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Jorge Luis Borges

(24 August 1899 - 14 June 1986)

Daniel Balderston
University of Iowa

See also the Borges entry in *DLB 113: Modern Latin-American Fiction Writers, First Series* and *DLB Yearbook: 1986*.

- BOOKS: *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Privately printed, 1923; revised and enlarged edition, Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1969);
- Luna de enfrente* (Buenos Aires: Proa, 1925);
- Inquisiciones* (Buenos Aires: Proa, 1925);
- El tamaño de mi esperanza* (Buenos Aires: Proa, 1926);
- El idioma de los argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Gleizer, 1928);
- Cuaderno San Martín* (Buenos Aires: Proa, 1929);
- Evaristo Carriego* (Buenos Aires: Gleizer, 1930); translated by Norman Thomas di Giovanni and Susan Ashe as *Evaristo Carriego: A Book about Old-Time Buenos Aires* (New York: Dutton, 1983);
- Discusión* (Buenos Aires: Gleizer, 1932; revised edition, Madrid: Alianza / Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1976);
- Las kenningar* (Buenos Aires: Francisco A. Colombo, 1933);
- Historia universal de la infamia* (Buenos Aires: Tor, 1935; revised edition, Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1954); translated by di Giovanni as *A Universal History of Infamy* (New York: Dutton, 1972; London: John Lane, 1973);
- Historia de la eternidad* (Buenos Aires: Vial & Zona, 1936; revised and enlarged edition, Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1953);
- El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (Buenos Aires: Sur, 1941);
- Seis problemas para Don Isidro Parodi*, by Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares, as H. Busto Domecq (Buenos Aires: Sur, 1942); translated by di Giovanni as *Six Problems for Don Isidro Parodi* (New York: Dutton, 1980);
- Poemas (1922-1943)* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1943); revised and enlarged as *Poemas, 1923-1953* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1954); revised and enlarged again as *Poemas, 1923-1958* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1958);



Jorge Luis Borges, circa 1972 (photograph
by Jesse A. Fernandez)

- Ficciones (1935-1944)* (Buenos Aires: Sur, 1944); enlarged as *Ficciones* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1956); translated by Anthony Kerrigan and others, and edited by Kerrigan (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962; New York: Grove, 1962);
- El compadrito, su destino, sus barrios, su música*, by Borges and Silvina Bullrich Palenque (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1945; enlarged edition, Buenos Aires: General Fabril, 1968);

- Dos fantasías memorables*, by Borges and Bioy Casares, as Bustos Domecq (Buenos Aires: Oportet, 1946);
- Un modelo para la muerte*, by Borges and Bioy Casares, as B. Suárez Lynch (Buenos Aires: Oportet & Haereses, 1946);
- El Aleph* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1949; enlarged, 1952); translated and edited by Borges and di Giovanni as *The Aleph and Other Stories, 1933-1969, Together with Commentaries and an Autobiographical Essay* (New York: Dutton, 1970; London: Cape, 1971);
- Aspectos de la literatura gauchesca* (Montevideo: Número, 1950);
- Antiguas literaturas germánicas* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1951);
- La muerte y la brújula* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1951);
- Otras inquisiciones (1937-1952)* (Buenos Aires: Sur, 1952); translated by Ruth L. C. Simms as *Other Inquisitions, 1937-1952* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964; London: Souvenir, 1973);
- El "Martín Fierro,"* by Borges and Margarita Guerrero (Buenos Aires: Columba, 1953);
- La hermana de Eloísa*, by Borges and L. M. Levinson (Buenos Aires: Ene, 1955);
- Los orilleros; El paraíso de los creyentes*, by Borges and Bioy Casares (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1955);
- Leopoldo Lugones*, by Borges and Betina Edelberg (Buenos Aires: Troquel, 1955);
- Nueve poemas* (Buenos Aires: El Mangrullo, 1955);
- Manual de zoología fantástica*, by Borges and Guerrero (Mexico City & Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1957);
- Límites* (Buenos Aires: Francisco A. Colombo, 1958);
- El hacedor* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1960); translated by Mildred Boyer and Harold Morland as *Dreamtigers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964; London: Souvenir, 1973);
- Antología personal* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1961); translated by Kerrigan and others as *Personal Anthology*, edited by Kerrigan (New York: Grove, 1967; London: Cape, 1968);
- El lenguaje de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1963);
- El otro, el mismo* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1964);
- Obra poética 1923-1964* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1964); enlarged as *Obra poética 1923-1966* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1966); enlarged again as *Obra poética 1923-1967* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1967); enlarged again as *Obra poética 1923-1969* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1972); enlarged again as *Obra poética 1923-1976* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1977);
- Para las seis cuerdas* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1965);
- Introducción a la literatura inglesa*, by Borges and María Esther Vázquez (Buenos Aires: Columba, 1965); translated and edited by L. Clark Keating and Robert O. Evans as *An Introduction to English Literature* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974);
- Literaturas germánicas medievales*, by Borges and Vázquez (Buenos Aires: Falbo, 1965);
- El libro de los seres imaginarios*, by Borges and Guerrero (Buenos Aires: Kier, 1967); revised, enlarged, and translated by Borges and di Giovanni as *The Book of Imaginary Beings* (New York: Dutton, 1969; Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1974);
- Introducción a la literatura norteamericana*, by Borges and Esther Zemborain de Torres (Buenos Aires: Columba, 1967); translated and edited by Keating and Evans as *An Introduction to American Literature* (New York: Schocken, 1973);
- Crónicas de Bustos Domecq*, by Borges and Bioy Casares (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1967); translated by di Giovanni as *Chronicles of Bustos Domecq* (New York: Dutton, 1976);
- Nueva antología personal* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1968);
- Elogio de la sombra* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1969); translated by di Giovanni as *In Praise of Darkness* (New York: Dutton, 1974; London: John Lane, 1975);
- El informe de Brodie* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1970); translated by Borges and di Giovanni as *Doctor Brodie's Report* (New York: Bantam, 1973; London: John Lane, 1974);
- El Congreso* (Buenos Aires: Archibrazo, 1971); translated by Borges and di Giovanni as *The Congress* (London: Enitharmon, 1974);
- El oro de los tigres* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1972); translated, in part, by Alastair Reid in *The Gold of the Tigers: Selected Later Poems* (New York: Dutton, 1977);
- Prólogos, con un prólogo de prólogos* (Buenos Aires: Torres Agüero, 1975);
- La rosa profunda* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1975); translated, in part, by Reid in *The Gold of the Tigers: Selected Later Poems*;
- El libro de arena* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1975); translated by di Giovanni as *The Book of Sand* (New York: Dutton, 1977; London: John Lane, 1979);
- Diálogos*, by Borges and Ernesto Sábato (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1976);
- La moneda de hierro* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1976);
- Qué es el budismo*, by Borges and Alicia Jurado (Buenos Aires: Columba, 1976);
- Cosmogonías* (Buenos Aires: Librería La Ciudad, 1976);
- Historia de la noche* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1977);
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- Borges para millones* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1978);
- Poesía juvenil de Jorge Luis Borges*, edited by Carlos Menses (Barcelona: José Olañeta, 1978);

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Siete noches (Buenos Aires & Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1980); translated by Eliot Weinberger as *Seven Nights* (New York: New Directions, 1984; London: Faber & Faber, 1984);

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Milongas (Buenos Aires: Dos Amigos, 1983);

Venticinco Agosto 1983 y otros cuentos (Madrid: Siruela, 1983);

Atlas, by Borges and María Kodama (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1984); translated by Kerrigan (New York: Dutton, 1985);

Los conjurados (Madrid: Alianza, 1985);

Textos Cautivos: Ensayos y reseños en "El Hogar," edited by Enrique Sacerio Garí and Emir Rodríguez Monegal (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1986);

A/Z (Madrid: Siruela, 1988);

Biblioteca personal: Prólogos (Madrid: Alianza, 1988);

Borges en la Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires: Agalma, 1993);

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Borges: Textos recobrados 1919-1929, edited by Zangara (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1997).

Editions and Collections: *Obras completas*, 9 volumes (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1953-1960); revised edition, 1 volume, edited by Carlos V. Frías (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1974);

Obras completas en colaboración, by Borges and others (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1979);

Prose completa, 2 volumes (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1980);

Antología poética (1923-1977) (Madrid: Alianza, 1981);

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Editions in English: *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, edited by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1962);

Selected Poems, 1923-1967, translated and edited by Norman Thomas di Giovanni (London: John Lane/Penguin, 1972; New York: Dell, 1973);

Borges: A Reader, edited by Emir Rodríguez Monegal and Alastair Reid (New York: Dutton, 1981);

Borges on Writing, edited by di Giovanni, Daniel Halpern, and Frank MacShane (Hopewell, N.J.: Ecco Press, 1994);

Collected Fictions, translated by Andrew Hurley (New York: Viking, 1998);

Selected Non-Fictions, edited by Eliot Weinberger, translated by Weinberger, Esther Allen, and Suzanne Jill Levine (New York: Viking, 1999);

Selected Poems, edited by Alexander Coleman, translated by Willis Barnstone and others (New York: Viking, 1999);

This Craft of Verse, edited by Calin-Andrei Mihalescu (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

OTHER: *Antología poética argentina*, edited by Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares, and Silvina Ocampo (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1941);

Francisco de Quevedo, *Prosa y verso*, edited by Borges and Bioy Casares (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1948);

Cuentos breves y extraordinarios, edited by Borges and Bioy Casares (Buenos Aires: Raigal, 1955);

Poesía gauchesca, 2 volumes, edited by Borges and Bioy Casares (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1955);

Walt Whitman, *Hojas de hierba*, translated by Borges and Else Astete (Buenos Aires: Juárez, 1969);

Breve antología anglosajona, edited by Borges (Santiago: Ediciones la Ciudad, 1978).

Jorge Luis Borges, Argentina's best-known writer, was born on 24 August 1899 in a traditional old house in central Buenos Aires (not far from today's financial district) and grew up in the neighborhood of Palermo. His father, Jorge Guillermo Borges, was the son of an Argentine military officer who had fought in the War of the Triple Alliance in Paraguay and died in an Argentine civil war, and of Frances Haslam de Borges, an English immigrant who for a time kept a boarding-house for English-speaking schoolteachers. Jorge Guillermo Borges taught philosophy and psychology at the secondary-school level. Borges's mother, Leonor Acevedo de Borges, was descended from a line of Uruguayan military men, and military mythology was dear to her. Raised in a partly English-speaking household, Borges and his sister, Norah Borges (later a well-known painter and the wife of the Spanish literary critic Guillermo de Torre), spent a fairly uneventful early childhood in Palermo, where their father was friends with the local poet Evaristo Carriego, with the philosopher and writer Macedonio Fernández, and with the nationalist poet Leopoldo Lugones. Their lives changed dramatically when their parents decided to take a trip to Europe in 1914; the outbreak of World War I led to a prolonged residence in Geneva, where Borges studied at the College Calvin (learning French, German, and Latin), his last period of formal education. When the war ended the family moved to Mallorca, Spain; Borges then went on to spend an important year in Madrid before the family returned to Buenos Aires in 1921. By then he had clearly chosen to be a writer.

Jorge Luis Borges



Borges with his parents and sister, Norah, in Saint Mark's Square, Venice, 1914 (from Charles Newman and Mary Kinzie, eds., *Prose for Borges*, 1974; Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina)

Though best known in the English-speaking world for his short stories, Borges began his career as a poet, published dozens of books of poetry, and wrote extensively about poetry (as well as collaborating in editing various anthologies of poetry). The three volumes published by Viking in honor of the Borges centenary, *Collected Fictions* (1998), *Selected Non-Fictions* (1999), and *Selected Poems* (1999), are striking in this regard—only a small portion of Borges's book reviews and literary essays are included, and a tinier proportion still of his poetry. Although he is one of the major Latin American poets of the twentieth century, the taste for Borges's poetry has not spread as widely as the fame of

his fiction (or, for that matter, of his literary essays). Yet, his poetry has had a wide impact: many verses have been used as titles for novels and other works, many poems have been set to music, and his variety of poetic voices have been important to many younger poets.

Borges published poetry over a period of more than sixty years; from his beginnings in the avant-garde he evolved later into a sort of neoclassicist. The history of his poetry is exceedingly complex, with rewritings of poems across several decades, rearrangements of his books of poetry, insertion of late poems into new editions of early books, radical changes of style and technique, and equally important changes in his ideas about poetics. Yet, there is a poetic voice, as well as a treatment of aesthetic and philosophical concerns, that continues from his early poetry to his late. Poetry dominated his production in the 1920s and again in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and even at the moments his creative energy was channeled above all into stories and essays, there is an important dialogue within his work between his poetry and his prose.

One of the serious problems that the student of Borges's poetry encounters is the complex relationship between the chronology of the poems (their composition and first publication) and their inclusion in book form, particularly after the first collections of Borges's collected works began appearing in the 1960s. The problem is twofold: poems that were published in his early career were modified or suppressed, and often much later poems were included in their places. A well-known example is "Arrabal" (Neighborhood), a poem originally published in 1921 and included in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (Fervor of Buenos Aires) in 1923. In editions of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* after 1964 (and indeed in the edition of *Poemas* [1922–1943] published in 1943), this poem ends:

y sentí Buenos Aires
esta ciudad que yo creí mi pasado
es mi porvenir, mi presente;
los años que he vivido en Europa son ilusorios,
yo he estado siempre (y estaré) en Buenos Aires

(and I felt Buenos Aires
this city that I believed was my past
is my present, my future;
the years that I have lived in Europe are illusory,
I have always been [and will always be] in Buenos Aires).

Despite the date "1921" that ends the poem in the 1964 edition of the *Obra poética* (Poetic Works), the original 1921 poem, published in *Borges: Textos recuperados 1919–1929* (Borges: Recovered Texts 1919–1929, 1997), ends in quite a different way. In it, Borges expresses no

such certainty about his "destiny" being Buenos Aires.
Its ending is instead:

Y sentí *Buenos Aires*
y literaturicé en el fondo del alma
la viacrucis inmóvil
de la calle sufrida
y el caserío sosegado

(And I felt *Buenos Aires*
and made literature in the depth of my soul
from the motionless way of the cross
of the suffering street
and the quiet houses).

There is a world of difference, of course, between a young man expressing certainty about his future and an older man retrospectively putting such words in the young man's mouth (because by 1943—and with greater certainty in 1964—Borges did indeed know that most of his life would be lived out in Buenos Aires). In 1921 Borges had spent a third of his twenty-two years in Europe (in Geneva from 1914 to 1918 and then three years in Mallorca and Madrid), and his "rediscovery" of Buenos Aires when the family returned from Switzerland and Spain was indeed dramatic—resulting in his first book, *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. Borges often plays this sort of game with time—in his poems about the deaths of his grandfathers, in the story "La otra muerte" (The Other Death, 1949), in the 1972 story "El otro" (The Other), and in *El libro de arena* (1975; translated as *The Book of Sand*, 1977). In "Arrabal," as in that late story, the older Borges is correcting the younger one, but the reader must beware before ascribing the sentiments expressed in the later version of the poem to the Borges of 1921. This mistake is frequently made by critics who are not sufficiently immersed in the chronology of Borges's work; similar problems exist with the second editions of *Discusión* (Discussion, 1932) and *Ficciones* (1935–1944) (Fictions, 1944). Tommaso Scarano has studied the rewriting of the poetry in great detail (as Michel Lafon has studied rewriting in Borges in general), while Enrique Pezzoni's excellent article on *Fervor de Buenos Aires* addresses the rewritings among other questions; the critic is urged to consult these works, as well as Nicolás Helft's bibliography (the most complete to date), to avoid important critical problems with the chronology of the works.

Borges's first published poem, "Himno del mar" (Hymn of the Sea) from the 31 December 1919 edition of the review *Grecia*, brims with enthusiasm for the sea and for an exuberant poetic voice that Borges had found in Walt Whitman. Even Whit-

man's homoeroticism influences the voice who cries: "¡Mar! / ¡Hermano, Padre, Amado . . . !" (Sea! / Brother, Father, Lover . . . !), or later:

Oh instante de plenitud magnífica;
Antes de conocerte, Mar hermano,
Largamente he vagado por errantes valles azules con
oriflamas de faroles
Y en la sagrada media noche yo he tejido guirnaldas
De besos sobre carnes y labios que se ofrendaban,
Solemnes de silencio,
En una floración
Sangrienta . . .
Pero ahora yo hago don a los vientos
de todas esas cosas pretéritas,
pretéritas. . . Sólo tú existes.
Atlético y desnudo

(Oh instant of magnificent fullness;
Before meeting you, brother Sea,
I have traveled far through wandering blue trees with
the oriflamme of street lamps
At sacred midnight I have woven garlands
Of kisses upon flesh and lips that offered themselves,
Solemn in silence,
In a bloody
Flowering . . .
But now I make a gift to the winds
of all of these past things,
past. . . Only you exist,
Athletic and naked).

Or later still: "Oh proteico, yo he salido de ti" (Oh Protean one, I have emerged from you). Whitman's ideal of male "adhesiveness" is oddly present in this song to the sea, which is gendered male and addressed as Whitman often addresses his lovers.

Already in "Himno del mar" there is a verse, "El camino fue largo como un beso" (The street was as long as a kiss), that prefigures the next period in Borges's production. With his discovery of German Expressionism and then of Spanish Ultraism, Borges explores audacious metaphors, while at the same time impressing them with a rather homely quality. The majority of his Ultraist poems are written between 1920 and 1923 (that is, during the last year of the Borges family's residence in Spain, back in Buenos Aires, then during the family's second European trip in 1923); many were evidently intended to be collected in a book called "Himnos rojos" or "Salmos rojos" (Red Anthems or Psalms), the ostensible theme of which was to be the Russian revolution. (Jean Pierre Bernès has reconstructed part of this book in the *Pléiade* edition of Borges's works in French, and *Borges: Textos recobrados 1919–1929* echoes some of his claims of what this book was to consist of; these claims must, however, be taken rather skeptically, since Borges never published this



Borges in 1924, shortly before returning to Buenos Aires from his second journey to Europe (Collection of Jorge and Marion Helft)

book or said anything precise about what it would have been.) Some of the *ultraísta* poems, sometimes shorn of their more extravagant metaphors, survived in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* in 1923, and a few (usually much rewritten) in the greatly revised editions of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* after 1964; the reader is advised, however, to consult *Borges: Textos recobrados 1919-1929* for the original versions of these poems, which are vastly different from Borges's later poetry.

In December 1921, in an essay on *ultraísmo* in the Argentine cultural periodical *Nosotros* (We), Borges defined the principles of the movement as he saw them:

1. Reducción de la lírica a su elemento primordial: la metáfora.
2. Tachadura de las frases medianeras, los nexos, y los adjetivos inútiles.
3. Abolición de los trebejos ornamentales, el confesionalismo, la circunstanciación, las prédicas y la nebulosidad rebuscada.
4. Síntesis de dos o más imágenes en una, que ensancha de ese modo su facultad de sugerencia

(1. Reduction of lyric poetry to its basic element: metaphor.

2. Elimination of links, connecting phrases, and superfluous adjectives.

3. Abolition of ornamental implements, confession-alism, circumstantial evidence, preaching, and deliberate vagueness.

4. Synthesis of two or more images in one, which thus enlarges its capacity for suggestion).

The insistence on metaphor, preferably surprising or "new" metaphor, and on the combination ("síntesis") of multiple images in a single verse is the dominant one in Borges's early poetry, and an idea that he spent much of the rest of his life rethinking. A typical example of an *ultraísta* poem is "Gesta maximalista" (Maximalist Epic) on the Bolshevik revolution:

Desde los hombros curvos
se arrojaron los rifles como viaductos
Las barricadas que cicatrizan las plazas
vibran nervios desnudos
El cielo se ha crinado de gritos y disparos
Solsticios interiores han quemado los cráneos
Uncida por el largo aterrizaje
la catedral avión de multitudes quiere romper las amarras
y el ejército fresca arboladura
de surtidores-bayonetas pasa
el candelabro de los mil y un falos
Pájaro rojo vuela un estandarte
sobre la hirsuta muchedumbre extática

(From the curved shoulders
the rifles were tossed like viaducts
The barricades that scar the squares
quiver in naked nerves
The sky has been crowned with cries and shots
Inner solstices have burned brains
Yoked by its long grounding
the cathedral airplane for crowds wants to break its tether
and the army fresh shrubbery
of fountain-bayonets passes
candelabrum of a thousand and one phalluses
Red bird flies on a flag
over the disheveled ecstatic crowd).

This poem is remarkable for its excess (but in this respect is fairly typical of Borges's *ultraísta* poems): the army is a moving forest (with echoes perhaps of Macbeth's Burnham Wood), the bayonets are fountains and candelabra and phalluses, the cathedral a grounded airplane. The images are piled upon one another in ways that defy logic, except perhaps the visual logic (influenced perhaps by Sigmund Freud) that sees fountain-bayonets as a "candelabrum of a thousand and one phalluses." Again, as in "Himno del mar," there is a strong homosocial element (Whitman's "adhesiveness"), as the image of the Red Army impresses itself on the young poet's imagination as male, erect, disheveled, and even ecstatic. The poem has a degree of historical specificity ("maximalista" is the Spanish translation of "bolshevik," for example, and the image at the end is of

the Soviet flag); yet, at the same time the poet seems to be searching for an archetypal or timeless quality (hence the final "extático").

Another important early poem is "Carnicería" (Butcher Shop), an Expressionist poem that appeared in the first edition of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* in 1923 and survived more or less intact in subsequent editions:

Más vil que un lupanar
la carnicería rubrica como una afrenta la calle.
Sobre el dintel
la escupidora de una cabeza de vaca
de mirar ciego y cornamenta grandiosa
preside el aquelarre
de carne charra y mármoles finales
con la lejana majestad de un ídolo

(More vile than a brothel
the butcher shop marks the street like an insult.
Over the doorway
the spittoon of a cow head
a blind stare and grandiose horns
presides over the witches' Sabbath
of gaudy meat and final marbletops
with the remote majesty of an idol).

Unlike "Catedral" or the other *ultraísta* poems that abound in metaphor (and that perhaps for this reason were not included in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* and suppressed from later editions of the poetry that were published in Borges's lifetime), the simple, monumental central image of "Carnicería"—the cow skull that presides over the butcher shop—survives the changes in aesthetics and the processes of revision that followed.

The 1974 version of this poem is shorter but retains the essential elements of the original. Though three lines shorter and a bit simplified, the marks of Borges's readings of German Expressionism are clear even in the 1974 edition: the search for naked and intense experience, a neoprimitivist quest for human essences, the reliance on a few bold images. One of the striking elements of the 1923 version, however, the final juxtaposition of "la palabra escrita junto a la palabra que se habla" (a written word beside words that are spoken), is absent. This image of "fijeza impasible" (impassive fixity), a metaphoric and metalinguistic reading of the monumental fetish of the cow head, implies a relation between Argentine oral culture—the culture of the slaughterhouses and butcher shops so important to the rise of Buenos Aires—and its literature (one of whose first important texts is the 1871 "El matadero" [The Matador], the posthumous publication of Esteban Echeverría, which is also an allegorical reading of the slaughterhouses). Like the German Expressionist poems about trench warfare (which Borges imitated in

"Trinchera" in 1920), "Carnicería" finds human intensity in the midst of death.

Borges's reading of German Expressionism is easily charted in the publications of the early 1920s that are brought together in *Borges: Textos recobrados 1919-1929*, which include reviews, essays, and translations (of such authors as Kurt Heynicke, Wilhelm Klemm, Ernst Stadler, Johannes Becher, Alfred Vagts, and August Stramm). Indeed, it could be argued that the Germans' focus on a few intense images helped cure Borges of his *ultraísta* excesses. *Fervor de Buenos Aires* already marks something of a departure from Ultraism. Borges's walks through the backstreets of Buenos Aires—unlike Charles Baudelaire's flâneur, who walks through the center—focus on images of humble everyday life, on suffering, on death. As in Expressionism, human suffering is transmuted in the pain felt by trees, by houses, by sunsets. Metaphor becomes less extravagant (and less frequent); what Borges calls (in the preface to *Luna de enfrente* [Moon across the Way, 1925]) an aesthetics of "mi pobreza" (my poverty) can be read as a reaction to the abundant metaphorizing of Ultraism—and of Surrealism, a subsequent avant-garde movement that Borges found distasteful.

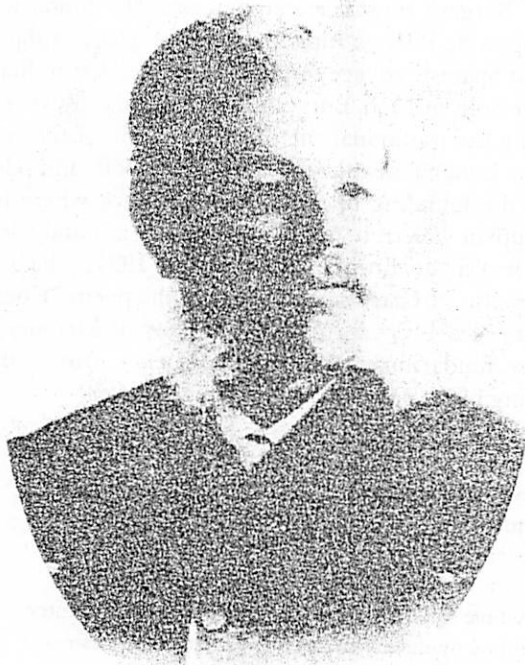
The first poem of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, "Las calles" (The Streets), memorably defines its subject as the quiet streets of the urban periphery:

Las calles de Buenos Aires
ya son la entraña de mi alma.
No las calles enérgicas
molestadas de prisas y ajetreos,
sino la dulce calle de arrabal
entermecida de árboles y ocasos

(The streets of Buenos Aires
are already the innards of my soul.
Not the energetic streets
bothered by hurry and bustle,
but the sweet neighborhood street
made tender by trees and sunsets).

Particularly noteworthy are the lines "Son todas ellas para el codicioso de almas / una promesa de ventura" (All of them are—for one who is greedy for souls—a promise of joy). The poetic speaker is a hungry observer, eager for vicarious experience, a variant of Baudelaire's *flâneur*, as Sylvia Molloy suggests, who looks for the remains of the older city that is disappearing, not at the modern city that is emerging.

As Pezzoni notes in his essay on *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (the most important critical article on the book), these poems function through a sort of solipsism, whereby the outskirts of the city are a "metáfora/anécdota del Yo empeñado en la empresa de afirmarse y



Borges's maternal grandfather, Isidoro de Acevedo Laprida, about whom he wrote the poem "Isidoro Acevedo" (Collection of Jorge and Marion Helff)

negarse" (metaphor/anecdote of the self engaged in the enterprise of affirming and negating itself). In this enterprise the avant-garde—a collective spirit of renovation—is replaced by a more lonely quest, which, though imbued with a desire for aesthetic renovation, works through the "residuo irracional de la memoria y el recuerdo" (irrational residue of memory and recollections). Pezzoni summarizes: "En el Borges grupal del ultraísmo ya estaba presente el Borges del paseo solitario por el arrabal fabricado como ámbito para la omnipotencia del Yo soberano en su errancia entre los extremos del sí y del no" (In the collective-minded Borges of *ultraísmo* the Borges of the solitary walks in neighborhoods already exists, neighborhoods constructed as the scene for the omnipotent sovereign self in its wanderings in the extremes of affirmation and negation). The poetic self of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* is a lonely witness to empty streets, to long-suffering houses, to inscriptions on graves, to sunsets and dawns. At no other point in Borges's career is the social dimension so absent from his writing. This emptying out of social spaces is yet another way of responding to the collective spirit of the avant-garde, so full of movement and a shared enthusiasm for modernity.

Luna de enfrente continues the search for Buenos Aires, with renewed focus on the backstreets and poorer neighborhoods (though it also includes poems on Nîmes, Dakar, and Montevideo, as well as a couple of poems set in rural Argentina). Such poems as "Calle con almacén rosao" (Street with a Pink Corner Store), "Al horizonte de un suburbio" (To the Horizon of the Outskirts), "Casas como ángeles" (Houses like Angels), "Ultimo sol en Villa Ortúzar" (Sunset over Villa Ortúzar), and "En Villa Alvear" continue the motif that is dominant in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, of the poet as night visitor to out-of-the-way parts of the city, participant-observer of its poverty, and witness to the passing of its traditions. Poverty—a poverty of form, of emotion, of theme—is erected into a creed: Borges writes in the first line of the preface, "Este es cartel de mi pobreza" (This is a sign of my poverty).

The best-known poem in *Luna de enfrente* is the stirring "El general Quiroga va en coche al muere" (General Quiroga Rides to His Death in a Carriage), on the stagecoach ride to Barranca Yaco that took Juan Facundo Quiroga to his death at the hands of assassins in 1835. Here Borges is reworking one of the most famous incidents in nineteenth-century Argentine history, the climax of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's great *Facundo* (1845), a life of the Argentine strongman:

Pero en llegando al sitio nombrao Barranca Yaco
Sables a filo y punta menudieron sobre él:
Muerte de mala muerte se lo llevó al riojano
Y una de puñaladas lo mentó a Juan Manuel

(But when the brightness of day shone on Barranca Yaco weapons without mercy swooped in a rage upon him; death, which is for all, rounded up the man from La Rioja and more than one thrust of the dagger invoked Juan Manuel de Rosas).

In this poem Borges renders homage not only to Quiroga but also to the probable paymaster of his assassins, Juan Manuel de Rosas. In the preface he states:

En dos [poemas de este libro] figura el nombre de Carriego, siempre con un sentido de numen tutelar de Palermo, que así lo siento yo. Pero otra sombra, más ponderosa de eternidá que la suya, gravita sobre el barrio: la de don Juan Manuel

(In two [of the poems in this book] Carriego's name figures, always in the sense of a tutelary god of Palermo, which is how I think of him. But another shade, of a deeper eternity still, weighs on the neighborhood: that of Juan Manuel).

The invocation of Evaristo Carriego, a local poet who had been a friend of Borges's father and a neighbor in

Palermo during Borges's early years, is suggestive, since a few years later Borges published a biographical study, *Evaristo Carriego* (1930; translated as *Evaristo Carriego: A Book about Old-Time Buenos Aires*, 1983), a clear attempt to ally himself aesthetically with Carriego's cult of neighborhood characters: seamstresses who became pregnant, local thugs, tango dancers, organ players with their monkeys.

Luna de enfrente is also important for marking the high point of Borges's infatuation with Argentine popular speech. Here—as in the book of essays *El tamaño de mi esperanza* (The Extent of My Hope, 1926)—he adopts a spelling that echoes Argentine speech patterns (suppressing the intervocalic and final *d*, for example, or changing from *e* to *i* in certain verb endings), as well as elements of the nineteenth-century spelling reform advocated by Andrés Bello and Sarmiento. If *Fervor de Buenos Aires* marks a return to the native city, *Luna de enfrente* and *El tamaño de mi esperanza* show Borges at his most extreme moment of Argentine cultural nationalism.

In this light, then, there is a surprising inclusion in *Luna de enfrente*: the most unusual poem, and one that Borges promptly suppressed and excluded from future editions of his poems, is "Soleares" (named after an Andalusian folk song and dance). Strongly reminiscent of the work of the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca, it is a series of brief three-line poems set in Andalucía, with guitars and olive trees and winds from the Mediterranean:

Igual que una herida abierta
es la guitarra y la copla
derrama su sangre negra

(Like an open wound
the guitar and its song
spill their black blood).

García Lorca made a prolonged visit to Buenos Aires a few years later, and Borges took an intense dislike to him, which probably explains the suppression of the poem. It appeared for the last time in *Laurel*, an anthology of Spanish and Spanish American poetry published in Mexico in 1941, and then disappeared forever from Borges's collected poetry and anthologies of his work.

The third book of poems that Borges published in the 1920s (and his last book of new poetry until 1960) is *Cuaderno San Martín* (San Martín Copybook, 1929), named for the brand of notebook in which Borges wrote the poems. The original manuscript is now in the collection of the Fundación San Telmo; the cover bears a conventional likeness of José de San Martín, the liberator of the southern part of South America and Argentina's iconic national hero. The book opens on an

appropriate nationalistic note with "La fundación mitológica de Buenos Aires" (Mythological Founding of Buenos Aires), later retitled "Fundación mítica de Buenos Aires" (The Mythical Founding of Buenos Aires), one of Borges's most celebrated poems. "La fundación mitológica de Buenos Aires" takes as its alleged subject the first Spanish voyage to the River Plate, that of Juan Díaz de Solís in 1516. Borges rewrites history, however, rejecting the traditional site of the founding of the city (Parque Lezama, near La Boca neighborhood) and relocating the founding of the city in the block where he grew up in Palermo (a house the Borges family left when it went to Europe from 1914 to 1921, which is evoked also in *Cuaderno San Martín* in the poem "Fluencia natural del recuerdo" [Natural Flow of Memory]). In "La fundación mitológica de Buenos Aires" the founding of the city is located precisely there:

Una manzana entera pero en mitá del campo
Presenciada de auroras y lluvias y suestadas.
La manzana pareja que persiste en mi barrio:
Guatemala, Serrano, Paraguay, Gurruchaga

(A whole square block, but set down in open country,
attended by dawns and rains and hard southeasters.
The very block which still stands in my neighborhood:
Guatemala—Serrano—Paraguay—Gurruchaga).

Even more radical, though, he foreshortens history, claiming that this original city block of Buenos Aires already was inhabited by organ-grinders, local thugs, tangos, and Yrigoyen posters:

Una cigarrería sahumó como una rosa
La nohecita nueva, zalamera y agreste.
No faltaron zaguanes y novias besadoras.
Sólo faltó una cosa: la vereda de enfrente.

(A cigar store perfumed like a rose
the new evening, flattering and rough.
There were hallways and kissing girlfriends.
Only one thing was missing—the other side of the street).

The "eternity" he feels as he evokes the founding of the city ("A mí se me hace cuento que empezó Buenos Aires: / La juzgo tan eterna como el agua y el aire" (Hard to believe Buenos Aires had any beginning: / I feel it to be as eternal as air and water) became a hallmark of various evocative texts on the foreshortening of history in Buenos Aires: "Sentirse en muerte" (Feeling in Death) in *El idioma de los argentinos* (The Language of the Argentines, 1928), an essay (included in *Borges: Textos recuperados 1919–1929*) on the Uruguayan painter Pedro Figari, and the preface to *Evaristo Carriego*.



*Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares in Mar del Lata, Argentina,
1942 (Collection of Jorge and Marion Helft)*

Another interesting poem is "Isidoro Acevedo," about Borges's maternal grandfather, who had fought in the mid-nineteenth-century civil wars. Like the later stories "La otra muerte" and "El Sur" (The South), this poem concerns a hero dreaming of the death in battle that he would have preferred to have had:

Entró a saco en sus días
para esa visionaria patriada que necesitaba su fé, no que
una flaqueza le impuso;
juntó un ejército de sombras porteñas
para que lo mataran.

Así en el dormitorio anochecido que miraba a un jardín
murió en milicia de su convicción por la patria

(In the visionary defense of his country that his faith
hungered for [and not that his fever imposed],

he plundered his days
and rounded up an army of Buenos Aires ghosts
so as to get himself killed in the fighting.
That was how, in a bedroom that looked onto the garden,
he died out of devotion for his city).

The imaginative death impresses itself upon the real one: the grandson remembers the grandfather as a warrior, not as a tranquil old man looking out the window onto a garden.

Cuaderno San Martín is the first of Borges's books to include endnotes, here explaining the references in some of the poems: particularly important is the note on "La Chacarita" on Borges's militant support of Hipólito Yrigoyen, the former president of Argentina who was elected to a second term, took power in 1928, and then was overthrown in 1930 by a military coup. Borges later cultivated the genre of the footnote in his

stories and essays; it is noteworthy that his exploration of the note should begin in this book of poems and not in the three books of essays he published around the same time: *Inquisiciones* (Inquisitions, 1925), *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, and *El idioma de los argentinos*.

After *Cuaderno San Martín*, Borges did not publish a volume of new poetry until *El hacedor* (The Maker, 1960; translated as *Dreamtigers*, 1964), which mixed poems and short prose pieces, though the diverse editions of his poetic works constantly included new poems. There were few poems published in periodicals from 1930 to 1957: "Atardecer" (Dusk) in 1933; "Insomnio" (Insomnia) in 1936; "La noche cíclica" (The Cyclical Night) and "Para la noche del 24 de Diciembre de 1940, en Inglaterra" (On 24 December 1940, in England) in 1940; "Poema conjetural" (Conjectural Poem) in 1943; "Poema del tercer elemento" (Poem of the Third Element) in 1944; "A un poeta menor de la antología" (To a Minor Poet of the Greek Anthology) and "Mateo XXV, 30" (Matthew 25:30) in 1953; and "Página para recordar al Coronel Suárez, vencedor en Junín" (A Page to Commemorate Colonel Suárez, Victor at Junín) in 1954. After years of such modest poetic production, suddenly in 1958 Borges published ten poems in periodicals as well as the plaquette *Límites* (Limits) and *Poemas 1923-1958*, and from then to the end of his life his publications of poetry were constant. It is true enough, then, to speak (as does Zunilda Gertel in the title of her 1967 book) of a "retorno" (return) to poetry in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, to the extent that *El hacedor* was Borges's first book to include a large number of new poems since the three books of poetry of the 1920s.

Of these poems, the best-known are "La noche cíclica" and "Poema conjetural." The first is a meditation on the myth of eternal return that begins with the line "Lo supieron los arduos alumnos de Pitágoras" (They knew it, the fervent pupils of Pythagoras). The final stanza reads:

Vuelve la noche cóncava que descifró Anaxágoras;
Vuelve a mi carne humana la eternidad constante
Y el recuerdo ¿el proyecto? de un poema incesante:
"Lo supieron los arduos alumnos de Pitágoras . . ."

(It returns, the hollow dark of Anaxagoras;
In my human flesh, eternity keeps recurring
And the memory, or plan, of an endless poem beginning:
"They knew it, the fervent pupils of Pythagoras . . .").

The poem, then, not only speaks of an eternal return but circles back on itself, a sort of poetic Möbius strip. Like the stories later collected in *Ficciones*, this poem is a brilliant game, one that reveals the literary artifice of which it is made.

"Poema conjetural" is perhaps Borges's greatest poem. A dramatic monologue inspired at least in part by Robert Browning, as Julie Jones has shown in an essay in Carlos Cortúnez's *Borges the Poet* (1986), this poem focuses on Francisco Narciso de Laprida, an Argentine lawyer who presided over the Congress of 1816 in Tucumán, which led to the Argentine Confederation. The poem purports to give the last thoughts of Laprida, surrounded by the irregular fighters who follow the strongman and former priest Félix Aldao, on the day of his death, 22 September 1829. The beginning reads:

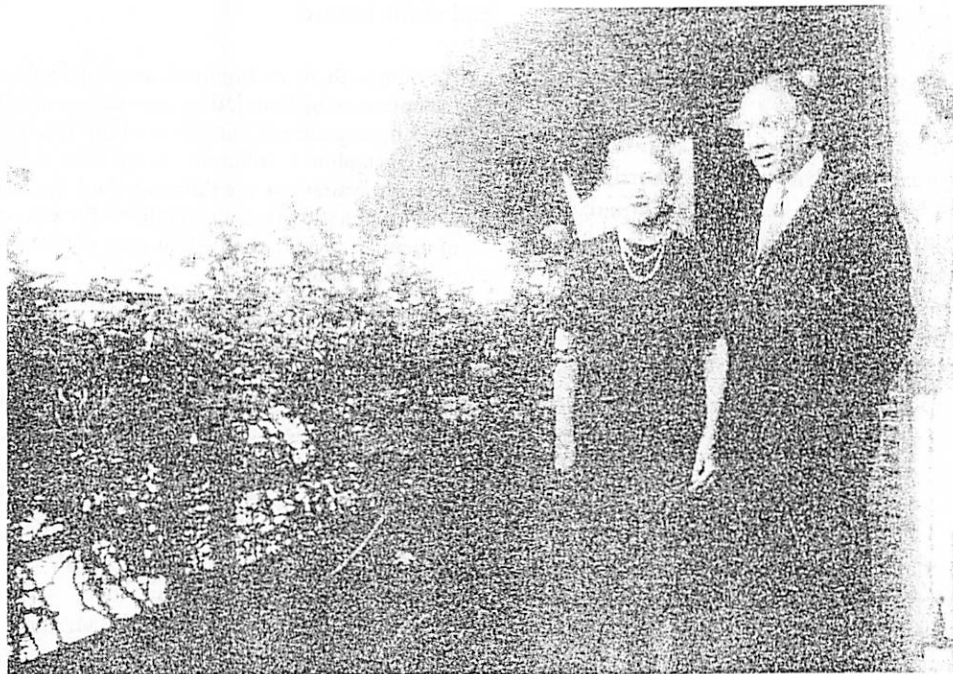
Zumban las balas en la tarde última.
Hay viento y hay cenizas en el viento,
se dispersan el día y la batalla
deforme, y la victoria es de los otros.
Vencen los bárbaros, los gauchos vencen

(Bullets whine on that last afternoon.
There is wind; and there is ash on the wind.
Now they subside, the day and the disorder
Of battle, victory goes to the others,
to the barbarians. The gauchos win).

A brilliant meditation on the dialectic of civilization and savagery (the topic of Sarmiento's *Facundo* of 1845, it also figures in his 1845 biography of Aldao), "Poema conjetural" is the story of a man of letters who finds himself unexpectedly dying on a battlefield. There is more than an echo of Don Quixote's "discourse on arms and letters" in Laprida's last thoughts, but with an interesting inversion: whereas Don Quixote argued that the career of arms was superior to that of letters, Laprida still believes in the career of letters, the choice he made years before, even if his destiny has proven his choice wrong. "Al fin me encuentro / con mi destino sudamericano" (At last I come face to face / with my destiny as a South American), he says, and goes on:

A esta ruinoso tarde me llevaba
el laberinto múltiple de pasos
que mis días tejieron desde un día
de la niñez. Al fin he descubierto
la recóndita clave de mis años,
la suerte de Francisco de Laprida,
la letra que faltaba, la perfecta
forma que supo Dios desde el principio.
En el espejo de esta noche alcanzo
mi insospechado rostro eterno . . .

(The complicated labyrinth of steps
that I have traced since one day in my childhood
led me to this disastrous afternoon.
At last I have discovered
the long-hidden secret of my life,
the destiny of Francisco de Laprida,
the missing letter, the key, the perfect form



Borges and his mother, Leonor Acevedo de Borges, on the balcony of his apartment on calle Maipú in Buenos Aires, December 1962 (Collection of Jorge and Marion Helft)

known only to God from the beginning.
In the mirror of this night I come across
my eternal face, unknown to me . . .).

The poem tells of a painful discovery, which is at the same time the discovery of a destiny. Around 1943 Borges had begun reading Dante in a serious way (his essays on Dante, collected in 1982 as *Nueve ensayos dantescos* [Nine Essays on Dante], were all published in the 1940s), and Dante's notion that a life is crystallized in its final moments, and that salvation and damnation depend on last thoughts, is as important as Browning to "Poema conjetural."

The poem ends with breakneck speed, the endecasylabic verse infused with urgency by alliteration:

Pisan mis pies la sombra de las lanzas
que me buscan. Las befas de mi muerte,
los jinetes, las crines, los caballos,
se ciernen sobre mí . . . Ya el primer golpe,
ya el duro hierro que me raja el pecho,
el íntimo cuchillo en la garganta

(My feet tread on the shadows of the lances
that point me out. The jeering at my death,
the riders, the tossing manes, the horses
loom over me . . . Now comes the first thrust,
now the harsh iron, ravaging my chest,
the knife, so intimate, opening my throat).

The swirl of lances, of horses and horsemen, the manes, the final (and "intimate") knife: there is another poetic influence here, though its importance did not reveal itself explicitly in Borges's work until sometime later. Already in *Las kenningar* (Kennings, 1933) he had begun to show an interest in the hermetic poetry of the Icelandic skalds, but his serious study of Old English and Old Norse did not begin for another twenty years. The Old Norse image of war as a "storm of swords," cited in "Las kenningar," is present in "Poema conjetural" not only in the furious movement of the scene but also in the harsh alliteration, particularly that of the *r* sounds in the next to last line, the climax of the poem.

The epigraph to *Cuaderno San Martín* years before had been drawn from a letter of Edward FitzGerald:

As to an occasional copy of verses, there are few men
who have leisure to read, and are possessed of any
music in their souls, who are not capable of versifying
on some ten or twelve occasions during their natural
lives: at a proper conjunction of the stars. There is no
harm in taking advantage of such occasions.

Borges would certainly be considered a major poet of the Spanish language even if he had only published "Poema conjetural" and a handful of other poems. A monument of historical imagination, "Poema conjetural" is a nuanced treatment of the poetic problem of

how to narrate a life (and a death) and makes brilliant use of lessons learned from Dante, Browning, and the Old English and Old Norse poets.

The 1940s were also a period of intense exploration of short prose pieces, some of which could be considered prose poems. Many of these pieces ended up collected in the "Museo" (Museum) section of the second edition of *Historia universal de la infamia* (1935; revised edition, 1954; translated as *A Universal History of Infamy*, 1972), in *El hacedor*, and in various anthologies: *Cuentos breves y extraordinarios* (Brief and Extraordinary Stories, 1955), *Manual de zoología fantástica* (Manual of Fantastic Zoology, 1957), and *El libro de los seres imaginarios* (1967; translated as *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, 1969). At the same time that Borges was publishing the stories of *Ficciones* and *El Aleph* (1949; translated as *The Aleph and Other Stories, 1933-1969, Together with Commentaries and an Autobiographical Essay*, 1970) and the essays of *Otras inquisiciones (1937-1952)* (1952; translated as *Other Inquisitions, 1937-1952*, 1964), then, he was experimenting with poetic and short prose forms.

Borges never stopped publishing poetry, however, and he collected his verse written after *Cuaderno San Martín* and prior to *El hacedor* in *El otro, el mismo* (The Other, the Self) in 1964, including "Poema conjetural" and "La noche cíclica." What is notable about the 1960 and 1964 books is the fact that in them Borges returns to traditional forms such as the sonnet and to rhyme and regular rhythmical forms. His explanation at the time was that his increasing blindness (which prevented him from reading or writing after the mid 1950s) forced him to work with meter and forms that were easy to memorize and then to dictate. The change in his poetics, however, mirrors the return to traditional forms: in "Arte poética" (*Ars Poetica*, 1958), which closes the main section of *El hacedor*, and a host of essays, talks, and interviews in the 1960s and 1970s he argues that there are few essential metaphors, and this aesthetic conservatism (accompanying his growing political conservatism in the same period) implied a radical break with his avant-garde production of the 1920s and with essays celebrating audacity in the poetic metaphor (such as the essays on metaphor of the *ultraísta* period and "Las kenningar").

The most interesting of these texts on metaphor is one of the Norton lectures, presented at Harvard in 1967-1968 and not published until 2000 as *This Craft of Verse* (when they were also issued in CD format, moving because of the antique flavor of Borges's English, his gentleness and self-deprecating humor with the audience, and his prodigious feats of memory with poetic quotations). In this talk he argues that there are few essential metaphors, and gives his usual examples from the period (for example, rivers = life, sea = death,

flowers = women), but adds that the stock of metaphors is not exhausted (or exhaustible). Instead, he asserts that there are radically different approaches that can be taken to these essential metaphors and gives a wealth of examples to prove his point. He says at the end of the lecture:

... though there are hundreds and indeed thousands of metaphors to be found, they may all be traced back to a few simple patterns. But this need not trouble us, since each metaphor is different: every time the pattern is used, the variations are different. And the second conclusion is that there are metaphors—for example, "web of men" or "whale road"—that may not be traced back to definite patterns.

Borges's point is fairly subtle: he rejects the more far-fetched metaphors that were typical of Ultraism and the other avant-garde movements, the purpose of which was to surprise the reader, but does not hold strictly to the idea that the number of essential metaphors is limited. In addition, in celebrating "new variations of the major trends" he makes explicit an important element of his ideas about literature in general, that repetition often implies divergence. This idea, which is at the heart of the 1939 story "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" (Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*) and of the 1940 story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," opens up rich veins for poetic exploration.

"Arte poética," after rehearsing some of the important metaphors (river = time, dreams = death, day = life), argues that poetry "es inmortal y pobre" (is immortal and poor) and then concludes:

Cuentan que Ulises, harto de prodigios
Lloró de amor al divisar su Itaca
Verde y humilde. El arte es esa Itaca
De verde eternidad, no de prodigios.

También es como el río interminable
Que pasa y queda y es cristal de un mismo
Heráclito inconstante, que es el mismo
Y es otro, como el río interminable

(They say that Ulysses, sated with marvels,
Wept tears of love at the sight of his Ithaca,
Green and humble. Art is that Ithaca
Of green eternity, not of marvels.

It is also like the river with no end
That flows and remains and is the mirror of one same
Inconstant Heraclitus, who is the same
And is another, like the river with no end).

The point here seems to be the same as in the Norton lecture of a few years later, that the variations are as important as the themes. "Prodigios" is



Borges at the University of Oklahoma, 1969 (from Lowell Dunham and Ivar Ivask, eds., *The Cardinal Points of Borges*, 1971)

in the same register as “asombro” (astonishment) and “sorpresa” (surprise), literary values that Borges had discarded in the 1920s. Borges celebrates here, as at Harvard, the “interminable” possibilities of poetry, and central to that endless quality are the always new possibilities for metaphor.

Another important poem in *El hacedor* is “El otro tigre” (The Other Tiger), a 1959 poem that reflects on the complex relationship between reality and representation. The “real” tiger in the poem, “El verdadero, el de caliente sangre” (the real one, the hot-blooded one), is a retreating mirage, impossible to imagine without the intervention of prior images of it, impossible to evoke in language without that fact turning it into a creature of artifice:

... ya el hecho de nombrarlo
Y de conjeturar su circunstancia
Lo hace ficción del arte y no criatura
Viviente de las que andan por la tierra

(... but yet, the act of naming it, of guessing
What is its nature and its circumstance
Creates a fiction, not a living creature,
Not one of those that prowl on the earth).

The poem ends with a renewed (but impossible) quest for “El otro tigre, el que no está en el verso” (the other tiger, the one not in this poem). Reality is in constant flight, out of the reach of language.

El hacedor consists largely of sonnets, rhymed quatrains, and verse in regular syllabic forms such as the endecasyllable. This change is less abrupt than it may seem, since *Cuaderno San Martín* and some poems in the later period (including “La noche cíclica” and “Poema conjetural”) also use traditional poetic forms. Within the reshaping of Borges’s poetics, however, the lesser use of free verse and the greater use of regular forms is significant, since it represents part of a larger quest for new possibilities within conventional forms. This shift is true not only of the poetry but also of Borges’s explorations of the detective story, for instance. The tight bounds of the sonnet form, as an illustration, proved rife with new possibilities for a philosophical poetry, for example, “Ajedrez” (Chess), and for portrait poems, such as “Susana Soca,” which abound in Borges’s subsequent books.

“Poema de los dones” (Poem of the Gifts), written after the fall of Juan Domingo Perón in 1955, commemorates two simultaneous events: the naming of

Borges as director of the National Library (a post he held for fifteen years) and his blindness (which was not absolute but prevented him from reading or writing after this date). The irony Borges found in this coincidence is celebrated in the first stanza:

Nadie rebaje a lágrima o reproche
Esta declaración de la maestría
De Dios, que con magnífica ironía
Me dio a la vez los libros y la noche

(No one should read self-pity or reproach
Into this statement of the majesty
Of God, who with such splendid irony
Granted me books and blindness at one touch).

Blindness is one of the principal subjects also of *Elogio de la sombra* (1969; translated as *In Praise of Darkness*, 1974), which, like *El hacedor*, combines poems and short prose. Besides the title poem of this book, blindness haunts several poems, including those on James Joyce (as well as "On His Blindness," on John Milton, in *El oro de los tigres* [1972; translated as *The Gold of the Tigers: Selected Later Poems*, 1977]). "Elogio de la sombra" declares:

Siempre en mi vida fueron demasiadas cosas;
Demócrito de Abdera se arrancó los ojos para pensar;
el tiempo ha sido mi Demócrito.
Esta penumbra es lenta y no duele;
fluye por un manso declive
y se parece a la eternidad

(In my life there were always too many things.
Democritus of Abdera plucked out his eyes in order to
think:

Time has been my Democritus.
This penumbra is slow and does not pain me;
it flows down a gentle slope,
resembling eternity).

Literature itself is reduced to those texts that are reread and reshaped in memory:

De las generaciones de los textos que hay en la tierra
sólo habré leído unos pocos,
los que sigo leyendo en la memoria,
leyendo y transformando

(Of the generations of texts on earth
I will have read only a few—
the ones that I keep reading in my memory,
reading and transforming).

And, like Laprida in "Poema conjetural," this encounter with destiny promises important insight about these "many things":

Ahora puedo olvidarlas. Llego a mi centro,
a mi álgebra y mi clave,
a mi espejo.
Pronto sabré quien soy

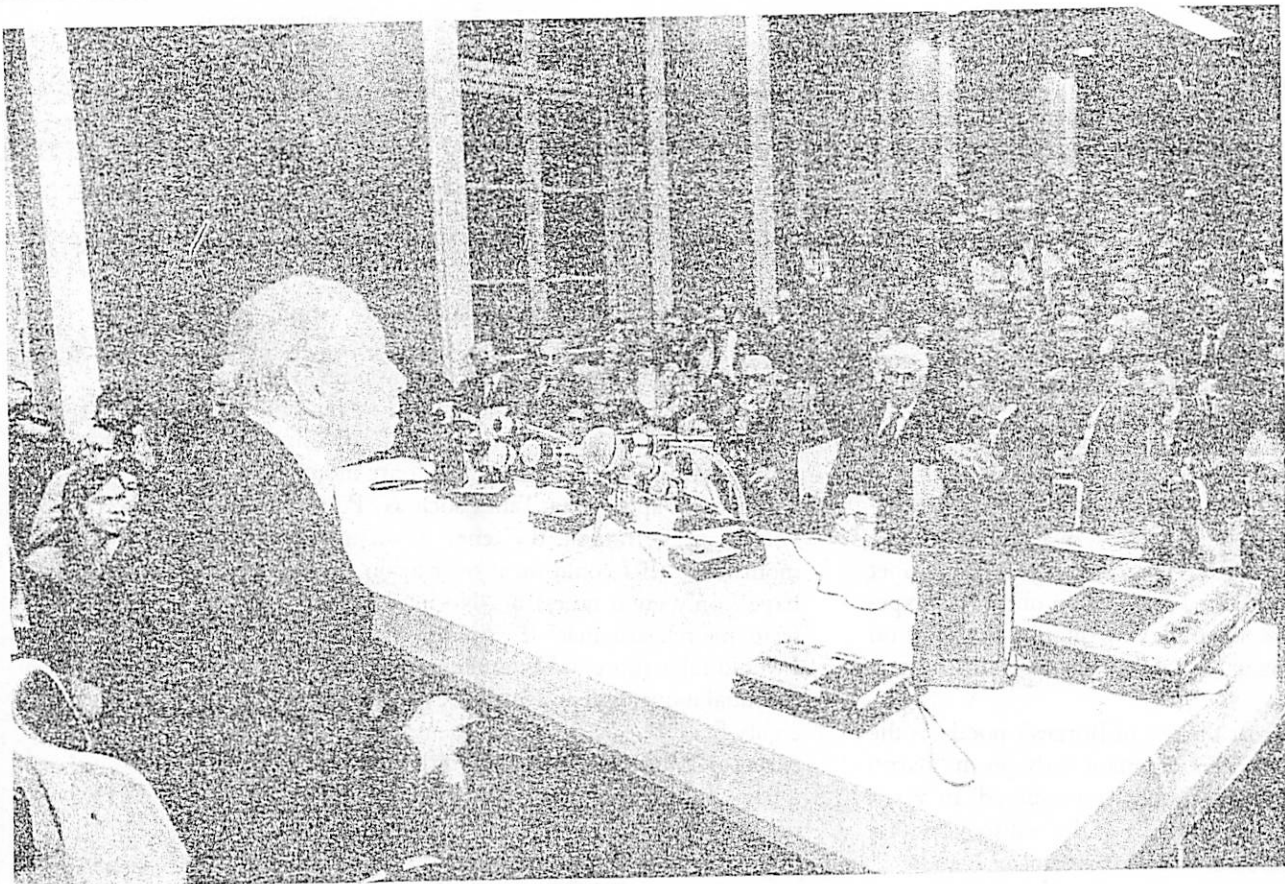
(Now I can forget them. I reach my center,
my algebra and my key,
my mirror.
Soon I will know who I am).

Besides the theme of blindness, *Elogio de la sombra* takes on the themes of old age and ethics, as Borges states in the preface. It is also typical of the last phase of his poetry—the books *El oro de los tigres*, *La rosa profunda* (The Unending Rose, 1975; translated in part in *The Gold of the Tigers: Selected Later Poems*), *La moneda de hierro* (The Iron Coin, 1976), *Historia de la noche* (The History of the Night, 1977), *La cifra* (The Limit, 1981), and *Los conjurados* (The Conspirators, 1985)—in mixing free verse and regular poetic forms (and sometimes short prose forms also) and in a preference for an accumulation of simple images (a process that is more dependent on metonymy than on metaphor). "Las cosas" (Things), from *Elogio de la sombra*, is a good example:

Notas que no leerán los pocos días
Que me quedan, los naipes y el tablero,
Un libro y en sus páginas la ajada
Violeta, monumento de una tarde
Sin duda inolvidable y ya olvidada,
El rojo espejo occidental en que arde
Una ilusoria aurora. ¡Cuántas cosas,
Limas, umbrales, atlas, copas, clavos,
Nos sirven como tácitos esclavos,
Ciegas y extrañamente sigilosas!
Durarán más allá de nuestro olvido;
No sabrán nunca que nos hemos ido

(The few days left to me will not find time
To read, the deck of cards, the tabletop,
A book and crushed in its pages the withered
Violet, monument to an afternoon
Undoubtedly unforgettable, now forgotten,
The mirror in the west where a red sunrise
Blazed its illusion. How many things,
Files, doorsills, atlases, wine glasses, nails,
Serve us like slaves who never say a word,
Blind and so mysteriously reserved.
They will endure beyond our vanishing;
And they will never know that we have gone).

Already in 1969 Borges took as his poetic task a summing up of his life. In the seventeen years that remained, he often made lists like the one in "Las cosas," lists of things, of emotions, of experiences, of friends, of books. The pathos of these lists is that they evoke a whole that is irremediably lost, experiences never fully lived or mostly forgotten. The key poem



Borges in Paris for his induction into the Legion d'honneur, January 1983 (Frank Spooner Pictures)

in this new poetics of abundance and loss is "Límites" (Limits, 1958) in *El hacedor*, ascribed to the apocryphal Uruguayan poet Julio Platero Haedo and his imaginary book from 1923 (the same year as *Fervor de Buenos Aires*):

Hay una línea de Verlaine que no volveré a recordar.
 Hay una calle próxima que está vedada a mis pasos.
 Hay un espejo que me ha visto por última vez,
 Hay una puerta que he cerrado hasta el fin del mundo
 Entre los libros de mi biblioteca (estoy viéndolos)
 Hay alguno que ya nunca abriré.
 Este verano cumpliré cincuenta años;
 La muerte me desgasta, incesante

(There is a line by Verlaine that I will not remember again.
 There is a street nearby that is off limits to my feet.
 There is a mirror that has seen me for the last time.
 There is a door I have closed until the end of the world.
 Among the books in my library [I'm looking at them now]
 Are some I will never open.
 This summer I will be fifty years old.
 Death is using me up, relentlessly).

In this 1958 poem Borges (who was fifty-eight or fifty-nine at the time) masquerades as an imaginary poet writing a poem of middle age and a sense of limits in the year that his younger self published the enthusiastic poems of discovery of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. The accumulation of things and sensations, dominant in the poems of his old age, is prefigured in the poem by the imaginary Haedo.

A later poem of a similar kind is "Things That Might Have Been" (title originally in English) in *Historia de la noche*:

Pienso en las cosas que pudieron ser y no fueron.
 El tratado de mitología sajona que Beda no escribió.
 La obra inconcebible que a Dante le fue dada acaso
 entrever,
 Ya corregido el último verso de la Comedia.
 La historia sin la tarde de la Cruz y la tarde de la cicuta.
 La historia sin el rostro de Helena.
 El hombre sin los ojos, que nos han deparado la luna.
 En las tres jornadas de Gettysburg la victoria del Sur.
 El amor que no compartimos.
 El dilatado imperio que los Vikings no quisieron fundar.
 El orbe sin la rueda o sin la rosa.

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El ave fabulosa de Irlanda, que está en dos lugares a un tiempo.
El hijo que no tuve

(I think about things that might have been and never were.
The treatise on Saxon myths that Bede omitted to write.
The inconceivable work that Dante may have glimpsed
As soon as he corrected the Comedy's last verse.
History without two afternoons: that of the hemlock, that
of the Cross.

History without Helen's face.
Man without the eyes that have granted us the moon.
Over three Gettysburg days, the victory of the South.
The love we never shared.
The vast empire the Vikings declined to found.
The globe without the wheel, or without the rose.

.....
The fabled Irish bird which alights in two places at once.
The child I never had).

This sense of loss, of pathos, is at the same time an expression of gratitude for the things that the poet had or has. A backhanded celebration of human experience, this poem is a complex meditation not only on the world that might have been but also on the one that is.

One of the great themes of Borges's poetry is the discovery of a world. The important early poem "Barrio reconquistado" (Neighborhood Reconquered) in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, for instance, tells of the rediscovery of a familiar neighborhood after a thunderstorm. It ends:

nos echamos a caminar por las calles
como quien recorre una recuperada heredad,
y en los cristales hubo generosidades de sol
y en las hojas lucientes que ilustran la arboleda
dijo su temblorosa inmortalidad el estío

(we streamed out to walk through the streets
like someone who finds his way through a property he has
recovered
and in the windows there were generosityes of sun
and on the glowing leaves that illustrate the trees
summer spoke its trembling immortality).

In Borges's Norton lectures one of the finest passages concerns John Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (1816), where he comments at length on the word *first* in the title. The thirst for fresh experience animates many of the poems, even those on blindness ("Poema de los dones" and the poems on Milton) and on death ("El general Quiroga va en coche al muere," "Isidoro Acevedo," and many later poems). The Whitmanian tone of his early "Himno del mar" is recaptured in the selections from *Leaves of Grass* (1855) that he translated as *Hojas de hierba* with his wife, Elsa Astete, in 1969 (they were married in 1967 and separated in

1970). Whitman's bold poetry of a New World has unexpected echoes even in the later Borges.

Amusingly, one of Borges's best-known poems is not by him at all. As shown in great detail by Iván Almeida, the apocryphal poem "Instantes" (Moments), often attributed to Borges in television commercials and other popular media, is derived from a spiritual New Age text that seems to have been written by one Nadine Stair. In "Límites" and "Things That Might Have Been" Borges uses some of the same tropes as "Instantes," but those poems are about the things that he did not do in his life—father a son, for example, or be happy—rather than the things that he did. "Instantes," though familiar drivel, is a fascinating piece of apocrypha, amusing because it is attributed to the author of "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote," "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," and other texts that are intimately concerned with apocrypha. Lines such as "Pero si pudiera volver atrás trataría de tener / solamente buenos momentos" (If I could do it over again I would try to have / only good times) or "No intentaría ser tan perfecto, me relajaría más" (I wouldn't try to be so perfect, I would relax more) take familiar ideas from the human potential movement and attribute them to Borges at age eighty-five. The apocryphal poem infuriated Borges's executor, María Kodama (whom he married by proxy a few weeks before his death of liver cancer in Geneva on 14 June 1986), and has given Almeida an occasion for a rigorous parody of philological procedures. In that sense "Instantes" deserves attention as the most ridiculous piece of Borges apocrypha.

Some of the editions of Jorge Luis Borges's *Obra poética* (that of 1964, for instance) include the following epigraph taken from a letter by Robert Louis Stevenson: "I do not set up to be a poet. Only an all-round literary man: a man who talks, not one who sings. . . . Excuse this apology; but I don't like to come before people who have a note of song, and let it be supposed I do not know the difference." In Borges's use of this epigraph there is a trace of false modesty. Clearly he did set up to be a poet, and poetry is a dominant part of his literary production in the 1920s and from 1960 to the end of his life in 1986. At the same time, the poetry, essays, reviews, and stories are bound together by strong thematic links. Borges's poetics (of prose as well as of poetry) evolves in parallel form across the decades of his work, with bold explorations in a variety of genres, one or two of which were dominant at a time but never at the expense of the others.

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Though many of Jorge Luis Borges's manuscripts seem not to have survived, some papers are collected at the Fundación San Telmo, Buenos Aires.