and then he defeated the *montoneros* of Rosas, and then he had to die in exile. And I thought of his life as having been something that could perhaps be

made into struggle and perhaps unhappiness. But, since I had read the manuscripts he left behind him, I knew that during all those years of sheer poverty, of exile, of bitterness, he always had that memory—the memory of the cavalry charge in Junín, the cavalry charge in 1824 when Bolívar had lost the battle, and he led his Peruvian men to victory, and he ran a Spaniard through with his spear. That memory stayed with him. And that may lead us to another, to a different conclusion. It may lead to the conclusion that perhaps the wish for happiness is natural, but I wonder if we may really attain it. I wonder if perhaps happiness may not consist in a single moment. There is a single moment in our lives when we are justified. And perhaps we are allowed not too many moments; we are allowed only that moment. Of course, we are looking for it all the time. We want that moment to be repeated over and over again. We want happiness to last. As Nietzsche had it: "Doch alle Lust will Ewigkeit—,/ Will tiefe, tiefe Ewigkeit!" "for all pleasure, all happiness yearns for eternity; yearns for deep, deep eternity." Foreverness: that's a finer word coined by John Wilkins. Well, we want happiness to come to us; but perhaps in the moment of our death we think that happiness has once come to us, and we think that we had, let us say, a wonderful evening. I suppose Suáez had it during the cavalry charge. The battle lasted three quarters of an hour only; not a shot was fired. He must have felt that exultation when he charged, when the Spaniards were defeated. We have that; we have something that is finer. For example, a memory of shared love, a memory of a shared evening, of music. Or merely, perhaps, of having been worthy of beautiful poetry, of lovely poetry. That perhaps might be enough. And this is the other thing hinted at in the poem. That when Suárez comes to his end, he feels that all his many days, his all too many days have been justified, because of that one cavalry charge in far-off Peru, in Junín.

"The Cyclical Night"

Three remarks, I suppose, might be allowed about this poem. The first is technical. You see, the poem is about cyclical

time, the idea of things happening in a circle, of circular time. Of things happening over and over again. And then, I thought, why not write a cyclical poem about cyclical time? That would be done by a very easy trick. The fact of having the last verse to be the first one, and then the poem would go on and on. Well, this is merely technical, but it may be allowed to be interesting. Then we have the other idea, the idea of cyclical time itself. This, of course, was thought out by the Stoics, then it was reasoned out for the first time by David Hume, whom I greatly love and whom I mention in the poem. And then after that, it was declared by Blanqui, by Nietzsche, and by many other writers. In fact, St. Augustine has in his *Civitas Dei* a long chapter against circular time, and he says that we can be saved from circular time through the Cross: the Cross against the circle. Well, this idea has been used, I suppose, very effectively by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in that poem of his called "Sudden Light." I can only recall the first stanza. It runs thus:

> But when or how I cannot tell:
> I know the grass beyond the door,
> The sweet keen smell,
> The sighing sound, the lights around the
> shore.

(and then)

> You have been mine before.

Then he goes on to think that she will be his another time, another time, and so on to eternity. Now, personally, I do not believe in cyclical time, since if we allow for two periods of the cosmos, or two periods of history to be exactly the same, I wonder how we will be able to tell them apart. In fact, if two things are exactly the same, they will be the same. So if we allow for cyclical time, then every time history comes to an end or repeats itself, then that time is really the first time; it is not the first time over again. It is essentially the first: the first is the time. But besides that, something might be said for the poem. I suppose that what has made this poem memorable, I won't say to many men, but to some men in Buenos Aires, is the fact that beyond the Stoic

theory of history being cyclical, of history repeating itself forever and ever, beyond that idea explained by David Hume in his book on natural religion, there is something else. That idea would be, I suppose, the fact that in that poem, I give an image of a lonely, a rather unhappy man, wandering at night over that loud, rambling city, Buenos Aires, and coming suddenly to a name that strikes a chord, a name that somehow reminds him of many things heard in childhood or in boyhood; he comes across the name of a street. And then he thinks that fate has brought other things to other men. It has brought them gold; that of course is of no account whatever. It has brought them love: that of course is precious. It has given him this night, the fact of wandering in the outlying barrios of Buenos Aires. And that, perhaps, should be sufficient, also. I suppose that if people like this poem, and some people have liked it, it is not because of the fact that it talks of cyclical time, or because of the metrical feat of having the last verse like the first one and then thinking of the poem as going on and on, but because something personal is said in the poem. At least, I hope you have felt it. Thank you.

New Poems

UN SABADO

Un hombre ciego en una casa hueca
Fatiga ciertos limitados rumbos
Y toca las paredes que se alargan
Y el cristal de las puertas interiores
Y los ásperos lomos de los libros
Vedados a su amor y la apagada
Platería que fue de los mayores
Y los grifos del agua y las molduras
Y unas vagas monedas y la llave.
Está solo y no hay nadie en el espejo.
Ir y venir. La mano roza el borde
Del primer anaquel. Sin proponérselo,
Se ha tendido en la cama solitaria
Y siente que los actos que ejecuta
Interminablemente en su crepúsculo
Obedecen a un juego que no entiende
Y que dirige un dios indescifrable.
En voz alta repite y cadenciosa
Fragmentos de los clásicos y ensaya
Variaciones de verbos y de epítetos
Y bien o mal escribe este poema.

A SATURDAY

A blind man in an empty house
Wears out certain limited routes
And touches the lengthening walls
And the glass of interior doors
And the rough spines of books
Denied to his love and the darkened
Silverware passed down from his family
And water faucets and moldings
And some spare coins and the key.
He's alone and no one's in the mirror.
Coming and going. His hand grazes
The bookshelf edge. Unintentionally,
He's stretched out in the lonely bed
And feels that the acts he performs
Interminably in the dusk
Obey a game he doesn't understand,
Which an indecipherable god directs.
Aloud and in cadence he repeats
Fragments of the classics and tries out
Variations of verbs and epithets,
And good or bad he writes this poem.

Tr. Willis Barnstone

EL REMORDIMIENTO

He cometido el peor de los pecados
Que un hombre puede cometer. No he sido
Feliz. Que los glaciares del olvido
Me arrastren y me pierdan, despiadados.
Mis padres me engendraron para el juego
Arriesgado y hermoso de la vida,
Para la tierra, el agua, el aire, el fuego.
Los defraudé. No fui feliz. Cumplida
No fue su joven voluntad. Mi mente
Se aplicó a las simétricas porfías
Del arte, que entreteje naderías.
Me legaron valor. No fui valiente.
No me abandona. Siempre está a mi lado
La sombra de haber sido un desdichado.

REMORSE

I have committed the worst sin of all
That a man can commit. I have not been
Happy. Let the glaciers of oblivion
Drag me and mercilessly let me fall.
My parents bred and bore me for a higher
Faith in the human game of nights and days;
For earth, for air, for water, and for fire.
I let them down. I wasn't happy. My ways
Have not fulfilled their youthful hope. I gave
My mind to the symmetric stubbornness
Of art, and all its webs of pettiness.
They willed me bravery. I wasn't brave.
It never leaves my side, since I began:
This shadow of having been a brooding man.

TR. WILLIS BARNSTONE

CAJA DE MUSICA

Música del Japón. Avaramente
De la clepsidra se desprenden gotas
De lenta miel o de invisible oro
Que en el tiempo repiten una trama
Eterna y frágil, misteriosa y clara.
Temo que cada una sea la última.
Son un ayer que vuelve. De qué templo,
De qué leve jardín en la montaña,
De qué vigilias ante un mar que ignoro,
De qué pudor de la melancolía,
De qué perdida y rescatada tarde,
Llega a mí, su porvenir remoto?
No lo sabré. No importa. En esa música
Yo soy. Yo quiero ser. Yo me desangro.

MUSIC BOX

Music of Japan. Drops of slow honey
Or of invisible gold are dispersed
In a miserly way from the water clock,
And repeat in time a weaving that is
Eternal, fragile, mysterious and clear.
I fear that each one may be the last.
It's a past coming back. From what temple,
From what light garden in the mountain,
From what vigil before an unknown sea,
From what shyness of melancholy,
From what lost and ransomed afternoon
Does its remote future come to me?
I cannot know. No matter. I am
In that music. I want to be. I bleed.

tr. Willis Barnstone

Homage

BORGES

Traveller of labyrinths
Pilot of infinity
Metaphysician of the milonga
Swimmer of mirrors
Chess player of time
Tireless pursuer of the Other
Magician of paradox
Tamer of tigers and minotaurs
Zealous guardian of culture
Ecologist of infamy
Master musician of the Spanish language
Truco gambler of Eastern and Western religions
Third founder of the city of Buenos Aires
Taxonomist of wondrous zoology
Argentine Kabbalist
Epic tale-teller of knife fights
Cartographer of detective plots and counterplots
Odysseus of the countries of the fantastic
Anatomist of the rose
Seer in darkness
And yet and yet ...
A man born not to be happy.

–JAIME ALAZRAKI

BORGES BLIND

Something is wrong with your face. It is not
an old man but one who has not grown up.
Despite gray hair or one eye caved like a cup
and dead, and one eye that is a gray plot
of yellowish mist through which a white deer
leaps and fades or flashes blue in a dream
where you forgot your death, you longly scheme
for light—a holy day to fill the sphere
in your heart. Blackness is gone. You have to smile
like a child. You relish a Saxon word
offered to the sky. Lonely and absurd
you know something is wrong. Face of a child,
laughing, tormented like a tooth, your eye
waters to know the panther who cannot die.

—WILLIS BARNSTONE

LUCKY BORGES

You are a lucky man. You have good friends
and in your way have loved passionately,
wandered in three continents for a key
out of the labyrinth of time and ends,
and in foreign pampas known every blend
of agony: fame, and truth of death. You see
back through our dream to no cosmogony
or Kabala's no-end.* Your dead eyes send
you to a mirror. You stand there. Nothing
burns in your head but gold from some old coin
lost like you in China or Thrace. You join
objects outside. No sword. You are a thing,
failure of God, alone, lucky to find
the brief light and echo for us the blind.

—WILLIS BARNSTONE

*no-end: Hebrew for infinity

BORGES AT A TABLE

No, no, no. Wait a bit. I think the right
word is nightmares. Tonight while rebel planes
fly low over the city, and the rains
of power drift, the icicle of light
plays on the table. If you could see the moon,
the other word, the *one* word, would be found
and the Yellow Emperor kill you or hound
you into madness and rage. Nightmares. Soon
the godless end. Tonight, almost a guest
in your unmirrored ebony room, you talk
about a strange friend and his son. The rest
is in a poem you will write. The dead clock
comes alive, and once more you lie down, seeing
the terror of peace: no time, no night, no being

—WILLIS BARNSTONE

CHRISTMAS IN BUENOS AIRES

So shalt thou feed on Death,
that feeds on men.
Shakespeare

Lost and found in the bloody Argentine,
after talking type with Shakespear I resort
to ringing my close friends Randy and Mort
and haul Borges under my arm—no sign
of taxis on Christmas eve. We drink and eat
and joke. How many killed in the big attack?
100 montoneros? We wander back
to food. Here the dream of murder in the street
is curiously absurd. I sleep under sheep-
skins, waking to cherries, African palm eyes
on the wall and breakfast in December sun.
Suddenly, moose music and gifts! Although we keep
our furies in our pockets, the phone sighs.
The hospitals are jammed, and death has won.

—WILLIS BARNSTONE

ORONO (Abril 15-18, 1976)

Desde que nieve cae sobre el mundo
has sido apenas una blanca esquina,
sin discutir la decisión divina
que te hizo leve y no rotundo.

Ni en futuros cercanos o remotos
dejarás de ser un punto invisible,
tácito en cualquier mapa inteligible,
arrinconado junto a los ignotos.

Oro no ha de traerte el tiempo sabio.
Leo, en cambio, que marca el astrolabio
conjunción favorable en fecha aciaga.

Sagrados días en que una madeja
de palabras argentinas, la vieja
poesía eterna, temblar nos haga.

—CARLOS CORTÍNEZ
Orono, febrero 1976

A UN LEJANO ESCRITOR NOVEL

Cuando eras otro Robinson perdido
y no más que Nadie eras todavía
y tu Fervor, un algo que caía
al bolsillo de algún desprevenido.

Cuando debiste inspeccionar gallinas
o catalogar libros lentamente:
y Lugones o Reyes (más paciente)
ven que te equivocas y desafinas.

Cómo eras antes de que la tibieza
de la Fama vil llegara a coro
a besar tu pie como el mar la arena?

No eras pobre, creo. En tu pobreza
para el ocaso atesorabas oro:
silencio, calles, tardes, sueños, pena.

—CARLOS CORTÍNEZ

TO A REMOTE BEGINNING WRITER

When you were just another Robinson
Crusoe lost and really Nobody at all
and your book *Fervor* something you let fall
into the raincoat pocket of an un-

suspecting editor, when you were made
poultry inspector or had to list and pore
over books, when the patient Reyes or
Lugones saw you fail and miss the grace,

how were you then? Before the comfort of
a loud vulgar Fame began to take hold,
kissing your feet like the ocean on a reef?

You weren't poor, I think. From sun above,
as it set you filled your poverty with gold,
quiet, streets, evenings, dreams, grief.

—CARLOS CORTÍNEZ
**(English version
by Willis Barnstone)**

JORGE LUIS BORGES

"Si (como el griego afirma en el Cratilo)..."
(J.L.B.)

De las tribulaciones de los Jorges,
condenados de antiguo a la aspereza,
quiso salvarlo, con gran entereza,
doña Leonor Acevedo de Borges.

"Si por sangre y por ley ha de ser Borges
—cavilaba en secreto la señora—
ya de romper la tradición es hora:
que no haya un nuevo Jorge entre los Borges.

Acaso esa cadena de guerreros
pueda cortar si afino los sonidos
(que agreden de tal modo los oídos).

Ya basta de parientes camorreros.
Que se llame Jorge *Luis* mi tesoro
y suceda así, al hierro, el oro."

CARLOS CORTÍNEZ

JORGE LUIS BORGES

"Si (como el griego afirma en el Cratilo) . . ."
J. L. Borges

From tribulations that had plagued all Georges,
condemned from old to play the roughest part,
wishing to save him, said with perfect art,
doña Leonor Acevedo de Borges:

"If blood and law demand that he be Borges
(the lady pondered in her secret heart)
the time has come to ditch tradition's cart:
among the Borges there won't be other Georges.

Perhaps that lengthy chain of warrior can
be cut if I effect to tune the sounds
(that ears may hear with pleasure within bounds).

Enough of hooligans within this clan!
Jorge Luis I'll name my son, my treasure,
to steel replying with this gold measure."

—CARLOS CORTÍNEZ
(English Version by Robert Lima)

ON FINDING THE TREE OF LIFE

After Genesis 3:22-23

If there is an outside out there
one should go out to try to find it.
This I did. There is a garden world
out there, with birds, trees, and the tree
they call The Tree Of Life. The birds
avoid it, naturally. The bunches of red
berries are intact except for one bunch. It's
partly eaten. The spoor around the tree
is old, but it would indicate that some
stupid godforsaken human or beast
had staggered around and crawled away
in the first agonies of immortality.
It's too bad for it, whoever it is,
and will be. Our own deaths are bad enough.

—ALAN DUGAN

PROSE POEM FOR BORGES

...es klang nach nächtiger
Heide im Sturm und Irrsal und
heillosem Gram der Seele.
—Mann

What did the poets mean?
We have no knowledge of 'endless night';
the nights here are nothing if not ends,
and the Fens are full of dry leaves
in every season.

I do not mean
that we have forgotten poetry, that heroin of the soul;
we would like to love this city
like children again,
and to love her as a child would not know how,
but the crowds we wander in
(or do they wander in us)
fade back into miscellany over the yawning bridges
and streets we love
somehow outstretch our embracing arms,
hold us in like windy uncles,
cold, ungatherable, older.
Even in April, as the rambler roses
bloom and brighten its melancholy walls,
the Charles flows unaccountably
backward into the hills, or so it seems,
and every rain
reminds us of a flood we never saw.
What can we do
but wander through the monstrous weight of the air
after a dream already broken,
to find one solitary vantage
from which to see
the motive for every morning,
the importance of being Adam

and all things new;
from the watery east to an indefinite west,
sunrise to nowhere,
by the swans of the Public Garden,
the crowds of Copley,
Symphony with its hands illuding water,
a Chinese bell;
by a young man drowning in a lake of air,
by words of brick and whisper of steel
and sidewalks jammed with miracles
we walk, avoiding
Kenmore with its drunken Alexanders,
every face an impenetrable Asia,
better in Charlesgate where the lissom
willows bend in the gentle breeze
like geishas.

Students sweep over Commonwealth in long diagonals of
light;
professors in their thousands
lecture to ponderous classes
they have never bothered to read.
But what are we students of? We too have read so little;
we decide to study bridges; are we deluded?
Does the herring gull
fly according to our lights?
Is it only by permission of intellect
that all these whitening sails
billow with fresh air?
As we watch,
the light, so soon, begins to fade at the edges;

bodies are changing shape all over the world,
nations vanish in place
as the day recedes and we are no longer sure
whether it was ever more
than the spark of a double darkness,
endless night.

Borges, how do we manage to be born
so desperately small
that a single sigh from the long jowls of the moon
can sound to us
like a hurricane smashing a tenement to splinters,
an ambulance wailing through these criminal streets,
a shout of pain from a disease so ancient
only our bones can say its name?

All over town
sleepers gasp for breath and wake in a fever,
intuiting grief
for a death they would never admit to
under the sun;
and over their roofs
the luminous wheel of history lies spinning on its side
like a flying saucer
no one really believes in,

except that we live
in the weather of its planet,
the scattered thundershowers,
the early frosts,
the gentle southeast winds
increasing to gale force sometime before morning.

—WILLIAM FERGUSON

JORGE LUIS BORGES

Sutileza de pensamiento
Traza laberinto de drama,
Que se ve con lente de aumento
Como universal panorama.

—JORGE GUILLÉN

JORGE LUIS BORGES

Subtlety of thought
Traces a labyrinth of drama
Seen in a magnifying glass
As universal panorama.

—JORGE GUILLÉN
(English version by
Thomas Montgomery)

UN SALUDO

Queridos amigos:

Siento de veras no encontrarme entre ustedes, cara a cara de Jorge Luis Borges en persona. Sus libros viven por su cuenta, perfectamente autónomos. Eso se propone todo autor: que el texto se baste a si mismo, y ya abandonado, se sostenga asl. Pero el conocimiento del poeta aclara el poema. Aunque la obra trasciende su origen, algo anterior resguarda: la raíz de la vida vivida.

El caso de Borges es único. Su situación no se parece a ninguna habitual, y siendo por excelencia el gran *vidente*, consigue mantener con el mundo una profunda relación esclarecedora. Sin ella no llegaría a ser el gran *dicente*—manejando su palabra escrita en su idioma, y su palabra oral en español y en inglés. "Mi destino es la lengua castellana,/ El bronce de Francisco de Quevedo". (Nos lo recuerda *El oro de los tigres*.) Nadie ignora que en la literatura del ilustre escritor argentino se encarna el genio de nuestra lengua con todo su esplendor. Y evitando el hispánico énfasis, evoca a ese "hombre que entrelaza/ Palabras en un cuarto de una casa".

A este Borges tan singular, tan individualizado, multiplica y enriquece sin pausa la imaginación del poeta. "Seré todos o nadie." Frase hiperbólica. Nadie? Imposible. Todos los hombres, no; pero sí el Hombre, y de modo concreto, gracias a esa variedad de personajes que animan sus narraciones, siempre a nivel de escritura poética. "En vano es vario el orbe", afirma en el último libro. No se lo creemos. Para él nunca es vana esa variedad. Invención y memoria se combinan y funden en esta constante poesia. El canto "Al ruiseñor" colecciona ruiseñores históricos: "Urdo en la hueca tarde este ejercicio". También él se alzará como un "ruiseñor" con la potencia de su lenguaje, jamás perdido por zonas informes, en los suburbios de hoy.

A todo esto, "Sobre nosotros crece, atroz, la historia". Otro verso de otro poema. Pese a tantas confusiones. Borges mantiene su laboriosa y muy vital madurez, y en *La Rosa Profunda* escuchamos la voz perenne del poeta, del verdadero poeta que nos hace sentir y entender este mundo en que por casualidad nos ha tocado nacer y habremos de morir. "Oh mente que atesoras lo increíble." "Rosa profunda, ilimitada, íntima".

Por de pronto, ahí está, hora de valor, ante ustedes el mismísimo Jorge Luis Borges. Mi más cordial saludo al poeta y a su auditorio.

JORGE GUILLEN
La Jolla, California, 12 y 13 de marzo de 1976

Dear friends.

I deeply regret not to be present among you, face to face with Jorge Luis Borges. His books have a life of their own, perfectly autonomous. This is what every author envisions: that the text be self-sufficient, and once released, remain self-supporting. However, the encounter with the poet enlightens the poem. Although the work transcends its origins, some residue remains: the root of the fully-lived life.

Borges' case is unique. His situation does not resemble any other that might be called common. Being the great *Seer* par excellence, he is able to maintain a profound, enlightening relationship with the world. Without this he could not be the great *sayer*: ministering the written word in his own language and the spoken word both in Spanish and English. "My fate is the Spanish language,/ Francisco de Quevedo's bronze" (We are reminded of this in *The Gold of the Tigers*). It is a secret to nobody that the genius of our language found its incarnation in all its splendor in the illustrious Argentine author's literature. Avoiding the Hispanic emphasis, he evokes that "man who intertwines/ words in a room of a house".

This is so particular, so individual Borges is incessantly multiplied and enriched by the poet's imagination. "I shall be all or no one". A hyperbolic statement. Nobody? Impossible. Not all the men, certainly; yet *the* Man, and very concretely so thanks to that variety of characters who animate his narrations, always at the level of poetic writing. "In vain the orb's variety" he affirms in his last book. We do not accept it coming from Borges. For him, this diversity is never in vain. Memory and invention combine and fuse in this constant poetry. The song "To the nightingale" offers a collection of historical nightingales: "I am scheming this exercise in the hollow afternoon". He himself will also soar like a "nightingale" by the potential virtue of his language, never lost in unshapely zones, in today's suburbs.

And with all that—here is another line of another poem—"history grows upon us, atrociously". In spite of so many confusions, Borges conserves his laborious and most vital maturity, and in *The Profound Rose* we hear the perennial voice of the poet: of the real poet who makes us feel and understand this world in which by chance we were born and shall have to die. "Oh mind, treasury of the incredible!" "Profound, intimate rose that knows no limits".

For the moment, there he is in this valued hour, the very Jorge Luis Borges facing you. My most cordial greetings to the poet and to his audience.

Tr.: B. Ciplijauskaité

NOCHE OSCURA DEL OJO

Ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbran
Virgilio, *Aeneida*

Cegado por el sol de las tinieblas
veo un ojo sin iris sin pupila
palpando el cielo en busca de su órbita

Y hay otro ojo idéntico al primero
que puede ser su espectro o su principio
volando en llamas por el firmamento

Vi un sistema solar de nervios ópticos
friccionando y quemando las imágenes
en sus vertiginosos corredores

Y la estrella nuclear oscurecida
fue un manantial varado en las tinieblas
desde su sombra dando a luz la luz

Ascuas en el silencio de la noche
hay dos astros sin iris sin pupilas
girando alrededor de un sol vidente

Una lluvia de ojos apagados
cae desde el espacio y encandila
con su tiniebla el centro de lo oscuro

Y vi en la oscuridad un arcoiris
blanco y negro elevándose
Y brillaba
la noche no vidente bajo el arco

—OSCAR HAHN

DARK NIGHT OF THE EYE

Ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbram.
Virgil, *Aeneid*.

Blinded by the sun of darkness
I sight an eye without iris or pupil
skywatching in its orbit search

And there exists another eye, identical
which may be spectre or its source
coursing through the firmament aflame

I saw a solar system of optic nerves
chafing and burning the images
within their vertiginous corridors

And the darkened nuclear star
was a fountain ensconced in the twilight
giving birth to light out of shadow

Embers in the silence of night
two stars without iris or pupil
gyrate round the axis of a seeing sun

A downpour of extinguished eyes
descends from space, enkindling
with its twilight the core of darkness

And within the dark I beheld a rainbow
black and white arising
And shining
unsighted night beneath its arc

–OSCAR HAHN
English Version by ROBERT LIMA

TIRESIAS, WEAVER
j.l.b.

Ur-friend with
the internaling of
the out-toward flow
of Sphinxblood
(*dasein*, cool, in design)
Tiresias, weaving, humsings a chant
of riverdrift & dusk's musk
while tying knots
to ravel into other knots

In the carpets' designs,
his bemused mythsense says,
slayings & lovings are
geometried, past is present coupleformed with past,
& my meals are sometimes mythologies

Dyed glyphs suck patterns from Sphinxblood
Their still structures dance

Muffled & crepuscular
joined things clickclack their bones
whose frictions are
cataloging metaphorings of
the way through the labyrinth
whose turns mime mind

One horse runs
Its hooves are lusters
Its big neck is God's Fool's rod,
its mane & tail a lightning play
its flanks carpets

the field it travels on
    a spread of candleflame
its progress (if there is such now)
    pounds so far beyond grief
    that rage is an irrelevant thing

He ties another knot
His working is a playing with
    godstuffs tradition invents

—JAMES HOGGARD

TO JORGE LUIS BORGES

"In lieu of five-hundred
he would say nine"

You don't know me Borges
but I've read your work *Ficciones* a dozen times
(sometimes aloud and evidently with a pen
in hand

          I even bought a British version
in Osaka in a high room lined with books
(a squat clerk whose eyes flashed like fish
behind his spectacles fetched it standing
on a ladder)

I remember I traveled with you
on a deck-chair in the China Sea

How does it feel to be a classic
in this atrocious age a torso in my pantheon
a voice a memory of our mystery

—KARL KOPP

TOUCHES

I
You grasp my cloud
        and hold in brace.
In darkness, bowed,
you grasp my cloud
and crash it loud
        against my face.
You grasp my cloud
        and hold in brace.

II
I see you die
        on curried hill
inclining sky.
I see you die
and cannot sigh
        the human kill.
I see you die
        on curried hill.

III
The triple six
        is on your fist
like cicatrix.
The triple six
which does commix
        with cabalist,
the triple six
        is on your fist.

—ROBERT LIMA

HORIZON

where the eye sees too far
where the mind thinks too large
matter shapeless, indistinct
beyond dimension or perspective
troglodytic and extinct
like the bloody sunset

—ROBERT LIMA

APHORISM

The blind man
is one from whom
the Universe
has been stolen

—ROBERT LIMA

DICHOTOMY

I. A VERSION OF JUDAS

"I am a concept of the Son,
complex but logical,
therefore misinterpreted,
consequently, mankind's goat—
the tragic sacrifice . . .

"I am excellent for conversation;
have me with your main course.

"I could have come as Pharaoh,
Mahomet, Alexander,
or the greatest Khan,
demolished all your kingdoms
and made the victory sign.

"If I had chosen,
Mormons could have been my people.
Or I could have been born
in black or brown with pinkish hands
riding back-seat buses—
yet, not man-deprived as I.

"I could have been made of laughter,
been a giraffe, prancing balletomane
or a single tear—
enough

"I am ponderous yet.
I, Judas, chose to be myself.
I, Son of God,
Second in His Figure,
Redeemer!

"I was born a protestant;
I could have chosen to be
Christ.

"God really dwells in Hell
and I, Judas, stir the ashes
resurrecting redemption
for eternity."

—ROBERT LIMA

REBIRTH FOR JORGE LUIS BORGES

How could we know you would fly down here?
The Jews were out looking for someone, but who
could have ever thought you to turn up, near
as Lubbock? Buenos Aires means way too
far for our pocketbooks. By the time the word
hit town, you were out of the desert, beginning
a return flight East, to dreams we have of Harvard.
And yet, with the knowledge you touched down, a wing
from another world, here in what even we called hell,
you left a feather upon our lap to swell
with pride the sting of sand, the barbing sound
of wind on wire,
drew down the isolate stars to choir
a new born land
you breathed, held, we've heard, in your dying hand.

—DAVE OLIPHANT

APUNTES

Vivir: jugada perdida.
Morir: vivir sin memoria.
Somos carne de una historia
Que Dios sueña y luego olvida

*

Chesterton, Whitman, Carriego.
Laberintos de la idea.
Con un bastón se pasea
por su ciudad, Borges, ciego.

—ANTONIO REQUENI

NOTES

To live: a lost move.
To die: living without memory.
We are flesh of a story
God dreams and soon forgets

*

Chesterton, Whitman, Carriego.
Labyrinths of the idea.
With a cane, blind Borges
strolls through his city.

—ANTONIO REQUENI
(English version by Dave Oliphant)

PARA UNA EXPERIENCIA CIRCULAR

(Culpa de J. L. Borges)

Redonda espiral del poema qué importa si otros han hecho

ya

lo mismo? siempre cuando se illega al centro se está definitiva

mente se es originalmente solo // sola

— –ELIANA RIVERO

FOR A CIRCULAR EXPERIENCE

Blame it on J. L. Borges

Round spiral of the poem

what does it matter if others have already done it?

whenever one reaches

the center one is definitely one is

originally alone // alone

–ELIANA RIVERO
(English Version by Robert Lima)

PARA CAER A BORGES

Qué veo en esta mesa: tigres, Borges, tijeras, mariposas
que no volaron nunca, huesos
que no movieron esta mano, venas
vacías, tabla insondable?

Ceguera veo, espectáculo
de locura veo, cosas que hablan solas
por hablar, por precipitarse
hacia la exigüidad de esta especie
de beso que las aproxima, tu cara veo.

—GONZALO ROJAS

TO FALL AT BORGES

What do I see upon this table: tigers, Borges,
scissors, butterflies
That never flew, bones this hand
Has never moved, empty
Veins, a plank unfathomable?

Blindness I see; I see a scene
Of madness, objects that speak autonomously
Just to be speaking, just to hurl themselves
Toward the meagerness of this sort
Of kiss that draws them near to one
another; your face I see.

—GONZALO ROJAS
(English version by Thomas Montgomery)

BORGES

Words—
the children of light
illumine the darkness.

Your face
a temple that links
this world to the other.

Your memory
frightening and soothing
outlines tomorrow's rhythm.

You planted seeds
in the nineteenth century.
Now
your hands carry ripe fruits
on a golden platter
tó the year two thousand and one.

Borges
you invented Borges
for our century

—RAINER SCHULTE

RECORDANDO A BORGES

La caballada cruza Puente Alsina,
donde luchó tu sangre en el noventa
y el alto sentimiento de la Patria
te enciende de pasiones.
Queda en el cuarto quieto el costurero,
donde Leonor alguna vez guardaba
viejas cartas de amor, y su madera
acaricia tu mano, recordándola.
Vuelve en las tardes la cadencia seca
de la runa y la espada. Tu memoria
rescata el barco oscuro de los muertos
que se pardió en el Báltico.
Un brumoso crepúsculo acompaña
los actos del mínimo coraje
de honorables canallas suburbanos
que para siempre celebró tu verso.
Entre tus labios, Borges, las palabras
resucitan a los que más amaste
y es Laprida o es Hastings o es Iberra,
o Buenos Aires en profundos patios,
o el judío de traslúcidas manos
que en el gheto, labraba los cristales,
o tus padres reunidos ya en la sombra,
o tu Patria, mi Patria que agoniza.

—MARÍA ESTHER VÁZQUEZ

REMEMBERING BORGES

The horses pass through Puente Alsina,
where in the nineties your bloodline fought,
and patriotism's noblest sentiment
enkindles passion's fire in you.
The silent room contains the sewing case
where Leonor would sometimes keep
her old love letters, and its wood
feels your hand's touch, remembering.
In afternoons, the dull cadenza of
the rune and sword resumes. Through memory
you rescue the dark ship of the dead
once lost within the Baltic Sea.
A misty dusk accompanies
the minimally courageous deeds
of honorable suburban louts,
enshrined forever in your verse.
Borges, the words which your lips form
resuscitate those whom you loved—
Laprida, Hastings, or Iberra named—
or Buenos Aires in its deep-set patios,
or the Jew with his translucent hands
who fashioned glass within his ghetto shop,
or your parents together now in shadow,
or your Country, my Country, in agony.

—MARIA ESTHER VÁZQUEZ
(English Version by Robert Lima)

HECHO, HECHO (w/ love)
for Borges

Looking In
A comes home and finds the door to his house
obscured by a wicked anteater with three heads,
red coals for teats, a tail of blue smoke.
In the window he sees his aged mother
rocking in her lap a pig he knows
for that same pig who built a house of straw.
Get out of my way he says to the middle head.
Growl the middle head says. The others say nothing.
He sees in the attic window looking out
the pig of sticks and the pig of bricks snickering
like little boys with hooves and flat noses.
His mother looks up and stops rocking
as if she sees him through the old chintz curtains
and then she rocks again. Fiddle he says
I didn't want to go in there anyway.
Growl says the middle head growl.
Guess what the other heads do.
They smile the way we have all seen anteaters smile
in situations exactly like this.

Looking Out
B studies the heavens, the constellations,
one of the constellations, stares at a star,
the one we came to call The North Star,
says one day at the biggest telescope,
leaping about, putting his spectacles on,
It's not a star, it's not a star, it's a hole!

—MILLER WILLIAMS

MY COLLABORATION WITH ORFELÍN TORRES

He is the great wizard of our world and time. A maker of labyrinths that only the fortunate have entered.

The time has come for me to write him. He must know that I share his enthusiasm for language, and that I am ready, with his help, to bring an extraordinary art-form into the world by translating his finest stories.

It will be a new kind of collaboration, not just between the two of us, but between the Spanish and English languages. A new synthesis of civilized voices, a landmark of cross-cultural fertilization, a supranational genre. The means will be continuing contact between the two of us. Correspondence will not do. By eliminating the intermediary of the written word, by bringing together the resources of our two languages in frequent personal interchange, we will turn the art of translation into something more than a paltry imitation of an original. We will produce a new form to transcend the limitations of any single language. I will try, in my letter to him, to give some suggestion of the depth of my insight, just enough to make him look forward to the visit which I hope to pay him in Buenos Aires. Once we have conversed, and he realizes how well I know his work, I will be able to unfold my plan. Only he is an adequate prime mover for the enterprise, and I can be the ideal catalyst. As we talk, the new literary medium will take shape. All the things I have thought about for so long will come together, selecting and ordering themselves in his presence. Our mutual comprehension and sympathy will bring out the best in me, and Torres will be amazed that anyone understands his writing so well, and can serve so well as a mirror of his ideas. More than a mirror: a reversible lens, revealing both the minute and the remote with unprecedented clarity. The rigidities of written expression will dissolve as we mingle our languages to rediscover the power of the spoken word, its ability to create, by its very dynamism, a structural totality in which the lines of force, being invisible, become multidimensional. The age-old wisdom of language itself will be our guide. As we learn

to perceive it, we will leave behind the world of arbitrary links and mechanisms, of suppressed redundancies and synonymies.

He will have a great deal to tell me. We must begin with the simplest elements, and consider each sound, each precious living relic of times more ancient than ancient. The *l*, for example, *l* for "labyrinth." Every *l* is an echo from the Stone Age, a strange, hollow, lopsided sound that thousands of years have scarcely altered. He will tell me how each *l* uttered by our nomadic ancestors, passing through the air from one to another just once, never to be heard again—how that sound, fading away innumerable times and as many times reduplicated, could combine with other sounds to produce a meeting of minds recognized as a word. We will see words, combined in turn, forming a structure engraved upon the wind of the Caucasian steppes, to be blown away yet ever renewed, and carried to all the shores of Europe. We will begin to understand how the words could multiply and reorder themselves, embracing all objects and imaginings, taking on a life of their own, forming syllogisms. We will see how they could begin to examine each other and finally themselves. How their living bodies could be snatched from the air and placed, piece by piece, in a straight line on a flat surface, never again to flow and drift freely, never again—until now—to know the freedom of being lost. How the pieces themselves could acquire beauty, like jewels on a chain. How the chains could be twisted and contorted infinitely. And, in that infinity, an infinite number of perfections is possible. That is what I want to ask him about: how each elemental sound has come to have its inevitable place in a perfect structure, as in the first story I will translate. And this is only the beginning.

I will dazzle him, of course, though respectfully and discreetly. The right examples will come to my mind. Our joint quest will bring out the clarity and incisiveness of my thinking. We will relive the history of some favorite words, of

some of those marvelous artifacts that both our languages have inherited. We may wish to begin with one of the many beautiful settings of *l*, perhaps *volver*, "to return," in which two like syllables, with equally sonorous vowels, are followed by liquid sounds just different enough to remind us that we never really return to the same place and thing that we have departed from. A bright, resilient word. Its English congener also means a kind of turning: "to wallow," a country word, muddy and dark, conjuring up fat bodies and cold comforts. Next to "I wallow," *vuelvo* is a brilliant abstraction, floating on a breeze that has kissed the Mediterranean. Torres will agree with me that all the substance of those two words was stored up already in the prehistoric group of sounds that we now know only as a mutilated root, stored up as a vast but predetermined potential. I will ask him then if it is not true that the time has come when the two are to coalesce in a unity hitherto undreamed of. When, refined and enriched by millenia of experience, they will move together in new harmony with all other words similarly re-created. When echoes of their past identity will themselves begin to make echoes, and we, standing at the mid-point of their trajectory, will begin to see the manner of their return to the earth from which they sprang; when *volver* and "wallow," projected into another order of reality, a strange and beautiful realm, will mean all they have ever meant and yet be one and the same.

We will be drawn on toward that realm, as the breadth of our comprehension increases. The re-created words will reflect one another in sentences, and our experience with sentences will lead us to a true grasp of language itself, and of the world of thought known only through language. And Torres will know that our goal must be reached through conversation, that only the spoken word can direct the formation of the written, and keep its brilliance from becoming mere appearance. We will establish a regular schedule of visits. Oh, yes, and I want to tell him how wrong he is about the *Chanson de Roland*.

I keep wondering what our first visit will be like. I imagine him at the door, receiving me himself, for he is an un-

pretentious man. I imagine him as the benign guardian of an unspeakably valuable library. He will gently ask me in. He will have the air of a man who spends his time quietly indoors, an air of slight physical deterioration that will only accentuate his gracious manner. I imagine the tiled anteroom and the lofty library: as one stands in the doorway, the books seem to be ranged on polished circular shelves, and to spiral gradually upward, continuing beyond the level illuminated by the light, to a height that can only be surmised—as Torres' own words carry us beyond the level illuminated by our intelligence, into a disconcerting realm of elusive certainties. Each book, to me, will be a dictionary, a collection of definitions and an elaboration of their interrelationships. And surrounded by those books, we will begin to spin out our own creation, at once an inspired story and a dictionary, not of a particular language, but of Language itself.

Now.

Muy Distinguido señor Torres:

Me permito dirigirle estas lineas para comunicarle el gran entusiasmo que siento por su obra. Hace años que sigo con interés el desarrollo de

Too pompous; not to the point. Try again.

Distinguido señor Torres:

Su admirable obra en prosa ha suscitado en mí el vivo deseo de que sea compartido su aprecio entre un público más amplio

Presumptious and patronizing, and perhaps grammatically ambiguous. He must sense an unspoken harmony of purpose from the beginning. Let's see now.

Estimado Torres:

—THOMAS MONTGOMERY

FOCUS ON BORGES

All the lectures of this series, intended as an introduction to the Symposium, will be held at 100 EM at 7:00 P.M.

January 28
Showing of *The Inner World of Jorge Luis Borges* and Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Spider's Stratagem.*

January 29
Ulrich Wicks (UMO, English) "Borges on Film. Bertolucci on Fiction"

February 12
Carlos Cortínez (UMO, Foreign Languages) "Borges' *Ars Poetica*"

February 26
Ralph Hjelm (UMO, Philosophy) "Borges on Khabbalistic Mysticism"

March 4
Stephen Weber (UMO, Philosophy) "Borges and Heidegger on the Mystery of Language"

March 11
Carroll Terrell (UMO, English) "Borges and Twentieth Century English and American Poets"

March 18
Robert Gillespie (Colby College) "Borges and the Detective Novel"

March 25
Robert Carroll (UMO, Foreign Languages) "The Skin of the Leopard, or The Impossibility of Knowing"

April 8
Burton Hatlen (UMO, English) "The Nightmare of History: Borges and Some Modern English and American Writers"

PROGRAM OF THE SYMPOSIUM

THURSDAY, APRIL 15

3:00 - 5:00 P.M. *Registration* English-Math (EM) Lobby

6:30 - 8:00 P.M. *Inaugural Session* 101 EM

Moderator: Carlos Cortínez (UMO, Foreign Languages)
James Clark (UMO, Vice President for Academic Affairs)
Welcome to UMO
Emir Rodriguez-Monegal (Yale University)
"The Intellectual Background"
Ana María Barrenechea (Columbia University)
"Borges and Symbols"

8:15 - 9:15 P.M. *Panel I* 101 EM

"Borges and Chesterton"
Moderator: Nancy MacKnight (UMO, English)
Participants:
Enrique Anderson Imbert (Harvard University)
Robert Gillespie (Colby College)
Robert Scholes (Brown University)

9:30 P.M. *Reception* Memorial Union, Peabody Lounge

FRIDAY, APRIL 16

10:00 - 12:00 A.M. *Session I* 100 Nutting

Moderator: Robert Carroll (UMO, Foreign Languages)

1. Humberto Rasi (Johns Hopkins University)
   "Borges in Search of the Fatherland"
2. Alexander Coleman. (New York University)
   "On the Concept of *Romance* in Borges"
3. Alicia Borinsky (Johns Hopkins University)
   "Museums, Libraries"
4. Donald Yates (Michigan State University)
   "A Friendship: Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares"

2:00 - 4:00 P.M. *Session II* Hauck Auditorium

Moderator: Paulette French (UMO, Foreign Languages)

1. Showing of *The Inner World of Jorge Luis Borges*
2. "Borges at the Library of Congress"
   Presentation by Georgette Dorn (Spanish Division, Library of Congress)
3. Bilingual Poetry Readings of Borges' Poetry
   Jorge Luis Borges and UMO Students

4:30 - 6:30 P.M. *Session III* 101 EM

Moderator: Ulrich Wicks (UMO, English)

1. Ronald Christ (Rutgers University)
   "Succeeding Borges"
2. Jaime Alazraki (University of California)
   "Inside and Outside the Mirror in Borges' Poetry"
3. Zunilda Gertel (University of Wisconsin)
   "The Dynamic Image in the Poetry of Jorge Luis Borges"
4. Eugenio Donato (SUNY at Buffalo)
   "The Topographies of Memory"

7:00 P.M. *Lobster Banquet* Wells Commons

Speaker: Carroll Terrell (UMO, English)

SATURDAY, APRIL 17

9:30 - 11:00 A.M. *Session IV* 101 EM

Moderator: Burton Hatlen (UMO, English)

1. Miguel Enguídanos (Indiana University)
   "Four Doctors for the *Yahoos*"
2. Emma Susana Speratti-Piñero (Wheaton College)
   "The Rose in Borges' Works"
3. James Irby (Princeton University)
   "Some Thoughts on 'Pierre Menard' "

11:30 - 1:00 P.M. *Panel II* 101 EM

"On Translating Borges"

Moderator: James Hayes (UMO, Foreign Languages)

Participants:

Willis Barnstone (Indiana University)
Alan Dugan
William Ferguson (Boston University)
James Irby (Princeton University)
Robert Lima (Pennsylvania State University)
Donald Yates (Michigan State University)

3:00 - 5:00 P.M. Hauck Auditorium

Jorge Luis Borges: "Simply a Man of Letters"

Remarks: Paul de Man (Yale University)

8:00 - 10:00 P.M. *Poetical Tribute to Jorge Luis Borges* 101 EM

Moderator: Constance Hunting

Poems by:

Willis Barnstone Carlos Cortínez R. H. Dillard Alan Dugan William Ferguson Robert Fitzgerald Jorge Guillén Oscar Hahn James Hoggard John Hollander Richard Howard Ivar Ivask Karl Kopp Robert Lima Dave Oliphant Antonio Requeni Eliana Rivero Gonzalo Rojas Rainer Schulte María Ester Vásquez

10:30 P.M. *Reception* Memorial Union, Peabody Lounge

SUNDAY, APRIL 18

10:00 - 12:00 A.M. *Panel III* 101 EM

"Borges: Philosopher, Poet, Revolutionary...?"

Moderator: Stephen Weber (UMO, Philosophy)

Participants:

Jaime Alazraki Enrique Anderson Imbert Ana María Barrenechea Jorge Luis Borges Ronald Christ Paul de Man Eugenio Donato Emir Rodríguez-Monegal Robert Scholes Donald Yates

Concluding Remarks: Gordon Haaland (UMO) Dean of Arts and Sciences

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EXHIBITIONS

During the symposium the public is invited to attend the following *exhibitions*:

–*Borges in Buenos Aires, 1975*. Photographs by Willis Barnstone (Photo Salon, Memorial Union)

–*Manuscripts and First Editions of Borges*. (Property of Donald Yates) (The Hole in the Wall Gallery. Memorial Union)

–*Borges in Texas, 1961*. Photographs by Miguel Enguídanos (The Hole in the Wall Gallery, Memorial Union)

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