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Five Manuscript Poems by Borges in the Virginia Collection

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AS WE KNOW, RELATIVELY FEW Borges manuscripts are available. Of those that are, a significant number exist in the Borges Collection of the University of Virginia.¹ From them we propose to discuss two poems which so far as we know remain unpublished, the uncompleted draft of one of the *milongas* in *Para las seis cuerdas* (1965), a much longer version of the "A mi padre" which appeared in *La moneda de hierro* (1976), and a hitherto unknown poem on the death of a friend.

VILLA MAZZINI

Un hurraño tranvía rezonga rendimiento
En la borrosa linde que los campos vislumbra
Y una corazonada de lluvia apesadumbra
Este domingo pobre de arrabal macilento.
Una que otra chicuela sonr e su contento
De posibles piropos en la acera y encumbra
Un prestigio festivo la placita que alumbra
Con limpidez de luces al turbio dejamiento.
De golpe un organillo profundiza la tarde
Publicando en arranque de sonido viviente
Lo que en las hondonadas del coraz n nos arde
Urgencia de ternura, esperanza vehemente,
Carne en pos de la carne con silencio cobarde
Burdo secreto a voces que unifica la gente.

¹ For most of these and an introduction to the Collection, see Loewenstein.

This was, presumably, one of the five poems which, Borges tells us in his "Autobiographical Notes," had to be left out of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* because the manuscript was too long (61).

We are in the presence of an early sonnet in regular (fourteen-syllable) alexandrines with the classic rhyme scheme: ABBA-ABBA-CDC-D CD, that is to say, a poem characterized by complete traditionalism of form. Of the alexandrine, Antonio Quilis, for instance, writes "desaparece prácticamente a partir del siglo XV, para resurgir espléndidamente en el XIX, con el romanticismo. Los poetas modernos lo han utilizado con gran maestría y belleza, sustituyendo a otros metros, como el endecasílabo, en la confección de sonetos" (67). Surprisingly, given Borges's rejection of *modernismo* (at this time, that is—he changed his mind about Darío later), the modern poet who comes at once to mind is Darío, many of whose sonnets are in this meter. None of the poems in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) is in alexandrines, far less in sonnet form, and only two of those in *Luna de enfrente* (1925) use fourteen-syllable lines ("Manuscrito hallado en un libro de Joseph Conrad" and the significantly entitled "Versos de catorce"; neither is a sonnet). Could it be that this poem was left unpublished because the Borges who, soon after his return from Europe to Buenos Aires in 1921 had issued the "Proclama ultraísta," felt that its form was old-fashioned?

Its content, on the other hand, is completely characteristic of the Borges of *Fervor*. Sucre writes of Borges's first collection:

Ciertamente, el tono, la atmósfera emotiva y el lenguaje del libro corresponden a una nueva visión que ha surgido en Borges: el reencuentro con su país, con el Buenos Aires de su infancia. Es significativa la ausencia de todo aire cosmopolita. Borges no canta la gran ciudad, sino el Buenos Aires ya fantasmal, en trance de desaparecer, en cuyos confines suburbanos se anuncia la pampa. Las calles y los barrios humildes son los predios de su meditación, las noches y los ocasos en los suburbios acogen sus confidencias. (32)

In this case the suburban house of the title is that of Norah Lange, who belonged to the *ultraísta* group with which Borges was associated in the early 1920s, and who wrote avant-garde poetry. But despite the reference to her home, the poem's setting is as unspecific as in another

poem with a similar tone, "Villa Urquiza," which figured in the original edition of *Fervor*. Like it, "Villa Mazzini" belongs to the group of poems including "Las calles," "Calle desconocida," and "Arrabal," among others from Borges's first two collections of verse, and in particular is linked by its opening image to the ending of "Dulcia linquimus arva" of *Luna de enfrente*:

Soy un pueblerito y ya no sé de estas cosas,
soy hombre de ciudad, de barrio, de calle:
los tranvías lejanos me ayudan la tristeza
con esa queja larga que sueltan en las tardes.

In both cases what is characteristic of the Borges who has recently returned to his native city is the humanization of the elements which make up the scene on the city's outskirts that the poem evokes. In the above quotation what humanizes and poeticizes the trolley is its groan. In "Villa Mazzini," it is its grumbling. But now the effect of the verb is intensified by the use of the similarly humanizing "huraño" (just as in "La vuelta a Buenos Aires" in the original *Luna de enfrente* he had referred to "la hurañía de las verjas agrestes" and "huraños vocablos"). The technique is consistent throughout the octave of the sonnet. The edge of the city "glimpses" the fields beyond. The shower is a "sudden impulse" which "saddens" the "haggard" suburb. The little square "extols" the happy mood of the lamplit area it occupies. We find constant parallels in *Fervor*. This is a form of "paysage état d'âme," made original not so much by the technique as by the unexpectedness of the suburban landscape which the poet selects to figure forth his mood. We notice that the mood changes somewhat from the first quatrain to the second. The key-words of the first four lines: "rezonga," "apesadumbra," "pobre," "macilento," have less than positive implications. In the next four, on the other hand, "sonríe," "contento," "festivo," and "limpidez" (in contrast to "borrosa" of line 2) mark a definite shift, so that the presence of the smiling girl fits easily into the context. It completes the humanization of the scene, calling to mind the "esperanza de niña en los balcones" which performs a similar function in "Calle desconocida" and "ese alboroto de chicas" in "Ultimo sol en Villa Ortúzar." However, the climactic word of the octave is "dejamiento"

which harks back in a sense to the opening evocation of the landscape and binds the quatrains together.

In the 1969 prologue to *Fervor* Borges writes of having “tachado sensiblerías.” A glance at the poems eventually excluded from the collection shows how the remark could be justified (see Scarano 99-110). But emotion, specifically the yearning for tenderness of the young poet who was to complain rather self-consciously in “La vuelta a Buenos Aires” that “todos me dejaron” and who repeatedly refers to his loneliness and emotional frustration, is not eliminated. Here it is the (normally hackneyed) sound of a barrel-organ in the little square which lends emotional depth to the scene. The change in the sestet from the mainly visual evocation of the octave is heavily emphasized by acoustical effects, which once more underline Borges’s debt to *modernismo*. The alliteration of “profundiza... Publicando” clearly governed the choice of the second word. But more important is the effect of the nasalized vowels under the tonic accents in line 10:

PublicANdo en arrANque de sonido viviENte

and in line 12:

UrgENcia de ternura, esperANza vehemENte

The whole sound of the poem alters appropriately with line nine as the music is alluded to. Where of course the poem differs totally from typically *modernista* practice is in its deliberate abandonment of conventionally beautiful and decorative referents. “Villa Mazzini” begins with a trolley and ends with a barrel-organ—humble, everyday things, to be sure, but not in this case banal. For the commonplace music whose beat we hear in the regular distribution of the tonic accents in lines 9 and 10 evokes what makes all humankind kin: the need for emotional and sexual fulfilment which the climax of the poem stresses.

The next poem is connected with that “Palermo of hoodlums, called *compadritos*, famed for their knife fights” which Borges in his “Autobiographical Notes” went on to say “was to capture my imagination” because of the way the behavior of its bravos illustrated “courage for its own sake” (40, 73). Borges, who strove not to believe in abso-

lutes, nonetheless regarded physical (but even more, moral) courage as practically an absolute, and enjoyed attributing the former to the "orilleros" and "compadritos" he had known, from a distance.

INTENTONA DE SONETO

A un bodegón de traza que proclama:
 Todo es aquí zaguán de cuchilladas,
 Aquí una advenediza flor de espadas
 Trueca puños en golpes, piso en cama,
 Un rufianejo—que la plebe llama
Caradura en su jerga figurada—
 Entró y la fornida *compadrada*
 Dijo en palabras que aprendió la fama:
 Señores, buenas noches y la perra
 (1) Madre que los etcétera. Dicho esto,
 Fue al mostrador con sosegado gesto
 Y azorado ninguno movió guerra.
 ¡Oh Zaratustra de arrabal, dispuesto
 A un barato morir, prez de mi tierra!

In the left hand margin of the manuscript we read: "(1) Madre que los parió—Proclamado esto," written vertically alongside the text of the poem. The poem is signed with Borges's initials but is undated. A letter which follows it on the back of the page, however, refers to the sea voyage of the Borges family to Europe and allows us to date the poem to 1923.

The anecdote belongs to those "mitologías de arrabal" which Borges tells us in "Borges y yo" (*El hacedor*) attracted him before he turned his attention to "los juegos con el tiempo y con el infinito" (though he never lost interest in them). It owes what interest it may have to the sudden change of tone in the last two lines, which comment unexpectedly on the time-worn incident which line 8 reveals was part of the folk-memory of the South-side *barrio* of Buenos Aires where Borges spent his youth before the first of his trips to Europe. This hendecasyllabic sonnet, in other words, divides not so much into the traditional octave and sestet, but rather into a twelve-line main section relating the event and a two-line climax in the form of an exclamation of pride on the part of the poet, who sees a symbol of Argentineness in

the *arrabalero's* elegant and foolhardy indifference to the danger which he has deliberately courted.

The octave, with its deliberately long intervals between the opening adverbial phrase: "A un bodegón de traza," the subject: "un rufianejo" and the verb: "entró," has a quaintly Baroque ring, reminiscent perhaps of the festive sonnets of Quevedo, one of Borges's favorite poets. The slightly archaizing impression which the reader gains is re-emphasized by the rhythmic pattern of line 4:

trueca puños en golpes, piso en cama

and the old-fashioned turn of phrase "en palabras que aprendió la fama." Plainly the effect that Borges is seeking is that of an implicitly comic contrast between the style adopted and the slummy scenario depicted, culminating in the insulting greeting of the newcomer. At the same time the insistence in lines 2-4 on the threatening atmosphere of the tavern, and later on its "burly" customers, creates an effective setting for the *orillero's* words. It is at this point (lines 9-10) that we see Borges approaching the unobtrusive technical mastery he was to achieve in his later verse. The heavily marked *encabalgamiento* linking the two lines focuses attention on the insult: "perra madre," while the shift in rhythm of line ten to the "emphatic" form of the hendecasyllable (with the tonic accents on the first and sixth syllables) both in the line itself as it appears and in the variant in the margin, together with the strong caesura, cause the line to stand out as the sonnet's dramatic climax. It is separated from the final exclamation by an anti-climax: the absence of any reaction on the part of the "fornida *compadrada*." We note the balance of "sosegado" and "azorado": the calm of the provocative individual in contrast to the bewilderment which paralyzes the recipients of his insolence. The exclamation itself makes a further effective use of *encabalgamiento* to bring the sonnet to a close on a note of exaltation of what Alazraki calls "la ciega religión del cuchillero: el coraje... cuyo credo es 'estar listo a matar y a morir'" (103-104). The "rufianejo" of line five has become a representative of the Nietzschean ideal and the epitome of *argentinidad*. A few years later in *Martín Fierro* 38 (26 February 1927) Borges published "Leyenda policial" (subsequently "Hombres pelearon" in *El idioma de los argentinos*, 1928) which contained the germ of "Hombre de la esquina rosada." In it "El

Chileno" meets his death in a knife-fight and is accorded the laconic epitaph: "Murió de pura patria." The idea of dying in a knife-fight as the supreme test of *argentinidad* surfaces again in "El Sur." "Intentona de soneto" is one of the first pieces in which we see Borges interpreting the *modo de ser* of his fatherland in this way.²

Probably in the early 1940s, Borges must have dictated to his mother the main part of "Milonga de Jacinto Chiclana," then provisionally entitled "Elegía," which appeared in *El compadrito* (Emecé, 1945) and later in *Para las seis cuerdas* (1965). We present the manuscript version and the final version side by side:

ELEGÍA	MILONGA DE JACINTO CHICLANA
No sé si fue en Balvanera	Me acuerdo. Fue en Balvanera,
En una noche lejana	En una noche lejana
Que alguien dejó caer el nombre	Que alguien dejó caer el nombre
De un tal Jacinto Chiclana	De un tal Jacinto Chiclana.
Algo se dijo también	Algo se dijo también
De una esquina y de un cuchillo;	De una esquina y un cuchillo;
Los años (el tiempo) nos dejan ver	Los años nos dejan ver
El entrevero y el brillo.	El entrevero y el brillo.
La arremetida	
No sé por que en la memoria [crossed out]	
Quién sabe por que razón	Quién sabe por qué razón
Me sigue sonando el nombre;	Me anda buscando ese nombre;
anda buscando	Me gustaría saber
Me gustaría saber	Cómo habrá sido aquel hombre.
De qué laya fue [crossed out]	
Cómo habrá sido aquel hombre	
Lo veo [crossed out]	
Y rescato del olvido que tal vez nunca ha existido	

² Very relevant to the whole question of *criollismo/argentinidad* in the early Borges is the excellent study by Olea Franco, especially "Borges nacionalista: el criollismo" (77-115).

Sólo Dios puede saber
La laya fiel de aquel hombre;
Señores, yo estoy cantando
Lo que se cifra en el nombre.

Entre las cosas hay una
De la que no se arrepiente
Nadie en la tierra. Esa cosa
Es haber sido valiente.

Siempre el coraje es mejor,
La esperanza nunca es vana;
Vaya pues esta milonga
Para Jacinto Chiclana.

As we can see there are significant differences, quite apart from the fact that the original draft was unfinished. The opening line becomes more concrete in the final version. Line 1 of stanza four, which had initially caused Borges to toy with three different adjectives and to decide to bring "Firme" to the beginning, is abandoned altogether and replaced with the much more effective:

ALto lo veo y cabal

Thereafter, however, the changes seriously affect the structure. The last two stanzas of the first draft (seven and eight) are brought forward and become stanzas six and seven of the published version; stanza five of the draft, on the other hand, emerges as stanza nine in the published version, since two wholly new stanzas have been inserted; while stanza six of the draft is rejected completely. Finally the poem is given an entirely new ending.

The rejection of stanza six of the draft is fully justified. On the one hand, the two stanzas (five and six) of the published version sufficiently extol the figure of the doomed *cuchillero*. On the other, the rejected stanza is intrinsically weak, passing as it does too brusquely from the victim's outward appearance to his impassive worldview. Less satisfying, however, is Borges's decision to bring the last stanza of the draft forward to its present position in the middle of the poem, where its

reference to Chiclana's death now comes before the evocation of the fight. It is not clear what is gained poetically by making the effect precede the cause. Nothing in the largely new last five stanzas is quite as striking as the reference to:

aquella muerte casual
En una esquina cualquiera.

"Casual" and "cualquiera" are the key words in the whole poem. It is they which create the contrast between the exalted figure of Chiclana and the meaninglessness of his death, attenuated only by his dignified acceptance of it. They are not in their right place.

It seems to have been the case that on certain social occasions Borges wrote out individual poems by hand on large oblong pieces of paper or card, which were then decorated and presented to favored recipients. Two such poems have come into the possession of the Alderman Library's Borges Collection. One dates from 1935, the other from 1951. Both are extremely attractive and decorative visual objects. That of 1951 is on a sheet of thin, brownish paper measuring approximately 41 x 28 cm. The top half of the sheet contains, in Borges's tiny handwriting, a version of the poem "Las calles" from *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. It contains only one variant from those listed by Scarano (109-110):

hostilizadas por inmortales distancias

which became:

abrumadas por inmortales distancias

is here:

inalcanzadas por inmortales distancias.

The lower half of the sheet is decorated with a superb pen and charcoal drawing of an old, deserted, tree-lined, suburban street of single-storied, nineteenth-century houses, intended to convey the impression of the streets which Borges "infested" after his return from Europe in

1921. These were the streets which in the poem he describes as "la entraña de mi alma" and which he felt he had never really left. The drawing is signed A. Rossi and dated 51. There is no indication of a recipient.

More original and striking is the 1935 item, on a piece of cream-colored cardboard measuring approximately 32 x 36 cm. At the left, occupying about two thirds of the sheet is a drawing of three flowers, with elongated pointed leaves, outlined in blue and filled in with fine pink lines, around a purple corolla picked out in black. The flowers are linked by thin green stems. These are joined at the base and bear leaves similar to those of the flowers, but this time picked out in black, with circular black and yellow pupil-like decorative effects which make them look like eyes. Around the flowers is a legend that reads: "Para la Sra Luisa viuda de Feliu y familia, con respeto estas flores tomadas del jardín de los recuerdos." The drawing and writing appear to have been made with rather fine-tipped felt pens. The whole effect is exceptionally eye-catching. The decoration is signed, boldly and rather illegibly, MaMucaLainez (Manuel Mujica Láinez, the novelist).

On the right hand side of the card, occupying about a third of its surface, is the following poem in Borges's handwriting:

HOMENAJE

Este es un homenaje
de mi corazón que aun late en el recuerdo tardío
de patios y de aljibes y de tardes no encumbradas.
Este es un homenaje
de asombro estremecido que observa desde lejos
para no herirme más sorpréndeme el sortilegio
al fulgor de sus relatos y de los cuchilleros.
(Confiaba sus tesoros"
quieto por la nostalgia en una miel de las tardes.)
Este es mi homenaje
de respeto húmedo viendo tras las lejanías
y mis ojos mojan lágrimas para el viajero.
Realidad sin medida la ausencia es un misterio.

Hubo en sus relatos varias resultas a mis días

hechura de coraje.
 Ahora, son Muraña o el Chileno mano a mano
 tras el truco sin apuro
 donde tantas muertes que debían son pagadas
 por el cuchillo que solo en su sueño oxida el tiempo.
 Ellos ahora ya no viven entre los vivos.
 Este es un homenaje
 a un hombre bien cortado y curtidas las entrañas
 que nunca un incumplimiento lo tentó a hacer ochava.
 Nosotros hoy seremos su heroísmo inmanente.
 *this word has been partially scratched out and altered.

Borges's signature is joined by a tiny "y" to that of Mujica Láinez and the poem is dated "1935 Buenos Aires."

Clearly this is a modest, occasional piece, written in memory of a friend who had entertained Borges with stories of knife-fighters from Buenos Aires's outskirts at the end of the last century. Muraña and el Chileno are familiar figures. The former is mentioned in "El desafío" (*Evaristo Carriego*) as "carrero y cuchillero, en el que convergen todos los cuentos de coraje que andan por las orillas del Norte" and inspired "Juan Muraña" in *El informe de Brodie*. El Chileno, as mentioned earlier, first appears in "Leyenda policial" (1927). In "Milonga de Don Nicanor Paredes" (*Para las seis cuerdas*) we read:

Entre sus hombres había
 Muchos de valor sereno
 Juan Muraña y aquel Suárez
 Apellidado el Chileno.

In "Un cuchillo en el Norte" in the same collection we find reference to:

aquel Saverio Suárez
 Por más mentas el Chileno
 Que en garitas y elecciones
 Probó siempre que era bueno.

The opening line of the second stanza suggests obliquely that Borges may have borrowed elements taken from the anecdotes of Sr. Feliu for

his own stories. The poem itself was presumably written between "Prose Poems for F.J." (1934) and "Insomnio" (1936). Gertel refers to this period as Borges's "hiato lírico" and reminds us that: "en trece años [1929-43] Borges publica seis poesías" and in the next eleven years only four more (122). For completeness's sake, we can add this to the tally in the full awareness that it is in an unpolished state, as some of the rather curious diction reveals.

"A mi padre" in *La moneda de hierro* (1976) is a sonnet in hendecasyllables, irregular to the eye of the purist in that its rhyme scheme is ABBA-CDDC-EFFE-GG:

A MI PADRE

Tú quisiste morir enteramente,
 La carne y la gran alma. Tú quisiste
 Entrar en la otra sombra sin el triste
 Gemido del medroso y del doliente.
 Te hemos visto morir con el tranquilo
 Ánimo de tu padre ante las balas.
 La roja guerra no te dio sus alas,
 La lenta parca fue cortando el hilo.
 Te hemos visto morir sonriente y ciego.
 Nada esperabas ver del otro lado,
 Pero tu sombra acaso ha divisado
 Los arquetipos que Platón el Griego
 Soñó y que me explicabas. Nadie sabe
 De qué mañana el mármol es la llave.

As it stands, this is a moving and memorable poem. What readers of *La moneda de hierro* in general are unaware of is that it is in fact a brutally cut down version of a poem written in 1938 (Borges's father died on the 14th of February of that year). This is the text. The manuscript is a neatly written fair copy, initialed and with the words "Buenos Aires, 1938," and decorated with a tiny hand-drawn picture of a tree beneath the text.

A MI PADRE

Tú quisiste morir enteramente
 La carne y la gran alma,

Tú quisiste entrar en la otra sombra
 sin la triste plegaria del medroso y del doliente,
 Tú quisiste morir dulcemente
 la paz sobre tus ojos, el sosiego, la calma.

Te hemos visto morir de pié
 dando frutos, como mueren los valientes,
 Te hemos visto morir con el tranquilo
 ánimo de tu padre entre las balas,
 Te hemos visto morir con el bardo,
 silencio en los ojos y oscuros los oídos,
 Te hemos visto morir de pié
 dando frutos, como mueren los valientes.

La guerra no te dió su ímpetu de alas
 y la parca fue cortando el hilo
 del valiente. Con asombro y marcial respeto
 celebramos tu victoria; orgullosos te observamos
 ya formando el cuadro magno con ancestros en la gloria.
 Te hemos visto morir sonriente y ciego;
 nada esperabas ver del otro lado.
 Pero tu sombra, acaso ha adivinado
 Los arquetipos que Platón el griego
 soñó y me explicabas. Nadie sabe
 de que [sic] mañana el mármol es la llave
 ni los cóncavos convexos que Fidias levantara en la portada
 iluminados por el ocaso de la aurora purpurada.

Te hemos visto morir sin gemido ni dolor,
 ni cubierto por el miedo, frío viento del temor;
 en tu rostro, se dibujan dos ojos entreabiertos
 y a tu mano quiero asirme, más cálida que nunca
 ¡Papá, no me dejes, contigo quiero ir adonde vayas!
 Buenos Aires, 1938. J. L. B.

If we exhume this heart-rending outcry of grief and pride and set it beside the sober poem which it became almost forty years later, there seem to be two justifications. One is the quality of the original poem

itself. The other is, of course, its uniqueness within the great mass of Borges's poetry. "When I write," he said to interviewers in 1968, "I try to get away from personal feelings" (Marx and Simon 109). This is perhaps less the case in his poetry than in his prose, as Manuel Ferrer, among others, long ago pointed out: "en esos libros es donde ha depositado toda su vena personal e intimista, donde ha volcado todo su sentir y su corazón" (25). But few, if any, of his poems rival this one in the open expression of feeling.

A comparison of the two poems is instructive. The original contains thirty-two lines of irregular length, ranging from seven to nineteen syllables; about a dozen of the lines are hendecasyllables or can easily be made into them. It is chiefly unrhymed, though there are a few rhymes, especially in the first and third stanzas. We can see at a glance that when Borges came to revise the poem in old age he chiefly retained the hendecasyllables and the rhyming lines. What he implacably eliminated was the last seven lines. The theme of the poem is the dignity of death without belief in the afterlife. In regard to this, Borges for the rest of his life strove to emulate his father. Speaking in Brown University in 1968 he declared, not for the only time, "I am out for oblivion." But, as this poem, written so soon after the latter's death, reveals, he could not fully share the unwavering atheism he attributes to him. Here, as elsewhere, he adopted a stance of milder agnosticism and tenuous hope that, even if we are not programmed to understand them, some mysterious laws exist which might make sense of the here below. Thus in one of his his most memorable poems, "Poema de los dones" (*El hacedor*), he suggests that:

Algo, que ciertamente no se nombra
Con la palabra *azar*

rules our experience. In "Poema de la cantidad" (*El oro de los tigres*) he writes in the same vein:

Si así no fuera, el universo entero
Sería un error y un oneroso caos.

Finally, to Reina Roffé, he confessed in the early eighties that he did believe the world to be mere chaos. But, he added: "quizás sea secre-

tamente un cosmos, quizás haya un orden que no podemos percibir; en todo caso debemos pensar eso para seguir viviendo. Yo preferiría pensar que, a pesar de tanto horror, hay un fin ético en el universo" (Roffé 11; also see Romero). This attraction-repulsion for his father's unyielding stance is the structuring factor in both poems. In the later one, pride in don Jorge Guillermo's tough-mindedness prevails in the first ten lines, culminating, as earlier, in a line which survives unchanged:

nada esperabas ver del otro lado

but it is followed, as before, by the word "Pero" and the hypothesis that on the other side of the grave the Platonic archetypes, which symbolize the "order" Borges alluded to when speaking to Roffé, may be revealed. This is the part of the poem which survives almost unchanged into the second shortened version (six of its fourteen lines), proving perhaps that it is the kernel of the original inspiration. We notice that the original line:

Pero tu sombra, acaso ha adivinado

has been strengthened by a change of verb:

Pero tu sombra acaso ha divisado

In the first poem the shade survives, but at best is still only able to guess at the answer to the great ultimate question. In the second, that answer may perhaps be glimpsed. The later poem ends with a simple restatement of Borges's agnosticism as its climax: no one knows what lies beyond the tomb.

The poem of 1938 is significantly different in two ways. If we underline the parts of it which are transmitted to the later version and examine the rest, we see that what Borges in his mid-seventies eliminated was partly the greater development in the original of the stoical tranquility of his father's passing. The "sosiego," "calma," and "silencio" of the earlier poem are reduced to the "tranquilo ánimo" of lines five and six, so that lines six and seven are the only ones which contain a military reference (to Colonel Francisco Borges, who died in battle

in 1874). By contrast what chiefly characterizes the first two and a half stanzas of the 1938 poem is the attribution to Borges's father of that same valor which the poet so much admired, whether in his grandfather or in the *cuchilleros* of the Palermo of his childhood. Hence the repetition of

Te hemos visto morir de pié
dando frutos, como mueren los valientes

and the further use of "valiente" in line 17. Most of all we miss in the later version the swelling lines in stanza three of the earlier poem in which don Jorge Guillermo's death is seen "with martial respect" as a victory and he is presented proudly as forming line with his forbears in a glory which death alone could bring.

Clearly the older Borges saw these lines as over-rhetorical and in too great contrast to his usual restrained and understated manner. Some readers, by contrast, may greet with pleasure evidence that Borges could write in this moving strain. The real question, however, concerns the last seven lines of the 1938 version, which disappear completely in *La moneda de hierro*. There can be little doubt that Borges was right to remove most of them. The reference to Phidias's "convex concaves" in the poem's longest line is infelicitous, as is the introduction of the banal "frío viento del temor" in apposition to "miedo" in line 29. But who, having read them, would give up the last two lines, in which, after a change of tense in line 30, all Borges's sorrow erupts? In retrospect, all the emphasis in the rest of the poem on his father's quiet and tranquil courage in the face of death leads up to this dramatic, searing appeal. The strength of the dying man is superbly balanced by the human outcry of his son. This is a splendidly achieved effect, and for that reason if for no other the 1938 "A mi padre" deserves to be incorporated into the Borges canon.

We are far away from a genuinely inclusive and critical edition of the *Obras completas* of Borges, with all the variant readings and mention of surviving manuscripts, uncollected items, journalism, etc. which are scattered about in various collections and in private possession. These are only very slowly becoming available. Until the full

corpus of his work is at the disposal of scholars and critics, we are at a serious disadvantage.

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