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Borges, the poem and the book:
a study of
Historia de la noche
and La cifra

Submitted for the degree of MLitt



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Abbreviations for titles of Borges' works used in the notes

- Atlas = Atlas London: Viking Press, 1986.
- BO = Borges oral Barcelona: Bruguera, 1980.
- LaC = La cifra Madrid: Alianza / Emecé, 1981.
- LosC = Los conjurados Madrid: Alianza, 1985.
- OCEC = Obras completas en colaboración (2 vols) Madrid: Alianza Tres/
Emecé, 1981 (vol 1), 1983 (vol 2)
- OP = Obra poética 1923 - 1977 Madrid: Alianza Tres / Emecé, 1983.
- PC = Prosa completa (2 vols) Barcelona: Bruguera, 1980.
- SN = Siete noches Madrid: FCE, 1980.

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Introduction

The first outstanding figure of the twentieth century, arguably the most important of all in Latin America, and certainly the best known outside, is Jorge Luis Borges. ¹

Jorge Luis Borges is undeniably the most significant writer to have emerged in Latin America. His fame and popularity, among both critics and readers, stems from his highly cultivated literary style. The salient feature of this style is the precision with which he manipulated language. This precision, which led him to use plain words rather than striking ones, was paralleled by the thematic precision which led him to select a small number of themes. ² These few themes, however, he made his own: labyrinths, eternity, the paradoxes of philosophy, the problematic nature of the universe and literature itself. The latter is perhaps the major theme in Borges' work. For this reason, any study of Borges is a study of literature itself.

When we read Borges, we think about literature. This makes what the reader experiences as he reads Borges different from what he would experience when reading another author. In this thesis I have attempted to elucidate what this experience is. It occurs when the reader interprets, or attempts to interpret, the text. Because Borges makes continual use of the self-conscious author technique, both Borges the man, of whom the informed reader will have a certain amount of information ³, and Borges' poetic persona intervene in this

process. This intervention adds the perspective given by these two vast and perhaps infinite bodies of information to the interpretative process and effectively blocks any chance of interpretation. A major preoccupation in Borges' texts is that every reading of a text produces a new text: the process of interpretation can never end. This postponement of interpretation bears similarity to Borges' famous definition of the aesthetic event, 'esta inminencia de una revelación, que no se produce' ⁴, and is, in sum, the Borges experience. It is this factor that sets Borges apart from other writers: he has created a special type of reading, and, in doing so, a special type of reader.

A vast quantity of material about Borges' work has been published. ⁵ Almost all of the full length studies on his work, however, examine his prose writing. Far fewer critics have studied his poetic work. Yet Borges always saw himself primarily as a poet and in his later years devoted himself almost exclusively to poetic writing. To date, there have been four full length studies of the poetry.

The first was Cleon Wade Capsas' 'The poetry of Jorge Luis Borges 1923 - 1963', a PhD thesis (1964): this studied the poetry from before Fervor de Buenos Aires to El hacedor, and was written before Borges' prose became widely read and written about in North America. ⁶ Capsas links the poetry to contemporary Argentine politics and social history. In his discussion of the books of poems he divides the poems into groups based on themes. Capsas' study, which is usually overlooked by later critics, includes an interview between the author and the poet, and reproduces some poems which had not been published in book form at the time.

Capsas wrote his study at a time when Borges' poetry had long been ignored by critics, and perhaps it was for this reason that he wrote:

... we can say that of his verse as a whole, his later poetry will generate more interest. 7

Capsas concluded his study with the idea that

Whatever value there is in studying Borges' poetry comes from the verse itself. 8

Then came Zunilda Gertel's Borges y su retorno a la poesía in 1968, which covered the same ground. 9 This study had as its central theme the idea that Borges' metaphysics found better expression in poetry than in prose. The longest and most successful section of this study is the chapter entitled 'La teoría poética de Borges' where she studies the poet's poetic theory as expounded in his essays. Paul Cheselka sums up the criticism on this work:

...Gertel devotes only one chapter - "Función de los principios poéticos en el verso" - to actual study of Borges' poems. Most of this chapter is devoted to Borges' first three poetry collections, and to analysing the poems Borges wrote during his so-called "lyrical hiatus" when he was supposedly not writing very much poetry; only a few scant pages deal with the new poems contained in El hacedor and Obra poética 1923 - 1964. Gertel's arguments are weakened by the fact that of the fifty-eight "new" poems contained in these two works, she only mentions or attempts an analysis of five texts to illustrate and to prove her basic premise: that Borges' "new" poetry is somehow superior to his previous work because of his discovery of his "personal symbol". Gertel fails to provide convincing proof to show how the mere fact of possessing a "personal symbol" makes Borges' poetry any better than it was before. In

addition, it is open to debate whether this "personal symbol" came to the forefront in the late 1950's as Gertel maintains, or if it is already present in Borges' poems back in the 1920's. ¹⁰

Gertel's work is valuable as a summary of the poetic theory expounded by the poet in his prose writing, and provides many insights into his poetry, but as with Guillermo Sucre's Borges el poeta, a detailed and thorough examination of the poetry is absent.

One of the principal ideas of Gertel's theory is the idea of the 'hiato lírico':

Con la publicación de Cuaderno San Martín, último libro en el cual persisten elementos ultraístas, se inicia la etapa de detención de la poesía borgiana. Durante un lapso de trece años el hiato lírico es absolutamente notorio, ya que el autor no vuelve a publicar poesías reunidas en libros. ¹¹

It is ironic that Gertel sees the publication of books as evidence of the poet's creative activity: in her analyses of the poetry itself she ignores the way that the poems fit together into books. She discusses individual poems, without considering their natural context, which is their placing in the individual volumes.

The third full length study was Guillermo Sucre's Borges el poeta (1967), which extended in a later edition (1972) to take in the poetry up until Elogio de la sombra. ¹² The study is of a fairly general nature, bringing in anecdotes and biography. As such, it gives a certain amount of perspective to the reader new to Borges, and is a work perhaps best seen as an introduction to the subject rather than

as a detailed study of a clearly defined field. About this work Gertel commented:

Sucre ilustra su punto de vista crítico con numerosas citas de versos, si bien no se detiene en el análisis intrínseco de los poemas. ¹³

While Donald Yates added, in agreement:

El libro de Sucre es el primero en acometer un extenso examen del desarrollo de Borges como poeta. Si su estudio es inteligente, elaborado con ideas personales y simpatía, carece por otro lado de un método crítico formal y, a fin de cuentas, no revela ningún aspecto nuevo de la poesía de Borges, ninguna interpretación original del espíritu poético del autor. ¹⁴

Perhaps the most unsatisfactory aspect of Sucre's work is the lack of footnotes and the way in which he frequently quotes the poet without stating the origin of the words.

All these books dealt with what might be termed Borges' earlier poetry; they did, however, study all the poetry by Borges available at the time. The gap between the publication of these studies and the next one, Paul Cheselka's The Poetry and Poetics of Jorge Luis Borges (1987) ¹⁵, might lead the reader to expect that in this later work, the great amount of poetry written by Borges since Elogio de la sombra might be examined. It is not.

Cheselka's study is worthy of attention in that, although it covers only the poems in Obra poética 1923 - 1964 and excludes the poetry written after 1964, it does so systematically. This study does not seek to impose a theory on the poetry, as does Gertel's, nor does

it suffer from the lack of a systematic approach as does Sucre's study. It also has the advantage of being written after the 'boom' in Borges criticism, which Capsas' 1964 study, roughly comparable with Cheselka's in approach, did not.

It is interesting, therefore, to note that Cheselka approaches Borges' books in the same way as Capsas, who is not mentioned in the former's work. In his introduction, Cheselka states his approach:

The poems from each segment of Borges' poetic trajectory are divided into thematic groups and then methodically analysed. ¹⁶

Although Cheselka's study investigates the 'poética' of the poet more thoroughly than does Capsas, both reach similar conclusions. Capsas, as we have seen, concludes that

Whatever value there is in studying Borges' poetry comes from the verse itself. ¹⁷

Cheselka concludes that

In summary, Borges' poetry is best described as being "essential poetry" deeply rooted in man's mythical origins; or as Borges tells us: "For myth is at the beginning of literature, and also at its end." Finally, in Verlaine's words, which Borges was fond of repeating, and which have now become an immortal cliché: "Et tout le reste est littérature." ¹⁸

Both studies examine more or less the same material also.

The fact that even the latest full length study, published in

1987, chooses to ignore the post 1964 poetry might suggest that the poetry produced after 1964 was somehow of poorer quality; and yet a critic as acclaimed as Jaime Alazraki has maintained that the later poetry is among Borges' best. ¹⁹

There is clearly a gap in the literature on Borges for a full length study on his later poetry. Cheselka himself states:

The substantial number of poems that Borges has written after 1964 will require yet another full-length study to be undertaken in the future either by this or some other critic. ²⁰

The present study attempts to fill that gap in part.

Clearly the later poetry of Borges has been neglected. But not just the later poetry; a whole aspect of Borges' poetic writing has been ignored by critics. Even a superficial reading of many of Borges' books of poems reveals more than a mere collection of poems. The poems fall into groups and knit together into the book as a whole. This aspect of Borges' writing has never been investigated in depth; this study, by limiting itself to a relatively narrow area, two volumes, seeks to investigate this phenomenon. Like Cheselka's study, this one

does not pretend to travel all the paths or to "explain" Borges' poetry; its purpose is to help the reader *experience* the texts. ²¹

Part of that "experience", and one part which Cheselka ignores, is the sense of unity which the reader finds in Borges' books of poems. In Borges' books, poems form into clusters. These clusters, together

with the figure of the poet as he appears in the prologue and throughout the poems, affect our reading. As we read, not only the individual poems but also the book takes on its shape. The book becomes an expressive device, a kind of extended poem. Reviewing a Silvina Bullrich novel in 1944, Borges wrote of his own work:

Bajo la pluma de J.L.B. (por ejemplo), un argumento así, de tipo ingenioso, hubiera sido sujetado a un férreo sistema de simetrías, de coincidencias y de contrastes. ²²

Although Borges probably refers to his prose work here, it is his use of a 'sistema de simetrías, de coincidencias y de contrastes' that leads the reader of La cifra and Historia de la noche to the structure of the books.

In order to study Borges' use of the book of poems as an expressive unit, one could perhaps choose any of his volumes. The two books to be examined in this thesis, Historia de la noche and La cifra, were the last books Borges had written when this study began in 1984. They are among the poet's most 'difficult' work, complex and abstract, and are books which, ironically, have received little critical attention. This in itself justifies a study of these volumes. In addition to this, both books illustrate Borges' use of the book as an expressive device well, as they utilize it in different ways.

How then do we approach Historia de la noche and La cifra? As Paul Cheselka rightly states,

...the critic of Borges' poetry has the privilege of being able to study a major portion of an internationally famous

author's work without the constraints imposed by the existence of a vigorous critical tradition. ²³

No methodology has been established to examine Borges' books of poems as expressive units. In order to do carry out a study of this topic, one must not only examine the individual poems but also the relationships between them.

Borges' poetics are based on contextualization. The most frequent poetic device used by Borges is enumeration. Many of his poems are formed by lists of poetic images. These lists are ordered; this emphasizes images, but more importantly, each image is refined by the images which precede and follow it, as well as by similar or contrasting images in the poem. The context of the image, to a great extent, defines the image.

The poetic images, in turn, create the poem. Each poem creates or modifies the poems which surround it. The poems are refined and defined in their context. The resulting matrix of ideas, images and poems creates the book. The book itself is modified and refined in the reader's mind by the conscious intervention of Borges in his prologues, epilogues, notes and dedications. By this intervention, the poet presents the poems to, and creates a frame of reference for, the reader.

In order to facilitate the study of the two books as a whole, I have divided the poems into groups and kept the poems in their published order. This maintains the natural context of the poems. These groups came about as a result of reading the text and finding where the natural breaks or pivotal points in the text seemed to

occur: 'simetrías', 'coincidencias' and 'contrastes'. In the case of Historia de la noche, there are short envois at the foot of the seventh, thirteenth, twenty-third and thirtieth poems. This use of a specific poetic form divides up and punctuates the text for the reader; the individual envois epitomize the thematic flow of the poems which lead up to them. The final poem, taking the name of the volume, sums up the discussion contained in the volume.

In the case of La cifra, a much longer and intricate work, the book's form is not so overt. A careful reading, however, reveals that elements of the first seven poems are mirrored in the second seven. This gives us two groups. Another five groups follow these: they depend on the development of theme for their unity. Many of the poems have close connections with poems outwith the groups into which they fall. This gives the volume a rather circular, infinite feel which mirrors the work's central theme of elusiveness and ambiguity. Again, as with Historia de la noche, the final poem takes the name of the book itself and sums up the thematic content of the volume.

I have tried to approach the texts in a way which is suggested by the books themselves: Borges, the poem and the book. The starting point for any study of Borges' books of poetry has to be Borges, the self-conscious author who sets the stage in his prologues and 'inscripciones' for the texts that follow. The poems are set among the other poems: they join up, modify each other and knit together to form the book when they are read. This study seeks to examine not only how the poems, but also the books, function as expressive units.

Notes

¹ Peter Standish. El túnel by Ernesto Sábato London: Harrap, 1980 p. vi.

² See OP p. 315: 'El tiempo me ha enseñado algunas astucias: . . . preferir las palabras habituales a las palabras asombrosas...'

³ See OP pp. 469 - 470: 'Puedo consentirme algunos caprichos, ya que no me juzgarán por el texto sino por la imagen indefinida pero suficientemente precisa que se tiene de mí.'

⁴ PC II p. 133.

⁵ See William David Foster. Jorge Luis Borges - an Annotated Primary and Secondary Bibliography. New York: Garland, 1984 for the most up to date account of work on Borges.

⁶ Cleon Wade Capsas. 'The poetry of Jorge Luis Borges 1923 - 1963'. PhD dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1964.

⁷ Capsas, op. cit., p. 174.

⁸ Capsas, op. cit., p. 180.

⁹ Zunilda Gertel. Borges y su retorno a la poesía. New York: The University of Iowa and Las Américas Publishing Company, 1967.

¹⁰ Paul Cheselka. The Poetry and Poetics of Jorge Luis Borges. New York: Peter Lang, 1987: pp. 3 - 4.

¹¹ Gertel, op. cit., p. 122.

¹² Guillermo Sucre. Borges el poeta. Caracas: Monte Ávila Editores, 1967.

- 13 Gertel, op. cit., p. 40.
- 14 Donald A. Yates. 'Cinco años de crítica borgiana: 13 libros nuevos'. In Jaime Alazraki, ed. Jorge Luis Borges: El escritor y la crítica Madrid: Taurus Ediciones, 1976: p. 298.
- 15 Cheselka, op. cit..
- 16 Cheselka, op. cit., p. 5.
- 17 Capsas, op. cit., p. 180.
- 18 Cheselka, op. cit., p. 194.
- 19 See especially three articles by Jaime Alazraki: 'Borges o el difícil oficio de la intimidad: reflexiones sobre su poesía más reciente' (Revista Iberoamericana nos 100 - 101 [1977], pp. 449 - 46), 'Language as a musical organism; Borges' recent poetry' (Review 28 [1981] pp. 60 - 65) and 'Enumerations as evocations: on the use of a device in Borges' latest poetry' (in Cortínez ed., Borges the Poet, Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 1986: pp. 149 - 160).
- 20 Cheselka, op. cit., p. 4.
- 21 Cheselka, op. cit., p. 5.
- 22 JL Borges. Review of Silvina Bullrich La redoma del primer ángel. Sur 111 (1944) pp. 74 - 76: see p. 74.
- 23 Cheselka, op. cit., p. 4.

Introduction:
the form of
Historia de la noche

The critical reaction to Historia de la noche was varied. Of serious work on the book, two texts deserve attention: Jaime Alazraki's 'Language as a musical organism: Borges' recent poetry' ¹ and David Lagmanovich's review of the book. ² Alazraki's article is favourable to Historia de la noche: he discusses it in order to investigate the increasing sense of serenity and frankness in the poet's work, which began with the sonnet '1964' in that year and which he sees as a key in the poet's later work:

Two elements set Historia de la noche apart from his previous collections: a restrained celebration of love, and a serene acceptance of everything life brings. ³

Alazraki writes of how these themes appear in the book. Historia de la noche epitomizes this trend and is a high point in the career of the poet because of this. Alazraki's concern is stylistic rather than formal; he examines the content of the poems rather than the content of the book as an expressive unit.

Lagmanovich feels that Historia de la noche is justified by the inclusion of a few poems of high quality, but that the book is essentially not an expressive unit, but a package, a commercial

necessity. He believes it is a response to the demand for more 'product' from Borges' publishers: he reminds us that the book was 'el tercero en tres años', and argues that Borges must have published the book as a result of 'la presión de los editores por nuevos productos de la misma marca ya consagrada'. ⁴ In his article, therefore, he addresses himself to the idea of the book as unit; he feels that rather than being a carefully balanced and crafted volume, it is cobbled together. However, because Borges is presented as the author of a *book*, Lagmanovich considers whether the book is a unity: 'Vale decir en qué medida estamos frente a un *libro* y no a un conjunto de poemas. Porque el libro es una unidad ideal cuyas dimensiones no son sólo las físicas: tantas páginas, tantos poemas.' He concludes:

Ahora bien: esa unidad que buscamos ("la celeste unidad que presupones", sopla una cita del pasado) no la encontraremos en este libro de Borges. ⁵

On even a superficial reading, however, the book seems to possess a coherence. This is created by three sections where the poet appears as the conscious author and directs the reader: the 'Inscripción' and the 'Epílogo' which give outline to the book, and the notes which serve as a supplement to what is contained in it. With an introduction, conclusion and appendix, *ergo* there must be a book, an expressive unit. But perhaps more important, for the internal coherence of the work, is the use throughout the book of envois, a device which punctuates the poems and provides the reader with pauses for thought. These envois, at the foot of the seventh, thirteenth, twenty-third and thirtieth poems, seem to epitomize what has happened

In the poems since the previous envoi (or in the first case since the 'Inscripción'). The envois divide the poems into groups. In addition to this, the final poem also has an envoi. Each envoi has one line more than the previous one, with the exception of the final poem, which has a two line envoi; this recalls the first envoi, also of two lines, and suggests a return to the beginning of the book. In the pauses created after these poems, the epigrammatic envois point the reader to interpretations, and towards the next group of poems.

These structural devices assist in creating the illusion that what we are reading is a 'libro' and not just 'tantas páginas, tantos poemas', as Lagmanovich claims. ⁶ In the 'Inscripción', while dedicating the book to María Kodama, the poet leads the reader immediately into the poetic world of Historia de la noche; the 'Epílogo' rounds off the work. Both these texts assist in transforming the poems which have been - or are about to be - read into a single work. The following study attempts to illuminate this idea.

Notes

¹ Jaime Alazraki 'Language as a musical organism: Borges' recent poetry' Review 28 (1981) pp. 60 - 65.

² David Lagmanovich. Review of Jorge Luis Borges Historia de la noche Revista Iberoamericana 45 (1979): pp. 706 - 710.

³ Alazraki, op. cit., p. 62.

⁴ Lagmanovich, op. cit., p. 706

⁵ Lagmanovich, op. cit., p. 707

⁶ Lagmanovich, op. cit., p. 706

The 'Inscripción'

In the title of Historia de la noche, there is both a phenomenon (the night) and man's reactions to it (history, fiction). This duality is developed in the 'Inscripción', where the reader makes his first contact with the text of Historia de la noche.¹ By means of a sequence of poetic images, Borges eases the reader into a poetic frame of reference.

The 'Inscripción' is characterized by images of vastness:

los grandes mares
el inexplorado universo
los versos que no nos encontraron (su número es
el número de la arena)

The atmosphere created by these images is heightened by the summing up of the images mentioned in the 'Inscripción' as

cosas dispares - meras figuraciones y
facetas de una sola cosa infinita

where we have the contrast between the attributes of the universe, which are perceivable, and the universe itself, so vast as to be, as Borges so often writes, 'inconcebible'. All things are both 'cosas dispares' and parts of 'una sola cosa infinita'.

With his perception, man has increased the number of elements in the universe. We find 'los grandes mares del mundo' beside 'los

'grandes mares del atlas', their idealized, fictionalized form. Not only has man created concepts out of phenomena, he has converted these into books, which then give rise to new and different perceptions in each reader.

The next image is that of three historically important rivers; water and islands are recurring images in the 'Inscripción', and water is frequently a metaphor for time in Borges. It is also a frequent metaphor of mirrors, repetition and the increasing complication of the universe by our perceptions. We then begin to read of Norse culture, one of Borges' obsessions, and one in which María Kodama, to whom the book is dedicated, is involved. She attended his early seminars on Anglosaxon literature: ²

Por las raíces de un lenguaje de hierro. Por una pira
sobre un promontorio del Báltico, *helmum behongen*.

While these images are of history and culture, they are essentially literary ones which Borges has found in books. The mention of two words in the original Anglosaxon reflects Borges' interest in the sound of words in different languages, as does the phrase 'lenguaje de hierro'. 'Helmum behongen' means 'exornada de yelmos'. ³ As this does not seem to have any connection with the other images (other than if we consider the passage to be an enumeration around the theme of Norse culture), it seems that the sound and look of an Anglosaxon word concern us here. As the semantic content of the words seems scarcely relevant, their only justification is their form, and it is on this level that the phrase functions here. It is a symbol of a linguistic

mythology. The very look and sound of the words conjure up an image.

From the linguistic theme, containing an image of death, 'una pira', evoking the idea of a dead language which found an afterlife in literature, Borges moves on to talk about the Vikings' exploratory travels:

Por los noruegos que atraviesan el claro río, en alto
los escudos. Por una nave de Noruega, que mis ojos
no vieron. Por una vieja piedra del Althing.

The reader thinks about the Vikings discovering America and Iceland. Again we have the idea of the book as a way of 'seeing' far off events through second hand perceptions. As do the mentions of geographical names, the mention of the Althing ties the vision of the world and of history found in books to the reader's vision of the world. At the same time, the stone is 'vieja', from the past. The next image is also of the past, of a remote, ancient form of literature, the kenningâr:

Por una curiosa isla de cisnes.

In his essay on the kenningâr, Borges writes that 'tierra del cisne' was an icelandic metaphor for the sea. † The present phrase could be a variant of this or it could refer to the boats already mentioned, in which the Norsemen crossed the Atlantic. This leads to the next line,

Por un gato en Manhattan.

Manhattan is perhaps the ultimate image of the New World, and is linked in Borges' imagination to Walt Whitman. ⁵ The next images are of literary figures. Whitman was both a man and a fictional persona adopted by a poet in his poetry ⁶; in this 'Inscripción' Borges plays on the expectations of his readers of the fictional figure of 'Borges', mentioning several of his obsessions.

This point could be a continuation of what Borges writes in the prologue to his preceding book, La moneda de hierro (1976):

Puedo consentirme algunos caprichos, ya que no me juzgarán por el texto sino por la imagen indefinida pero suficientemente precisa que se tiene de mí. ⁷

Borges writes this list of images in a cryptic, magical style, including interests which are expected by the reader of Borges: Anglosaxon and Norse culture, idealism, literature, the complications of the universe and so on. Perhaps the most effective aspect of this 'Inscripción' is that it announces the idea of Jorge Luis Borges to the reader. It evokes a world contained in, and interpreted by, texts with Borges' name at the foot, preparing the reader for the poems.

The title of this introductory text itself suggests permanence and a sense of the past, like an inscription on a monument, a landmark in the text. The next point of departure in this series of images is the Orient. The dediquée, María Kodama, is half Japanese:

Por Kim y por su lama escalando las rodillas de
la montaña. Por el pecado de soberbia del samurai.
Por el paraíso en un muro.

With Kim, we have an allusion to Kipling, and the case of a European writer bringing the Orient to the West. Kipling made a fictional world out of India, which although it was a reality for him was a fictional world for many of his readers. There is the suggestion that literature is separate and distanced from external reality.

From the infinity and circularity of Borges' vision of Las mil y una noches, suggested by 'el paraíso en un muro', the text moves toward the wonder of the unknown:

Por el acorde que no hemos oído, por los versos
que no nos encontraron (su número es el número de
la arena), por el inexplorado universo.

For Borges, the aesthetic event is the imminence of a revelation which does not materialize; the unknown is at the centre of his poetics:

Lo esencial es el hecho estético, el thrill,
la modificación física que suscita cada lectura. •

The very vastness of the area of possible experience which remains 'inexplorado' is of a different kind to the vastness, known and yet unknown, of the memories held by Borges' mother:

Por la memoria de Leonor Acevedo. Por Venecia
de cristal y crepúsculo. ♡

All of Borges' books of poetry previous to this one were dedicated to his mother, whom he has called the 'alma' of his work¹⁰; her memories were in turn part of his, they were the inspiration for his poetry.

However, it was with María Kodama that Borges visited Venice, and it is to her that the book is dedicated:

Por la que usted será; por la que acaso no entenderé. Por todas estas cosas dispares, que son tal vez, como presentía Spinoza, meras figuraciones y facetas de una sola cosa infinita, le dedico a usted este libro, María Kodama.

The 'Inscripción' is addressed to María Kodama: there are hidden in its intentionally cryptic style things which only she may understand:

Historia de la noche fue dedicado a María Kodama, su secretaria y colaboradora. Ella quedó sorprendida y, según declaró en una entrevista, de haberse enterado antes, 'le hubiera pedido a Borges que no lo hiciera. Creo entender que representa muchas cosas que hemos vivido juntos. En esa dedicatoria hay cosas que sólo yo puedo entender'. ¹¹

Just as Penelope and Ulysses share a common talisman in 'Un escolio', this 'Inscripción' could be a talisman for Borges and Kodama. ¹² On the other hand, the reader is free to interpret the list of images, the reasons for the dedication, which forms the text as he sees fit; this is another illustration of the idea that there is a gap between outer reality (in this case it appears that the text consists of secret memories shared by Borges and his secretary) and what could be called the reality of literature or of the imagination (the images also introduce the reader to this world).

In the 'Inscripción' the poet introduces us to the vastness both of the world and of man's reaction to it in literature, the mysterious and imaginative world of poetic images, the ambivalence of literature,

Notes

¹ OP p. 511.

² See Emir Rodríguez Monegal, Jorge Luis Borges: A Literary Biography New York: EP Dutton, 1978. p. 475: 'Among the young students who were attracted to the seminar was María Kodama, a young woman with Japanese ancestors.'

³ OP p. 559.

⁴ PC I p. 342.

⁵ See Willis Barnstone, Borges at Eighty Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982. p. 5: 'When I speak of New York, I think instantly of Walt Whitman.'

⁶ Borges writes of this in 'Camden, 1892' OP p. 239. See my 'The Poet and his Poetic Persona: two Sonnets by Jorge Luis Borges', Poetry Ireland Review Special Issue nos 18 - 19, Spring 1987, pp. 142 - 150.

⁷ OP pp. 469 - 470.

⁸ OP p. 21.

⁹ See Atlas p. 25: 'In some prologue I remember writing the phrase crystal and crepuscular Venice. Twilight and Venice are for me practically synonymous words. Twilight for us has lost its light and is fearful of nightfall, while the twilight of Venice is delicate and eternal, without a before or an after.'

¹⁰ See Todo Borges y... Buenos Aires, Editorial Atlántida / Revista Gente 1977. p. 202: 'Mi madre mucho tiene que ver con la

The first group of poems:

'Alejandría 641AD' to 'Leones'

In the first group of poems, the reader is immediately presented with the suggestion that he is reading not an individual poem but a collection of poems, which forms a frame of reference:

Desde el primer Adán que vio la noche
Y el día y la figura de su mano,
Fabularon los hombres y fijaron
En piedra o en metal o en pergamino
Cuanto ciñe la tierra o plasma el sueño.
Aquí está su labor: la Biblioteca. ¹

The reader is reading what comes at the end of a long continuing tradition of human thought. Literature is a reflection of what man perceives; the library, or book, by extension, is a mirror of man's perception of the universe. A library is an ordering of data, what we perceive of the universe is subject to our search for order. As these are the first lines in the collection, the library evokes the present collection of verses; thus we have an evocation of the book as a whole. Were this poem to be read out of context, on the other hand, the library referred to would be the one at Alexandria. ²

After this evocation of the book, we read that the library contains an infinity of books. There is also an oblique reference to Borges' blindness:

... El hombre
Que quisiera agotarla perdería
La razón y los ojos temerarios.

For Borges, books are an extension of the memory and the imagination: ³

Aquí la gran memoria de los siglos
Que fueron...

Clearly, this poem can be read as a description of the destruction of a library. Borges is destroying or questioning our ideas of the function of literature, using the historical or mythical persona of Omar. The library contains many types of books: history, mathematics, astrology, medicine, magic, love poetry, alchemy and belief systems. These symbolize in turn all books.

Now Omar begins to tell us things which betray his own opinions. Already we know that he does not seem to be very interested in books, or that he does not read: 'Dicen que los volúmenes...'; he relies on hearsay. Omar clearly does not subscribe to what Borges has called the 'culto de los libros'. ⁴

Omar talks of non-Islamics, 'infieles', who think that burning a book destroys it; he considers books in a way eternal, as they are the product of 'las vigiliass humanas'. Were they to be destroyed, they would be written again, so strong is man's literary urge. Here we have the idea of cyclical rebirth: the books are written in order to be burnt, then rewritten in a phoenix-like manner. The burning of the library is a creative, not a destructive, act: 'no perecerá'. ⁵

Omar's insistence on the importance of books is interesting as he is a Muslim and belongs to a religion which has at its centre a divinely written book, the Koran. The books which he claims are eternal are of mortal origin. Another irony in the poem stems from the 'notas' ⁶: we are reminded that we are reading a book, not an individual poem, by the act of reading a note within a group of notes which accompanies the volume. There the poet writes that the poem was not written as is indicated, 'En el siglo primero de la Hégira'; Omar does not speak but rather Jorge Luis Borges in 1976. This note, then, changes the poem from being an image of Omar into one of Borges introducing his literary persona and newest collection of verses. It also serves to warn the reader not to read the verses too imaginatively. Although the reader might want to believe that he is listening to Omar speaking in 641 AD - the rhetorical style of the poem assisting the reader's imagination here - he must bear in mind the wide gap between literature and non-literary reality.

In the following poem, 'Alhambra', we find again the themes of Arab civilization and anachronism. ⁷ This poem is dated 'Granada, 1976', making of the poem a souvenir of a possible visit, like a holiday photograph. Borges records his reactions to the famous building. However, rather than providing us with a picture of the Alhambra, the poet gives us a record of his reaction to the atmosphere of the place and the memories it evoked for him.

The ambiguity of reality is underlined in this poem by form; the first verse is characterized by the description of the Alhambra's beauty, in an enumeration marked by repetition of the word 'grato'. In this section Borges wavers between writing about the present and about

the past. The suggestion is that his present reactions and perceptions are in turn modified by what he knows or believes of the past. Mixed in are images which could refer to his probable visit there in 1976 * and images which are connected with the building's semi-historical, mythical past.

The imagery of the first verse depicts the Alhambra via the poet's reactions to the building. In these lines there are two predominant ideas: circularity and time. For example, we find 'el mármol circular de la columna' and 'los finos laberintos del agua'. Also, 'la voz del agua' symbolizes the passing of time, the river of time.

The evocation of the beauty of the Alhambra is intensified in the poem by the blind poet enumerating aspects of the 'Alhambra' which appeal to all our senses. We read of the 'agua' and 'limoneros', 'la voz del agua' and 'la música del zéjel', 'jazmín' and 'el mármol circular de la columna'. There are also more abstract, intellectual stimuli like the 'zéjel' and the 'plegaria dirigida a un Dios'. Also, the most archetypal image of pleasure, or beauty, 'el amor'. These images of pleasure and beauty are mixed together those of a religion noted for its austerity: Islam. This heightens the dramatic effect of the first verse. Alliteration creates a relaxed atmosphere in the first lines: 'agua' connects with 'abrumaron' and 'arenas', while 'cóncava' connects with 'columna', and 'laberintos' with 'limoneros'. It is at this point that the contrastive, violent past of the building intrudes into the poet's vision.

In the second verse there is the idea of an empire which is

falling, a civilization which is so concerned with beauty that it finds itself under attack:

Vano el alfanje
Ante las largas lanzas de los muchos,
Vano ser el mejor.

This is the idea of an ivory tower elite which is unable to go against the cyclic nature of history: the rise and subsequent fall of empires. The beauty of Islamic Spain's Alhambra was no insurance against this, and the poet expresses no pity for that fact:

Grato sentir o presentir, rey doliente,
Que tus dulzuras son adioses,
Que te será negada la llave,
Que la cruz del infiel borrará la luna,
Que la tarde que miras es la última.

Although the caliph will not go to heaven, the palace he has created gives its visitors a kind of foretaste of heaven; the art and beauty of a culture are perhaps ultimately the only parts of it that can survive the 'ultraje de los años', which Borges converts into poetry in 'Arte poética'. ♡

The idea of cycles, of destruction as rebirth, pervades both the poems we have discussed. They are in the form of meditations on events from Islamic history. Both the incidents (the destruction of the library at Alexandria and the 'reconquista') are more legendary than historical or literary. The first poem is a literary text about the history (itself a form of literature) of a (legendary) library, an infinity of books which would again arise, phoenix-like, from the

burned library. ¹⁰ In the second poem, memories invade the poet's mind, and colour his reactions to 'Granada, 1976', a place definite both in space and time.

In the third poem, 'Metáforas de las mil y una noches' ¹¹, we move to the idea of a book which for the poet is so circular as to be a metaphor of the universe, in which the reader can both lose and find himself as part of the text:

Dicen los árabes que nadie puede
Leer hasta el fin el Libro de las Noches.
Las Noches son el Tiempo, el que no duerme.
Sigue leyendo mientras muere el día
Y Shahrazad te contará tu historia.

This poem, the longest in the book, consists of a long enumeration of images suggesting The Arabian Nights. This enumeration divides into four parts: 'el río', 'la trama de un tapiz', 'un sueño' and 'un mapa de... el Tiempo'.

The first metaphor

... es el río.
Las grandes aguas. El cristal viviente
Que guarda esas queridas maravillas
Que fueron del Islam y que son tuyas
Y más hoy.

Besides suggesting the 'finos laberintos de agua' which are part of the Alhambra and of the previous poem, this first section of the poem seems to be about the way history has permitted The Arabian Nights to survive. This section serves as a general introduction to the subject matter. Many well known images from the book are mentioned: 'la

caverna que se llama Sésamo', 'el genio confinado en la vasija', 'las manos que se lavan con ceniza'. Also present is the idea that books tend to be rewrites of other books:

Los viajes de Simbad, ese Odiseo
Urgido por la aventura,
No castigado por un dios...

The story of Simbad is a retelling of Ulises' adventures (which are mentioned in 'Un escolio'). ¹² Both books and our perceptions are

... un orbe fluido
De formas que varían como nubes,
Sujetas al arbitrario del Destino
O del Azar, que son la misma cosa

That the 'río' here is both the origin and guardian of this book, and hence of its readers, is significant. The world of the reader is the same one in which originated the stories of The Arabian Nights; the 'río' is the passage of time, the universe.

The second metaphor

... es la trama
De un tapiz, que propone a la mirada
Un caos de colores y de líneas
Irresponsables, un azar y un vértigo,
Pero un orden secreto lo gobierna.

Although this sounds as if it is amplifying the idea presented in the first section, that the universe where the book originated and our own

are one and the same, we find here a division between literature and reality:

Como aquel otro sueño, el Universo,
El libro de las Noches está hecho
De cifras tutelares y de hábitos...

Significantly, the three numbers mentioned are seven, three and

... encima de las otras la primera
Y última cifra del Señor; el Uno.

This section tells us, again enumerating episodes from the book, that although the book can be seen as reflecting aspects of the world in which we live, it possesses its own reality.

The third metaphor is 'un sueño'. This refers to the way in which no-one is aware of the ultimate meaning or consequences of his actions:

Agarenos y persas lo soñaron (...)
Y seguirán soñándolo los hombres
Hasta el fin de su jornada.

In other words, no-one knows what he does, and this ignorance compounds itself:

Como en la paradoja del eleata,
El sueño se disgrega en otro sueño
Y ése en otro y en otros, que entretejen
Ociosos un ocioso laberinto.

The book represents both man's tendency to impose order (in the 'trama') and the chaos of his surroundings, and of his self. As far as the book as opposed to our reality is concerned,

En el libro está el Libro. Sin saberlo,
la reina cuenta al rey la ya olvidada
Historia de los dos. Arrebatados
Por el tumulto de anteriores magias,
No saben quiénes son. Siguen soñando.

The reader is aware of their identity, but the characters themselves are not. Perhaps the universe is a book and the reader of that book, or its author, understands who we are. It is significant that we are reading of Islam here, as that religion includes the idea that its adherents are living in accordance with the dictates of a book which was written by God. If God both wrote the Koran and created the world, might the universe not be a book in which we, as characters, are unaware of our fate? It is in this sense that we read 'sueño' here: a lack of awareness of our destiny.

All these things - the passage of time, chaos and order, our ignorance of who we are - are surrounded by Time. It is for this reason that the fourth and final metaphor is:

... un mapa
De esa región indefinida, el Tiempo,
De cuanto miden las graduales sombras
Y el perpetuo desgaste de los mármoles
Y los pasos de las generaciones.

Everything is included in this map:

Todo. La voz y el eco, lo que miran
Las dos opuestas caras del Bifronte,
Mundos de plata y mundos de oro rojo
Y la larga vigilia de los astros.

The stars are not 'soñando', perhaps they know our destiny, as watchers of our 'ocioso laberinto'. Just as all the other metaphors are part of time, the reader of the book himself can become the king who hears his story:

Sigue leyendo mientras muere el día
Y Shahrazad te contará tu historia.

Although the real universe and that of the book are parallel and the book is a reflection of reality, at the end of the poem we read that no-one can read The Arabian Nights 'hasta el fin', but if they were able to, they would find that their reality is part of the literary reality contained in the book and not the other way round.

As this interpretation of the relationship between the reader and the text is so typically borgesian, it would be possible to assume that as the book is the reflection of the reader's world while at the same time remaining autonomous, Borges is really talking more of his own world view than of The Arabian Nights. What all this illustrates is the gap between literary reality and outer reality. Literary reality consists of a postulated reality based on a kind of literary logic, whilst outer reality consists of events. However, literary reality can intrude more powerfully into outer reality than the reverse. This we have seen, for example, in the preceding two poems, where the reader must resist his readerly desire to believe that the

words in 'Alejandría 641 AD' are Omar's and not Borges', and in 'Alhambra', where literary images of legend dominate and modify the poet's reactions to the famous building. Both the Alhambra and The Arabian Nights are works of art upon which the poet reflects. The burning of the library is the destruction of the records of such reflection, books.

The next text, 'Alguien' ¹³, is in some ways a postscript to the previous poem. The destiny of the protagonist in this text is revealed to the reader in the second paragraph. The man 'Cree hablar para unos pocos y unas monedas y en un perdido ayer entreteje el Libro de las Mil y Una Noches.' In addition to this, 'Narra la historia del primer jeque y de la gacela o la de aquel Ulises que se apodó Es-Sindibad del Mar.' These, of course, are among the stories mentioned in the previous poem.

We find in these lines a rather fictionalized account of this man reciting his stories, which seems like a glimpse from an almost forgotten dream. There is a distance between the poet and what he describes:

Balkh Nishapur, Alejandría; no importa el nombre. ¹⁴

The event is distant in time and the location is irrelevant. Also the reader is asked not to see what is happening, but rather to imagine it:

Podemos imaginar un zoco, una taverna...

The distancing effect of time is emphasized in the image (also common to the previous poem) of 'un río que ha repetido los rostros de las generaciones'. The picture which emerges from the text is distant and blurred. The poet, however, informs us that

No nos es dado descifrar (los reinos y los siglos
son muchos) el vago turbante, los ojos ágiles, la
piel cetrina y la voz áspera que articula
prodigios. Tampoco él nos ve; somos demasiados.

We are, in a sense, the present day equivalents of the 'rueda' of listeners. In addition to not being able to see him, nor he us, we are not told his name. As the poem is titled 'Alguien', and as the place of the action 'no importa', the event is one which happened in many places and with many protagonists.

The details of this event are not given, and we are urged not to believe in what we are reading (as is the case with the note on 'Alejandría 641 AD'): we are reading an undisguised fiction, a fiction in which we are not involved except as spectators, in which we participate from the outside. The first paragraph of the text situates us both in the make-believe world of fiction and keeps this at arm's length, giving us distance and perspective vis-à-vis the text.

In the second paragraph the poet defuses the first. We are situated as readers in the crowd listening to the man's story and at the same time as we are listening to one man reciting one story, we are made to believe that in this we are listening to all story tellers reciting all the stories which eventually made up The Arabian Nights.

On a literary, metaphorical, level, the reader is in fact one of

that group of people listening to 'nuestro bienhechor': as the ultimate destiny of this group of people is to hear a version of these stories, this is just what the reader of this prose poem is engaged in. By virtue of the metaphoric nature of literature, we can be part of this picture; at the same time, the text's vagueness makes for a picture so far away in time and in space, that what we - or the poet - take as the meaning of this event may have more to do with what we 'podemos imaginar' than what we can actually see. In the text, then, the reader only sees what he can imagine, which is in essence part of himself rather than part of the poet. This is underlined in this text; it is also present in Borges' idea about The Arabian Nights, stated in 'Metáforas de las Mil y Una Noches': 'Sigue leyendo mientras muere el día/ Y Shahrazad te contará tu historia.' ¹⁵ Ultimately the reader finds only himself reflected in the text.

'Alguien' forms an appendix to 'Metáforas de las mil y una noches', developing ideas from that poem. It also emphasizes differences between distinct interpretations of The Arabian Nights. In the first of the two poems, the book is seen as a metaphor of the circularity of reality, of the universe: 'Todo. La voz y el eco'. In the second poem, the stories are seen as a way of passing the evening: 'No sabe (otros lo sabrán) que es del linaje de los confabuladores nocturni, de los rapsodas de la noche, que Alejandro Bicornes congregaba para solaz de sus vigiliás.' In these poems we find indications as to what the 'noche' in the title of the book might be: in addition to symbolizing cyclical time, it also stands for literature, man's attempts to fill in the hours of darkness when he can see nothing else and must rely not on his perceptions but on his

imagination.

The next poem, 'Caja de música' ¹⁴, marks the end of the islamic part of the book, and also the end of titles with arabic - derived words beginning with 'Al...', but as in the last poem, time and distance are in the foreground, as is the preoccupation with interpretation and art. In this poem we have an ambiguous image: either the poet is listening to the dripping of a water clock which he likens to the sound of Japanese music, or else he is listening to 'música del Japón' which reminds him of time dripping away in a water clock. On the other hand it could be that the 'Caja de música' in the title has suggested both these images to him.

Just as the origin of the stories of The Arabian Nights remains mysterious, the origin of the sounds which the poet hears is distant and unknown:

¿De qué templo,
De qué leve jardín en la montaña,
De qué vigillas ante un mar que ignoro,
De qué pudor de la melancolía,
De qué perdida y rescatada tarde,
Llegan a mí, su porvenir remoto?

The reader of The Arabian Nights was the book's destiny, its 'porvenir remoto'; here, we have a similar situation in which the listener hears not what is intrinsically in the music but what he chooses to hear, as the mystery it holds is, in a way, its clearest message. The temples, gardens and so on are in the mind of the listener and are the things that create the music for him.

There is also the idea that this music is precious. We read

Avaramente

De la clepsidra se desprenden gotas
De lenta miel o de invisible oro
Que en el tiempo repiten una trama
Eterna y frágil, misteriosa y clara.
Temo que cada una sea la última.

Like the books held at the library at Alexandria, the music is both 'eterna y frágil'; like the books also, it is the end of a wait. The books had been being written ever since 'el primer Adán que vio la noche/ Y el día y la figura de su mano.'¹⁷ And this distillation is being expressed 'avaramente'; here, the poet repeats an observation he makes about art in 'Alhambra': like the caliph's life in the palace, art is at once vulnerable to destruction and, ironically, eternal.

In the preceding poems there is the idea that art is the distillation of some observation, or of a sum of observations, which is man's reactions from the past. In 'Alhambra' we have the personal memories of things from history, from books, interpolating themselves between the poet and his immediate surroundings. Art is a type of dream, a nostalgia for a past. The drops of music

Son un ayer que vuelve.

This realization causes the poet to ponder on the origin of the sounds, and in doing so to reveal his reaction to them rather than to find objectively where they have come from. The sounds of the water clock - or music box - have created 'música del Japón' in his imagination. At the same time, there is a mystery: what event or thing is the inspiration for these lines? It could be a music box, Japanese

music, or the dripping of a water clock: this is not made clear to the reader. The first words of the poem are those of the title, 'Caja de música'. This phrase is not repeated elsewhere in the poem. The second image in the poem is 'Música del Japón', which is also not repeated. The third is 'Avaramente/ De la clepsidra se desprenden gotas'. The three images are immediately juxtaposed, suggesting that as neither is a clear metaphor of any other, it is to the passing of time that the poet refers to here. The final lines would support this idea, while at the same time telling us that the poet is not interested in demystifying art:

No lo sabré. No importa. En esa música
Yo soy. Yo quiero ser. Yo me desangro.

It may be that the music is life, the image of 'caja' suggesting a clock, the mention of Japan suggesting mystery and distance, while the water clock represents time passing, the poet's life running out by the minute. With the poet's pondering in his imagination on the possible origin of the music, the imaginative element in art and literature is brought in. It is also significant that he is unconcerned about finding its origin, as the beauty of the experience for him is in itself sufficient. However, this suggests that there is a wide gap between art and reality, as has been suggested in the previous poems.

From an image of the poet dying ('Yo me desangro'), we move to a childhood memory of the poet in 'El tigre'. ¹⁰ The image of the tiger in this poem passes through various stages; at the same time, it is

important to remember that for Borges this animal holds a special place. In his childhood he drew many tigers, dreamed often of tigers, and now in his blindness he finds that this animal's colour is perhaps the only one he can see. In this poem the tiger is seen through various levels of interpretation, which could be what Borges considered the image of the tiger to be at various points of his life.

We begin with the animal in the zoo:

Iba y venía, delicado y fatal, cargado de infinita
energía, del otro lado de los firmes barrotes y
todos lo mirábamos. Era el tigre de esa mañana,
en Palermo...

Even this animal, the one in the cage, is described in a fantastic, literary way: 'delicado y fatal', 'infinita energía'. The poet goes on to tell us that the tiger was also of literature:

... y el tigre del Oriente y el tigre de Blake y
de Hugo y Shere Khan...

and of philosophy:

... y los tigres que fueron y serán y asimismo
el tigre arquetípico, ya que el individuo, en su
caso, es toda la especie.

Although the tiger could belong to a platonic archetype, this particular tiger 'en su caso' could be all tigers for the children, as they have perhaps not seen any other.

The text, written as a prose anecdote to conceal its complexity,

ends with the children's reaction, as opposed to the poet's reactions which we have read:

Pensamos que era sanguinario y hermoso. Norah, una niña, dijo: Está hecho para el amor.

This concluding observation, from the poet's sister, seems to suggest much of what was stated in 'Caja de música'. Art - and here the tiger is viewed in much the same way as adults view art, as an object of contemplation - works on account of its mystery and beauty; the middle section of the poem, the philosophical and literary part, is an extension of this mystery, not an explanation.

However, because of the juxtaposition of the tiger in the cage, or the 'real' tiger and the literary or philosophical tiger, there is a distance between the two animals. Also, although we may filter our perceptions of the tiger through our experiences of tigers in literature, the poem ends with the children's description of the tiger, 'sanguinario y hermoso'. This seems fairly down-to-earth and non-literary, but when we consider Norah's final verdict, 'está hecho para el amor', we are again in the abstract world of literature. What does her statement mean? It seems to suggest that the tiger is in the cage solely to give pleasure to the spectators, which holds with what has so far been said of art in the collection. On the other hand, that she needs to utilize abstract language underlines man's necessity for this type of expression. Some things, real as our impressions of tigers, are inexpressible, and so, in order to express them, we must use abstract language, literature.

It is the gap between language and reality that is discussed in the final poem of this group, 'Leones'.¹⁹ Here we find the poet at issue with the traditional literary symbol or cultural idealization of the lion, the 'king of the animals'. He considers the tiger to be a more worthy heir to this title:

Ni el esplendor del cadencioso tigre
Ni del jaguar los signos prefijados
Ni del gato el sigilo. De la tribu
Es el menos felino, pero siempre
Ha encendido los sueños de los hombres.

Not only does he prefer the tiger to the lion, he considers the latter to be the least graceful of all the cat family. The next section of the poem is an enumeration of various examples of the lion in art, 'Leones en el oro y en el verso'.

As well as being a subject for poets and artists, the lion has been immortalized in myth:

Es la mitad de la secreta esfinge
Y la mitad del grifo que en las cóncavas
Grutas custodia el oro de la sombra.

Man has often seen the lion as a symbol of protection of art, and the 'oro de la sombra' is a frequent bourgeois symbol of poetry, accentuating the image of the lion as a protector of treasure. That the images of lions are taken from various cultures stresses the universal nature of this symbol: a symbol used in Islam, in the Bible, in Hugo, in Dürer, classical art, the Sphinx, the gryphon, Shakespeare. It is therefore not surprising that

Los hombres lo esculpieron con montañas
Y estamparon su forma en las banderas
Y lo coronan rey sobre los otros.

The lion has become more than a literary or artistic symbol, he has become elevated to the status of a god, a myth. The lion on the flags is not the lion in the zoo (like the tiger in the poem) but is rather one of man's imagination. He is an idealized form of the lion, like literature, a product of our imagination modifying what we see and converting it into something else. The lion of flags is an idealization of certain desired human qualities like bravery and powerfulness. For this reason Milton saw him 'con sus ojos de sombra'; but this myth, inexplicable and arbitrary in its choice of animal, outlasts the individual. Since ancient times,

Resplandece en la rueda del Caldeo
Y las mitologías lo prodigan. ²⁰

The lion we think of is not the one in the cage. For the animal which 'ha encendido los sueños de los hombres' could not be the one in the the two line envoi which ends the poem:

Un animal que se parece a un perro
Come la presa que le trae la hembra.

Here there is a contrast between the image of the ugly animal and the feminine 'presa' and 'hembra'; this recalls the poet's sister's naive and innocent remark placed at the end of the preceding text. This suggests that the animal in our imagination is more pleasant than the

real one, which does not protect beauty, but destroys it, eating the 'presa'. In this ironic envoi, we can see how distant literary reality is from external, non literary reality. There is also a questioning of myth, an indication that myth perhaps reveals less of the world surrounding men than it does of what lies inside them. This point is developed in the second group of poems.

22 p. 13. 'De los diversos instrumentos d
de este mundo, el libro es el libro
de los libros'.

Thomas Aldrich, El mundo de los libros, 1964, p. 37.

See Willis Barnstone, Borges at Eighty, Wiley
Press, 1982, p. 110. There, Borges talked
of the library at Alexandria. He stated that its cost
was so high that the books destroyed would then have

22 p. 510.

He visited Spain twice in 1930, according
to Borges' El libro de los libros, 1930 y 1931, p. 290.

...

Notes

¹ OP pp. 513 - 514. It is unusual that we find 'AD' here in place of the normal 'AdC'.

² According to the Margaret Drabble ed. Oxford Companion to English Literature Oxford: OUP, 1985. 'the story that the library was destroyed by order of the Caliph Omar is without foundation.' According to this source, it was destroyed by Julius Caesar. (p. 16)

³ BQ p. 13. 'De los diversos instrumentos del hombre, el más asombroso es, sin duda, el libro. (...) ...el libro es una extensión de la memoria y de la imaginación.'

⁴ Roberto Alifano 24 Conversations with Borges New York: Grove Press 1984. p. 32.

⁵ See Willis Barnstone, Borges at Eighty Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982. p. 110. There, Borges talks of the destruction of the library at Alexandria. He states that its destruction was a creative act, as the books destroyed would then have to be rewritten.

⁶ OP p. 559.

⁷ OP p. 515.

⁸ He visited Spain twice in 1976, according to María Esther Vázquez, in Borges' 25 de agosto 1983 y otros cuentos, Madrid: Siruela, 1983. p. 290.

⁹ OP p. 161, 'Arte poética'.

¹⁰ This idea reminds us of the way in which Don Quijote's library continued to influence him after it was burned: Don Quijote is

the subject of 'Ni siquiera soy polvo'. OP p. 520.

¹¹ OP p. 516, see Borges Siete noches Madrid: FCE, 1980. pp. 55 - 74.

¹² OP p. 526.

¹³ OP p. 519.

¹⁴ Balkh and Nishapur are two different places, not one as the text suggests. This ambiguity heightens the statement that 'no importa el nombre'. In Balderston, The Literary Universe of Jorge Luis Borges Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986. p. 261, we read that Balkh is a 'city in Afghanistan, the ancient city of Bactria or Zainaspa' and is only mentioned once in Borges' works. Nishapur, according to the same source, is a 'province of Iran, in northern Khorasan, and the capital city of [that] province'. (p. 287) It is also mentioned, in the poem 'The unending rose' (OP p. 465), as well as in many other texts.

¹⁵ OP p. 518.

¹⁶ OP p. 520.

¹⁷ OP pp. 513 - 514.

¹⁸ OP p. 521. For an account of Borges' lifelong fascination with tigers, see 'El oro de los tigres' OP p. 415. The first lines of that poem also recall the present text:

Hasta la hora del ocaso amarillo
Cuántas veces habré mirado
Al poderoso tigre de Bengala
Ir y venir por el predestinado camino
Detrás de los barrotes de hierro,
Sin sospechar que eran su cárcel.

In Atlas p. 47 the poet notes: 'There have always been tigers in my life'.

¹⁹ OP pp. 522 - 523.

20 The 'Caldeos' were the inhabitants of part of Mesopotamia, and the city of Babylon was their capital. They were famed for their occult learning. (See Lemprière's Classical Dictionary London: George Routledge and Sons, 1879. p. 141, 'Chaldaeae'.)

... the past is making us, making us all of the line. I think of the past not as something that has passed away, but as something that is still with us, the one who is the collection, the...

The past is making us, making us all of the line. I think of the past not as something that has passed away, but as something that is still with us, the one who is the collection, the...

... might reveal archetypal human situation which has been recognized in psychoanalytic literature. (Alejandro 2418). We see the distinction between the 'la tierra' and literature ('el mundo') in the poem of the first group which celebrates the second group of poems. The distinction of the literature affects the...

The second group of poems:

'Endimión en Latmos' to 'Un libro'

In the second group of poems, we find various ideas communicated to the reader by means of a retelling of myths. Speaking of a poem which comes near the end of the collection, the poet has said:

... The past is making us, making us all the time. I think of the past not as something awful but as a kind of fountain... And speaking of the past, I refer not only to things that have historically happened - since history is frivolous and irrelevant - but to myths. Myths are far more important... I spoke of Hamlet, I spoke of Greek mythology, of things that have happened not in history but in the dreams of men. ¹

Myths, then, might reveal archetypal human situations, and this is a point which has been developed in psychoanalytic theory, by Freud and Jung. In 'Alejandría 641AD' we saw the dichotomy between 'lo que ciñe la tierra' and 'lo que plasma el sueño'; the difference between reality ('la tierra') and literature ('el sueño') is accentuated in the final poem of the first group, which culminates in its enigmatic envoi. In the second group of poems Borges continues his exploration or discussion of how literature affects our consciousness by looking at how myths are commonly used in order to explain real situations, as opposed to how they affect our perception. The myth is used as an expressive apparatus rather than a vehicle of perception. Borges uses

myth as a means to an end, a framework on which he places his own ideas, rather than as an end in itself.

Of the first poem in this group, 'Endimión en Latmos', the poet has said:

'Endimión en Latmos' is a mythological poem, and perhaps the one personal poem I have ever written. Because Endymion, like all myths, is not a figment or mere reason. Endymion stands for all men. So you say when a man has been loved, then he has been loved by divinity, he has been loved by a goddess, he has been loved by the moon. ²

This poem is written in a single stanza in which the poet talks of his encounter with Diana, goddess of the moon, and of the reactions which he has seen in other people. As the poet says that this poem is one of his most personal, it would be possible to postulate that the 'luna' here refers to María Kodama, to whom this book and the earlier poem, 'La luna' ³ were dedicated. On the other hand, the moon in that poem is also poetry, and in another poem of the same name in El hacedor the moon is used as a symbol of something which cannot be put into words or verse, because 'Siempre se pierde lo esencial.' ⁴ The moon is a challenge to the poet's creative powers, the ultimate problem in his work. To capture the moon in verse would be equal to being able to write perfect poetry. It may be true, as Borges states, that Endymion represents all men; however, the speaker in this poem has a lot in common with Borges. This points to the possibility, born out by his assertion that this is a 'personal' poem, that the speaker in the poem is Borges himself, using the mask of a myth to protect his intimacy.

In the first section of the poem, lines 1 - 9, the poet sets the

scene for the encounter with the moon. We find that the speaker, like Borges, is old:

Yo dormía en la cumbre y era hermoso
Mi cuerpo, que los años han gastado.

The old man recounts an event from his youth; this experience has been memorable and has affected his life ever since. The historical and mythical context is set:

Alto en la noche helénica...

with a mention of the 'centauro', making the man both ancient Greek and borgesian. Crucial to the man's tale is the reason he slept:

... Me placía
Dormir para soñar y para el otro
Sueño lustral que elude la memoria
Y que nos purifica del gravamen
De ser aquel que somos en la tierra.

Here again we have the person who seeks another awareness beyond that of everyday life, the poet or the mystic. At the same time, the division of experience into literary reality ('sueño') and physical reality ('la tierra') is again in evidence. The poet seeks to take refuge in a world of dreams, which could be that of literature. The man could be reading 'en la cumbre', or else his actions were ones which secured him a place in mythology; the encounter with the goddess converted him into a literary figure, and in a sense gave him

immortality, an escape from the banality of his life which is evoked in the last two lines of this section.

In the second section of the poem we find a description of the encounter. The description, the anecdote, of the encounter is the justification for the man's existence as a literary figure. This most crucial event in the man's life is described in the terms of a hallucinatory experience. It is ironic that at the end of the poem he describes himself as isolated from society, which is an experience on a totally different level from the one on which he meets the moon. Immediately the second character, Diana, is introduced. This arrival is emphasized by the use of alliteration:

Diana, la diosa...

which contrasts with the calmer atmosphere of the first section, where there is no movement and where the sound /k/ predominates in 'cumbre', 'cuerpo' and 'cuádruple carrera'.

In the first part of this section, we have the suggestion that whoever or whatever the poet met was seen as having two distinct personalities: 'la diosa que es también la luna'. A person and a monument; this imagery is repeated in the last line, where the poet creates an image of his own isolation with the phrase 'La indiferente luna, hija de Zeus'. It is significant that the goddess brings him 'oro y amor', both poetry and physical love, emphasized by the physical image of 'descendió a mis brazos'. The night changes its purpose: it is now the 'encendida noche'. The distance and alienation

which the man feels from the goddess is expressed by contrasting his banality with her beauty:

Yo apretaba los párpados mortales,
Yo quería no ver el rostro bello
Que mis labios de polvo profanaban.

Although the goddess is eternal and perfect, he was destined to decay, his body 'era hermoso'. He has grown older. Although he seems to consider himself unworthy of the goddess, her power over him overcame this:

Yo aspiré la fragancia de la luna
Y su infinita voz dijo mi nombre.

At the moment when Endymion loses control over his actions the goddess pronounces his name. As poetry is concerned with naming things, perhaps it was at the moment when Diana uttered Endymion's name - or Borges', the word she utters is not stated - that he first felt poetry. We may therefore be reading of the poet's encounter with the muse. The next three lines evoke the chaotic, passionate nature of the encounter:

Oh las puras mejillas que se buscan,
Oh ríos del amor y de la noche,
Oh el beso humano y la tensión del arco.

In the three lines which follow these, the poet regains the mood of calm which dominated the first section of the poem. What has happened

to him is at once mysterious and timeless; the encounter seems to belong to the part of his life which exists in dreams, in fantasy. And yet this act has had a great effect on his everyday life:

No sé cuánto duraron mis venturas;
Hay cosas que no miden los racimos
No la flor ni la nieve delicada.
La gente me rehuye. Le da miedo
El hombre que fue amado por la luna.
Los años han pasado.

Because the speaker has experienced something inconceivable, which cannot be quantified or measured, people run from him and he is isolated. Yet he is fortunate as the encounter with love - or poetry, the muse - has given him great pleasure. In this final section of the poem we are again with the speaker as an old man. Whereas in the first group of poems literature and reality are seen as contrastive, here we find the speaker wondering 'Si aquel tumulto de oro en la montaña/ Fue verdadero o no fue más que un sueño'. The literary or philosophical idea that the past is a dream as far as the present is concerned is useless to this man; whether he imagined the encounter or not, it has haunted him and made him isolated from society:

Mi soledad recorre los comunes
Caminos de la tierra, pero siempre
Busco en la antigua noche de los númenes
La indiferente hija de Zeus.

Whether we read this poem as an allegory of a meeting with a poetic muse or not, we can see stereotyped ideas about relationships between men and women in this poem. The idea of the fickle woman, for example.

As Borges has described this text as 'perhaps the one personal poem I have ever written' ⁵, we may assume that the goddess in the poem might represent a woman who has loved him.

Borges has written at least one other poem about a woman close to him - the sonnet 'Elsa' ⁶, about his first wife. As the woman there is named, why should the poet now choose to disguise his story in a myth? The answer is perhaps to be found in the next text, 'Un escolio'. ⁷

In this short prose piece of two paragraphs, the first is an anecdote taken from literature:

Tal es la historia que se lee en el libro
vigésimo tercero de la Odisea.

The second is an explanation of a mythical, symbolic tale. At the same time, it is also an explanation of the previous poem. The writer of the Odyssey, Homer,

... no ignoraba que las cosas deben decirse
de manera indirecta. Tampoco lo ignoraban sus
griegos, cuyo lenguaje natural era el mito.

Homer was a writer; 'sus griegos' were his readers. His readers understood the symbols in his work. Just as Homer had his readers, so does Borges, or any other author. What this text suggests is that writers write in a code of symbols and metaphors which readers acquainted with their work understand. This indicates that the previous poem was written as a myth because the poet knows that 'las cosas deben decirse de manera indirecta'.

Just as Homer had 'sus griegos', 'Ulises vuelve a su Itaca': something which is very personal might best be explained by means of impersonal myth or archetypal stories. There is the idea that love is so personal that it can only be explained in a mythical way; otherwise the exclusiveness suggested by 'un orden que comparten los dos, y sólo los dos' would be destroyed. For this reason the poet wrote 'Endimión en Latmos' as a rewrite of a myth. The two poems share other details as well: Endimión talks of his life having passed, 'Mi cuerpo, que los años han gastado'. This is mirrored in 'Al cabo de veinte años de trabajos'. In 'Endimión...' we read 'Oh el beso humano y la tensión del arco,' while in the present poem we find 'Con la espada de hierro y con el arco ejecuta la debida venganza'.

In both poems we find two lovers, normally separated but united in the course of the poem. In 'Un escolio' the lovers' 'tálamo común' brings them together and makes them recognize each other. In that anecdote, the lovers are united; in 'Endimión...' the goddess never returns to the man. They are however united in the enumeration of the poem, in the reader's and speaker's mind. The first poem unites the lovers in a metaphor, in the imagination; the second, in the protagonists' life. In the same way, the first poem is a metaphor, a cipher, whilst the second is a narrative. This difference is emphasized by the second paragraph of 'Un escolio'. In the first poem, the 'tálamo común' would be the poem itself: the mythical form serves to disguise this secret message.

From literature being a method to disguise a message to someone in the world, we move to a poem where the protagonist exists only in myth: 'Ni siquiera soy polvo' ^o. Don Quijote depends on his readers

for his 'reality'. Just as eternity is touched on in the preceding two poems, as archetypes are unchanging and as the love in 'Un escolio' is described as one 'que ninguno de los mortales puede mover', we have here a character created by man's imagination, and which in this poem seems to exist beyond it. Ironically the figure only exists when the page is subject to the reader's imagination, or when the page is being read. As with myth, we have both the personal, reader's level, and the more profound level at which the myth, the eternal myth, exists in our collective subconscious.

On the other hand, we find Borges employing myth in much the same way as in 'Endimión...', as a way to talk of his own experience. The archetypal myth, unlike the personal experience, is something which bridges the gap between the poet and the reader. A literary myth is particularly apt for this use. The first statement, 'No quiero ser quien soy', is typically borgesian, evoking many of Borges' meditations on the theme of identity. In the first eight lines of this poem we find the speaker or poet describing his current state: he is in the 17th. century, trapped in a dusty Castilla. Apart from the specificity of time and place, this could be Borges talking. The details belong to Don Quijote; the thoughts to Borges.

Just as for Don Quijote - and this is confirmed in the 'Epílogo' - books have been the centre of Borges' life. The speaker in the poem is a man 'entrado en años':

... Una página
Casual me reveló no usadas voces
Que me buscaban, Amadís y Urganda.
Vendí mis tierras y compré los libros...

Borges has often expressed his regret at the fact that unlike his ancestors he was not a military man, unlike the knights mentioned here, whom Quijano tried to emulate: he became a 'bookish sort of person' 7. Quijano, of course, existed only in a book; and by extension in the imagination of its readers. For both men, books were their destiny. The books enumerated by Quijano are of a martial nature, books of chivalry, and reflect ironically the division which Borges makes between arms and letters. Quijote's past is in the books he has read; he is now locked in a book. Quijano's current state is dependent on his readers.

What Quijano hopes for is a return to the past: an imaginary, literary past:

Cristianos caballeros recorrían
Los reinos de la tierra, vindicando
El honor ultrajado o imponiendo
Justicia con los filos de la espada.
Quiera Dios que un enviado restituya
A nuestro tiempo ese ejercicio noble.

It is at this point that the reader is most aware of the fictionality of the speaker, when he talks of 'nuestro tiempo'. This time is that shared by the reader and the character, the time when the text is read and the character lives in the reader's imagination. What Quijano hopes for is a renewal of interest in the books of chivalry: here, on his own level of unreality, he wishes to create another fiction within his own fiction, and the problem for the reader is to know where one fiction ends and another begins. The border between fact and fiction

is meaningless if one is a fictional character. Quijano hopes for a kind of Messiah of whom he says

... Lo he sentido
A veces en mi triste carne célibe.
No sé aún su nombre. Yo, Quijano,
Seré ese paladín. Seré mi sueño.

The mention of 'triste carne célibe' reminds us of Endymion and Borges, both of whom seem to have spent a great deal of their lives dreaming of the past. Quijano's life is a dream, and he wishes he could wake and experience action instead of dreams. He wishes to become the protagonist in a new book of chivalry. For a moment the reader wonders whether he is listening to the character created in the Cervantes text, the hero of Don Quijote, or rather to the pathetic figure of this poem, who is trapped among the pages of a dusty copy of the book - 'El polvo y la rutina de Castilla'. 'Rutina' reinforces this image, suggesting repetition, ordinariness and boredom. Here we find underlined the character which Cervantes created in his book, and yet who exists beyond the book. This character is so real that Borges imagines him attempting to escape from his original text.

Ironically, Quijano himself feels the unreality of his situation:

¿A mi brazo? Mi cara (que no he visto)
No proyecta una cara en el espejo.
Ni siquiera soy polvo. Soy un sueño
Que entreteje en el sueño y la vigilia
Mi hermano y padre, el capitán Cervantes,
Que militó en los mares de Lepanto
Y supo unos latines y algo de árabe...

In these lines, in addition to the invisible literary figure of Quijote, there are more suggestions of Borges. We have his blindness in 'mi cara (que no he visto)', and the mention of mirrors which for Borges multiply and complicate the universe. But what Quijano tells us here is that although he would like to experience other adventures, he belongs to a specific writer, Cervantes. This is a writer of the past, and so the character he has created, who outlives him, has in a way died with him. After the writer's death, the fictional character is condemned to the repetition of old stories; there can be no new adventures. On the other hand, the fictional character depends on the reader as well. Each reading will be different. The former's 'otro', to use a borgesian term, is the reader:

Para que yo pueda soñar al otro
Cuya verde memoria será parte
De los días del hombre, te suplico:
Mi Dios, mi soñador, sigue soñándose.

We can see parallels between 'Borges' the fictional product of Borges' works, and Quijano, the product of Cervantes' book. Ultimately, he consists of the imagination of mortals, and himself has achieved a kind of immortality. His world seems artificial to the reader; however, it is more permanent and in some ways perhaps as real as that of the reader.

From the poet using a well known fictional personality as a persona, we move to the poet's impressions of a country which he has 'met' through books: Iceland. For Borges, Iceland and Quijano are creations of literature, with the difference that after meeting

Iceland in books he visited the place. The next poem is written by a reader of literature, while the 'Ni siquiera...' and 'Endimión' are written from inside literature as it were. In 'Un escolio' he writes from the point of view of an informed reader, who knows how a particular group of texts (those written by Homer) work. In 'Islandia' he writes of a literary version of the island, and contrasts this with what he saw when he went there. ¹⁰

In the first lines of the poem the poet addresses Iceland directly; for him it is more than a place, it is a presence as real as that of any other well-crafted literary character:

Qué dicha para todos los hombres,
Islandia de los mares, que existas.

As Borges was blind when he visited Iceland, we find the sounds of the island used as an evocation:

Islandia de la nieve silenciosa y del agua
ferviente.
Islandia de la noche que se aboveda
sobre la vigilia y el sueño.
Isla del día blanco que regresa,
joven y mortal como Baldr. ¹¹

Iceland seems to be a place of contrasts; there is also the cyclic image of 'día blanco que regresa', which recalls a remark made by Borges in an interview about his travels:

Con cierta tristeza descubro que toda la vida me
la pasé pensando en una u otra mujer. Creí ver
países, ciudades, pero siempre hubo una mujer
para hacer de pantalla entre los objetos y yo.

Es posible que hubiera preferido consagrarme por entero al goce de la metafísica, o de la lingüística, o de otras disciplinas. ¹²

Perhaps every poem about a place which Borges has ever written is a metaphor of his feelings for a woman. Just as 'Endimión...' could be a poem about Borges' unrequited feelings, a myth in order to convey a personal story, perhaps this poem about Iceland is about a similar situation.

It is significant that the poet mixes the Iceland of books and that of reality as early on in the poem as the sixth line. From there he moves on to the mythological side of Iceland:

Fría rosa, isla secreta
que fuiste la memoria de Germania
y salvaste para nosotros
su apagada, enterrada mitología...

Mythology and literature are then invoked. We have the violence of 'el anillo que engendra nueve anillos', the wolves and the boat made of 'las uñas de los muertos'. The ambiguity between a person or a force is maintained; the wolves seem to be a form of the night, as they 'devorarán la luna y el sol', and the atmosphere is one of magic and shadow.

In the next section, Borges moves onto the Iceland of the present day, a place of light:

Islandia de los cráteres que esperan,
y de las tranquilas majadas.
Islandia de las tardes inmóviles
y de los hombres fuertes

que son ahora marineros y barqueros y párrocos
y que ayer descubrieron un continente.

The final image of the preceding section, 'uñas de los muertos', contrasts strongly with this one. However, the images of the people turn back towards their past which has never left the poet's mind. The remaining section of the poem also turns back toward the mythology and history of the island, while also pointing forward:

Islas de los caballos de larga crin
que engendran sobre el pasto y la lava,
isla del agua llena de monedas
y de no saciada esperanza.

Although expressed in terms which tend toward the past, we have the suggestion of a future; the horses will proceed to other generations, there is still hope.

From this view, Borges tells us what his view of Iceland is:

Islandia de la espada y de la runa,
Islandia de la gran memoria cóncava
que no es una nostalgia.

For him, the real Iceland is in the mythology; it is a yearning for the past, but for a past unknown to him, a fictional past. Literature and myth exist in the human mind and are unaffected by time. For Borges, Iceland is both an island and a myth, but he prefers the eternity of the myth. For this reason he writes

Islandia de la noche que se aboveda
sobre la vigilia y el sueño.

Iceland has a presence which goes beyond reality ('vigilia') and fiction or myth ('sueño').

We see Borges as a reader in 'Islandia'; the enigmatic poem which follows it is named after a man, possibly a writer, from Iceland, 'Gunnar Thorgilsson (1816 - 1879)' ¹⁹. This poem bridges the gap between 'Islandia' and the final poem of this group, 'Un libro'. In 'Islandia', the poet talks of 'Islandia de la espada'; the martial theme is present in 'Ni siquiera soy polvo' as well. It is continued here. The poem begins with what could well be a kenningâr for history:

La memoria del tiempo
Está llena de espadas y de naves
Y de polvo de imperios
Y de rumor de hexámetros
Y de altos caballos de guerra
Y de clamores de Shakespeare.

This short poem with its literary images emphasizes that the poet initially got to know Iceland through books, and that perhaps that impression of the island was so strong as not to allow his impressions of the place during his visit to replace the literary ones. However, whereas in 'Leones' we find the idea that literature concerns itself with a kind of reality largely of its own making, one which distances it from reality and causes the reader to see it as false, in the case of Iceland we find that literature can enrich reality, besides being a source of self-contained pleasure:

Yo quiero recordar aquel beso
Con el que me besabas en Islandia.

It is as if the visit to Iceland made the poet appreciate the literary Iceland even more. At the same time, in the final couplet of the poem we sense various emotions: nostalgia, love, literature and history. The reality and literature of Iceland complement each other, whilst the image of 'beso' recalls 'Endimi3n...'. where the speaker in the poem felt privileged as he had taken part in something that seemed to have been no more than a dream, while the experience he had in the dream seemed more real than a dream. Borges' vision of Iceland was as personal an experience as Endymion's experience of love. When we consider that Diana brought him 'oro y amor', poetry and love, a matrix of ideas around these concepts appears in this group of poems. Did not Quijano lament his 'triste carne c3libe'? It is as if the poet is telling us he was disappointed in love and finds that the happiness brought to him by books has been the most enduring emotional experience of his life. Quijano also wanted to act in more books; the poet talks of 'aquel beso/ Con el que me besabas en Islandia', and of the intense pleasure which Iceland brings him:

Qu3 dicha para todos los hombres,
Islandia de los mares, que existas.

As the Iceland he refers to exists only in books, we can say that a chief source of happiness in the poet's life has been books; Endymion's happiness derives not from the events of long ago, but from their memory. For him they are like a dream, like a book he has read.

Like Quijano's book, where Quijano would be the protagonist, Endymion was the protagonist in his memory of the encounter with Diana. In 'Un escolio' the poet is the protagonist; the anecdote in paragraph one serves as the introduction and pretext for the explanation in the second paragraph. If the poem dedicated to the Icelandic author bridges a gap between 'Islandia' and 'Un libro', it does so by making the literary visions in the first poem overt, and hence assigns Borges' ideas about that country to books. In contrast to the first group of poems, where literature seems to corrupt our view of the world, books enrich our view and give pleasure in the second group.

Apart from moving the reader's attention towards books as phenomena which complement reality, this short poem mentions literature 'de altos caballos de guerra/ Y de clamores y de Shakespeare'. The next poem, 'Un libro', is about Macbeth.¹⁴ About this poem, Borges has said in interview:

A book is an extension of the imagination, of memory. Books are perhaps the only thing we know of the past, of our personal past also. And yet, what is a book? A book, when it lies in the bookshelf - I think Emerson has said so (I like to be indebted to Emerson, one of my heroes) - a book is a thing among things. (...) It has no existence of its own. A book is unaware of itself until a reader comes. (...) Since I had to choose a certain book, I thought of Macbeth. (...) We find that in this volume the tragedy of Macbeth is enclosed, all the din, the uproar, the weird sisters. (...) And this book is dead, this book is lifeless, and this book in a sense is lurking, awaiting us. So I wrote the last line.¹⁵

The book in the poem is 'apenas una cosa entre las cosas', but it hides magical powers. Whereas in the earlier poems we find literature

as the opposite of reality and action, the book is both reflection, and part, of that reality here:

Apenas una cosa entre las cosas
Pero también una arma.

The poet becomes reconciled to the idea that literature is not an escape from reality, but a mysteriously powerful part of it. Some books, of course, especially political or philosophical ones, have been perhaps among the most powerful arms in human history: the Bible, the Koran, Mein Kampf and Das Kapital for example. But the type of book that concerns the poet here is one that is read primarily for its artistic content.

The choice of Macbeth is an interesting one: for Borges, Shakespeare is among the least typical of English writers, as he prefers hyperbole to what Borges calls 'understatement'.¹⁶ This reminds us of the distance between reality and literature; but distance is here a thing of beauty and not, as in the first group of poems, a distortion. Although the story in the book is set in Scotland, the book, 'una arma',

... Fue forjada
En Inglaterra, en 1604,
Y la cargaron con un sueño.

That the author of the book wrote about another country emphasizes the fictional nature of the book. Borges writes about the book through the eyes of a South American; this distances him further from the legend

of Macbeth, which was a myth to Shakespeare as was that of Endymion to Borges.

Another interesting feature of this discussion of the book is that for Borges, Macbeth does not seem to be a play, but rather a book to be read in the reader's privacy:

... Encierra
Sonido y furia y noche y escarlata.
Mi palma lo sopesa.

It is the potential of this book which the poet feels beneath his hand. Although it contains hell and eternity, and survives us, until the reader's eyes meet the page, it is powerless:

... Quién diría
Que contiene el infierno: las barbadadas
Brujas que son las Parcas, los puñales
Que ejecutan las leyes de la sombra,
El aire delicado del castillo
Que te verá morir, la delicada
Mano capaz de ensangrentar los mares,
La espada y el clamor de la batalla.

Literature is a creation of man and yet it is in a sense independent of him; the book, closed, remains powerless, it awaits its reader. On the choice of Macbeth Borges has said:

Were I to choose a single tragedy of Shakespeare, I think I would choose Macbeth, that terse thing that begins: "When shall we three meet again/ in thunder, lightening, or in rain?" And then goes on: "Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Another character who speaks "of this dead butcher and his fiendish greed." Of course Macbeth was

far more than a "dead butcher." Then I thought,
well, here is a volume. 17

For him, the book is one of pleasure, of verbal play; the idea that life is a story 'signifying nothing' heightens the ludic nature of Borges' general view of literature as verbal artifice. He lists images from the book in the poem not to illustrate philosophical points about the universe as he does with another book in 'Metáforas de las Mil y Una Noches', but in order to draw our attention to the idea that a book besides being a simple physical object is also a kind of miracle, a source of pleasure. From the above remarks made by the poet about Macbeth, it is evident that for him the pleasure of the play lies not in the action but in the words themselves.

The poem ends with a tercet, an envoi to both this poem and the group of poems which it punctuates and closes. It is interesting that the debate between arms and letters in this group ends with a poem stating that the book is a kind of weapon. At the same time, we return to the image of sleep current in 'Endimión...':

Ese tumulto silencioso duerme
En el ámbito de uno de los libros
Del tranquilo anaquel. Duerme y espera.

We have a dramatic effect in that the mysterious 'cosa entre las cosas' which contains 'el infierno' is now identified as a book, for the first time in the poem. Until now, this thing has been an 'arma'. The mention of sleep returns us to the first line of 'Endimión...', the first poem in the group:

Dormía en la cumbre y era hermoso
Mi cuerpo, que los años han gastado.

Endymion's encounter with Diana was a kind of dream. This dream became a recollection, a memory, a kind of literature; it converted Endymion into a literary, fictional character in myth. Alonso Quijano begs the reader in 'Ni siquiera soy polvo' to continue dreaming his world, and in the final poem of the group, we have a book which awaits its reader, whom in turn it may be dreaming, as it 'duerme y espera'. Books are an extension of man's imagination, and he has, in some cases, become an extension of books. The pleasure felt by the reader is from a book, not from reality; it is intangible, but none the less real. Borges celebrates this miracle in this group of poems.

Notes

- ¹ Willis Barnstone. Borges at Eighty. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982. p. 62 ('Las causas')
- ² 'Endimión', OP pp. 524 - 525. See Barnstone, op. cit., p. 52.
- ³ 'La luna', OP p. 487.
- ⁴ 'La luna', OP p. 131.
- ⁵ Barnstone, op. cit., p. 52.
- ⁶ Obra poética completa, Madrid: Alianza, 1972. p.
- ⁷ OP p. 526.
- ⁸ OP pp. 527 - 528.
- ⁹ New Yorker Magazine September 19th., 1970: p. 42.
- ¹⁰ OP pp. 529 - 530. He visited Iceland in 1971, according to María Esther Vázquez, in El 25 de agosto 1983 y otros cuentos Madrid: Siruela, 1983. p. 126: 'viaja a Islandia, cumpliendo un viejo sueño'.
- ¹¹ 'Balder or Baldr (Norse God of Summer)': Balderston The Literary Universe of Jorge Luis Borges. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986. p. 15.
- ¹² JR Molachino and JM Prieto, En torno a Borges Buenos Aires: Librería Hachette, 1983. p. 79.
- ¹³ OP p. 531. Thorgilsson may be a fictional character. Balderston only tells us (op. cit., p. 150) that he was an 'Icelander, 1816 - 1879'.
- ¹⁴ OP p. 532.
- ¹⁵ Barnstone, op. cit., pp. 67 - 68.

¹⁶ Molachino and Prieto, op. cit., p. 169: 'Shakespeare es - digámoslo así - el menos inglés de los escritores ingleses. Lo típico de Inglaterra es el 'understatement', el decir un poco menos de las cosas. En cambio, Shakespeare tendía a la hipérbole en la metáfora, y nos sorprendería nada que Shakespeare hubiera sido italiano o judío, por ejemplo.'

¹⁷ Barnstone, op. cit., p. 67.

The third group of poems:
'El juego' to 'La espera'.

In the third group of poems we find images of a dream-like nature. The image of dreams is hinted at in the last lines of the second group of poems, where the book is said to be sleeping, 'duerme y espera'.

The first poem is 'El juego'. The form in which it is written is unusual. It is written as a prose poem, in paragraphs short enough to give the text the appearance of lines of verse. Despite this, the text conforms to the pattern which we find in Borges' other prose poems. In the 'Inscripción', for example, we have a three part form, which we also find in 'Un escolio' and 'El condenado'. The first part typically consists of the creation of an image or statement, while the third is an explanation of the first. The second part is a short bridging passage between the two outer parts, which blurs the distinction between them. One is carried in this way from the expository first part to the voice of the omniscient author in the third part in something like a curve.

In 'El juego' the first part is to be found in paragraphs 1 - 5, the bridging part is paragraph 6, and the third part is the last paragraph. The first part of the poem contains a mysterious image. The protagonists seem to be acting out a kind of magical ceremony, a

ritual, 'serios y silenciosos'. It is dark and the couple are so deeply in concentration that they do not look at each other. The idea that the two are operating in a harmony neither of the two understands is suggested by 'la penumbra compartida'. The man acts; he takes the woman's hands and puts rings on them, while the woman, almost passively, 'tendía alternativamente las manos'. At the same time, they are carrying out a joint activity: 'Fueron entrelazando los dedos y juntando las palmas'. This part of the poem is coloured by magical, mysterious symbols like 'el anillo de marfil y el anillo de plata', 'los dos anillos de plata y el anillo de oro con piedras duras'. This paragraph and its imagery seem impenetrable: the reader is left without knowing what the rings mean, who the people are, or what the significance of their actions might be. The picture is similar to a fragment of a half-remembered dream; to the dreamer the actions have significance and require no explanation, but to the mind of a person who is awake, they are trivial because they seem inconsequential.

However, the people in the poem act in seriousness:

No se miraban. En la penumbra compartida
los dos estaban serios y silenciosos.

Later in the poem we read:

Procedían con lenta delicadeza, como si temieran
equivocarse.

Both these paragraphs, at the beginning and end of the description of the act, serve to distance the reader from it. They are also a window

onto the intentions of the protagonists. Although the reader shall perhaps never understand the act, he is made aware of its importance. That the reasons for the act are not stated underlines its importance. The opening paragraph, then, seems to belong to the second part of the poem, the bridge between the act and the interpretation of the poem.

But for the fact that we know the act in the poem to be important - and the suggestion is that the protagonists themselves are also aware of this - we could say that the pair are acting unconsciously; unlike Alonso Quijano in 'Ni siquiera soy polvo', the actors in this dream seem unaware of the fact that they are being dreamt. Their fate, explained in the last part of the poem, is to cause a certain thing, possibly the reading of the poem:

No sabían que era necesario aquel juego para
que determinada cosa ocurriera, en el porvenir,
en determinada región.

Their actions have led to the reader reading the poem: perhaps but for literature they would never have existed, as is the case in the other poems with Quijano, and Macbeth (and the characters from myth in the first group of poems). Of course, Macbeth was a historical person as well as a literary one, as Endymion may have been, but the characters we know as Macbeth and Endymion are essentially literary. The book in 'Un libro' is described as being asleep, waiting; this echoes the description of the two people in 'El juego', who seem to be an image from a dream which is perhaps yet to be dreamt. The book alluded to in 'Un libro' is Macbeth, a book about a man and a woman; the characters in 'El juego' are also a couple. The rings suggest marriage; they also

suggest royalty, which recalls Macbeth.

In both poems we have the idea of a meeting with fate or destiny. In the next poem, 'Milonga del forastero' ², we have the idea of destiny, echoing the seeming impenetrability of the couple's fate:

La historia corre pareja,
La historia siempre es igual;
La cuentan en Buenos Aires
Y en la campaña oriental.

The story in both cases has no justification other than that of destiny; perhaps the story of the couple in 'El juego' is in essence the same as that of the two men described here. Perhaps the acts of the couple in a distant past are the direct ancestors in a long chain of causes and effects of those described here.

Whereas the couple seemed to be carrying out their task in order for some future event to occur, here we have men for whom their past life has been a preparation for their meeting with destiny:

Para esa prueba vivieron
Toda su vida esos hombres;
Ya se han borrado las caras,
Ya se borrarán los nombres.

The movement of destiny here takes place within the lifetimes of two contemporaries. In this poem there is what might have been a tragic story. However, the nature of the verse, and the emphasized point that the story has repeated itself countless times, gives the episode an almost comic aspect. The message is that destiny is stronger than

man's will, and that man acts out a fatal, but meaningless, play of roles:

Siempre son dos los que tallan
Un propio y un forastero;
Siempre es de tarde. En la tarde
Está luciendo el lucero.

The image of darkness which was current in 'El juego' is repeated. Just as the couple 'no se miraban', acted not as individuals but as the tools of fate, and as the 'juego' was the best defined of the three characters in the text, there is an analogous situation in the present poem.

The men do not know each other. Where in 'El juego' the rings suggest marriage, relationships seem irrelevant here:

Nunca se han visto la cara,
No se volverán a ver;
No se disputan haberes
Ni el favor de una mujer.

The rings in the previous poem seemed unimportant to the couple; possessions are unimportant here. The title of the previous poem suggests an act which is absolute and repeated infinitely. The catalyst for the act central to the 'Milonga...', the duel, is the arrival of the 'forastero'. Both the 'juego' of the previous poem and the duel require two players. This 'forastero' is expressed as an archetypal figure in the poem. We see not the unfolding of an individual's destiny but rather the way destiny uses the man as its pawn.

The two men seem aware of their fate, and yet go towards it without a sense of tragedy, as if they knew that fate was stronger than either of them:

Al forastero le han dicho
Que en el pago hay un valiente.
Para probarlo ha venido
Y lo busca entre la gente.

La convida de buen modo
No alza la voz ni amenaza;
Se entienden y van saliendo
Para no ofender la casa.

These men, then, are helpless before their fate, as the couple in 'El juego' were unaware of the future results of their actions:

Ya se cruzan los puñales,
Ya se enredó la madeja,
Ya quedó tendido un hombre
Que muere y que no se queja.

And yet, when we reach the last two verses, where the poet speaks in tones suggesting that we are about to hear the moral of the story, the fatalism which has hitherto dominated the poem is both challenged and reaffirmed:

No vale ser el más diestro,
No vale ser el más fuerte;
Siempre el que muere es aquél
Que vino a buscar la muerte.

One of the men has chosen to die. In the face of his resolve, or that of fate - this is left ambiguous - no amount of technique can change

what is about to happen. In dying, the man finds his destiny, just as Francisco Laprida does in 'Poema conjetural' ³. Where destiny seems to operate over and above the couple in 'El juego', their actions having consequences far removed from their origin, here the man who dies seems almost to be in control of his fate, which directly affects him. At the same time, the story would be repeated with different men. In that case, fate seems to be controlling the man and not the other way round.

As this information comes to us through literature in a very marked poetic style of rhyming quatrains, perhaps the ultimate destiny of the two men - of any two men manipulated by fate in the same way, or who manipulate fate in the same way - is to become a poem. Apart from the poem, the reader would be unaware of the men. They exist as a theory, a postulation, in the mind of the reader.

In the next text, 'El condenado' ⁴, we find a figure who exists in a timeless present; the timeless present of literature. He is condemned to live forever, like Alonso Quijano, in this state. Just as the story in the previous poem 'corre pareja', this man could be any of a plurality of places: 'Una de las dos calles que se cruzan puede ser Andes o San Juan o Bermejo', in Buenos Aires. The passing of time, on the other hand, is irrelevant: 'En el inmóvil atardecer Ezequiel Tabares espera.' The description of the 'tarde' here recalls a phrase used to emphasize timelessness in 'Islandia', 'la tarde inmóvil'. Perhaps although Tabares is situated in Buenos Aires, he could well be in Iceland, in another time: he is in a measure an archetypal figure. He is caught in the eternal present of literature, just as Quijano was in 'Ni siquiera...'. However, this is the tale of a man waiting to

take revenge, to meet his destiny. The text is written in the usual three part form of Borges' prose poems.

In contrast to the vagueness of the geographic location in the text, we find detail in the description of the scene: for example, 'el portón del conventillo, que queda a media cuadra', or 'con la mano derecha roza el bultito del puñal que carga en la sisa.' The banality and repetition of Tabares' existence is also directly underlined: 'donde el mismo dependiente le sirve la misma ginebra', 'sabe que el Chengo no tardará mucho en salir, el Chengo que le quitó la Matilde.' Although it was the loss of the woman which occasions Tabares' revenge, it is his meeting with fate ('el otro') which obsesses him now: 'Hace tiempo que no se acuerda de la mujer; sólo piensa en el otro.' Here, the bourgeois, paradoxical side of the text becomes evident. The man is trapped in a Buenos Aires of the past by virtue of his hate for el Chengo: 'Siente la modesta presencia de las manzanas bajas: las ventanas de reja, las azoteas, los patios de baldosa o de tierra. El hombre sigue viendo esas cosas.'

With this, Tabares is condemned to living in a city of the past, in repetition. The wait for his 'otro' is his destiny, and this has more importance than the reasons for this wait. He lives only in the text. Time is stopped in the text: Tabares lives in 'ciertos minutos de mil ochocientos noventa'. At the same time, the poet envisaged the scene in 1977: 'Hoy, trece de junio de mil novecientos setenta y siete'. The reader may read the text at any future date, and yet Tabares is stuck in the same time; the poet, in 1977, is also stuck, as he is now part of the text. Here again we have the parallel with Alonso Quijano; the latter, however, knows that he depends on the

reader for his existence. Tabares, in contrast, is unaware of the unreality and complexity of his situation:

Sin que lo sepa, Buenos Aires ha crecido a su
alrededor como una planta que hace ruido. No ve -
le está vedado ver - las casas nuevas y los
grandes ómnibus torpes. La gente lo atraviesa
y él no lo sabe. Tampoco sabe que padece castigo.
El odio lo colma.

Rather than being a straightforward literary invention, Tabares is described as a ghost who inhabits a street corner in Buenos Aires, waiting. He believes that his destiny is to meet el Chengo. However, just as he is not allowed by fate to see his surroundings as they are now, neither is he allowed to appreciate that his fate consists of delay. This is analogous to the description Borges has given of the aesthetic event:

esta inminencia de una revelación, que
no se produce es, quizá, el hecho estético. 5

These characters, trapped within texts and awaiting a fate which does not arrive, are illustrations of the aesthetic event.

In the three poems from this group which we have examined, we have images of duality. In each case, there are two people. Tabares stands on the corner of two streets: where the two streets meet. The destinies of two men are about to meet. In these poems there are also images of darkness: 'penumbra compartida' in 'El juego', and 'Siempre es de tarde' in the 'Milonga...', while in 'El condenado' there is the phrase 'en el inmóvil atardecer'. However, these images differ in a

subtle way: the first is of a shared darkness. Unlike the characters in the other poems, the couple share a destiny, and a darkness. The other characters are on their own. In the second poem, we have a static image of darkness, or of lateness; in the third an image of intensifying darkness. This suggests movement, development, but is countered by 'inmóvil'. Tabares shall wait forever; it shall never get dark.

'El condenado' also brings us the idea of ghosts and a fictionalized past (or in the case of Tabares, a future). The next poem, 'Buenos Aires, 1899' builds on these. In this poem, Borges enumerates images of the house where he was born - the date suggests this. The Buenos Aires described is not a place but an atmosphere. The description of the house must be an imaginary one; the poet could not remember such detail of the house when he was days old. The date in the title continues the fictional image of 'El condenado'; by 1899 the ghost of Tabares had stood on his street corner for nine years. At the same time, if Tabares is a literary invention, then, as a parallel, so might be the Borges' house of 1899. Both occur when the reader imagines them.

The poem is written as a sonnet. Its rhyme scheme is abba cddc effe bb and because of this is not a completely traditional sonnet. The poem's semi-classical form is a nostalgia for the sonnet; the images are a nostalgia for impossible memories. If the poem had been written at a time when sonnets were the norm, one could argue that this form was merely an apparatus upon which to build the poem. However, as he did not, there is the idea of something not quite exact, a distortion, and as the poem deals in images of long ago,

there is also the idea that these memories are second hand at best, and most probably imaginary.

The images are a search for a definition of 'Buenos Aires, 1899'. The past in this poem belongs to other people. We begin with 'El aljibe', water, a symbol of time, and a memory of childhood, 'Sobre el patio la vaga astronomía/ Del niño.' Even as a child, the past is implied in the way things have reached him from a more distant past: 'La heredada platería/ Que se espeja en el ébano.' However, if these memories appear to be second hand, the assertiveness of the opening line, 'El aljibe. En el fondo la tortuga' seems to contradict this. The River Plate region is symbolized by the mention of a tortoise which was supposed to purify the water in the tank. ⁷ After a mention of how things were handed down through generations, 'la heredada platería', we find the first of two abstract statements surrounded by the objects denoted in the poem:

... La fuga
Del tiempo, que al principio nunca pasa.

The subject of the poem is that since his birth, in 1899, the poet has been haunted by an ideal Buenos Aires which he finds better expressed by the objects enumerated in the poem than in the Buenos Aires of the present day. This Buenos Aires may never have existed in reality; perhaps, like the characters in the other three poems we have discussed, it is a literary invention. When he was young, time seemed slower and so the gap between the 'grave rostro militar y muerto' or 'un sable que ha servido en el desierto' and himself seemed less

distant.

Even when the poet was a baby the house and its contents were old: 'la vieja casa', 'El patio que fue de los esclavos'. The contents of the house seem to be sleeping:

Silba un trasnochador por la vereda.
En la alcancía duermen los centavos.

The 'centavos' are waiting, perhaps to be spent in the future. This atmosphere seems to be a background, a scene waiting for characters to arrive and give it life. Perhaps the poet describes the world that awaited him when he was born, the family history of which he was to be the next chapter. The poem is an elegy for something which the poet could never experience, the Buenos Aires before he was born. Just as the 'centavos' wait in the box to be spent, and their value changes as they wait, memories change as they wait to be used in a poem. The past, then, needs the present to exist. The 'grave rostro militar y muerto' would be nothing were it not remembered. The only sound referred to in the poem is the whistling 'trasnochador'; everything else is silent and sleeps. There is a tranquillity and the objects in the poem seem lost; the last lines seem to tell us that the objects in fact are unimportant:

Nada, sólo esa pobre medianía
Que buscan el olvido y la energía.

The destiny of these things is to be forgotten. The past is an absence and a memory, in the present.

The past can be ciphered into a poem for the present. A poem is renewed on each reading. The sonnet form of the poem emphasizes its status as an artifice. The final couplet aside, the poem lacks the rhetorical structure of the traditional sonnet, but the use of rhyme and alliteration underlines the artifice: 'espeja/ ébano'; 'principio/ pasa'; 'sable/ servido'; 'militar/ muerto'; 'sombra/ silba', and a more complicated example, 'patio/ esclavos/ parra/ aboyeda'.

The destiny of the things, as in the case of the previous three poems, is their appearance in the poem. All four poems have in common the idea of waiting, an unfulfilled wait, perhaps the wait to be read. In 'Milonga...' one of the men is killed, while the other awaits his fate. The men's anonymity emphasizes this. In 'Buenos Aires, 1899', the things in the poem, 'el olvido y la elegía', await only 'esa pobre medianía'.

These ideas, of waiting and of nothingness, are both present in the next poem, 'El caballo'. As in the last poem, there is a description of a scene. It is written in the same form as 'El condenado': the illustration, the intrusion of the author, and the interpretation by the author. While the origin of 'Buenos Aires, 1899' was uncertain, the image of the horse in this poem is attributed to literary sources in the first place, and to Borges' memory's effect on them. The title is followed by an asterisk, directing the reader to the notes at the end of the book. We find the following:

El caballo: Debo corregir una cita. Chaucer (The Squieres Tale, 194) escribió: Therewith so horsely and soquick of yē. *

When we read the poem, we find a description of the horse in the pampa; immediately we have the image of waiting:

La llanura que espera desde el principio.
Más allá de los últimos durazneros, junto
a las aguas, un gran caballo blanco de ojos
dormidos parece llenar la mañana.

Not only is there the idea of waiting; it is transposed onto the 'llanura', giving the picture a dream-like quality. Perhaps the poet dreams the horse; perhaps the horse dreams, as it is sleeping. The poet's past experience of horses intervenes:

El cuello arqueado, como en una lámina persa,
y la crin y la cola arremolinadas. Es recto y
firme y está hecho de largas curvas. Recuerdo la
famosa línea de Chaucer: a very horsely horse.
No hay con qué compararlo y no está cerca, pero
se sabe que es muy alto.

There is a mysterious distance between the poet and his vision, which he attributes to Persian pictures and to Chaucer, to the imagination of other artists. In the note, we find that what is described as a quotation from Chaucer is in fact a piece of Borges' imagination. Thus the poet begins to intrude, preparing us for his interpretation of the scene in the final part of the text.

In the next paragraph there is an echo of the end of the previous poem, 'Nada, salvo ya la mediodía'. The final line of the previous poem is 'Nada. Sólo esa pobre medianía que buscan el olvido y la energía', bringing tranquillity and pathos to the poem. While the things in 'Buenos Aires, 1899' were asleep, seeking oblivion, the

horse in 'El caballo' is alive; only its eyes are asleep: it is described as 'de ojos dormidos'. Through the corrupted line from Chaucer, the memory of the 'lámina persa', the silent horse seems to invade the the world of the wakeful, like a dream remembered: 'parece llenar la mañana'. The dream of the horse is transported to the world of the reader.

The horse is singular and surrounded by nothing, 'No hay con qué compararlo y no está cerca, pero se sabe que es muy alto'. This special horse is white and surrounded by only the midday. The final paragraph gives the horse an archetypal quality:

Aquí y ahora está el caballo, pero algo
distinto hay en él, porque también es un
caballo en un sueño de Alejandro de Macedonia.

He has appeared in illustrious people's dreams or imaginations: Alexander the Great, Chaucer, the Persian artist and Borges have all seen him. Perhaps the horse is an archetype, beyond our perception and visible only in dreams. The distance created between the poet and the picture he describes gives it the nature of a photograph or illustration. The horse seems to live on a level different from the one the poet or reader exists on, in a timeless, silent present, as does Ezequiel Tabares in 'Buenos Aires, 1899'. He also lives in silence: he does not notice Buenos Aires growing around him, 'como una planta que hace ruido'.

In the next poem, an engraving inspires the poet: 'El grabado' 9. In this engraving there are similarities with the horse image of the previous text. Although this time the horse has a rider, and is

'moving', there is an echo of the 'llanura' in the 'estepa'. There is also the idea of the memory suddenly recalling half-forgotten images without conscious effort. In the previous poem, the poet mentions some horses which he remembers, to form an archetypal horse.

The first part of this poem takes the form of a question, directed at the reader:

¿Por qué, al hacer girar la cerradura,
Vuelve a mis ojos con asombro antiguo
El grabado de un tártaro que enlaza
Desde el caballo un lobo de la estepa?

This has the effect of implicating the reader in the discussion taking place in the poem, and indicates that the answer to this question will not be found in the poem. The second part is a brief description of the 'grabado'. This is begun in the first part, in the third line, avoiding what would be an unnatural-sounding division of ideas. Part of the mystery expressed in the first part has to do with the way in which we find it hard to distinguish between, for example, cause and effect. The part devoted solely to a description of the 'grabado' lasts only a line and a half:

La fiera se resuelve eternamente,
El jinete la mira.

Just as the figures in the previous poems were trapped in a literary reality, the figures in this one - as is the case with the last one - are trapped in a picture; although the poem is entitled 'El grabado', the portion of the poem devoted to the picture is small. Borges' main

consideration is the wonder he feels about his memory, and even in mid line he begins to talk of this:

... La memoria
Me concede esta lámina de un libro
Cuyo color y cuyo idioma ignoro.
Muchos años hará que no la veo.

He remembers nothing about the book other than the engraving, and does not remember why he remembers it. It is engraved upon his memory. This is a very personal recollection. Just as the corruption of the line of Chaucer in the last poem is particular to the poet, so is this memory. It is as if we have moved from the idea of the figures in the poems searching for their identity, to the poet searching for his. The discussion of the memory continues, with alliteration:

A veces me da miedo la memoria
En sus cóncavas grutas y palacios
(Dijo San Agustín) hay tantas cosas.
El infierno y el cielo están en ella.

However, the memory also contains happiness; in the final part of the poem, the poet specifies what he considers heaven and hell to be. First, hell:

... basta lo que encierra
El más común y tenue de tus días
Y cualquier pesadilla de tu noche;

Hell is nothing out of the ordinary, it is a part of every day. Heaven is called 'el otro', and perhaps this is a suggestion that it is our

destiny, or that our aim is happiness. Heaven consists of fragmentary experiences:

Para el otro, el amor de los que aman,
La frescura del agua en la garganta
De la sed, la razón y su ejercicio,
La tersura del ébano invariable
O - luna y sombra - el oro de Virgilio.

These can be interpreted as meetings with destiny: the lover being loved, thirst being quenched, intellect being used, wood being polished, preserving its beauty. Heaven, then, exists in fulfilment. The memory of the engraving, however distant or fragmented, finds its fulfilment in being remembered by the poet and built into a poem.

The final two lines of the poem seem to underline this. The mention of the ebony mirrors a line from 'Buenos Aires, 1899': 'La heredada platería/ Que se espeja en el ébano.' The polished silver, like the ebony, seem 'invariable', timeless. Perhaps, like mirrors, they reflect the passing of time without taking part in that process, symbolizing a distance found in works of art - which themselves stand out from the passing of time. Eternity, or a kind of eternity, a sense of being of both the future and the past, is part of Borges' idea of heaven. It is ironic that the very smoothness of the ebony is mentioned as a kind of heaven, for the idea of hell seems to be a routine, 'el más común de tus días', while the images of heaven seem to be events which rise above the monotony of everyday life. In this poem, the poet talks of the memory's arbitrariness, and this incongruous image of heaven stresses this.

The last line is also interesting; both the form of Virgil's

poetry, its 'oro', and its influence on Borges' memory, its 'sombra', are forms of heaven. Here we have images used frequently by Borges when talking of poetry, in two poems called 'La luna' for example. ¹⁰ Virgil is for Borges a symbol of poetry. ¹¹ If the 'oro' of Virgil is the poetry he wrote, and the 'sombra' its effect on his readers, the poem suggests that the its destiny is in its meeting with the reader. Each thing requires its 'otro'.

In these poems, the poet is writing images of dreams and memories. Dreams and memories exist in the imagination. In 'Things that might have been' ¹² he talks of conjecture, which, like dreams, exists in the imagination: 'Pienso en las cosas que pudieron ser y no fueron.' The English title is perhaps an allusion to the poet's English ancestry: had his family history been different, he might have been an English poet. The poet lists things which although possible are only speculation. The first is an unwritten 'tratado de mitología sajona' which he attributes to an author who did exist. Mythology itself is a form of speculation. We have the contrast between the objectivity and scholarship implied in 'tratado' and the imagination and unreality of 'mitología'. The next lines of the poem concern how Dante could not have known how influential his work would be; reference is made both to the skill of the poet, 'Ya corregido el último verso', and in contrast to his lack of control over his work.

The next line is still connected with the written word; what would have happened had Christ not been crucified nor Socrates poisoned? To provide answers to these questions we must examine the past. Dante and Bede are different from Christ and Socrates in that the first two are literary, while all four are historical. The second

two, however, are also mythical. They are also philosophical, while Christ is essentially a religious figure; Dante's work concerns religion and forms a bridge.

The poem then moves on to talk of classical myth: 'La historia sin el rostro de Helena.' Here we would be in the same territory as with Bede in the first line but for the fact that the myth of Helena was written down and forms part of our consciousness, as might have been the case with the Saxon myths in Bede's putative treatise. The reader is invited to speculate: perhaps the Saxon myths would have become as relevant as the classical ones but for the influence of Christianity.

The next line is: 'El hombre sin los ojos, que nos han deparado la luna.' For Borges, the moon is a symbol of poetry: this line seems to suggest that had man not been able to see the moon - which is a type of poetic muse in much of his work, representing his sense of wonder at the universe - man might never have been inspired to compose poetry. Borges is blind; he saw the moon, or poetry, before he lost his sight. The moon in the poem is the myth or group of images which we call the moon.

From ancient history and myth, we move to more recent events. We also move from Europe to America. Although the 'Victoria del Sur' at Gettysburg would have had great historical implications, in this line we also have an allusion to Dahlmann's romanticized search for destiny in 'El sur' ¹³. The battle is therefore both a political or universal struggle and a personal event for the combatants. Until now we have been dealing in the poem with myths and literature, which belong as experiences to whole civilizations or at least to social groups.

Dante, for example, wrote the poem, but the 'obra inconcebible' exists in the minds of his readers. With the 'victoria del Sur' we enter the realm of the individual: although Bede, Dante, Socrates and Christ were individuals, we remember them here for their contribution to civilization rather than for their lives as individuals. While winning a battle is a group act which has implications for a social group, each combatant has his own personal experience in that battle. In the line 'El amor que no compartimos', which could refer to María Kodama, the future wife of the poet, this process towards the individual is continued. She is a real person, but in the collection she appears as a semi-fictional character, in the 'Inscripción', and perhaps also in 'Endimión en Latmos'.

The next line remains in America, while the second last is about a myth in Europe: 'El ave fabulosa de Irlanda, que está en dos lugares a un tiempo'. None of the 'Things that might have been' exist outside of man's imagination; some have roots in history, others in man's reaction to the world around him. The final line of the poem is concerned with the poet's own impossibility: 'El hijo que no tuve'. This child, ironically, was the only one he ever had. Perhaps it is here that the poem gets. In an earlier text, 'The unending gift', * the unfulfilled promise of the painting is its existence; each thing in 'Things that might have been' exists only in that it does not exist. In the realm of the imagination, as in a dream, anything can exist. It is with this type of reality that literature often deals: speculation, unfulfilled hopes, theories.

The note of understated emotional unfulfillment at the end of 'Things that might have been' leads us to the next poem, 'El

'enamorado' ¹⁵, which deals with the poet's wait for a love which never arrives. This echoes Endimión's search for the 'indiferente luna' and is also a case of the wait for the 'otro', the lover waiting for the lover. In order to survive, the poet has to make a constant exercise of believing things which he cannot believe.

The poem is a sonnet, in four parts of 4 4 3 and 3 lines, with the rhyme scheme abba cddc eff egg. Each part of the poem is governed by the phrase 'Debo fingir...'. This comes at the start of each part, with the exception of the first part, in which the poet must 'fingir'. Here the poet, who in the last poem believed in things that never happened, does not believe in things which have happened. The first lines enumerate elements of everyday life:

Lunas, marfiles, instrumentos, rosas,
Lámparas y la línea de Durero,
Las nueve cifras y el cambiante cero,
Debo fingir que existen esas cosas.

Again there is the moon, symbol of love and poetry, the ivory mentioned in 'El juego', and the rose, symbol of beauty. Whilst the 'línea de Durero' could relate to the 'grabado' of 'El grabado', the 'lámpara' remains enigmatic. The alliteration on 'l' adds to the poetic effect of these lines; the repetition of 'Debo fingir' gives structure to the poem. Repetition is underlined by the use of plural nouns, which contrasts with the two singular noun clauses. Neither of these is really singular. There are a variety of 'ceros' if it is 'cambiante'; with a line, a great artist can create ambiguity, a plurality of emotions.

Delaying the key phrase of the poem, 'Debo fingir', until the end of the quatrain has the effect of emphasizing the distance between the poet's reality and that of the reader, who is immediately presented with a list of things he need not pretend the existence of. The title makes the reader expect that this poem is a list of things which have contributed to the happiness of the man indicated in the title. The delaying effect allows the poet to build the reader's expectations and then to destroy them; rather than form a climax, line four is a postponement.

The second quatrain is concerned with the past:

Debo fingir que en el pasado fueron
Persépolis y Roma y que una arena
Sutil midió la suerte de la almena
Que los siglos de hierro deshicieron. ¹⁶

For the literary poet, even events as important as those from ancient history have ceased to be real. Here there is alliteration on 's' and 'r'; the poetic nature of these lines is enhanced by the Germanic sounding image of 'siglos de hierro'. This North European theme is continued in the third part of the poem:

Debo fingir las armas y la pira
De la epopeya y los pesados mares
Que roen de la tierra los pilares.

This in turn evokes a line from the 'inscripción', dedicated to María Kodama: 'Por las raíces de un lenguaje de hierro. Por una pira sobre un promontorio del Báltico.' ¹⁷ These lines also echo the 'siglos de

hierro'. Even something as close to the poet's heart as germanic poetry, 'la epopeya', has ceased to exist for him; with María Kodama he studied germanic literature and compiled a short book, Breve antología anglosajona ¹⁶. In the third part of the poem the poet uses alliteration on 'p', and again on 'r', which provides a self conscious poetic effect. This mirrors the artifice of make-believe. The final tercet provides the poem with its climax:

Debo fingir que hay otros. Es mentira.
Sólo tú eres. Tú, mi desventura
Y mi ventura, inagotable y pura.

Love prevents the 'enamorado' from thinking of anything other than his 'otro', whatever he is in love with. As the book is dedicated to María Kodama, this might be her. In the first quatrain, the poet loses his surroundings, in the second, the past; in the first tercet, he loses poetry, and in the second, everything other than his self and what he is in love with. This final tercet is marked by short sentences and irony: the object of his love is both his 'desventura' and 'ventura', a play on words.

If the subject of his love is a play on words, it might be poetry. The poem takes the form of a poet addressing María Kodama; on a more literal level it is a poem addressing the reader. The poem is in love with poetry; at the same time, the reader is the 'desventura' and 'ventura', the object of the poem. It is poetry that must 'fingir' all these things; it consists of words on a page, which have to be given life by the reader. All the things which the poem no longer believes in are part of the reader's imagination. In order for the

poem to function, it needs the reader; in order for the 'enamorado' to function it needs the object of its love. Without the reader, a poem is only a potential world: a list of 'Things that might have been', just as the love of the 'enamorado' is without the presence of the object of his love, his 'otro' in either case.

The next poem, 'G A Bürger' ¹⁹ is also about the poet's search for an 'otro'. Borges takes Bürger as his 'otro', his persona, for the poem. The two names are similar; they were both poets. The poem is a speculation, a 'thing that might have been'. Borges has spoken of this poem in interview:

This poem was given to me one afternoon in my apartment in Buenos Aires. I felt very sad and dreary, weebegone, and then I said to myself: Why on earth should I worry what happens to Borges? After all, Borges is nothing, a mere fiction. And then I thought I would write this down. And I bethought myself etymologically - I am always thinking etymology - and I thought: My name, a very common Portuguese name, Borges, means a burger. Then I thought of a German poet whose works I suppose I have read. His name is the same as mine, Bürger. Then I thought of a literary trick. I would write a poem about Bürger. And as the reader goes on, he'll find out that Bürger is not Bürger but Borges. After all, we share the same name. Then I began, and I spoke of the river of the plain. That may be the lowlands more than Germany, but also the province of Buenos Aires. And then I gave a hint. I spoke of a palm tree, not the pine, and then I spoke of a river, a river with only one bank to it. And then I remembered the beautiful title of a book by Mallea, La ciudad junto al río, (...) and I worked in the line. The reader would find at the end that the poem was not about Bürger but about myself, and that I had played a legitimate trick on him. I hope it works. ²⁰

The mood of sadness of the previous poems is present in this poem; while Borges' comments tell us how he came to write the poem, they do not explain how it is read in the context of the book.

Bürger is a haunting figure, and the poet is puzzled about this: 'No acabo de entender...'. The parallel between the two poets is suggested by the duality of the information which Borges has found about him, '(sus dos fechas están en la enciclopedia)', which has the effect of making the other poet more real. The postulation in this poem is that some secret link exists between the two poets.

Borges is perplexed by the things

que le sucedieron a Bürger
(sus dos fechas están en la enciclopedia)
en una de las ciudades de la llanura,
junto al río que tiene una sola margen
en la que crece la palmera, no el pino.

In other words, he is not interested in what happened to him in Germany, but in Argentina; the G. A. Bürger of the title is a poetic presence, not a historical figure. This presence has outlived the physical man and has been transported across the Atlantic by his work. The second part of the poem stresses how ordinary - and archetypal - Bürger was; he seems like another Borges. We read that he

agonizó de amor muchas veces
y, tras la noche del insomnio,
vio los cristales grises del alba,
pero mereció la gran voz de Shakespeare
(en la que están las otras)
y la de Angelus Silesius de Breslau
y con falso descuido limó algún verso,
en el estilo de su época.

Borges, who talks of rewriting archetypal metaphors in the language of his time, and who wrote 'Endimión en Latmos', 'El enamorado' and

'Things that might have been', and who translated Angelus Silesius ²¹, is present here. As Borges states in the interview, Bürger is a mask he adopts in the poem.

The next sentence is typically borgesian. Bürger shares Borges' preoccupation with time:

Sabía que el presente no es otra cosa
que una partícula fugaz del pasado
y que estamos hechos de olvido:
sabiduría tan inútil
como los corolarios de Spinoza
o las magias del miedo.

Bürger already knew what Borges writes about in his works, about time and how 'inconceivable' the universe is, and how futile our attempts to understand it are. We have the idea that Borges is in a way a mirror image of Bürger, that Bürger said things that Borges would later repeat. Time, which was an interest of both poets, is what divides them.

The mystery created by the opening lines of the poem is due to the poet's wonder at his memory, at its powers of remembering and forgetting things, an idea also present in 'El grabado'. For the man in 'El enamorado' the past had ceased to exist; here we find the present expressed as part of the past.

In the final part of the poem we find the desenlace which has already been suggested:

En la ciudad junto al río inmóvil
unos dos mil años después de la muerte de un dios
(la historia que refiero es antigua)

Bürger está solo y ahora,
precisamente ahora, líma unos versos.

Bürger is in present day Buenos Aires. Both these ideas are communicated indirectly to the reader, by means of allusions to Mallea and Nietzsche, setting the stage for the final couplet. In this last sentence we again find the device of the parenthesis, which in all three cases is used to state ideas which an experienced reader of Borges might automatically expect to find in the context, an effect which almost parodies Borges' style. When we read an unusual name in Borges, we think of Borges having found it in an encyclopaedia. We think of there being a multiplicity of characters in Shakespeare, of every reader becoming Shakespeare; the infinite repetition of every metaphor and plot, not only that of 'la muerte de un dios'. These parentheses are present in each of the sentences of the poem, with the exception of the third, where the poet writes directly of thought, using alliteration: 'partícula ...pasado', 'magias del miedo'. The parentheses are used to show how the poet thinks, a device unnecessary in the third sentence.

The final couplet points to the essential ambiguity of the text; is it Bürger's presence that Borges feels, helping him to write his poem, or are we supposed to believe that Bürger writes, in an incarnation as Borges? Is Bürger Borges' 'otro'? There are many ways to view these lines. At the moment the reader reads the poem, Bürger polishes them; might Bürger not be the reader? In 'El enamorado' the poem remains the same while the reader changes. Although Bürger is specifically in Buenos Aires, in the 'ciudad junto al río inmóvil',

which might suggest that he is not the reader, when he reads the poem, the reader may be transported to Buenos Aires. This idea is frequent in Borges; a good example is from Elogio de la sombra, 'New England, 1967'. Although Borges the man is in North America, the poem being dated 'Cambridge, 1967'²², his poetic persona, the manifestation of the poet's self in the poem, remains in Buenos Aires:

Buenos Aires, yo sigo caminando
por tus esquinas, sin por qué ni cuándo.

The man is temporarily in New England: 'Cambridge, 1967'; the poetic persona, the poem, is eternally in Buenos Aires. The reader is also, in a sense, there; only the external reality of the poet, 'las formas de mi sueño', has changed.

The poet is continually in Buenos Aires. Buenos Aires for Borges is not the city; it is an idea, an atmosphere. From the same book, there is a poem which ends defining Buenos Aires:

Buenos Aires es la otra calle, la que no pisé nunca, es el centro de las manzanas, los patios últimos, es lo que las fachadas ocultan, es mi enemigo, si lo tengo, es la persona a quien le desagradan mis versos (a mí me desagradan también), es la modesta librería en que acaso entramos y que hemos olvidado, es esa racha de milonga silbada que no reconocemos y que nos toca, es lo que se ha perdido y lo que será, es lo ulterior, lo ajeno, lo lateral, el barrio que no es tuyo ni mío, lo que ignoramos y queremos.²³

Borges writes of himself with the mask of Bürger in 'G A Bürger'. The reader, as he reads the poem, is involved in waiting for an explanation of the relationship between Borges and Bürger; the poem

waits for its interpretation.

The next poem, 'La espera' ²⁴, is concerned with this wait. What the poet is waiting on remains ambiguous; as it is 'esperada/ Por la ansiedad', it could be assumed that this poem is an extension of 'El enamorado', that the poet waits for love. On the other hand, the lines

(En mi pecho, el reloj de sangre mide
El temeroso tiempo de la espera.)

suggest that the poet awaits death. This idea is supported by the fact that when what is 'esperada/ por la ansiedad' arrives, it is not Borges who opens the door:

Antes que suene el presuroso timbre
Y abran la puerta y entres...

This suggests that the poet would not be able to open the door; on the other hand, the 'esperada' could be a person.

Before this event happens, 'el universo tiene/ que haber ejecutado una infinita/ serie de actos concretos.' Can an infinite number of acts ever be completed? Perhaps what he waits for shall never come. The next sentence, besides having many bourgeois symbols of infinity like 'la cifra/ de lo que multiplican los espejos', repetition in 'sombras que se alargan y regresan' and 'pasos que convergen y divergen', is prefixed by the idea that only to human perception is the number of acts infinite: 'Nadie puede/ computar ese vértigo, la cifra...'. However, although perhaps the number of events is finite, it is also too large to be conceivable:

La arena no sabría numerarlos.

The envoi to this poem is written in a quatrain as a revision of the first stanza:

Antes que llegues,
Un monje tiene que soñar con una ancla,
Un tigre tiene que morir en Sumatra,
Nueve hombres tienen que morir en Borneo.

It is not impossible that a person could perceive these things. However, it would be improbable for one person, reading this poem, to have knowledge of all these events, were they to happen.

What the poet waits for remains ambiguous; the period of waiting is either immeasurable or inconceivable. The poem then becomes an illustration of an archetypal wait on something which 'esperada/ Por la ansiedad'. What is waited on remains undefined; we only know that it is longed for. In all the poems of this group we are concerned with types of delay, waiting. In 'El juego' the game awaits its result, its purpose: 'era necesario aquel juego para que determinada cosa ocurriera, en el porvenir, en determinada región'. In the 'Milonga...' two men await death; in 'El condenado' Tabares is condemned to an eternal wait on his revenge - or his destiny, his own death. In 'Buenos Aires, 1899', all the things in the house seem to be waiting for something to happen, something the poet suggests shall not happen. On the other hand, perhaps the objects' existence in the poet's memory or poem is their destiny:

Nada. Sólo esa pobre medianía
Que buscan el olvido y la elegía.

In 'El caballo', 'La llanura ... espera desde el principio', whilst in 'El grabado' the 'fiera se resuelve eternamente': both are waiting, caught in time, lurking in the poet's memory. In 'Things that might have been' we read a list of possibilities which await realization. For them, as is the case of the objects in 'Buenos Aires, 1899' and 'El condenado', the wait is their destiny. They are caught in an eternal wait, just as the moon would be, as far as man is concerned, if it were invisible: 'El hombre sin los ojos, que nos han deparado la luna'. ²⁵ Waiting is a form of absence; for the poet in 'El enamorado', the presence of the idea of what he loves excludes anything else. In 'G A Bürger', the reader is caught up in the wait for clarification of the poem's origin - is it Borges or Bürger that we read?

The final envoi of this group of poems seems to tell us that we may know when we shall finish our wait, but that knowing is not enough. It may be that the information we need might not be available. This is mirrored in a poem where there are often more variable elements than fixed ones, delaying interpretation and enriching the text. However, the wealth of meanings and possible interpretations in a text can cause it to be impenetrable and meaningless if we seek absolute interpretation. If we accept the variable elements of a text as they are, the ultimate point in interpretation is the postponement of interpretation. In other words, like Ezequiel Tabares, we must accept a wait rather than a revelation as the destiny of the reader of

Notes

- 1 'El juego', OP p. 533.
- 2 'Milonga del forastero', OP pp. 534 - 535.
- 3 'Poema conjetural', OP pp. 186 - 187.
- 4 'El condenado', OP p. 536.
- 5 Molachino and Prieto, En torno a Borges Buenos Aires: Librería Hachette, 1983: p. 153.
- 6 'Buenos Aires, 1899', OP p. 537.
- 7 See Emir Rodríguez Monegal, Borges por él mismo Barcelona: Laia, 1983. p. 176.
- 8 'El caballo', OP p. 538. 'Notas', OP p. 559.
- 9 'El grabado', OP p. 539.
- 10 'La luna', OP p. 487, and pp. 131 - 134.
- 11 Willis Barnstone, Borges at Eighty, p. 81: 'Virgil? For me he stands for poetry.'
- 12 'Things that might have been' OP p. 540.
- 13 'El sur' PC I, pp. 529 - 535.
- 14 'The unending gift', OP p. 327.
- 15 'El enamorado', OP p. 541.
- 16 Persépolis, according to Balderston, The Literary Universe of Jorge Luis Borges Westport: Greenwood Press 1986, p 292, was an 'ancient city in Persia, near Shiraz'.
- 17 'Inscripción', OP p. 511.
- 18 Breve antología anglosajona in OCEC II, pp. 307 -

321.

¹⁹ 'G A Bürger', OP pp. 542 - 543. This poem also appears in Roberto Alifano 24 Conversations New York: Grove Press, 1984. It is titled there, in English, aptly, 'G L Bürger'. Balderston, op. cit., p. 25 contains the entry 'Bürger, Gottfried August (German poet and novelist, 1747 - 1794, author of *Baron Munchhausen* and other works)'. He is mentioned in this Borges text only.

²⁰ Barnstone, op. cit., pp. 47 - 48.

²¹ This book, perhaps an unfinished project, is mentioned on p. 189 of Jorge Oscar Pickenhayn's Borges: álgebra y fuego Buenos Aires: Belgrano, 1982.

²² OP p. 325.

²³ OP p. 355.

²⁴ OP p. 544.

²⁵ OP p. 540.

The fourth group of poems:

'El espejo' to 'Adán es tu ceniza'

In an earlier poem, 'Arte poética' ¹, Borges uses the mirror as a symbol of the way people might find their identity in poetry:

A veces en las tardes una cara
Nos mira desde el fondo de un espejo;
El arte debe ser como ese espejo
Que nos revela nuestra propia cara.

In the first poem of the fourth group, 'El espejo' ², the poet uses the image of the mirror and shows how his perceptions of its powers changed as he grew older, to convey the idea that behind our perceptions may lurk other things which are beyond our ken but present as possibilities.

The poem is written in the form of a sonnet, with lines of eleven syllables but without a rhyme scheme. It is in two parts, lines 1 - 10 and lines 11 - 14. Just as is the case in the prose texts in the book, the last line of the first part forms a bridge between the perspectives of the two parts. At the same time this bridge reflects the beginning of the first part, which is about the poet's childhood impressions of mirrors. The second part is about what he feels now. This change of perspective is clearly marked in the text. The poem

begins: 'Yo, de niño, temía que el espejo', while the second part begins:

Yo temo ahora que el espejo encierre
El verdadero rostro de mi alma

There is a unity of identity in these two statements in the repetition of 'Yo'; the last line of the first part, however, serves to distance the first 'yo' from the second:

(A nadie se lo dije; el niño es tímido.)

This utterance, in parentheses, underlines that the poem stems from the difference between the poet's earlier and later impressions of the mirror.

In the first part, the emotion which inspires the poet is - or was - fear of the unknown:

Yo, de niño, temía que el espejo
Me mostrara otra cara o una ciega
Máscara impersonal que ocultaría
Algo sin duda atroz.

What the child fears is the negation of his personality, or the transformation of the everyday and personal into something which is alien to him and terrible. That the mirror hides something 'sin duda atroz' is perhaps a suggestion of the child's growing and insecure awareness of himself; the image of the mask being 'ciega' suggests a fear of the future, as blindness was a hereditary condition in the

Borges family. At the same time, people use mirrors to see what they look like, and thus blindness here perhaps points to the fact that this may be impossible. The child is not using the mirror simply as a way to see what he looks like; he is concerned with what lies inside the mirror, and this would be a reflection of what lies inside him. In other words, the mirror is an exteriorization of the hidden side of the child's identity and of the fears which the child's imagination, or subconscious, 'ocultaría'. The mirror shows the reverse of an image. Ironically, the mirror here is a way of finding outside the child what lies within him.

These childhood memories continue in the same line, breaking with strict sonnet structure:

Temí asimismo
Que el silencioso tiempo del espejo
Se desviara del curso cotidiano
De las horas del hombre y hospedara
En su vago confín imaginario
Seres y formas y colores nuevos.

This adds to the fear of loss of identity in the first sentence; here the world inhabited by the child is negated. Time and sound cease in the world of the mirror; time changes direction. If the strange beings and colours - perhaps existing in the mirror but invisible to the child, echoing the idea of 'ciega/ Máscara impersonal' - in the mirror are in a 'vago confín imaginario', they exist not in the mirror, but in the imagination of the child as he looks into the mirror. The child worries about a future confrontation with the strange world of the mirror. The second part of the poem does not confirm that this

happened later in the poet's life. This thought was so frightening that the child chose not to exteriorize it, and kept it secret. Ironically, it is when we read this in the parenthesis that the poet reveals his childhood secret. The secret is both identified as such and ceases to be a secret in the same line, in line ten. This may be a purely formal consideration, but it symbolizes the delicate nature of the intangible images that the child saw in the mirror; once revealed to the reader, once touched, the secret is no more.

Whereas in the first part the poet felt that what the mirror held was essentially a distortion, in the second he believes its reflection to be in some way more real, more essential, than the face looking in the mirror:

Yo temo ahora que el espejo encierre
El verdadero rostro de mi alma,
Lastimada de sombras y de culpas,
El que Dios ve y acaso ven los hombres.

The face the mirror sees is the archetype, free from distortion. The mirror hides some truth; it both hides and offers the possibility of finding the truth. Were it not concealed here, like the secret, it would cease to exist. It exists only as a fear for the poet, in his imagination, which becomes a mirror here; the poet only exists as 'el verdadero rostro de mi alma' in his imagination. Borges has called the book 'una extensión de la imaginación y de la memoria' ⁹; perhaps the poet only exists in his books. We read that the poet's soul is 'lastimada de sombras y de culpas'; the poet's face casts its shadow over the mirror, while with the mention of God - and of the soul - in

the poem there is also the idea that guilt, or sin, could damage the 'verdadero rostro de mi alma'. Guilt also relates to the poet's feelings as a boy; he was 'tímido' about telling people his secret, perhaps out of a feeling of guilt at having seen what he should not have, the possibility of the other world in the mirror. The possibility that human beings can also see what lies in the mirror is here, 'acaso ven los hombres'; however, only God can definitely see the 'verdadero rostro de mi alma'.

The mirror has been a constant in the poet's search for identity and understanding of the universe. In the next poem he looks to a different, less archetypal image, a variant of the mirror: that of French literature. This poem, 'A Francia' ⁴, begins with a paraphrased quotation from Diderot. The same quotation prefixes 'El congreso', a text which has been seen as a cipher of the poet's prose work. ⁵ This cuento, which has been regarded by its author as one of his best, was published only as an individual short story until its appearance in El libro de arena. ⁶ That the text was composed in 1955 and El libro de arena was published twenty years later underlines the importance to the poet of the Diderot quotation. Just as the mirror haunted the poet for many years, so did the quotation. The idea is stated in the poem:

Diderot narra la parábola. En ella están mis días,
mis muchos días.

The words form part of the poet's consciousness, that inner part of his personality referred to in 'Two English poems':

I offer you that kernel of myself that I have saved, somehow - the central heart that deals not in words, traffics not in dreams and is untouched by time, by joy, by adversities. 7

Somehow the Diderot parable has transcended language. Although the poet has experienced other things, 'otros amores/ y la erudición vagabunda', he then makes what seems an unusual comment for Borges, who normally makes remarks like this about Buenos Aires, not France 8,

pero no dejaré de estar en Francia
y estaré en Francia cuando la grata muerte me
llame
en un lugar de Buenos Aires.

On the other hand, we are dealing here not with the physical reality suggested by the image of 'castillo', France the country, but with literature from France. The poet's days are not in the castle, but in 'la parábola'.

In the next sentence this idea becomes further defined:

No diré la tarde y la luna; diré Verlaine.
No diré el mar y la cosmogonía; diré el nombre de
Hugo.
No la amistad, sino Montaigne.
No diré el fuego; diré Juana,
y las sombras que evoco no disminuyen
una serie infinita.

Here we have the poet suggesting that certain images are epitomized by French literary figures, both authors and historical-literary figures like Joan of Arc. This is written in the future tense, which suggests intention. It is as if the poet is resolving to use these images in

future poems; in previous poems, for example, the moon is often linked to Virgil, not Verlaine. The poet does two things in these lines: he lists images

la tarde y la luna
el mar y la cosmogonía
la amistad
el fuego

and tells us how he would like to epitomize them. As any reader of Borges would know, these are not the usual symbols Borges uses. It is as if the poet is indicating that he would like to expand his poetic language, but refusing to: this would distort the image which his readers have of him.

The idea of infinity in lines 15 and 16 is continued in the next sentence, where after having earlier defined what France means to him - a series of literary images - he wonders about when or how this part of his life began. French literature entered his life

como aquel juglar del Bastardo
que entró cantando en la batalla,
que entró cantando en la Chanson de Roland
y no vio el fin, pero presintió la victoria.

This happened in such a subtle way that he perhaps never realized that it had entered his life: perhaps it had always been there. In the last two lines of the poem the point that French literature has become a major preoccupation for the poet is emphasized. The poet writes that its voice is eternal and pervasive:

La firme voz rueda de siglo en siglo
y todas las espadas son Durendal.

Perhaps the poet first met French literature in the medieval Chanson de Roland; As already mentioned, here we have Roland's sword, Durendal.

The next poem, 'Manuel Peyrou' ♪, is about a friend of Borges who died; he has a French surname, and 'un verso de Hugo podía arrebatarlo'. Like Borges, he has shared in the world of French literature. The first six and a half lines form a eulogy to his friendship:

Suyo fue el ejercicio generoso
De la amistad genial. Era el hermano
A quien podemos, en la hora adversa,
Confiarle todo o, sin decirle nada,
Dejarle adivinar lo que no quiere
Confesar el orgullo.

While the use of 'hermano' suggests that the two writers were colleagues in their love of French literature, the description here is not specifically literary. We read of his social skills - the next part of the poem tells us of the man's likes, which are similar to those of Borges:

Agradecía
La variedad del orbe, los enigmas
De la curiosa condición humana,
El azul del tabaco pensativo,
Los diálogos que lindan con el alba,
El ajedrez heráldico y abstracto,
Los arabescos del azar, los gratos
Sabores de las frutas y las aves,

El café insomne y el propicio vino
Que conmemora y une.

This is an enumeration of images of a friend of Borges who enjoyed life. How is he evoked? In the first six lines he is remembered as an understanding friend; in lines 6 - 15, he is philosophical and conversational. Speculation on the 'enigmas de la condición humana' belongs to the art of conversation; the tobacco, together with the 'diálogos', makes an image of someone who likes to communicate, to be with other people. Chess is a game for two players; however, it is presented here, 'heráldico y abstracto', as intellectual rather than social, perhaps more as a subject for conversation than a game for playing. In contrast to the rules of chess, the design, we have the 'arabescos del azar', chance. A game of chess is concerned both with chance and skill.

It is rare that Borges mentions food or drink in a poem, but here we have an exception - and here these images are used in order to present a social picture of Peyrou: 'el café insomne' suggests the 'diálogos que lindan con el alba', while 'el vino/ Que conmemora y une' uses wine as a social ritual rather than a drink.

What was it that united the two writers? French literature, and immediately following the 'vino/ Que conmemora y une' we find the statement:

Un verso de Hugo
Podía arrebatarlo. Yo lo he visto.

Apart from Borges sharing his interest in Hugo, he adds that he has shared in Peyrou's by witnessing it. French literature and Hugo are identified with wine. The intoxication of conversation and philosophical argument has already been used as an image in this poem, presaging the image of wine itself which then becomes transubstantiated in literature. In the previous poem, 'el nombre de Hugo' is a symbol for 'el mar y la cosmogonía'; here we find not Hugo the poet but a specific line from Hugo.

The next part of the poem underlines how similar the two poets' outlooks were:

La nostalgia fue un hábito de su alma.
Le placía vivir en lo perdido,
En la mitología cuchillera
De una esquina del Sur o de Palermo

This quatrain initiates the second part of the poem; the first concentrates on the writer's 'amistad genial', how he related to the external world. This part relates to his imagination, to his inner side. Peyrou lived in a nostalgia for things which he would never - or could never - see:

O en tierras que a los ojos de su carne
Fueron vedadas: la madura Francia
Y América del rifle y de la mañana.

Again we have the identification of the writer with a literary France. Just as the poems in the previous group are a series of projections, the France felt by Borges and Peyrou is imaginary and theoretical.

Literature is the expression of a tendency towards the impossible, in this poem: at the end we read of the dead man 'Que no se ha muerto', while here what inspires Peyrou is the idea of countries and periods he has never witnessed physically.

In lines 24 - 28 we find Peyrou carrying out the writer's task, the product of his imagination and nostalgia. Borges praises his stories:

En la vasta mañana se entregaba
A la invención de fábulas que el tiempo
No dejará caer y que conjugan
Aquella valentía que hemos sido
Y el amargo sabor de lo presente.

The image of 'vasta mañana' heightens our awareness of the lack of importance which time seems to have held for Peyrou, suggested by the endless conversations of the first part. At the same time, it is time which preserves his work (line 25). Ironically, the past here becomes 'aquella valentía', from which we are distanced by time. The present - from which we are not distanced by time - has an 'amargo sabor'. The writer has brought memories of the past together with a bitter present. Perhaps it is for this reason that Peyrou had nostalgia as a preoccupation; both writers shared not only a liking for French literature but also a dislike of the present. Their poems are an evocation of a world which because of nostalgia bears little resemblance to the object of that nostalgia. The bitterness of the present has fictionalized the past.

The next two lines contain a contrast:

Luego fue declinándose y apagándose.
Esta página no es una elegía.

The man who wrote about the heroic past in the bitter present has become part of that literary past. And yet, the poet does not give in to the urge to write an elegy about losing such a friend:

No dije ni las lágrimas ni el mármol
Que proscriben los cánones retóricos.
Atardece en los vidrios. Llanamente
Hemos hablado de un querido amigo
Que no puede morir. Que no se ha muerto.

Although the poet has not written a traditional elegy, by stating this, he is writing of loss, and this is characteristic of the elegy. The loss is not that of a friend, but of the elegy. Although his friend has gone, he remains in the poet's memory; as Peyrou preferred an impossible past to the 'amargo sabor del presente', perhaps now, in Peyrou's absence, Peyrou is more real. In these final lines, the presence of Peyrou is felt: it is getting dark (it is at night that Peyrou's social nature is brought out earlier in the poem); in his 'fábulas' Peyrou wrote of impossibilities (in the last line the poet writes that the man has not died); the image conjured up by the phrase 'hemos hablado' recalls Peyrou's powers of conversation. What has survived in the poet's memory is an idealized form of the man: the essence, for Borges, of Peyrou. Although Peyrou has died, something of him has survived: his identity has changed. No longer is being alive part of his existence, but the man exists on another level.

In the next poem, 'The thing I am' ¹⁰ Borges investigates his own

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Identity. The reader is immediately directed to the section of notes at the end of the collection. The title is taken from Shakespeare, from a military context - apt, as the poem begins with images of war. The reason for the selection of the phrase as the title is that in it

se oye el eco del tremendo nombre
Soy El Que Soy, que en la versión inglesa se lee
I AM THAT I AM. (Buber entendió que se trata de
una evasiva del Señor urdida para no entregar su
verdadero y secreto nombre a Moisés). Swift, en
las vísperas de su muerte, erraba loco y solo de
habitación en habitación, repitiendo *I am that
I am*. Como el creador, la criatura es lo
que es, siquiera de manera adjetiva. '1'

We have the idea of the creator/author speaking to the reader, the dreamer or perceiver of the text. While God created the world, or dreams the world, the poet creates the poem. The poet in this poem takes up the role of poet.

What he writes in this poem is that he cannot define his identity because of his proximity to the subject. The dead Peyrou will have distance from, and perspective on, his personality, unlike the live poet. In this poem the poet systematically discounts possible identities: in lines 1 - 10, he begins 'He olvidado mi nombre'. He then looks back over his family's history, where his name has come from, at the three surnames he is related to: Borges, Acevedo and Haslam. He concludes:

Soy apenas la sombra que proyectan
Esas íntimas sombras intrincadas.

The references to his family history are divided into two groups: passive figures who read, his father and Fanny Haslam, and three active military figures. The latter both begin and end this part of the poem. The literary images 'inclinado sobre el libro' and 'descifrando los versículos/ De la Escritura, lejos de Northumberland' seem to suggest evasion from reality. Acevedo is linked to a battle, but in an indirect way: he is 'soñando una batalla'. This is ambiguous; 'soñando' could either mean remembering a battle in which the man himself took part, or dreaming of a fictional one. However, the line at least suggests action, and this image of action is continued in 'Borges murió en La Verde, ante las balas' and 'Suárez, de la carga de las lanzas'.

In lines 11 - 15 Borges elaborates on the literary image. He feels that he descends from the books that he has read, as well as from his family's past, 'soy su memoria, pero soy el otro/ Que estuvo, como Dante...'. He is, ironically, as he is concerned with the written word, blind: 'la carne y la cara que no veo'. His father, also illustrated 'inclinado sobre un libro', was blind when he died. Literature and blindness were part of the family's past as much as the military tradition.

'Soy la carne y la cara que no veo' might refer to the presence, real, but intangible, of the poet in the poem. The literary character seems real, but as in 'Ni siquiera soy polvo' has no physical reality. For this reason he cannot see himself in the mirror. In 'El espejo', the child looks for what lies beyond his superficial self, beyond his external actions, in the mirror: the literary character cannot, as he exists only as a series of fictional actions. The book is the poet's

mirror. In lines 16 - 20 we have the image of the poet (which is developed along similar lines in the next poem, 'Un sábado'):

Soy al cabo del día el resignado
Que dispone de un modo algo distinto
Las voces de la lengua castellana
Para narrar las fábulas que agotan
Lo que se llama la literatura.

This is his occupation. However, in lines 21 - 29, we see the poet as librarian and scholar, ironically the 'prisionero de una casa/ Llena de libros que no tienen letras.' This image of books without letters might be the poet's mind, filled with as yet unwritten books; it more probably represents the blind poet's collection of books which he cannot read. The poet is also a reader:

El que quiere salvar un orbe que huye
Del fuego y de las aguas de la ira
Con un poco de Fedro y de Virgilio.

In lines 30 - 36 we find the poet searching through his memories of literature: he begins, 'El pasado me acosa con imágenes', enumerating things which he has read, literary personalities whom he has met through reading, like Angelus Silesius. He concludes

Soy el que no conoce otro consuelo
Que recordar el tiempo de la dicha.
Soy a veces la dicha inmerecida.

For him, happiness has come through the past, through literature. Reading is an act posterior to writing. The poet searches for his

identity in memories; his identity eludes him.

That the poet is unable to define his identity is summed up in lines 37 - 38:

Soy el que sabe que no es más que un eco,
El que quiere morir enteramente.

In these lines the poem is found in abbreviated form; the poet is the sum of his and his ancestors' memories, and yet he feels like a paler, less worthy version of these. Borges feels himself to be an 'eco'. The suggestion is that he will not have an echo outside of his poetry, he is the last to bear the family name; he seeks only oblivion. In this poem the reader reads the poet's echo; his echo, ultimately that of his family, is to be found in poetry. But in the next line, this is put in doubt:

Soy acaso el que eres en el sueño.

Therefore, the reader of verses does not come into contact with the poet, but subconsciously substitutes part of himself for the voice of the poet in the poem. If this is the case, the poet has no echo in his poems.

In the last tercet, the poet decides that he is what remains:

Soy la cosa que soy. Lo dijo Shakespeare.
Soy lo que sobrevive a los cobardes
Y a los fatuos que han sido.

This part of the poet, which will survive, is intangible but essentially his; it lies beyond his actions. Ironically, the poet resorts to another poet's words to express this, suggesting that even this highly personal part of him, a part which he can neither identify nor express, which may not even exist in his verse, belongs essentially to someone else. However, if the poet in the poem is part of the reader rather than part of the person who wrote the text, Shakespeare as he appears here is, equally, part of Borges or the reader.

In the following poem, 'Un sábado' ¹², the poet's identity is again the theme, but he talks of his identity as a creator of texts rather than as a reader of preexistent texts: he ends by talking of himself as the writer who 'bien o mal escribe este poema'.

The poem is written in the third person; the previous poem is in the first person. This use of the third person creates a sense of objectivity between the poet and his subject matter. In the first nine lines we have the image of the blind poet, alone in his house. He seems trapped: 'Fatiga ciertos limitados rumbos'. He goes around the house, touching things, like the walls, 'que se alargan', and the 'cristal de las puertas interiores'. The latter are again ironic in that a blind man cannot see through glass doors any more than those people who are not blind can see through ordinary, opaque, doors. It could be that with these 'puertas interiores' the poet is describing his search inside his memories. The poet also searched through his memories in the previous poem. The irony becomes stronger and the initial description of the man 'un hombre ciego en una casa hueca' is emphasized. We read of 'los ásperos lomos y los libros/ vedados a su

amor', which recall the 'libros que no tienen letras' of the previous poem. We also find allusions to an earlier poem in the volume, 'Buenos Aires, 1899': 'la apagada / platería que fue de los mayores' reminds us of 'la heredada platería' of the earlier poem; 'los grifos del agua' recall the 'aljibe' of that poem; the 'vagas monedas' recall the 'centavos que duermen'.¹³ Although the poet is surrounded by these memories, and things, he feels alone: 'Está sólo y no hay nadie en el espejo'. This idea is developed in lines 10 - 17:

Y siente que los actos que ejecuta
Interminablemente en su crepúsculo
Obedecen a un juego que no entiende
Y que dirige un dios indescifrable.

The only 'reason' for this man's existence is fate; ultimately it governs all activity. Here we find allusions to the poems 'El juego', 'La milonga del forastero' and 'El condenado' in the idea of the 'juego que no entiende', the image of a man waiting and the 'crepúsculo'. There is also an allusion to unrequited love, 'la cama solitaria'. This is a theme in 'Endimión en Latmos' and 'La espera'. The idea of 'un dios indescifrable' alludes to the poems around the Islamic theme at the beginning of the volume. In a general way, this poem reminds us of the poems which we have just read; they are recalled and made part of the present poem, in which we see the poet as a lonely man, alone with fate and poetry:

En voz alta repite y cadenciosa
Fragmentos de los clásicos y ensaya
Variaciones de verbos y de epítetos
Y bien o mal escribe este poema.

The poet recites and writes in defiance against a fate which seems foreign and alien, 'que no entiende'. The poem presents the reader with a rather negative, sad picture of the poet at work, although the overtly poetic word order of line 18 suggests defiance. Amidst all the greyness and frustration in the poem there is a confidence, a will to continue. After the metaphysical, and philosophical considerations of the previous poems, here the poet is presented as a rather pathetic old man, alone with books which he cannot read, together with only memories, poetry and a sense of destiny which he cannot understand. This poem modifies the emerging picture of the poet in the collection. Here the vision of the poet as philosopher, the intellectual haunted by poetic beauty is reduced to 'un hombre ciego en una casa hueca'. Perhaps this poem strengthens the speculations contained in the previous poems: beyond all theories and fictions lies a banal reality. Perhaps this banality is what impels men to seek theories. The third group of poems concerns man's speculations and the wait for proof of their truth. If the man in 'Un sábado' has been waiting, then the writing of poetry seems almost, in the last line, to have been a way of filling in the time of the wait. He does this unconsciously, 'sin proponérselo', as an act of human nature, and this broadens the poem's implications to include the reader and people in general. All await confirmation of their perceptions.

In this group of poems, we read of various kinds of identity. The child's fears about his future identity ('El espejo'), the absorbing of ideas and images from a foreign culture into the identity ('A Francia'), the identity of a friend ('Manuel Peyrou'), someone known from the personality he presented; the secret and inconceivable

reality of the self ('The thing I am') and the banality of the external self, the face of the self in the mirror, 'no hay nadie en el espejo', in 'Un sábado'. In these poems there is also a chronology of the self: from the first person of the child of the first poem, afraid of what may lie in the mirror, to the aged poet of 'Un sábado', where the poet is seen and described from the outside, in the third person, as a mirror might see him.

The next poem, 'Las causas' ¹⁴, is a long enumeration of images and is commented upon in the notes:

Unos quinientos años antes de la Era Cristiana,
alguien escribió: Chuang-Tzu soñó que era una
mariposa y no sabía al despertar si era un hombre
que había soñado ser una mariposa o una mariposa que
ahora soñaba ser un hombre. ¹⁵

We are dealing here with the confusion of cause and effect. Although all the things listed in the poem are both cause and effect, from the perspective of this poem, they are all causes:

Se precisaron todas esas cosas
Para que nuestras manos se encontraran.

In poetic terms, the poet's hand touches that of the reader via the poem; if we take these lines literally, none of the things in the poem were necessary for this moment: the poet's hand does not touch that of the addressee. The poem is then speculative, rather than assertive; the last couplet only makes sense if we believe the hands to have touched.

In Borges at Eighty the poet talks about this poem. For him, the significance and justification of the poem lies not in its images but in the fundamental idea behind them:

And I think that this poem is a true poem in the sense that, though it includes many tropes and metaphors, the strength of the poem does not lie in each line or metaphor or in adjectives or in rhetorical tricks but in the fact that what the poem says is true: that all the past, all the unfathomable past, has been made in order to arrive at the particular moment. Then the past is justified. ¹⁶

As we had in the first poem in the volume the idea that the past was the stuff of literature, that the library (or the book) was the end point in a long line of human experience and imagination, so here we have the poet, towards the end of the book, discussing his identity in the last group of poems. In 'Un sábado' he shows us the banality of his existence; at last we meet the poet as he is, behind the mask of literature and philosophical speculation. To mark this moment we have 'Las causas'; the past - either the historical past or the past in the sense of all the poems we have examined so far from the collection - is justified. The circle begun in 'Alejandría, 641 AD', with the words 'Aquí está su labor: la Biblioteca', begins to close.

This idea of circularity is implied by the central idea of the poem: every effect is in its turn a cause. The opening lines also imply cycles, of time:

Los ponientes y las generaciones.
Los días y ninguno fue el primero.

We have the recurring theme of the first man deciphering what he sees and creating words to express it:

La frescura del agua en la garganta
De Adán. El ordenado Paraíso.
El ojo descifrando la tiniebla.

Besides the last of these three lines recalling Funes el memorioso's attempts to remember the clouds ¹⁷, the theme of Adam naming things occurs in 'Alejandría, 641 AD', 'Adán es tu ceniza' and 'Historia de la noche'. We have the idea that man is surrounded by an impenetrable, secret, darkness which his imagination has filled with symbols and imagination. Funes attempted to replace numbers with visual images; man's world is of his own making, based on his perceptions, and this finds its fullest, most extensive expression in literature. The order in Paradise may be inherent - or it may exist in the mind of the perceiver.

The two ideas are inseparable, idea and counter-idea, just as Adam's thirst finds its 'otro' in the 'frescura del agua'. In lines 1 - 7 we find man's attempt to create knowledge out of his observations. First, after the observation he creates words. These become poetry, 'el hexámetro', and this in turn forms literature, 'el espejo'. Man's attempts to understand 'Las causas' result in 'la torre de Babel', which symbolizes our failure to communicate, and man's 'soberbia'. Out of man's therefore futile attempts to decipher his place in the universe have arisen irrational beliefs, represented by 'las arenas innúmeras del Ganges' and 'La luna que miraban los Caldeos'. This moon

is different from the moon as we see it today. Words, coming between man and what he observes have both enriched and complicated our world with myth and literature. This, in a way, is summed up in line 11:

Chuang-Tzu y la mariposa que lo sueña.

The perspective here is different from that in the note. In the note, the man seems, because of our unconscious linguistic code, to be dreaming. Here we have the butterfly dreaming he is Chuang-Tzu. By analogy, if words represent things, might not things represent words? This is a circularity, a blurring of cause and effect.

In lines 12 - 17 we read of classical myth. This encompasses both fictions such as Penelope, classical religious ideas like 'la moneda en la boca del que ha muerto' and philosophy, 'El tiempo circular de los estoicos'. Myths epitomize central human experiences. Each myth is part of a cycle, as each individual experiences what the myth epitomizes in the course of his life. For the poet, each instant is a cause:

Cada gota de agua en la clepsidra.

After this pivotal line, we read of history which has almost become myth:

Las águilas, los fastos, las legiones,
César en la mañana de Farsalia.
La sombra de las cruces en la tierra. 18

These events have become part of the memory of an ancient culture, just as 'el ajedrez y el álgebra' are a memorial to Arabic civilization.

The rest of the poem is an enumeration of various human pursuits, in an anachronistic order. This underlines the suggestion that cause and effect are ambiguous. For example:

Los rastros de las largas migraciones.
La conquista de reinos por la espada.
La brújula incesante. El mar abierto.

In these lines we have images of man exploring the earth, led on by 'la brújula incesante' and the challenge of 'el mar abierto'. Although this exploration would precede migration to the new territories, the 'largas migraciones' come first in this poem.

Then, in line 26, we find another pivotal point, similar to line 18, alluding to the passing of time:

El eco del reloj en la memoria.

This brings us to the idea that every instant has a part in 'las causas': it is infinite, plural. Everything is both an event and its echo, its consequence. Each thing can happen a plurality of times, on different levels, and be a multiplicity of causes. In the next line we see a king being punished: this is an event which depends upon some previous event. This event, the cause for the king's execution, only finds its effect in the king's death. The 'polvo incalculable' in the next line is an echo of the 'ejércitos'. For someone to see the dust

as the armies, he must add memory to his perceptions. In doing so, he colours them, and in turn creates new perceptions. The poet or artist does this; he transforms an observation into a new artefact. In lines 29 - 32, therefore, we read of the 'ruiseñor en Dinamarca' which might inspire art (this is also possibly an allusion to Shakespeare's Hamlet), and of the 'escrupulosa línea del calígrafo' which would create, via the artist's skill, an aesthetic reaction in the viewer.

Art is speculation; it attempts to create a reaction in its perceiver by a somewhat haphazard means. This resounds in the next two lines, where we find

El rostro del suicida en el espejo.
El naipe del tahir. El oro ávido.

Gold has been the cause of many actions; yet gold's worth is supposed rather than intrinsic. Man has assigned to it a value which stems from myth, the starting point of this poem. The mythical worth attached to this metal seems arbitrary and beyond our rational control. The next three lines underline this idea by first mentioning clouds which are random and beyond human control:

Las formas de la nube en el desierto.
Cada arabesco del calidoscopio.
Cada remordimiento y cada lágrima.

The second of these lines seems to suggest the idea of 'cada gota del agua en la clepsidra'; it also heightens our awareness of the uncontrollable and random, even in a man-made object. The next image,

of remorse and tears, is close to us, part of us, and yet beyond our rational control. It is an image of sadness and contrasts with the images of art and beauty found earlier in the poem. Things are beyond our control, yet they may provide us with both beauty and sadness. In the last two lines, all things are justified; the poet's hand has touched the reader's.

The next poem, 'Adán es tu ceniza', is concerned with identity and the eternal return; each person's destiny is to become dust and then to become Adam, the first man. ¹⁹ This is expressed on various levels: in human terms, in line 5:

Adán, el joven padre, es tu ceniza.

and then in lines 12 - 14:

El rostro que se mira en el espejo
No es el de ayer. La noche lo ha gastado.
El delicado tiempo nos modela.

Time becomes here a source of corruption and aging. Ironically it is 'delicado'; the idea that 'nos modela' suggests that it brings us not farther from, but nearer to, our real selves. This idea was also present in 'El espejo'. 'Gastado', however, might imply a negative process.

The idea of the eternal return is expressed in its most archetypal way in line three:

Las cosas son su porvenir de polvo.

The poem is written in two sections: the first, an enumerative stanza; the second, a five line envoi. In this fourth group of poems the poet is concerned with identity; in 'Las causas' he describes how we arrive at any event. There is an infinite pattern of causes and effects which leads up to any event. In 'Adán es tu ceniza' he writes of a similar theme, further developing it by adding the idea that anything which is either a cause or an effect (all things are) is also subject to a process of continual metamorphosis. This problematizes for example the search for identity; in a less personal way it converts history into a fiction, as in history we tend to see a particular historical figure in a particular light, as they were at only one time of their life. For example, Urquiza, the Argentine general:

Urquiza, lo que dejan los puñales. 20

What we call 'Urquiza' is the effect of his once having lived, his shadow.

This poem suggests that it is precisely because of the continual changing of everything that the search for understanding of the self or the universe is impossible. Our perceptions are part of the temporal quicksand that they observe.

The list of images with counter-images which forms the initial stanza is mixed up in such a way as to suggest to the reader that there is neither a beginning nor an end to these events. They are timeless, eternal, and yet they have come about through the effects of time:

La espada morirá como el racimo.
El cristal no es más frágil que la roca.

The man-made sword is no less vulnerable to time than the root of a tree, a living thing; a window pane is no more fragile than a rock. What these things have in common is atoms, in the Nietzschean sense. The atoms may come together in a certain number of ways, and as the number of atoms in the universe is supposed to be finite, eventually they repeat themselves, and the eternal return occurs. ²¹ However, until this happens, the sword or the tree root of the past exists only as a memory; their atoms form parts of other things:

Las cosas son su porvenir de polvo.

Only if we could find out what happened to these atoms before they became the sword, and after they had been the sword, would we know what the physical sword was.

This, then, is stated in the first three lines. The fourth line develops this idea; the atoms of things which could become those of something which we find unrelated, 'el hierro es el orín', or something related, 'La voz, el eco'. These things are echoes, or consequences, of each other. This idea is then applied to the reader's destiny:

Adán, el joven padre, es tu ceniza.
El último jardín será el primero.
El ruiseñor y Píndaro son voces. ²²
La aurora es el reflejo del ocaso.

We are all destined to be part of the garden of Eden. The past and future are eternal, just as there is always an 'aurora' somewhere on one side of the earth, and an 'ocaso' on the other. The second of these lines is reminiscent of the Beatitudes.

In the next three lines we read of historical change, in the light of what has come before in the poem. The reader wonders what will become of these things, aware that one day they will return. The initial stanza ends on the theme of the self, with the image of the individual looking in the mirror, reiterating the imagery of 'El espejo' and 'Un sábado' while echoing the mirror images of 'A Francia' and 'The thing I am'. The face he sees in the morning 'No es el de ayer'; what he sees is not the face, but the changes which have come with time. Time prevents us from seeing beyond its effects, and although we can perceive the possibility of seeing through time, there is no way in which we can step outside of time. The final envoi expresses the poet's longing to be able to step out of time's influence and his resignation to the mortal state:

Qué dicha ser el agua invulnerable
Que corre en la parábola de Heráclito
O en el intrincado fuego, pero ahora,
En este largo día que no pasa,
Me siento duradero y desvalido.

The 'largo día que no pasa' is the eternal present of literature. Although there is no hope of our being able to understand our identity or the universe, our state is permanent, the poet regrets. Our identity exists as perceptions, in the same way as time and the universe exist for us. Time complicates our perception, in much the

Notes

- ¹ 'Arte poética' OP p. 161 -162.
- ² 'El espejo' OP p. 545. In addition to this, it is worth noting Borges' remark about his childhood fear of mirrors: 'I always stood in fear of mirrors'. Willis Barnstone, Borges at Eighty Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982 p. 153.
- ³ See BO p. 13: 'El libro es una extensión de la memoria y de la imaginación'.
- ⁴ 'A Francia' OP p. 546.
- ⁵ See Peter Standish, 'El congreso' in the works of Jorge Luis Borges'. Hispanic Review vol 55 no 3 (Summer 1987) pp. 347 - 359.
- ⁶ PC II, p. 536: 'El congreso' es quizá la más ambiciosa de las fábulas de este libro'.
- ⁷ OP 181.
- ⁸ For example, 'New England, 1967'. OP p. 325.
- ⁹ 'Manuel Peyrou' OP pp. 547 - 8. For information on Peyrou, see Balderston, The Literary Universe of Jorge Luis Borges Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986 p. 120: 'Argentine novelist and short-story writer, b. 1902, author of *La espada dormida*, *La noche repetida*, *El estruendo de las rosas* and other works.'
- ¹⁰ 'The thing I am' OP p. 549.
- ¹¹ 'Notas' OP p. 559.
- ¹² 'Un sábado' OP p. 551. The poet's description of himself in

the first line recalls a line from the earlier poem, 'Al primer poeta de Hungría': 'Un hombre solo en una tarde hueca'. (OP pp. 396 - 397)

¹³ 'Buenos Aires, 1899' OP p. 537.

¹⁴ 'Las causas' OP p. 552.

¹⁵ 'Notas' OP p. 559.

¹⁶ Barnstone, op. cit. p. 62.

¹⁷ See PC I p. 481:

[Funes] 'Sabía las formas de las nubes australes del amanecer del treinta de abril de mil ochocientos ochenta y dos y podía compararlas en el recuerdo con las vetas de un libro en pasta española que sólo había mirado una vez y con las líneas de la espuma que un remo levantó en el Río Negro la víspera de la acción del Quebracho.'

¹⁸ Pharsalia was the battle in which Julius Caesar beat Pompey the Great in 48 BC. See Eric Smith A Dictionary of Classical Reference in English Poetry Cambridge: Barnes and Noble, 1984: p. 190. It is also mentioned in 'Tríada': LosC p. 21.

¹⁹ 'Adán es tu ceniza' OP p. 554.

²⁰ Justo José de Urquiza (1801 - 1870) was an 'Argentine general, politician and president'. See Balderston op. cit. p. 154. He is also mentioned in other texts by Borges: among them is 'El gaucho' OP pp. 385 - 386.

²¹ For information on Borges' interpretation of Nietzsche's idea of the Eternal Return, see 'La doctrina de los ciclos' and 'El tiempo circular': PC I pp. 335 - 370.

²² The nightingale may be used here as a symbol of the way in which all poetry is a rewriting of previous poetry. In 'El escritor argentina y la tradición', Borges comments:

'el ruiseñor es menos un pájaro de la realidad que de la literatura, de la tradición griega y germánica.' (PC I,

p. 218).

In 'El ruiseñor de Keats', he writes:

El ruiseñor, en todas las lenguas del orbe, goza de nombres melodiosos (*nightingale, nachtigall, usignolo*), como si los hombres instintivamente hubieran querido que éstos no desmerecieran del canto que los maravilló. Tanto lo han exaltado los poetas que ahora es un poco irreal; menos afín a la calandria que al ángel. Desde los enigmas sajones del Libro de Exeter ("yo, antiguo cantor de la tarde, traigo a los nobles alegría en las villas"), hasta la trágica *Atalanta* de Swinburne, el infinito ruiseñor ha cantado en la literatura británica; Chaucer y Shakespeare lo celebran, Milton y Matthew Arnold, pero a John Keats unimos fatalmente su imagen como a Blake la del tigre. (PC II p. 237.)

The nightingale is a literary tradition. Pindar, who is mentioned in the same line of 'Las causas' as the 'ruiseñor', was the inventor of the Pindaric Ode. Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale', on the other hand, is a Horatian Ode. (See Frances Stillman, The Poet's Manual and Rhyming Dictionary London: Thames and Hudson, 1984. p. 74.) Pindar and the nightingale are both primarily literary figures.

The final poem:
the book as a whole

The final poem in the collection, like the 'Inscripción', stands at the head of the other poems. It does not fit into the fourth group of poems, and has an envoi of its own. Before analysing this poem, which seems to epitomize the other poems, it is worthwhile reviewing the previous four groups of poems, in order to stand back from them and see the book as a whole.

Each group of poems, as we have seen, leads toward an epigrammatic envoi; these form a series when read consecutively:

Un animal que se parece a un perro
come la presa que le trae la hembra.

Ese tumulto silencioso duerme
En el ámbito de uno de los libros
Del tranquilo anaquel. Duerme y espera.

Antes que llegues,
Un monje tiene que soñar con una ancla,
Un tigre tiene que morir en Sumatra,
Nueve hombres tienen que morir en Borneo.

Qué dicha ser el agua invulnerable
Que corre en la parábola de Heráclito.
O el intrincado fuego, pero ahora,
En este largo día que no pasa,
Me siento duradero y desvalido.

What patterns emerge from these lines? On the most superficial level, each envoi has a line more than the preceding one. The thematic or

Idea content is also connected. The first concerns the gap between literature and reality; the second continues the theme of books, seeing them as powerful and yet dependant on the reader's attention for their existence. At the same time the book 'duerme y espera', and almost actively awaits its reader. The third envoi also concerns the idea of waiting, this time the idea of a person waiting for a crucial event. In the fourth envoi the poet seems to have given up hope of his wait being fulfilled, 'me siento duradero y desvalido'.

We may abstract that the first two groups of poems discuss literature, while the second two discuss identity. The two halves of the book in turn have symmetries: the first group is essentially concerned with the gap between what lies outside of literature, external reality, and what lies inside it. The latter is often a distortion of the external reality from which literature is seen to be derived. The second group considers the world of literature to be not so much a reflection of outer reality as a reflection of man's inner reality, his imagination and thoughts. While these have connections with external reality, they are here seen not so much as a distortion of this reality as an addition to it, an enrichment.

The final poem of the volume, 'Historia de la noche', underlines this process. ¹ The line of argument of the first half of the book is summarized in lines 3 - 10 of this poem. First, the initial group, with its emphasis on external reality:

En el principio era ceguera y sueño
y espinas que laceran el pie desnudo
y temor de lobos.

In these lines there is a return to the world of 'el primer Adán' who is present in both the first poem of the book and the one immediately preceding this one. External reality is perceived as immediate sensation, as language as opposed to literature, which came later, bringing with it myth and distortion. In contrast to early man, the reader of the book can only perceive events through his consciousness, which has been coloured by literary images.

In lines 6 - 10 we see the beginning of man's attempts at ciphering his experience in words, the process which led to literature:

Nunca sabremos quién forjó la palabra
para el intervalo de sombra
que divide los dos crepúsculos;
nunca sabremos en qué siglo fue cifra
del espacio de estrellas.

Man's imagination turns phenomena into ciphers, into signs and symbols. ² Lines 3 - 10 of the poem refer back to a time before history, to a time before words. The suggestion is that all history is the consequence of man's having created - or having been given - words, of his ability to cipher thought and observation in language.

The second half of the book discusses identity in terms of literature. The man in 'Un sábado' is, for example, a poet. In 'The thing I am' the poet defines himself with a quotation from Shakespeare.

The way in which man has used words as an extension of his imagination, to create 'historia', is discussed in lines 11 - 21 of the poem, beginning with the line

Otros engendraron el mito.

Usually, the part of the past which is accessible to us is the part which has been written down, or preserved in a story. Although the things enumerated in these lines are from earlier times, they form part of the background to our own period of history. In the previous part of the poem, man creates a terminology as he gives names to the things around him like 'el primer Adán'. Here, he is in the business of populating the 'espacio de estrellas' with the products of his imagination. This concept of man 'populating' the night echoes the sexual imagery of the initial couplet of the poem:

A lo largo de sus generaciones
los hombres erigieron la noche.

Here we have the number of man's 'generaciones', the image of 'noche' and the verb 'erigieron' emphasizing procreation, and fertilization. At the same time, the idea that sex only happens at night is a myth, a creation of man's imagination; this is the type of fictionalization which the poet is discussing in this poem. Apart from using the hours of darkness to create people, man has used them in order to fabricate a mythology:

La hicieron madre de las Parcas tranquilas
que tejen el destino
y le sacrificaban ovejas negras
y el gallo que presagia su fin.
Doce casas le dieron los caldeos;
infinitos mundos, el Pórtico. ³

Here we have illusions to Greek mythology, the Chaldaeans, and the Stoics. These civilizations are distant from us in time; this contrasts with what follows, where writers and poetic structures which are part of modern literature's background replace 'otros' as subject:

Hexámetros latinos la modelaron
y el terror de Pascal.
Luis de León vio en ella la patria
de su alma estremecida. ←

The writers and traditions mentioned here form part of the reader's world: France, Spain and Ancient Rome.

This poem traces the development of man's ability to cipher the world into words, and his ability to create a new world out of these words, which is both autonomous from, and dependent on, him. It also forms, in turn, part of his consciousness. By analogy, neither the reader nor the poet control the poem.

This central part of the poem, lines 3 - 21, refers to a time neither of the poet nor of the reader. Both main words in the title refer to time: 'historia' refers to something reported from the past, while 'noche' refers to the cyclic passing of time (in the first couplet, 'noche' is used in the context of cycles of generations). The central part of the poem, which deals with the past, introduces and contextualizes what the poet has to tell the reader, in the present, about the 'noche'. Ironically, in crystalizing his vision in the poem, he is adding to the mythology of the night he seems to see through.

The opening couplet seems to refer the reader to the poem which opens the collection, where there is a similar image of the reader

standing with the poet at the end of a long literary tradition, reaping the benefits of past generations, 'Aquí está su labor: la biblioteca.' ⁵ In the present poem, 'noche' symbolizes literature; by extension it symbolizes all expression and perception. Man has built myths around the phenomenon of the night and it has become more than the 'intervalo de sombra/ que divide los dos crepúsculos':

Ahora la sentimos inagotable
como un antiguo vino
y nadie puede contemplarla sin vértigo
y el tiempo la ha cargado de eternidad.

Out of his perceptions and imagination, man has created his own world. This reflects the poet's search for his identity, an extension of the wait for the 'otro' discussed in the third and fourth groups of poems. The world which man creates in response to the physical world is the world of art. This world of art, in turn, modifies mankind's view of the physical world.

In this poem, then, we can see the elements of the four groups of poems synthesized: the questions of literature and reality, of the autonomy of literature, of perception and, by extension, of identity. Also raised are the urge behind man's attempts to cipher the universe in terms he can understand, in his own words, and the wait involved in exploring the world of perception, which may be infinitely variable, as can be seen.

The last poem in the fourth group of poems, 'Adán es tu ceniza', seemed to point to the idea that a circle begun with the first poems was beginning to close, via the imagery about Adam; now, the envoi in

this final poem seems to offer the antidote to the ideas in the rest of the book - although, of course, a poem is never final as a book can be reread. The circle may begin to close, but it never closes. All through the book we have been reading of man's perceptions. Out of these, on a cultural level, he has created myth and literature; on the personal level, the person creates his identity. These creations are acts of faith in perception. In order to search for identity, for example, one must first believe in at least the possibility of identity. Perhaps in the context of a book of poems which discusses literature and its concomitants - the poet, the reader - it is logical that the final lines should in a sense destroy the root of the ideas which populate the book, maintaining thus the polemic nature of the subject matter:

Y pensar que no existiría
sin esos tenues instrumentos, los ojos.

By this, the poet seems to clear the reader's mind of what he has read, so that he may reapproach the book at some later date without preconceptions. Only by doing this can the discussion of literature which forms the base of the book's thematic content be kept intact. However, the past forms an inescapable filter through which the reader perceives reality and his reading of Historia de la noche has now formed another layer on this filter. Rather than destroying the filter, these lines strengthen it. Without the eyes man would not have seen the night; man would not have mythologized the 'intervalo de sombra/ que divide los dos crepúsculos'. Had man not begun literature,

the book the reader reads would not exist. At any rate, without the literary symbol which man has developed out of the night, the book would be very different. It is ironic that the eyes, which see light, are linked here with darkness, but this reinforces the image of man being deprived of one sense (sight) and developing another in its place (imagination). This could also have parallels with Borges' blindness.

In Historia de la noche we see a process beginning with man giving things names (like the often mentioned Adam) and ending with literature. However, the book begins with the burning of a library and ends, in a sense, in the final poem of the fourth group, with the first man, Adam, beginning the literary tradition which Omar attempts to end.

At the same time all these developments are mixed in a way which suggests anachronism; if 'noche' symbolizes perception, the inspiration and mode of expression of the artist - this recalls Borges' early poem 'La luna' - 'historia' represents the passing of time, chronology. Time itself is a perception; with it we impose an order, a structure, on history, for example. In literature, time seems trapped in an eternal present.

In this book the reader might read the poems in the printed order first; but when he rereads the poems he might read them in an order defined by what he has taken out of the first reading. For example, the final poems seem to recall the first poems, which suggests a cycle. On the other hand, the envois, given order both by their placing throughout the texts and by their increasing size, seem to possess a coherence which makes the reader emphasize some elements of

the text at the expense of others. This all adds to the sense of perspective and understanding which the reader feels as he reads (and rereads) the book.

It is at this point that something approaching the full sense of the word 'historia' in the title of both poem and book becomes evident. We are not concerned with a chronological history, beginning with A and ending with Z, rather we have here a miscellany of thoughts and images which raise certain issues, and which are printed in a definite order (the use of the envoi emphasizes this) but which, by their ambiguity and inter-related nature, invite us to ponder over the texts in an infinity of orders, or contexts, all within the confines of the book, teasing out different strands of meaning and enriching our perception of the text. The irony contained in the final envoi, of two lines as is the first, suggesting both a return to the start and yet a variation, an end, is precisely that the magnitude of the work we survey - literature, perception - makes impossible a 'total' view. And it is this variation that characterizes the work of art, literature as opposed to journalistic writing, for example. Also, the 'artistic' quality assigned by the reader to the writing may come more from the mind of the reader, from his interpretative technique, his approach to the text, than from the pen of the writer. If this variation is endless, the only form of time possible in a text would be eternity; is this not the form of time in 'El condenado', 'La espera', and 'Adán será tu ceniza', for example?

'Historia' also implies commentary, explanation. Whether we decide it means 'history' or 'story' (Borges would argue that both are ultimately forms of fiction) they both involve the retelling of some

event in words. Subjectivity, variation and interpretation are implied in this activity. These things depend upon the perceptions of the person writing or telling; it is worth noting that in this book Borges is primarily concerned with written stories - for example he sees the work of the 'confabulatores nocturni' in 'Alguien' as the predecessor of the written Arabian Nights. 'Historia de la noche' is about the imagination, and perception is part and a prerequisite of this. Ultimately, both 'historia' and 'noche' here refer to both perception and the imagination; in turn, both depend upon our senses of perception.

Another implication of this last poem is that if either the night or our perception had not existed, 'sin esos tenues instrumentos, los ojos', the one remaining thing in these lines would be thought. 'Historia' is a chronological account of what was perceived at a time; this book turns its back on what was perceived and seems to discuss philosophy, pure thought. History and philosophy seem to be counterparts; philosophy is what men thought, history is what they did. On the other hand, 'historia' also has a ludic sense, as an entertainment. If we take the final couplet of the collection to mean that beyond our perceptions, which depend upon an act of faith in the possibility of the existence of what is perceived, there might exist only thought, we might find in them the significance of this collection. It is a celebration of thought, of man's imagination and literature. A new compilation of ideas and observations would then be self-justifying, generating yet another each time the reader reads the book. This mirrors the emphasis, given in the collection, on the idea of cycles and renewal.

Notes

¹ 'Historia de la noche' OP p. 555. This poem is discussed in Arturo Echavarría Ferrari 'From Expression to Allusion: Towards a Theory of poetic language in Borges'. In Carlos Cortínez ed. Borges the Poet Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 1986. pp. 110 - 119.

² Borges talks about this process, by means of which men turn phenomena into symbols and myths, in Atlas p. 27:

I suspect that there was no God of the Sea, nor a God of the Sun: both concepts are alien to the primitive mind. there was simply the sea, and there was Poseidon, who was also the sea. The theogonies and Homer came much later.

³ The 'infinitos mundos' of the 'Pórtico' refer to the Pythagorean doctrine of the transmigration of souls, an early version of Nietzsche's eternal return. The 'doce casas' referred to are probably the twelve signs of the Zodiac, as the Chaldaeans were noted for their study of astrology.

⁴ In 'La esfera de Pascal' (PC II, pp. 134 - 137), Borges writes:

En aquel siglo desanimado, el espacio absoluto que inspiró los hexámetros de Lucrecio, el espacio absoluto que había sido una liberación para Bruno, fue un laberinto y un abismo para Pascal. Éste aborrecía el universo y hubiera querido adorar a Dios, pero Dios, para él, era menos real que el aborrecido universo. Deploró que no hablara el firmamento, comparó nuestra vida con la de naufragos en una isla desierta. Sintió el peso incesante del mundo físico, sintió vértigo, miedo y soledad, y los puso en otras palabras: "La naturaleza es una esfera infinita, cuyo centro está en todas partes y la circunferencia en ninguna. (p. 137)

The 'noche' of the poem alludes to the world of man's imagination and

powers of creative thought. Pascal's thought led him to doubt his religious beliefs; this is alluded to by the words 'el terror de Pascal'.

Luis de León is probably mentioned in connection with his famous poem, 'Noche serena'. See Vicente Gaos ed. Diez siglos de poesía castellana Madrid: Alianza, 1985: pp. 103 - 105.

5 'Alejandría 641 AD' OP p. 513 - 514.

6 'La luna' OP p. 131 - 134.

... however, the poet ... and how he fee ... The irony here ... read the epilogue before starting ... seem to progress from the non-dialectic ... and then to the search for the 'other' and ... In the 'Epilogue' there is also a ... 'Alazaki calls ...' in ... critics of the poet's work:

... cualquiera - una observación, una descripción, una de esas raras ... puede decirse que ... propiedad ... de la ciencia, la materia ...

The 'Epílogo'

With the last poem, the journey begun by the reader in the 'Inscripción' seems to end. With the 'Inscripción' the poet appears in poetry, introducing poetry. In the poems, he appears as the creator of the verses. And whilst he refers to himself as a reader in some of the poems, he remains on the other side of the page, as it were, from the reader of the collection. In the 'Epílogo', however, the poet speaks directly to the reader, about the poet's task and how he feels about the collection which the reader has just read. The irony here is that the reader may well have read the epilogue before starting on the verses themselves.

Just as the poems seem to progress from the non-poetic world to the poetic world, and then to the search for the 'otro' and finally to the search for identity, in the 'Epílogo' there is also a progression towards what Jaime Alazraki calls 'intimidad'. ' In the first paragraph Borges writes of the poet's task:

Un hecho cualquiera - una observación, una despedida, un encuentro, uno de esos curiosos arabescos en que se complace el azar - puede suscitar la emoción estética. La suerte del poeta es proyectar esa emoción, que fue íntima, en una fábula o en una cadencia. La materia de que dispone, el lenguaje, es, como afirmó Stevenson, absurdamente inadecuada.

Borges then affirms that 'la empresa no siempre es imposible'. Here the poet talks in very general terms.

In the second paragraph he talks more intimately, of the possibility of failure which faces any poet:

Un volumen de versos no es otra cosa que una sucesión de ejercicios mágicos. El modesto hechicero hace lo que puede con sus modestos medios.

Here again there is the emphasis on the collection of verses as opposed to the individual poem. The phrase 'sucesión de ejercicios mágicos' sums up very well the structure of Historia de la noche which, although characterized by a definite structure, seems in places to have the same structure as most of its poems, enumeración caótica. The reason for the poet's possible failure to give his perceptions a perceptible form is ultimately that:

El universo es fluido y cambiante; el lenguaje, rígido.

The poet depends on words, which are imperfect. However, the poet was seen in the first paragraph as a privileged reader - for in the first paragraph he writes of poets he himself has read - whose place is to communicate, 'proyectar'; in the second paragraph, communication through language seems almost impossible.

In the last paragraph the poet admits

De cuantos libros he publicado, el más íntimo es éste. Abunda en referencias librescas; también abundó en ellas Montaigne, inventor de la intimidad. (...) ¿Me será permitido repetir que la biblioteca de mi padre ha sido el hecho capital de mi vida? La verdad es que nunca he salido de ella, como no salió de la suya Alonso Quijano.

These are the closing lines of the book; not only does Borges cite more precedents for his work as a poet, he also claims that literature has been the most important thing in his life. The reality of books seems to have displaced 'external' reality.

In the first group of poems literature seems to distort our view of reality; perhaps this book is concerned with the way literary images have populated Borges' vision of the world around him. In his last book, Atlas, for example, this is a central theme. ² Just as the generations are seen as cycles returning to and passing through Eden in 'Adán será tu ceniza', each work of literature begets another, and another in its turn. Thus the idea of the endless story, which recalls the Arabian Nights, where at the end of the book - were the reader to reach that point - Shahrazad would tell the reader his own story, who would then become part of the story. This work is both one of the poet's favourite books and one to which he devotes the longest poem of the book, 'Metáforas de las mil y una noches'. 'Historia' implies the act of retelling, and 'noche' cyclic repetition. Each repetition seems to provide a definitive interpretation, but on each reading this interpretation eludes us, and repetition becomes inevitable and necessary; perhaps ultimately the significance of Historia de la noche is the eternity, the endlessness and impossibility of communication in fiction and poetry. Definitive interpretation is impossible in

literature and for this reason man has used literature as a distraction and entertainment. However, as Borges has said in interview,

literature is a necessity of the human mind ▯

- and man has always created literature and always shall. This ongoing enterprise is mirrored in 'historia', where the events of the past or of the imagination are fixed in an eternal present, and 'noche', a symbol of the unchanging, eternal, and returning night. All storytelling, all poetry, is related to the work of the 'confabulatores nocturni'. Even without 'esos tenues instrumentos, los ojos', man has his thoughts - as the blind poet, trapped in an everlasting 'noche', knows well - and these thoughts find expression in poems.

As Borges himself said, 'I think I am concerned with images rather than ideas.' * Despite its philosophical bias, and tone of seriousness, Historia de la noche, far from being an instructive treatise in a coherent world view or philosophical outlook, is an entertainment which uses ideas and images in order to produce its poetic effect. The ideas of Historia de la noche are subservient to the artistic considerations of image production. The effect is poetic because the poems use images and ideas, while even in the prose poems, the narrative flow of fiction is absent. For this reason, the irony of the title is fitting: the flow indicated in 'Historia' and the etern^{ity} and cyclic, anachronistic, sense of time represented in

'noche' combine to produce a concept of things flowing and developing
- yet remaining the same.

... Borges a di... of...
... were so... of...
... pp. 400 - 401. See also 'Epl...'
... (with Maria Kodama), Alas
...
... Barnstone, Borges at Eighty Bloomington: Uni
... 1982 p. 75.
...
... Barnstone, no. cit. p. 84.

Notes

¹ Jaime Alazraki, 'Borges o el difícil oficio de la intimidad: reflexiones sobre su poesía más reciente'. Revista Iberoamericana 43 (1977) pp. 449 - 463. See also 'Epílogo' OP p. 557.

² Borges (with María Kodama), Atlas

³ Willis Barnstone, Borges at Eighty Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1982 p. 78.

⁴ Willis Barnstone, op. cit. p. 84.

INTRODUCTION

... writer on historia de la literatura

Part Two:

LA CIFRA

... these writers on la cifra see

... more of the random crowd

... la cifra will into two groups

... own identity, inspired

... time and place see

... a, the crowd

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... 1981 disponemos de un poemario que
... la cifra *

... typifies this trend, while also

... on its own

... su último poemario editado en 1981, como
... diccionario de la vida política
... y autorreferencial se extiende a
... páginas. *

Introduction to La cifra

While only one writer on Historia de la noche underlines the need for internal structure in a book if the book is to have coherence, adding that the volume does not and that it is only 'tantas páginas, tantos poemas', most writers on La cifra see this volume as a book rather than as a more or less random group of poems. ¹

Writers on La cifra split into two groups. Both see the volume as a book with its own identity. Inspired, perhaps, by the intention implicit in the title, some critics see it as being a key to Borges. Miguel Enguídanos, for example, writes:

Los que somos lectores y amigos de Borges siempre hemos sospechado que en su obra, especialmente en su poesía, subyace un arcano que nunca hemos podido desentrañar. Pero desde 1981 disponemos de un poemario que él ha titulado, no por azar, La cifra. ²

Rolando Gabrieli typifies this trend, while also suggesting that the book might stand on its own:

La cifra, su último poemario editado en 1981, constituye un verdadero diccionario de la obra poética borgiana, biográfica y autorreferencial en estos 46 textos y poco más de cien páginas. ³

One group sees the volume as a kind of appendix to all Borges' other work. Another group, on the other hand, see the volume as a structure which does not depend on its ability to explain earlier work for justification. Guillermo Sucre sees it as a spiritual travelogue:

En gran parte, La cifra es el itinerario de un viaje: de Ronda y el Islam hasta Japón y el Shinto, pasando y concluyendo en el invariable centro: Buenos Aires. Pero todo viaje en Borges, y ahora más, es una peregrinación: la busca de la doble cara de la moneda, del doble signo de la cifra. La busca de todas las máscaras. ⁴

Marcos Ricardo Barnatán takes this idea a step further, concluding that there is indeed a structure in the book, one which revolves around the final poem. This poem epitomizes the volume:

El poema que cierra el libro y le da título - como viene siendo tradición en sus últimos volúmenes poéticos - cifra la cifra de La cifra. ⁵

Here we have the idea that the book is a structure governed by the final poem in the book. This final poem is seen as a key to the rest of the book; the other poems lead to it and its meaning is dependent on our reading of the other texts in La cifra. For all these critics, La cifra is a book of verses rather than a kind of anthology: a 'diccionario' is a volume in its own right. The idea that the title poem 'cifra la cifra de La cifra' implies structure, or at least a hierarchy of interpretation within the volume, a direction in reading.

Historia de la noche has a fairly overt structure and groupings of poems which carry the reader towards the final poem in that volume, both thematically and structurally. In comparison, La cifra is at first sight unstructured and vague, beyond the obvious structure of 'inscripción' - 'prólogo' - poems - 'unas notas' which announces the book of poems and affects its interpretation, in much the same way as is the case with the earlier book. In order to facilitate this study of the volume, I have divided the poems into groups. The groupings are more subjective than those in the study of Historia de la noche, because of the absence in La cifra of any clear structural device like the use of the envoi in Historia de la noche. My groupings, then, are not suggested in any way as definitive; rather, they are a strategy for investigation.

These groupings are also at times elastic and flexible, referring back to poems which I have placed in other groups. Elements of the first seven poems, from 'Ronda' to 'Aquél', are repeated in the second seven, from 'Eclesiastés, 1 - 9' to 'La prueba'. The third group, from 'Himno' to 'El hacedor', centres on newness and creation, contrasting with the images of oldness and death in the previous group. The fourth group, from 'Yesterdays' to 'El ápice', contains poems about identity. Borges has always considered Buenos Aires part of his identity, and in this group, there are poems which evoke that city. The fifth group, from 'Poema' to 'Correr o ser', has poems about the interaction of literature and dreams, and archetypes. The sixth group, from 'La fama' to 'A cierta isla', concerns human activities and types of work, and how people perform important roles in the universe. The seventh group, from 'A cierta isla' to 'Nihon',

concentrates on things which fascinate the poet and puzzle him, things which he will never understand. The final poem, as is the case in Historia de la noche, sums up much of what is contained in the poems which precede it.

While most critics agree that La cifra possesses some kind of structure or coherence which makes it function as a book rather than only as a collection of verses, no critic attempts to pursue this idea further. It is this idea which the present study hopes to investigate.

Notes

- ¹ David Lagmanovich. Review of Jorge Luis Borges. Historia de la noche. Revista Iberoamericana 45 (1979). p. 706.
- ² Miguel Enguídanos. 'Diecisiete apuntes para descifrar a Borges (glosas)'. Ínsula 461 (1985) p. 1.
- ³ Rolando Gabrieli, 'La cifra: inventario borgiano'. Lotería 352 - 353 (1985) p. 165.
- ⁴ Guillermo Sucre, 'La cifra de Jorge Luis Borges'. Vuelta vol 6 pt 65 (1982) p. 40.
- ⁵ Marcos Ricardo Barnatán, 'Poesía y pensamiento de Jorge Luis Borges'. Revista de Occidente no 13 (1982) p. 145.

The 'Inscripción'

and

'Prólogo'

As is the case with Historia de la noche, the reader first encounters the poetic world of La cifra in the 'Inscripción'. ¹ In Historia de la noche the 'Inscripción' relies on poetic images for its effect: in La cifra, it relies on ideas.

While the earlier 'Inscripción' was an enumeration of reasons for the poet dedicating the book to María Kodama, in La cifra it is a discussion of what a dedication is. The first paragraph questions the assumption that anything can actually be 'given':

De la serie de hechos inexplicables que son el universo o el tiempo, la dedicatoria de un libro no es, por cierto, el menos arcano. Se la define como un don, un regalo. Salvo en el caso de la indiferente moneda que la caridad cristiana deja caer en la palma del pobre, todo regalo verdadero es recíproco. El que da no se priva de lo que da. Dar y recibir son lo mismo. ¹

The viability of a 'dedicatoria' is questioned, or rather denied; however, this statement has the effect not of negating our basic notion that giving is essentially the act of something being passed to another owner, but rather of asserting that the beauty of poetry is perhaps never owned by anyone: as Borges has written elsewhere, 'La belleza es común'. ² The 'indiferente moneda' suggests that there are

two types of giving: one, when someone gives something because they want to, the 'regalo verdadero'; the other, when someone gives something out of a sense of guilt, or any other reason apart from a genuine desire to give something. Only in the first case has the person truly given; and what is given in this way is not lost.

In the second paragraph, the magical (and hence uncontrollable, subconscious and random) nature of poetry is referred to:

Como todos los actos del universo, la dedicatoria de un libro es un acto mágico. También cabría definirla como el modo más grato y más sensible de pronunciar un nombre. Yo pronuncio ahora su nombre, María Kodama. Cuántas mañanas, cuántos mares, cuántos jardines del Oriente y del Occidente, cuánto Virgilio.

Everything in the universe is 'inexplicable' and 'mágico'; to define a dedication in 'el modo más grato y más sensible' he must 'pronunciar un nombre'. Much of the poetry in this volume is written in enumerative lists which celebrate the magical nature of the universe. This dedication, then, has at least two functions: it dedicates La cifra to María Kodama, and secondly - perhaps more importantly to the reader - it forms a kind of poética, an explanation of how and why the poet writes, why he has written the present collection. The final sentence of the 'Inscripción' recalls the corresponding text in Historia de la noche; it presents the reader with a series of images perhaps private to Borges and Kodama. This heightens the reader's curiosity and warms up his imagination for the poems which follow. The enumeration centres on two things: travelling ³, and poetry - symbolized by Virgil, who reappears in the poem which closes the

volume, as part of the poet's memory: 'La amistad silenciosa de la luna/ (cito mal a Virgilio)'. ← There runs, from the 'Inscripción' to the closing poem, a line to follow in our reading.

The 'Prólogo' is also more concerned with ideas than images. → The poet explains that he must take a course between what he sees as two opposites: 'poesía puramente verbal' and 'poesía intelectual'. The poet reminds us that he has spent a long time writing poetry and that this experience 'nos revela nuestras imposibilidades, nuestros severos límites' and that 'el ejercicio de la literatura puede enseñarnos a eludir equivocaciones, no a merecer hallazgos'. Considering that the universe is a 'serie de hechos inexplicables' the reader must wonder what the possible purpose of the book is.

Whereas in the 'Inscripción' we find a poética which is hidden and suggested rather than stated explicitly, in the 'Prólogo' the poet tells us what he is attempting in the poems that follow: a 'vía media' between the two kinds of poetry he has described. The suggestion is that all poetry is a compromise between the two. In poetry we have meaning ('poesía intelectual') and sound ('poesía puramente verbal'); one is impossible without the other.

The example of the 'verbal' poetry which we are given here, according to the poet, 'no quiere decir nada y a la manera de la música dice todo'. Of the example of 'poesía intelectual', Borges writes:

No hay una sola imagen. No hay una hermosa palabra, con la excepción dudosa de testigo, que no sea una abstracción.

However, this is also an example of the utilization of the sounds of the words as a poetic device - the musical effect which Borges has assigned to the 'verbal' poetry, which ought to be absent here. We find rhyme in 'conmigo' and 'testigo', and a constant play on assonance with 'cielo', 'celo' and 'recelo'. The 'poesía puramente verbal' which Borges cites has alliteration on 'peregrina paloma' and is reminiscent of modernist verse: 'los últimos amores', 'alma de luz, de música y de flores', and seems little different in terms of style from the example given as 'poesía intelectual'. What, then, is the difference between the two styles? Perhaps the reason for Borges writing of the 'excepción dudosa de testigo' is that the example is doubtful because it is not really an exception. 'Testigo' could be an abstraction. The idea arises that there is no difference between the two types of poetry. Since he also writes that 'Estas páginas buscan, no sin incertidumbre, una vía media', perhaps the essence of his poetry is precisely its preoccupation with doubt. For this reason, Borges' later poetry has made frequent use of the dynamic image and avoided the static image, the absolute statement. ⁶ In the example of 'poesía puramente verbal', the poet evokes, with words used in a specifically poetic manner, a stereotypical poetic image of idyllic beauty, a beauty which exists only in the imagination of the poet: the bird is 'imaginaria'. This line both starts and finishes - and punctuates - the stanza cited. The poem, then, takes both its shape and imagery from the poet's fictional, imaginary vision.

In the example of 'poesía intelectual', the poet's message is complex. We read of the poet's abstract ideas. He writes of what he wants: 'Vivir quiero conmigo...', and what he does not want: 'amor',

'celo', 'odio', 'esperanza', 'recelo'. The poet wants to live and 'gozar del bien que debo al Cielo'. All this, together with the implication behind these ideas that the things which the poet wants to be without are things which make him suffer at the moment, forms a matrix of ideas rather than of beautiful images.

Perhaps the essential difference between the two types of poetry is that, although both use what might be defined as 'poetic techniques' (musicality of verse, unusual sentence structure and other markers of poetry), the 'poesía puramente verbal' essentially portrays a single image of beauty, whilst the 'poesía intelectual' is of open-ended ideas which are suggestions for future meditation. The 'peregrina paloma imaginaria' is a beautiful image, but not a particularly thought-provoking one. Luis de León's image is more puzzling and thought-provoking.

However, both poems could be read as thought-provoking and beautiful on the level of artifice. They differ in the way they are read; if we look for thought-provoking statements or beauty in them we find different poems. The significance of this is that in the 'Prólogo', Borges - a poet best known for the ideas in his work rather than for his work's verbal beauty - is effectively telling us what to look for in the poems, how to read them: we must concentrate on the verbal beauty of his poems at the expense of the ideas.

The 'vía media', then, is between musical and intellectual verse; at the same time, the beauty of the resulting verse is paramount:

La poesía intelectual debe entretejer
gratamente esos dos procesos.

Whilst it must do so 'gratamente', and try, 'a la manera de la música', to say everything, it must have content of a thoughtful nature. Because Borges feels that 'me está vedado ensayar la cadencia mágica, la curiosa metáfora, la interjección, la obra sabiamente gobernada o de largo aliento', the beauty of his verse must come, at least in part, from the ideas presented in it. Eduardo Urduñibia has called this the 'ideología que subyace en su obra'.⁷ It is on the level of ideas that Borges the poet is most celebrated, rather than for the musicality of his verse. However, Borges has always considered that in poetry, 'la cadencia y el ambiente de una palabra pueden pesar más que el sentido'⁸, and in this prologue he sets himself the aim of concentrating more on this aspect of the poetry, while maintaining its other side.

Why should the poet, at such a late stage in his career, want to steer away from the type of poetry he has written most, poetry of doubt and problematization? Perhaps in his declared move towards poetry which is 'puramente verbal' we can see a phenomenon which echoes his earlier move away from the fantastic cuento, about which he writes in the prologue to El informe de Brodie. The closing lines of the 'Inscripción' mention travel and allude to Atlas. In that book the poet writes:

The temple of Poseidon dates from the fifth century before our era, that is, before the philosophers put everything in doubt.⁹

Together with the urge towards static images mentioned in the 'prólogo' of La cifra, we may glimpse a Borges perhaps tired of

uncertainty wanting to move towards certainty, a process which is more evident in the poems contained in his last book, Los conjurados.

fra' LaC p. 105.

ago' LaC pp. 11 - 12.

se of the dynamic image and static image in B

studied in Zentida Carter, 'La imagen metafis

Revista Iberoamericana 100 - 101, pp. 433

to underline. 'varias veces conjeturas sobre un

de la Revista Literaria Iberoamericana vol

22, pp. 165 - 171. See p. 161.

p. 11.

p. 28.

Notes

- 1 LaC p. 9.
- 2 OP p. 317.
- 3 Atlas
- 4 'La cifra' LaC p. 105.
- 5 'Prólogo' LaC pp. 11 - 12.
- 6 The use of the dynamic image and static image in Borges' later poetry is studied in Zunilda Gertel, 'La imagen metafísica en la poesía de Borges'. Revista Iberoamericana 100 - 101, pp. 433 - 448 (1977).
- 7 Eduardo Urdanivia, 'Variaciones borgianas sobre un tema platónico'. Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana vol 11 (1985), nos 21 - 22, pp. 165 - 171. See p. 161.
- 8 LosC p. 11.
- 9 Atlas p. 28.

The first seven poems:

'Ronda' to 'Aquél'

The first seven poems are mirrored by the second seven. The first poem is 'Ronda' ¹, and has as its theme Arabic Spain, which is also the opening theme of Historia de la noche.

The poem is written as a single enumerative stanza of two sections: the poet writes of his impressions of the town, which are a mixture of what he remembers of literature and history and what he experiences in Ronda. This illustrates what Daniel Balderston has written about Borges' travel writings:

Curiously, one of Borges's last books is called *Atlas*. These travel writings of a blind man are frequently reflections on the tension caused by the discrepancy between the experience of a place and the cultural idea one has of it. . . . He conceived of travel to a place as a pilgrimage in search of the idea of that place, as much as (indeed, more than) for the experience itself. ²

The first section deals with the past and the poet's imagination; the second with Ronda the place. This is 'ceguera' and 'silencio' in the poet's experience.

The first section is a long, complicated enumeration. On a superficial level it is a list of unconnected things, but these things are linked in a way which is not simple. The way in which these things relate to each other mirrors what the poem seems to say: the Ronda

perceived by the poet's physical senses can trigger off more complex mental images, and in turn these form the real Ronda.

The first seven lines of the poem present the reader with a matrix of ideas which centre on the idea of Islam as both a terrible military power and a religion. The words used to evoke violence all begin with the same sound, creating an incisive effect: 'espadas', 'estrépito', 'ejércitos'. At the same time, these military images 'desolaron el poniente y la aurora' - an image which encompasses various meanings. It could mean that the Arabs invaded all the known world, that their empire in a sense was of an infinite size; it could also allude to the the rise and fall of empires. In these lines we have the idea of Islam having been and gone, both in the opening line, 'El Islam, que fue...' and in the image of 'la aurora'.

There is irony in the line 'estrépito de ejércitos en la tierra' when we consider that the reason for all this violence was religious; the Hegira was fought on behalf of 'un terrible Dios, que está solo', in Heaven. God is in an abstract Heaven, and the violent soldiers are 'en la tierra'. 'Un terrible Dios' is then a particularly effective epithet; in line 4, 'y una revelación y una disciplina' is similar. Again there is the contrast between religious revelation and military discipline. Although the Islamic conception of God and religion may be different from the Christian one, the poem assumes that Islam is a thing of the past in Christian Ronda; the Christian ideas of God and religion - that they are concerned primarily with love, peace and reconciliation - are implicated in the writing (and reading) of the poem. The dichotomy seen in the first seven lines between war and God is only a dichotomy in Christian terms, but not in Islam.

The 'aniquilación de los ídolos' could be either the destruction of statues, violence, or a long process of cultural change, where the country invaded had its culture destroyed and replaced by the values of Islam. In this line, the dichotomy between religion and the army seems to fuse; this occurs in lines 6 - 7. The 'conversión de todas las cosas' into one God suggests that the violence of the Hegira is itself part of this God, that all things are holy. It could also signify monotheistic religion replacing polytheistic ones.

The next three lines concern another aspect of Islam: that of art and beauty. These lines are characterized by the use of the letter 'r': 'la rosa', 'la rimada prosa alcoránica', 'ríos que repiten alminares'. We see beauty in the form of literature, architecture and in the activities of the sufis, who used nonsensical stories as a means to enlightenment. ⁹ Contrasting with the implied sensuality of these lines, the next three lines present intellectuality. The minarets were infinitely mirrored in the rivers of the previous line; we find another suggestion of infinity in 'el idioma infinito de la arena'.

In the line 'ese largo jardín, las Mil y Una Noches', 'jardín' becomes a symbol for books. This recalls the poet's early cuento, 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan'. A garden is a place where nature is cultivated by man in order to suit his ideas of beauty and art, modelled by man's imagination. In literature, man models his experience of reality in a similar way. God (for example in line 7) models the world; the author models his text. At the same time, the image of Ronda given towards the end of this poem is a garden; a garden of the poet's senses.

The ideas of literature and history are continued in lines 14 - 15, 'dinastías que son ahora nombres del polvo', and this reinforces the reader's awareness of the distance between the two Rondas, ancient and modern. The 'polvo' we find in this line continues the image of 'arena'; the 'dinastías' have become part of an infinite past. This section of the poem, which has seemed to move away from the violence of the Hegira, ends not with the beauty of art or science, but with the violence of war:

y Tamerlán y Omar, que destruyeron... *

Where does all this information about Islam come from? The next part of the poem tells us:

[El Islam]
es aquí, en Ronda,
en la delicada penumbra de la ceguera

These visions of Islam and Ronda have come from the poet's personal imagination when in Ronda; the poem is about an experience particular to one man. Borges appears in these lines in the image of 'ceguera'. The next lines suggest that the poet is in a garden in Ronda:

un cóncavo silencio de patios,
un ocio del jazmín
y un tenue rumor de agua, que conjuraba
memorias de desiertos.

The first two lines here describe the poet's surroundings, but the last two suggest the images of the first part of the poem. The use of 'y' to begin the line contributes to this - the first section of the poem is characterized by the repetition of 'y'. The noise of the water, blotting out the desert from the memory, seems to suggest that the Arabs, once they arrived in Ronda, forgot about the difficulties of their original homeland and lost their empire. Deserts suggest difficulty, harsh conditions; perhaps Ronda with its beauty (this subject is also dealt with in 'El alhambra' in Historia de la noche) so enchanted the Arabs that they forgot to defend their empire. In this poem the use of poetic techniques like alliteration, enumeration punctuated by key words, and transmutation of one concept into another (for example, the use of 'idioma') are used to convey a complex picture of Ronda.

In 'Ronda' the poet finds himself in a garden which is a book, the book being the Arabian Nights. In the next poem, 'El acto del libro' ⁵, the poet writes of a fictional arabic book. This may be the book which Don Quijote's life was based upon. The poem is written as four short prose paragraphs. The 'acto del libro' seems to be the way in which fiction, via a book, can become part of the suppositions and beliefs which comprise reality, and yet remain outside of it.

The first paragraph is characterized by detail. We are told where someone bought the book, and that it has been in a library. This 'biblioteca' could be the universe; it might also be Don Quijote's library, which was burnt by the 'cura' and 'barbero' in chapter six of the first part of Don Quijote. The burning of libraries is also mentioned in 'Alejandría 641 AD' in Historia de la noche. The book was

in the original arabic; Don Quijote's book was written by an arab and found in a market. The detail in the first sentence creates an illusion of reality which is challenged in the second: the book is 'mágico'. Don Quijote believed that a 'sabio encantador' chronicled his life. In the book the period of a man's life between his fiftieth birthday and his death 'que ocurriría en 1614' would be chronicled; Don Quijote was published in 1615, and ends with the death of Quijote.

In the next paragraph we find it suggested that the library which held the original Arabic book was burnt in 'la famosa conflagración' which occurred in the 'sexto capítulo' of a book. While the 'cura' and 'barbero' burn the library in chapter six, the book is not 'found' until chapter nine. This book must be Don Quijote, because of the details we read here, about the burning of the library which 'ordenaron un cura y un barbero, amigo personal del soldado', the 'soldado' being Cervantes. In either case, the book is a fiction; the Arabic book is only known in its Spanish version, as it is only known within another book, Don Quijote.

The other book is 'parte de la larga memoria de los pueblos', as we read in the third paragraph. Cervantes both created an immortal character, a type of folk-hero, and claimed to have rescued the story of the book from folk memory. This immortal character is also a valuable piece of intertext which any reader in the Spanish language must have when he interprets texts. Literature can go on forever, we read in this paragraph: the man in the book never read the book, just as Alonso Quijano in 'Ni siquiera soy polvo' from Historia de la noche never saw himself in a mirror, 'pero cumplió minuciosamente el destino que había soñado el árabe y seguirá cumpliéndolo siempre...'

In the final paragraph the poet asks if this fantasy is any less plausible than 'la predestinación del Islam que postula un Dios, o que el libre albedrío, que nos da la terrible potestad de elegir el infierno'; this question is all the harder when we consider that the destiny of the man in the piece is not only part of the 'larga memoria de los pueblos', but also of the reader's memory. The events which happen outwith the immediate world of the reader - like religion, philosophy and literature - seem to form a world which is at once both real and unreal, and also seem to invade what we would consider reality. Things which we experience in literature are as much part of our experience of 'reality' as other extra-literary experiences. In dreams we find the world of our perceptions through direct experience and our 'literary' world mixed indiscriminately. What would seem contradictory to the wakeful seems normal to the dreamer. In 'El acto del libro', we have great detail with regard to the events as they are told by the poet, and an almost contradictory element of the magical, the fantastic, which would destroy the inner logic of the piece if we did not think of it in terms of literature, just as we can accept similar situations in dreams. In an earlier poem, 'El despertar', Borges wrote:

Entra la luz y asciendo torpemente
De los sueños al sueño compartido
Y las cosas recobran su debido
Y esperado lugar ...⁶

This 'sueño compartido' could well be the world of literature, 'la larga memoria de los pueblos'.

The next poem, 'Descartes' 7, is also concerned with perception and dreams. Descartes, in a long monologue, describes his sense of absolute doubt towards all things. The historical Descartes passed from universal doubt to certainty via the formula 'cogito ergo sum'; the speaker in this poem is a reductio ad absurdum of Descartes. He doubts endlessly.

The speaker in the poem, although based on Descartes, is fictional. The poem is written in three sections: lines 1 - 4, where we read of the speaker's 'present'; lines 5 - 18, where we read of things which he has seen or dreamt; lines 19 - 23, where we return to the 'present' of the speaker, which has become more terrible for him in proportion to the extent to which he believes his existence is a solipsism.

The first section of the poem opens with the statement 'Soy el único hombre en la tierra y acaso no haya tierra ni hombre'. It is to this realization of loneliness that the speaker returns in the third section of the poem, characterized, as is the first, by lines beginning with 's' and the repetition of the word 'acaso'. The first line of the third section begins with 'quizá', synonymous with 'acaso'. In the first section we find the speaker negating reality and substituting for it his powers of dreaming. God, whose existence was the central stabilizing factor in the historical Descartes' world, may not exist:

Acaso un dios me engaña.
Acaso un dios me ha condenado al tiempo,
esa larga ilusión.
Sueño la luna y sueño mis ojos que
perciben la luna.

In these first lines, there is the probability that the speaker has been condemned. A factor in Descartes' life was the fear that the Church would condemn his ideas as they were based on the findings of Galileo, who had been excommunicated. However, if the speaker in the poem feels condemned, there is hope in these lines. To be condemned, the speaker would have to be perceived by another being. This destroys the illusion of a solipsistic universe.

The second section, characterized by the words 'He soñado', is enumerative. In the previous line, the speaker feels that he has not only dreamt the moon, but also his perception of it and of all things. In this section, therefore, we read a list of things perceived by the speaker. We find cyclical time, 'la tarde y la mañana del primer día', and also linear time, but not infinity, as infinity would not have a first day. We find images of the rise and fall of an empire ('Cartago'), in a line which is repeated in 'La dicha' later in the volume, 'He soñado a Cartago y a las legiones que desolaron a Cartago'. We find Ancient Greece and Rome, both as a literature ('Virgilio'), science ('la geometría'), and history ('la colina de Golgota y las cruces de Roma'). This image of Christianity also reminds the reader of Descartes' preoccupation with the Church. At line 10, there is a change. We read of things both personal and universal, of Descartes and the classical period, as well as of our own time: 'el punto, la línea, el plano y el volumen' and 'amarillo, el azul y el rojo'. Yellow was the last colour visible to the blind Borges. The speaker then enumerates more personal things, things which are more sure, such as 'mi enfermiza niñez'. This biographical reference is quite possibly to Borges, not Descartes. It alludes to

the world of the individual, emphasized in 'el inconcebible dolor', which follows the contrastive 'los mapas y los reinos y aquel duelo en el alba', with its political as opposed to personal images.

This political imagery is continued in 'He soñado mi espada', which suggests both war and Borges' longing for the military past of his ancestors. In the following line we find named one of Descartes' correspondents, Elizabeth of Bohemia.

The last two lines of this section of the poem seem to add a climax to the process of doubt which was at the base of rationalism, the result of Descartes' investigations. The theory seems to doubt even itself. It is this paradox which intrigues Borges:

He soñado la duda y la incertidumbre.
He soñado el día de ayer.

Here we have the speaker having dreamt all that has led up to his present state of mind. He has dreamt both his temporal background and the series of doubts and uncertainties (questions and answers) which have led him to the present. It is on this bleak note that the third section of the poem begins:

Quizá no tuve ayer, quizá no he nacido.
Acaso sueño haber soñado.

His very life is put into doubt. From this position, he can doubt no further. He resolves not to probe any further into his existence, and in the last three lines there is alliteration on 's' and repetition of rhythmic phrases ('un poco de frío, un poco de miedo'). The 's' sound

is possibly an allusion to Descartes' death from pneumonia. 'Siento un poco de frío...' also suggests this. The similarity in sound between 'Sobre el Danubio' and 'Seguiré soñando a Descartes' emphasizes a gloomy, damp atmosphere. Ultimately, in the last line, we find Descartes' preoccupation with his religious faith:

Seguiré soñando a Descartes y a la fe
de sus padres.

In 'Descartes' we see the philosopher playing an intellectual game; in the next poem, 'Las dos catedrales', the poet writes of a deceased friend's intellectual game: a literary project.⁹ The poem also continues the French theme started by Descartes: the cathedral is that of Chartres. The word Chartres sounds like Descartes. In the note on the poem, we find the two poems linked by the statement

La filosofía y la teología son, lo
sospecho, dos especies de la literatura
fantástica. Dos especies espléndidas.¹⁰

Among the other examples of what the poet considers to be 'literatura fantástica', we find platonic archetypes: it is with these that the present poem is concerned. In the context of Borges' texts, an archetype is an ideal form: an example of this is to be found in the poem 'Blake' ¹¹:

La rosa verdadera está muy lejos.
(...)
Puede ser (...)

... un terrible arquetipo que no tiene
la forma de la rosa.

In Borges, the archetype is the essence of a thing; this essence may express itself in many forms. It is the inconceivable ideal form, which is beyond our senses. Another example of Borges' use of the idea of archetypes is found in Atlas, where he writes that a brioche bought by María Kodama is so perfect as to be, perhaps, the archetypal brioche. ¹²

The archetype in the poem is the one for which the cathedral at Chartres is a simulacrum. The poem which Schiavo wanted to write would also have been a simulacrum of the same archetype. The men worked in a library; in a library all subjects are categorized into archetypal headings. The poem begins:

En esa biblioteca de Almagro Sur
compartimos la rutina y el tedio
y la morosa clasificación de los libros
según el orden decimal de Bruselas

The library is specific; it is also a simulacrum of an archetype. Accentuating this focus on archetypes is the idea of 'la rutina y el tedio', both of which might be simulacra of a single archetype. Also, the idea that both men shared this activity raises the idea that they were both variants of a single bored man. 'Morosa' also develops this further, while 'clasificación' epitomizes archetypes in the context of a library. That this classification was done in Buenos Aires according to a system from Brussels - universally used - emphasizes the library's similarities with other libraries, the plural nature of

the variants and the archetypal nature of the library, set out as a simulacrum of an archetypal library cataloguing system. The mention of Brussels also directs the reader's attention to Europe, away from 'Almagro Sur', away from Buenos Aires.

In this atmosphere of copies and repetition, human inventiveness seems to overcome the stifling, unoriginal - yet infinite - world of the library and archetypes:

y me confiaste tu curiosa esperanza
de escribir un poema que observara
verso por verso, estrofa por estrofa,
las divisiones y las proporciones
de la remota catedral de Chartres
(que tus ojos de carne no vieron nunca)
y que fuera el coro, y las naves,
y el ábside, el altar y las torres.

Although the idea that Schiavo had might have been original, in essence he wanted to make another simulacrum of the archetype to which the cathedral of Chartres belongs. The seventh line emphasizes the repetitive, archetypal nature of art, filling old forms with new ideas, while the ideas themselves are old and eternal, like the cathedral. Also, the idea that Schiavo had never seen the cathedral with his own eyes emphasizes the abstract nature of archetypes, divorcing them from our physical senses. This division in experience between abstract experience and physical experience is also found in 'Ronda'.

Line thirteen has a strong element of irony:

Ahora, Schiavo, estás muerto.

That the man died before being able to write his poem is emphasized by the line's number. The poet lost a friend, the world a poem. However, the idea of the poem exists in a pure form, uncontaminated by reality. A similar situation occurs with a painter's unpainted work in 'The unending gift', an earlier poem. ¹³

In Heaven, the dead poet, the poet argues, will have more insight into his poem and the archetypal nature of the cathedral, or rather the archetype upon which the cathedral is based. This advantage of death seems to counter any tendency towards sadness in the poem: in a later poem in Los conjurados, the poet wrote, 'debemos entrar en la muerte como quien entra en una fiesta'. ¹⁴ In 'The unending gift', in this poem, and in the later poem, death is seen as positive:

Desde el cielo platónico habrás mirado
con sonriente piedad
la clara catedral de erguida piedra
y tu secreta catedral tipográfica
y sabrás que las dos,
la que erigieron las generaciones de Francia
y la que urdió tu sombra,
son copias temporales y mortales
de un arquetipo inconcebible.

Here again we have images of archetypes. The 'sonriente piedad' recalls religious iconography, Schiavo being in Heaven. Both cathedrals reflect the same ideal form. Line thirteen has denied the world Schiavo's poem, but it has given him enlightenment. It is ironic that Descartes' enlightenment, his rationalism, has led him to despair, whereas here it has led Schiavo to 'sonriente piedad'. The two men were involved in types of questioning. Descartes' was a questioning of everything; Schiavo's was limited to a (perhaps absurd)

literary project. This recalls 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote'. ¹⁵

The next poem, 'Beppo' ¹⁶, is also about archetypes, and leads up to the question

¿De qué Adán anterior al paraíso,
de qué divinidad indescifrable
somos los hombres un espejo roto?

In the note to this poem ¹⁷, we read that philosophy and theology are two kinds of fantastic writing. Both subjects are involved in the previous poems, and in these lines we see both theology ('divinidad') and philosophy ('un espejo roto' of the archetypal 'divinidad indescifrable'). What is discussed in this poem is existence, and fantastic writing, philosophy and theology are parts of our existence. Although the poem is about the poet's cat, we do not read of the cat's existence. The cat becomes a vehicle for the poet's thoughts about men.

The poem is in four sections: lines 1 - 5, 8 - 12 and two rhetorical questions, lines 6 - 7 and 13 - 15. In the opening lines the cat is described:

El gato blanco y célibe se mira
en la lúcida luna del espejo.

The cat is 'blanco y célibe': these images suggest holiness, innocence and religion, drawing our attention to the mention of theology in the note. The alliteration in the second line emphasizes the moon, often a symbol of enlightenment in Borges. The cat, then, seems to be looking

for something in its reflection. This recalls 'Un espejo' (Historia de la noche) and 'Arte poética'. The poet stands above and outside the cat, and can explain what it does. In a sense he has a creator/creation relationship with the cat, as the cat in the poem is a creation of his words in the mind of the reader. The poet knows more than the cat:

y no puede saber que esa blancura
y esos ojos de oro que no ha visto
nunca en la casa, son su propia imagen.

The cat sees its reflection in the mirror. The poet is of the opinion that it is unaware of the fact that the image it sees is its own, although the image in the mirror is reversed:

¿Quién le dirá que el otro que lo observa
es apenas un sueño del espejo?

The phrase 'sueño del espejo' presents us with an ambiguity central to the view of existence in the poem. In the third section, the poet parallels his own thought with Plotinus' 'en las Ennéadas'. He considers the cats, 'el de cristal y el de caliente sangre', to be two. In this case the mirror is not an apparatus producing a replica but a device which makes the two cats 'simulacros que concede al tiempo/ un arquetipo eterno'. Similarly, the poet, making this decision, is a simulacrum of the archetype to which Plotinus, 'en las Ennéadas', belongs:

. . . Así lo afirma,
sombra también, Plótino en las Ennéadas. 16

A mirror distorts. Borges leaves the gap between his statement that the cats are 'simulacros' and that Plotinus is a 'sombra también' to be filled in by the reader. The two cats are of the same archetype, and a similar cat must have been seen by Plotinus to enable him to reach the same conclusion as Borges does here. Perhaps this poem is a simulacrum of the archetypes which made up Plotinus' incident.

The last section of the poem broadens the idea of nothing being original as everything is a 'simulacro', in order to question, not the cat's identity, but the identity of the reader and poet, who are united here:

¿De qué Adán anterior al paraíso,
de qué divinidad indescifrable
somos los hombres un espejo roto?

In this poem, the poet's cat, Beppo, is used as the catalyst for speculation on human existence. The subject of the poem is 'los hombres'. Beppo was given his name by the poet, just as Adam, mentioned in line thirteen, named the animals in the Garden of Eden. The cat here is what the poet has attributed to him. Saying that we, 'los hombres', are an 'espejo roto', implies imperfection. 17 However, each fragment of a broken mirror is able to reflect; each piece becomes a whole mirror. Being a broken mirror is positive. The pieces of broken mirror might be individuals; the original mirror would be a huge collective consciousness.

The next poem is 'Al adquirir una enciclopedia'.²⁰ An encyclopaedia is a symbol of man's attempts to understand the universe, as perceived by individuals, and to arrange this knowledge systematically.

The first eleven lines enumerate pieces of this knowledge; the last lines of the poem record the poet's reactions to his new encyclopaedia. We gain impressions of its vastness, and also of the density of information found in it: 'la vasta enciclopedia de Brockhaus'; 'los muchos y cargados volúmenes'. There is also an atlas; space is in the atlas, in ciphered form, while time and man's actions are ciphered in the other volume. Language is a temporal medium, and the entries in the encyclopaedia record linguistic events, while the earth exists behind all this, as the spatial aspect of man's universe.

The encyclopaedia is from Germany: it includes much information about that country, 'aquí la devoción de Alemania'. This line could also allude to the German devotion to detail. In lines 4 - 6 we read a list of some of the things found in the encyclopaedia. There are different philosophical schools, people with similar names - a device which recalls the previous poem's concern with archetypes - like 'el primer Adán y Adán de Bremen', the latter being a poet. Adam of the Garden of Eden was also a poet, naming things. There are also animals and tribes sided by side; some of these things seem to fit together, while others, like 'el tigre', seem to be unrelated to the other information - for example, lions are not mentioned. As some things are left out of the encyclopaedia it is flawed, as is our understanding of the universe. There are facts about the encyclopaedia itself, part of the universe it seeks to exteriorize: 'la escrupulosa tipografía y el

azul de los mares'; things implicit in the text, 'la memoria del tiempo y los laberintos del tiempo', 'el error y la verdad'. These are parts of the text both in the sense reading and writing; also, in the thought and exploration which has led up to the opinions, objective or subjective, contained in the text. The atemporal nature of knowledge is also mentioned: 'la dilatada miscelánea que sabe más que cualquier hombre', 'la suma de la larga vigilia'. The discoveries of the generations are brought to the reader; this echoes the ideas in the first poem of Historia de la noche, and also the first line of the last poem of that book, 'A lo largo de sus generaciones los hombres erigieron la noche'. ²¹

What is emphasized in the first section of the present poem is that all this diverse human knowledge, all these observations, impossible for a single human to have made, are brought by the encyclopaedia to its reader. This is emphasized by the repetition of 'Aquí' at the start of each line. The same device also heightens the change in atmosphere which occurs between lines 11 and 12:

aquí la suma de la larga vigilia.
Aquí también los ojos que no sirven, las manos que
no aciertan,
las ilegibles páginas,
la dudosa penumbra de la ceguera, los muros que se
alejan.

The irony present in the juxtaposition of 'vigilia' and 'los ojos que no sirven' underlines the difference between mankind and man. These are the discoveries of mankind, and a certain blind man cannot read them. In terms of the individual, man may be weak, while in terms of

'la larga vigilia' he is able to achieve many things. These lines also allude to the poet's oldness and the changing nature of his surroundings, or of his perceptions of them: 'la dudosa penumbra', 'los muros que se alejan'. Among this uncertain situation, of growing frailty, the encyclopaedia offers a world of unchanging certainty:

Pero también aquí una costumbre nueva
de esta costumbre vieja, la casa,
una gravitación y una presencia,
el misterioso amor de las cosas
que nos ignoran y se ignoran.

The encyclopaedia preserves fossilized knowledge; only with a new edition can it be updated. The physical presence of the books in these lines emphasizes the idea that the unchanging certainty of the encyclopaedia is based on a fiction. The new encyclopaedia is like a piece of furniture, a part of the home; it is a list of diverse elements which together enumerate the known universe. It is part of a man's home, and the poet may find himself included in it in a future edition. The poet's attraction to the encyclopaedia is mysterious and he is puzzled by this. The encyclopaedia is ordered alphabetically, but this order does not reflect their order in the known universe, which the encyclopaedia purports to represent. Man has attempted to systematize the universe in the encyclopaedia; for the poet, this enumeration has produced not a picture of the universe, but rather another, alphabetical and fictional, idealized, universe.

Encyclopaedias are part of the poet's idea of 'la casa'. In the next poem, 'Aquél' ²², he writes, at a distance, about himself. The distance, which is created by the use of the third person, and by a

declamatory and rhetorical style, reminds us of the objectivity and sparseness of an encyclopaedia entry. The 'hombres' who were the broken mirror in 'Beppo' have, in their turn, constructed their own broken mirror, the encyclopaedia, and the poet becomes part of it. The distancing effect of the third person also gives the text an ironic grandeur. In 'Aquél' the poet opens the poem:

Oh días consagrados al inútil
empeño de olvidar la biografía
de un poeta menor del hemisferio
austral, a quien los hados o los astros
dieron un cuerpo que no deja un hijo...

Describing himself as a minor poet, in this anonymous way, the poet creates the encyclopaedic atmosphere. It may be an out-of-date encyclopaedia: once, Borges certainly was a 'poeta menor del hemisferio austral'. This also recalls the 'Epílogo' of the Obras completas 1923 - 1972 (1974), where the poet writes a fictional encyclopaedia entry on himself:

El renombre de que Borges gozó durante su vida, documentada por un cúmulo de monografías y de polémicas, no deja de asombrarnos ahora. Nos consta que el primer asombrado fue él y que siempre temió que le declarasen un impostor o un chapucero o una singular mezcla de ambos. ²³

Already in the first lines we have the image of a man resigned to his fate. He cannot escape the sum of his fate, his 'biografía', and in the final lines of the poem he returns to this.

We have the distancing effect of 'hemisferio austral', which recalls the Atlas in the encyclopaedia of the previous poem, and also

the library system from Brussels in 'Las dos catedrales'. The enumeration is split into two sections, characterized by the repetition of 'y' at the beginning of each line. The word 'y' does not appear until the sixth line, until the poet tells us the cause of his situation: fate ('los hados' and 'los astros'), which is also mentioned in 'El ápice': 'No hay lástima en el Hado / y la noche de Dios es infinita'. ²⁴ The first three things enumerated are explained, commented upon. They are things the poet does not seem to like: blindness ('penumbra y cárcel'); age ('aurora de la muerte'); and fame ('que no merece nadie'). The next four lines, unexplained, are about his interests in the present:

y el hábito de urdir endecasílabos
y el viejo amor de las enciclopedias
y de los finos mapas caligráficos
y del tenue marfil

In the middle of line twelve, we find an 'y', and here the mood changes. this device of having an 'y' in the middle of the line is continued until line 15, where it is - as in line 12 - accompanied by an 'y' at the beginning of the line. In lines 12 - 15 we find the poet concerned with a lost past:

... y una incurable
nostalgia del latín y fragmentarias
memorias de Edimburgo y de Ginebra
y el olvido de fechas y de nombres

These are cities, names and languages from the poet's past which he tries to forget. In the next two lines we read of the gap between knowledge and the subject of that knowledge:

y del culto del Oriente, que los pueblos
del misceláneo Oriente no comparten,

which adds to the image of the encyclopaedia being interesting, but in a special way, remote from what it describes, like a piece of fantastic writing. This is the bookish side of the poet, interested in learning for its own sake, distanced from the world and yet part of it. The next lines place him both in the literary world ('el abuso de la etimología', 'el hierro de las sílabas sajonas') and in a world of discovery, of newness: 'y vísperas de trémula esperanza', 'la luna, que siempre nos sorprende'. All these things contribute to the image of the 'poeta menor del hemisferio austral'.

However, in lines 22 - 25, we see the mundane everyday life of the poet, the personal side at odds with the external side we have seen until now. This image is similar to that shown in 'Un sábado' in Historia de la noche: ²⁵

y esa mala costumbre, Buenos Aires,
y el sabor de las uvas y del agua
y del cacao, dulzura mexicana,
y unas monedas y un reloj de arena

Here the poet alludes to Buenos Aires, the subject of many of his poems; chocolate is mentioned in 'México' ²⁶; the coins suggest the theme of the 'otro' and the poem 'La moneda de hierro'. ²⁷ The sand

clock suggests both the Libro de arena and the 'idioma infinito de la arena', which is mentioned in 'Ronda'. 20

In these last lines, the poet is surrounded by images and memories, preoccupations out of which he has made his poetry. The same can be said of the rest of the poem: 'la ceguera', 'la vejez' and 'la fama' for example. At the end of the poem, surrounded by these things, the poet writes:

y que una tarde, igual a tantas otras,
se resigna a estos versos.

At this point, it is worth remembering the form which this poem has taken. Although printed as a single stanza of enumeration, with an introductory passage (lines 1 - 5) of an ode-like quality, the title and content of the poem recall an encyclopaedia article. We are given biographical information and general details about the poet's external personality. The information in the poem is both about his interests and his limitations and frustrations. This aspect of the poem makes it less detached than an encyclopaedia entry. From the poet's frustrations has sprung his poetry. This is the aim of the poet in his earlier poem, 'Arte poética':

Convertir el ultraje de los años
en una música, un rumor y un símbolo. 29

The banal aspects of his life have ironically lifted him above their banality and made him a poet. The impersonal title of this poem, 'Aquél', contrasts strongly with the personal nature of poetic

writing.

At the end of the first group of poems, Borges appears as a well-known poet (how else would he be well enough known to refer to himself as 'Aquél'?), a poet in the romantic sense, a creator, and yet a very ordinary, mundane person. From the banality of his life, which he has resigned himself to, and from its contradictions and imperfections, has come his poetry and his existence as a poet: his identity.

Notes

¹ 'Ronda' LaC p. 13.

² See Balderston The Literary Universe of Jorge Luis Borges Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986, p. xvii.

³ For information on Borges' and the Sufis, see Giovanna De Garayalde, Jorge Luis Borges: Sources and Illumination London: Octagon Press, 1979.

⁴ 'Tamerlán' was Timur the Lame, the renowned Tartar conqueror (1336 - 1405), according to Ivor H Evans ed. Brewers Dictionary of Phrase and Fable London: Cassell, 1981. 'Omar', according to Balderston, op. cit. p. 113, was the 'second caliph, born in Mecca, c. 581 - 644, conqueror of Egypt'.

⁵ 'El acto del libro', LaC p. 15.

⁶ OP p. 216.

⁷ 'Descartes' LaC pp. 17 - 18.

⁸ 'La dicha' LaC pp. 43 - 44.

⁹ 'Las dos catedrales' LaC p. 19. This poem was published in La Nación, 18th. June 1978: p. 1. This was a different version. In line 11, a comma is deleted after 'el coro'; in line 13, 'Schiavo' is substituted by 'amigo'; in the last line of the present version, the full-stop is deleted and an extra line, 'como el fin de la serie de los números(.)', ends the poem.

¹⁰ 'Unas notas' LaC p. 107. In the note, we are referred to Fung Yu-Lan's A Short History of Chinese Philosophy New York:

Macmillan, 1948. In the 4th. edition of this work (1958), p. 296, the author writes of 'Li or principle': 'This theory is the same as that of the new realists, who maintain that there is a mathematics before there is mathematics.'

¹¹ 'Blake' LaC p. 47.

¹² Balderston, op. cit. p. xvii: 'In one of the brief sections of this book [Atlas], for instance, Borges asserted that at a bakery called Aux Brioches de la Lune he encountered the perfect brioche: the brioche which is all brioches, or rather the Platonic idea of a brioche.' See Atlas p. 41, 'The Brioche'.

¹³ 'The unending gift' OP p. 327.

¹⁴ LosC p. 36.

¹⁵ 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote' PC I, pp. 425 - 434.

Although Schiavo's literary project bears little resemblance to Menard's, both would seem impossible to carry out. The beauty of the projects lies in their existence as possibilities. This idea recalls 'Things that might have been': OP p. 540.

¹⁶ 'Beppo' LaC p. 21. There is also a poem by Byron called 'Beppo'. The present poem was published in La Nación 5th. November 1978: p. 1. In that version, in the fourth line a comma is added after 'oro'; in the ninth line, 'el del cristal' replaces 'el de cristal'.

¹⁷ 'Unas notas' LaC p. 107.

¹⁸ See Atlas p. 11:

Plotinus of Alexandria refused to allow a portrait to be made of himself, we are told by Porphyry, alleging that he was merely a shadow of his Platonic prototype and that a portrait would be the shadow of a shadow.

19 See R T Willis Neo Platonism London: Duckworth 1972, p. 57:

'Plotinus' conception of the One can best be understood if we recall that in his view multiplicity is never a valuable addition to an initial unity, but connotes rather a fraction of that unity.'

20 'Al adquirir una enciclopedia' LaC p. 23.

21 'Historia de la noche' OP pp. 555 - 556.

22 'Aquél' LaC pp. 25 - 26. Although the title of this poem seems to suggest Darío's 'Yo soy aquél...' (Darío, Poesía Madrid: Alianza, 1986, pp. 69 - 72) where Borges' poem is of resignation to fate, Darío's is an exaltation of being a poet. The brightness of the latter's poem contrasts with the seriousness of Borges' 'Aquél'. Both poems, however, celebrate the life of the poet.

23 José Miguel Oviedo 'Borges el poeta según sus prólogos' Revista Iberoamericana nos 130 - 131 (1985) pp. 209 - 220: see p. 209.

24 'El Ápice' LaC p. 63.

25 'Un sábado' OP p. 551.

26 'México' OP p. 479.

27 'La moneda de hierro' OP p. 507.

28 'Ronda' LaC p. 13.

29 'Arte poética' OP pp. 161 - 162.

The second seven poems:

'Eclesiastés, 1 - 9'

to 'La prueba'

The second seven poems of La cifra are connected to the first seven. In 'Ronda' ¹, the poet is surrounded by his memories and literary images; in 'Eclesiastés, 1 - 9' ², which above all else is founded upon a quotation from a book, the Bible ³, we find allusions to other works of literature: The Arabian Nights (line 3) and H G Wells' The Time Machine (line 7). Also, memories of others' ideas interpose themselves between the poet and his surroundings: 'digo lo que los otros me dijeron'. This poem, which has as its theme cyclic time and the idea that the poet will never do anything new again, if he ever has done, has an interesting structure. It is a kind of compound enumeración caótica. This poem begins the second group, which is in some ways a variation on the first group; it is, then, fitting that its theme should be cyclic time. The poem is in a sense a rewrite of 'Ronda'. The first section, lines 1 - 12, is composed of a series of conditions, preceded by the word 'si', which draws the reader into the poem, as he waits for the thing which is dependent on the enumerated conditions:

repito lo cumplido innumerables
veces en mi camino señalado.

This is an anti climax; the lines which follow are an elucidation of these lines, ending with

hora del día o de la abstracta noche.

This 'abstracta noche' provides the germ for lines 19 - 20:

Cada noche la misma pesadilla,
cada noche el rigor del laberinto.

This provides a point of punctuation in the poem, both by its subject matter and by the repetition of the opening words, which slow the poem down. The 'rigor del laberinto' is a 'pesadilla'; this in turn is the 'abstracta noche'. If we consider that a frequent metaphor in Borges is life as a dream, and that he considers his life to be a series of repetitions (as in lines 1 - 18), it follows that all his life is repetition and he is trapped in his 'camino señalado', bored and tired:

Soy la fatiga de un espejo inmóvil
o el polvo de un museo.

The figure of the bored poet was also present in the previous poem, 'Aquél':

y que una tarde, igual a tantas otras,
se resigna a estos versos.

In the last four lines there is only one thing left for the poet to experience, death:

Sólo una cosa no gustada espero,
una dádiva, un oro de la sombra,
esa virgen, la muerte. (El castellano
permite esa metáfora.)

However, it is only a part of his 'camino señalado' (his language) that permits him to say - or to think - this. Not even death provides him with an exit from the tedium of his life. There are connections with 'Ronda' again, in line 22 ('el polvo de un museo') and in the way in which the memories which the poet has in his imagination of Ronda seem eternal: the myths have outlasted the Arabs in Spain. This contrasts the poet - mortal man - with the poet as the creator of poems - who may be immortal. However, 'el castellano' has permitted him to use this metaphor, 'esa virgen, la muerte'; it has also permitted him to be a poet. Language might go on forever; poets come and go. This, then, is an idea similar to that central to 'Ronda', where there seem to be at least two Rondas, one archetypal and eternal, the other personal and temporal.

In 'Ronda' the poet writes of something he has experienced physically: a visit to Ronda. Here, he also writes of physical sensations and touch:

Si me paso la mano por la frente,
sí acaricio los lomos de los libros,
sí reconozco el Libro de las Noches

The first three lines have combinations of tactile sensations and abstract connotations. The blind poet recognizes the book by the feel of its spine. At the same time, in the first line we have the combination of the hand image, which connotes manual activity, together with that of the forehead, which suggests intellectual activity. The second line, with its allusion to affection, 'acaricio', both physical and intellectual, further reinforces the image of abstraction perceived through touch. Also, the alliteration on 'l' emphasizes the line. The 'Libro de las Noches' also appears in 'Ronda', as 'ese largo jardín, las Mil y Una Noches'.

With the third line, we are dealing not only with literature, but with a type of garden. In line 4 we find 'si hago girar la tercera cerradura', which is also suggestive of entering a space. The poem continues:

si me demoro en el umbral incierto,
si el dolor increíble me anonada

Although the idea of entering a space (of either literature or poetry) is still present, line 5 seems out of place. The pain contrasts with the pleasure of books in the previous lines. That was initially a physical pleasure, just as the 'dolor increíble' might be a physical pain. However, although these things do not seem to fit together, they are all part of the poet's 'camino señalado'. In line 6 there is an allusion to H G Wells; in line seven a tapestry is mentioned:

si recuerdo la Máquina del Tiempo,
si recuerdo el tapiz del unicornio →

We then turn from literature and art to the poet's personal experience:

si cambio de postura mientras duermo,
si la memoria me devuelve un verso,
repito lo cumplido innumerables
veces en mi camino señalado.

In the second section of the poem, lines 13 - 20, the poet turns from listing images to a kind of interpretive narrative. Having told us that he is trapped in a 'camino señalado', he develops this idea which was announced in the first section. He uses repetitive language to illustrate the repetition which he believes his life to be:

tejo y torno a tejer la misma fábula,
repito un repetido endecasílabo,
digo lo que los otros me dijeron,
siento las mismas cosas en la misma
hora del día o de la abstracta noche.

Beyond the repetition of verbal forms and adjectives, 'día' and 'noche', used elsewhere in Borges to signify cyclical time and repetition, strengthen this image of repetition.

The next two lines also use words to express repetition: 'cada noche... cada noche...', and the adjective 'misma' again. The line following this two line parenthesis, line 21, also expresses repetition:

Soy la fatiga de un espejo inmóvil

whilst the next implies a lack of action, an acquiescence, a waiting for fate:

o el polvo de un museo.

Here we have a past which has perhaps no connection with the poet's actions. Time has placed the dust in the museum. By the end of the poem, the poet is fate and repetition; even death, his only remaining new experience, is part of fate, and a cycle. It, too, represents repetition. It is called an 'oro de la sombra', an image suggesting poetry. Poetry is the only bringer of newness in the poet's life; as a poet his only existence is in creating new poems. These in turn are rewrites of other poems. For this reason, only death is new. The cyclic idea is also current in 'Ronda', where there is the idea of the rise and fall of a civilization.

Like the second poem in the collection, 'El acto del libro' ³, the next poem is a prose text: 'Dos formas del insomnio' ⁴. Its subject is 'longevidad', which relates it to the previous poem. The second poem in the collection makes the reader wonder about the difference between what we call 'fantastic' and what we might term 'normal'. It also brings into question our sense of fiction and the suspension of disbelief which it involves and depends upon.

The poem, in a sense, analyses itself: its title suggests to the reader that what he is about to read is two views of the same thing. The first paragraph is prefixed: '¿Qué es el insomnio? / La pregunta es retórica; sé demasiado bien la respuesta.' Immediately the reader is aware that insomnia itself is not the subject of the poem. In the

second paragraph the poet goes on to reveal the real subject of the poem. It is prefixed by '¿Qué es la longevidad?', and the description of 'longevidad' closely parallels that of 'insomnio'. Both things are aspects of a single archetype; this is like the discussion of what is fantastic and what is not in 'El acto del libro', in that in the first paragraph insomnia is discussed concretely while in the second it has become a metaphor. Something commonplace, 'longevidad', becomes almost fantastical. Also, in 'El acto del libro', we may choose hell, 'elegir el infierno'; 'longevidad' is described here as a kind of hell.

The first paragraph is characterized by frequent use of repeated sounds: 'una respiración regular', 'la carga de un cuerpo que bruscamente cambia de lado', 'apretar los párpados... parecido a la fiebre... pronunciar fragmentos de párrafos'. Particularly noticeable is the repetition of /p/ and /f/; /k/ and /r/ are also repeated. These underline the image of repetition in the paragraph, which is perhaps begun by the words, 'Es temer y contar en la alta noche las duras campanadas fatales'. This phrase also expresses the frustration and misery of the insomniac. The poet's body seems alien to him, out of control.

The second paragraph begins with an image of the poet's body: 'Es el horror de ser en un cuerpo humano cuyas facultades declinan'. In this paragraph there is more use of repeated sounds and letters: 'cuerpo.. cuyas', 'horror... humano', 'mide... décadas', 'agujas de acero', 'peso de mares y de pirámides', 'antiguas... auroras... Adán', 'condenado a mi carne', 'dinastías... detestada', 'rutina de recuerdos'. These alliterative effects create a rhapsodic, repetitive atmosphere. This effect is underlined by the fact that the second

paragraph is essentially a modification, a transformation, of the first. It is also heightened by the parallels existing between the insomniac's restless and uncontrollable body and the 'cuerpo cuyas facultades declinan'. Just as the first paragraph develops out of a question, so does the second.

Both paragraphs end in a parallel, the poet identifying himself more with longevity than with insomnia: '... es querer hundirse en el sueño y no poder hundirse en el sueño, es el horror de ser y de seguir siendo, es el alba dudosa' and '... a querer hundirme en la muerte y no poder hundirme en la muerte, a ser y seguir siendo'. The repeated /s/ in the first statement contrasts with the mixture of /m/ and /s/ sounds in the second. 'Longevidad' has as its final point death; insomnia has 'el alba dudosa'. Longevity offers certainty.

This question of doubt and certainty brings us back to the third poem in the volume, 'Descartes'. The speaker of that poem doubts all things and even doubts that he is doubting: 'Acaso sueño haber soñado'. The 'Descartes' in the poem is, in a sense, perpetually in the 'alba dudosa' of the present poem. It is ironic that while Descartes imagines he has dreamt everything, the insomniac is not able to sleep or to dream.

In the third poem of this group, 'The cloisters', the French theme of 'Descartes' and the dream theme are both continued. The poem takes its name from, and is based upon, Samuel Yellen's poem of the same name. 7 Just as longevity was seen as a variant of insomnia in the previous poem, the present poem can be seen as a rewrite of the Yellen poem; it is also a rewrite of 'Descartes'. It is also, by its subject matter, related to 'Las dos catedrales': it concerns a French

church rebuilt in America.

The poem is based on a dream image : 'Esta abadía es más terrible... porque es también un sueño.' The poet finds himself, in a dream, in a strange place:

De un lugar del reino de Francia
trajeron los cristales y la piedra
para construir en la isla de Manhattan
estos cóncavos claustros.

Although these lines do not state that the building materials brought from France had been used before, the following lines suggest this:

No son apócrifos.
Son fieles monumentos de una nostalgia.

Here again we find repeated sounds, on /c/, /r/, /p/ and /f/, synthesized in the word 'apócrifos'. In this sixth line, the sounds /n/ and /m/ are emphasized. The first part of the poem seemed to reflect the letters of the word 'Francia' in its repeated sounds. In the seventh line, /m/ and /n/ sounds are emphasized and we move to America:

Una voz americana nos dice
que paguemos lo que queramos,
porque toda esta fábrica es ilusoria
y el dinero que deja nuestra mano
se convertirá en zequíes o en humo.

The dreamer can leave whatever he likes; miraculously, it will vanish. At the same time, it could be said that money can work 'miracles',

like the bringing of the cloisters from medieval France, through time and space, to modern Manhattan. This creates a dislocation between history and geography in the poem, which points to the cloisters' insubstantiality.

In lines 12 - 15 we read

Esta abadía es más terrible
que la pirámide de Ghizeh
o que el laberinto de Cnosos,
porque es también un sueño.

Because this fantastic place is in a dream it is terrible; it does not obey the rules which ordinary reality obeys. The coins can vanish, for example. It was the intangibility of dreams that caused 'Descartes' to fear the idea that all was a dream. Although some parts of dreams are controlled by the dreamer, like the amount of money he leaves in this dream, some of the dream is beyond his immediate control. Since dreams are created by the dreamer, the fear which a dream provokes is proof of the unpredictability of his inner personality. Lack of control and uncertainty create anxiety for the speaker both in this poem, in 'Descartes' and in 'Dos formas del insomnio'. In 'The cloisters' we read of a world which does not obey normal chronology; it is this anachronism that gives the building described in the poem its fantastic quality. Although the speaker of the poem finds the building 'terrible', he seems to find its terror interesting; it fascinates him and gives him pleasure. It has brought him a new experience, unlike longevity, which holds only death as a new experience:

Siento un poco de vértigo.
No estoy acostumbrado a la eternidad.

With these lines the poem ends, leaving the impression of a poet who found the dream at once frightening and enjoyable.

The section of the poem which tells us about what the poet perceived in the dream, lines 16 - 28, is perhaps the most overtly formal of the poem. It begins with two tercets, written on a similar plan and hence related, placed in an order: they both begin 'Oímos.../pero...'. The poet hears sounds which he considers to be from another place and time:

Oímos el rumor de la fuente,
pero esa fuente está en el Patio de los Naranjos
o en el cantar *Der Asra*.
Oímos claras voces latinas,
pero esas voces resonaron en Aquitania
cuando estaba cerca el Islam. ♣

Here we see both the imagination of the dreamer and his attempts to understand, or decipher what he hears. He rejects the idea that these sounds 'belong' to the building; they belong to another time. The dreamer's world with its fantastical qualities contrasts with the 'infierno' experienced in the previous poem by the insomniac; the latter's 'magia inútil' also contrasts with the working magic of dreams. The dreamer, beyond his fear, feels pleasure.

Lines 22 - 28 bring in the speaker's sense of vision:

Vemos en los tapices
la resurrección y la muerte
del sentenciado blanco unicornio,
porque el tiempo de este lugar

no obedece a un orden.
Los laureles que toco florecerán
cuando Leif Ericsson divise las arenas de América.

The speaker sees tapestries which show him a matrix of images. The white unicorn is a symbol of Christ and yet a symbol which perhaps predates Christianity⁹; this is pictured in biblical scenes. The idea of simultaneous resurrection and death suggests to the speaker the anachronistic feel of the building. This leads his imagination to assume that he is in the past, and in Europe, although he is in Manhattan, perhaps the ultimate symbol of The New World. Because he is in all these times and places at once, he is in eternity. The poet's discovery of eternity is mirrored by Leif Ericsson's discovery of America, a continent which would have seemed to be of infinite vastness at the time of its discovery. Also in these lines there is a division between Europe (old) and America (modern), which is also found in 'Las dos catedrales'.

'Las dos catedrales' is a poem about an unfulfilled literary project; the next text is an unfulfilled literary project, 'Nota para un cuento fantástico'.¹⁰ 'Las dos catedrales' is about two simulacra belonging to one archetype; 'Dos formas del insomnio' also follows this pattern. The previous poem is set in Manhattan; 'Nota para un cuento fantástico' continues in North America: 'En Wisconsin o en Texas o en Alabama...' The first of the two paragraphs which make up this text holds what might be, as it seems conjectural and out of context, an image from a dream. The dream-like quality of the image is increased when, in a passage where we are firmly in the poet's consciousness, where he is not observing as at the start but thinking

and reflecting, he adds 'ese juego, que abarca más de un siglo y un continente'. The text takes the image of the children playing and puts it through a series of transformations. First, by stating an opinion of his own, the poet adds his own presence: 'Yo sé (todos lo saben) que la derrota tiene una dignidad que la ruidosa victoria no merece'. He then adds the 'fantastic' element. The game

que abarca más de un siglo y un continente, descubrirá algún día el arte divino de destejer el tiempo o, como dijo Pietro Damiano, de modificar el pasado.

This forms a climax for the first paragraph, emphasized by the repetition of /d/ and /t/. All this depends on the poet's gift of imagination: 'también sé imaginar...'

This poem concerns two versions of a single archetype. The archetype is defined at the end of the first paragraph as 'el arte de destejer el tiempo'. The game played by the children will discover this art. The children's game is a device used to introduce the reader to the idea of undoing and changing the past. The game played by the children is related to 'el arte divino de destejer el pasado' by virtue of them sharing the same archetype, while the events of paragraph two, of historical events which have been revised, are of this archetype. The game is a form of changing the past.

The second paragraph is a development of the last two lines of the first. Having built up this idea, the poet begins to 'modificar el pasado'. He reverses famous historic events; had they turned out in the way described here, history would have been different. Some of the images, however, are literary: John Donne and Alonso Quijano. There

are also historic images: the Norman invasion of England, the Vikings. The events described are all contrary to what happened in history and in the books where we find these incidents: for example, Don Quijote here 'conocerá el amor de Dulcinea' and the Normans are defeated by the Saxons at the battle of Hastings.

At the end of the poem, we have an image which bridges the gap between history and literature: Pythagorous. He is a figure in books, a philosopher and a historical figure. He had as his central teaching the idea of the transmigration of souls. He is pictured with the shield of Euforbus, a Trojan warrior; the poet states that, in a previous incarnation, Pythagorous had been Euforbus. Earlier in the paragraph, John Donne is pictured writing a 'poema sobre las transmigraciones de un alma'. He is, then, an incarnation of Pythagorous; Borges is also an incarnation of Pythagorous, therefore, as he writes a poem about the transmigration of souls here. We find the idea that events repeat themselves; if people have souls which are passed from person to person, this mirrors the way in which archetypes take form in various simulacra.

In this poem there is a lack of what normally characterizes a text as poetic: the typography in short lines in stanzas or in a single stanza, the use of alliteration, rhyme, and other poetic devices. There is, however, much use of the parallelism, a series of images which seem to grow out of or resemble one another. For example, almost all the images in this text are variations on the idea of historical events turned upside down. To illustrate this point, let us take the central idea, stated in paragraph one:

destejer el tiempo o, como dijo Pietro Damiano,
modificar el pasado

This idea is then applied to the various images that make up paragraph two, creating a series of parallels and a poetic effect. ¹¹ It is fitting that this text depends upon parallels for its poetic effect as its subject matter is essentially the series of parallels which exist between different simulacra derived from a single archetype. Pietro Damiano, an eleventh century poet and philosopher, is mentioned in the statement of the theme of the poem. ¹² This makes Borges' poem a repetition of Damiano's thought; the two things are both simulacra from a single archetype. Like 'Las dos catedrales', 'Nota para un cuento fantástico' deals with an impossible, unfulfilled literary project. Literature is seen to be an art form where archetypes, ciphers and abstract ideas can be suggested.

The next poem, 'Epílogo' ¹³, is a kind of epitaph for a deceased friend and fellow poet, Francisco Luis Bernárdez, who once formed part of what has been called Borges' Ultraist Movement. ¹⁴ The poem is written as a single stanza of 21 hexameters, divided into three sections. The first, lines 1 - 3, brings to the reader's mind a double image of finality: both Francisco Luis and the poet Borges have died:

Ya cumplida la cifra de los pasos
que te fue dado andar sobre la tierra,
digo que has muerto. Yo también he muerto.

Here we have an image of fatalism and the word 'cifra', linking the poem to the final one in the volume, which has as a theme finality and

death. The poet speaking in these lines has died, as if in sympathy with Francisco Luis. This also suggests that the part of Borges' life when he was near to Bernárdez passed away a time ago. the caesura in line three punctuates the poem.

The second section, lines 4 - 13, is an evocation of the poets' shared past. The image of the speaker in the poem is further defined here. In line 3 we have the identification of the speaker ('digo...') as speaker and in the same line his reaction to Bernárdez's death; these are the justifications for the poem. The next lines seem to form an epilogue for the past which the speaker shared with the dead poet. In these poems, we have the poet Borges actively searching for something. This he seems to disdain as a folly of youth; the later Borges of La cifra sits and calmly waits on certainties, for example in 'La cifra'.

The duality of line three ('digo que has muerto. Yo también he muerto.') in the image of both poets having died, in different ways, is continued in lines 4 - 5:

Yo, que recuerdo la precisa noche
del ignorado adiós, hoy me pregunto:

The dead poet took part in the 'ignorado adiós' which has become, for the living poet, 'la precisa noche'. Dark words like 'muerto', 'noche' and 'ignorado adiós' contrast with the light implied by 'precisa' and 'hoy'. These words illustrate how the past seems dark and mysterious in the present; the poet looks back at the past to reevaluate it with a new perspective.

The two poets are characterized as 'aquellos dos muchachos'; this distances the speaker of these lines from the poets. It is as if somewhere the two young men still exist:

¿Qué habrá sido de aquellos dos muchachos
que hacia mil novecientos veintitantos
buscaban con ingenua fe platónica
por las largas aceras de la noche
del Sur o en la guitarra de Paredes
o en fábulas de esquina y de cuchillo
o en el alba, que no ha tocado nadie,
la secreta ciudad de Buenos Aires?

Vagueness, contrasting with the assertiveness of 'Yo también he muerto', is evident in these lines. Searching is associated with darkness; revelation with light, 'el alba, que no ha tocado nadie'. The poet and his friend searched in vain ('buscaban...') for the 'secreta ciudad de Buenos Aires'. What they searched for in fiction ('fábulas'), in the sky and streets, and in the guitar playing of a compadrito, Nicolás Paredes ¹⁵, was the platonic archetype of Buenos Aires. This they searched for 'con ingenua fe platónica'; 'ingenua', as platonic archetypes are to be found only in the 'cielo platónico' where Schiavo is in 'Las dos catedrales'. ¹⁶ In that poem, the poet also writes of a dead poet and friend. Both Schiavo and Bernárdez were involved in their lifetime in a search for an inconceivable archetype which could not exist on earth; perhaps in Heaven they may have seen the archetype. However, Schiavo wanted to create another simulacrum of an archetype, whilst Bernárdez wanted to find and experience the archetype of Buenos Aires. Borges, the poet and speaker in these poems, watched both these searches and took part in the second. All

three poets therefore were involved in impossible searches; this impossibility owes itself to the secret nature of 'la secreta ciudad de Buenos Aires'. If it were found, identified or discovered, Buenos Aires would no longer be the 'secreta ciudad'. The irony is that the young men were surrounded by what they were searching for.

'Beppo' ¹⁷ is also concerned with archetypes. The young men searched for 'la secreta ciudad' at night; Beppo the cat looks 'en la lúcida luna del espejo', he is a 'sueño del espejo', another nocturnal image. In 'Beppo', men are an 'espejo roto' of a 'divinidad indescifrable'. In 'Epílogo', the young men searched for the archetype of Buenos Aires, which in turn is then an 'espejo roto' of that 'divinidad indescifrable'. Both 'Beppo' and 'Epílogo' contain parallels concerning men and archetypes. These themes are heightened by the poems' proximity to 'Las dos catedrales' and 'Nota para un cuento fantástico'.

The third and final section of the poem, lines 14 - 21, is an evocation of Francisco Luis, an apostrophe to the poet, in which the speaker identifies himself with the dead poet, reinforcing the third line where he states that he too has died:

Hermano en los metales de Quevedo
y en el amor del numeroso hexámetro,
descubridor (todos entonces lo éramos)
de ese antiguo instrumento, la metáfora,
Francisco Luis, del estudioso libro,
ojalá compartieras esta vana
tarde conmigo, inexplicablemente,
y me ayudarás a limar los versos.

Here there is a trace of Borges' distaste for his early ultraist period, the idea that the movement's followers suffered from a delusion or an excess of self importance, in the words 'descubridor (todos entonces lo éramos)'. However, the dead poet was both a colleague and friend; the image of Quevedo's poetry, 'los metales de Quevedo' recalls an earlier epithet for Quevedo, in 'Al idioma alemán':

el bronce de Francisco de Quevedo. ¹⁸

After the ultraist period, the poets went their separate ways: Borges became identified as an intellectual, elitist and international poet, while Bernárdez became a Catholic, popular and nationalist poet. The last four lines of the poem are an exhortation to the dead poet to take part in the writing of the poem. The phrase 'del estudioso libro' recalls a statement made by Thorpe Running about Bernárdez's early books of verse Orto, Bazar, and Kindergarten:

... although not bad as academic copies replete with numerous specific and eulogistic references to Rubén Darío, these poems contain everything that the young ultraists were already rebelling against. ¹⁹

In 'Epílogo', Bernárdez may be a dead poet, but here he becomes part of Borges. Bernárdez becomes a symbol of the poet's earlier life; the poem forms an epilogue to the poet's youth.

Much of 'Epílogo' is given over to a list of fragmentary memories, enumerated in a search - parallel to the young men's search

for 'la secreta ciudad de Buenos Aires' - for what happened to the poet's past. Ultimately, the poet's friend's presence is 'inexplicable'. This relates the poem to the one which follows 'Beppo' in the first group, 'Al adquirir una enciclopedia', where the poet presents the idea that a list of the elements of the universe in a book does not comprise a depiction of the form of the universe. This, in turn, parallels the search for 'la secreta ciudad', and in the next poem, 'Buenos Aires' ²⁰, the poet in his eighties lists aspects of that city, perhaps to show that he is still searching for the elusive 'secreta ciudad de Buenos Aires'; alternatively, he may have found it and be trying to express what he has found. Perhaps the 'secreta ciudad' is best expressed in a poem - or perhaps it is a poem, that mirror where we may see the 'espejo roto' mentioned in Beppo.

In 'Aquél', the poet writes of 'esa mala costumbre, Buenos Aires'. It is this obsession with the past, of a world which is no more, that is the subject of 'Buenos Aires'. In 'Buenos Aires', the reader is presented with a list of images, not unlike the list which makes up 'Al adquirir una enciclopedia', memories which the poet considers to be representative of Buenos Aires. At the poem's close, Buenos Aires becomes more a part of the poet than a city. The entries in the encyclopaedia build up our conception of the universe, but not a replica of the universe. In a similar way, Borges' 'Buenos Aires' is a small, selective view of the city, his memories of everything which he connects to it in his imagination. In this sense, the reader of the poem is in Buenos Aires as he reads it, because the poem itself becomes Buenos Aires, and the reader is implied in the poem. In a parallel way, the reader of the encyclopaedia is part of what it

describes, the universe.

The poem is in three sections: the first line, which announces the otherness of the present day city of Buenos Aires; lines 2 - 16, a long list of memories; and lines 17 - 20, where the poet indicates that he is the only inhabitant of the place he calls 'Buenos Aires'. At the same time, he can see that other people are similarly alone in their own realms of experience.

The first sentence attracts the reader's curiosity:

He nacido en otra ciudad que también
se llamaba Buenos Aires.

The reader continues to read, in order to find out what this 'otra ciudad' is. This search parallels the young men's search for the 'secreta ciudad de Buenos Aires' in the previous poem. Lines 2 - 16 are marked by the repetition of 'Recuerdo...'; this creates an alliteration on the /r/ sound, which is present in some of the lines. This harsh sound creates a feeling of definiteness in the lines, as if the poet is affirming the existence of his Buenos Aires, the 'otra ciudad', and denying that of the present day city. This effect tapers away in lines 14 - 17. In line 14, line 13 is developed and elucidated:

Recuerdo el Almacén de la Figura en
la calle de Tucumán.
(A la vuelta se murió Estanislao del Campo.) 21

The regimentation of the memories and the conciseness of the images begin to deteriorate here with the parenthesis. Although the next line returns to the 'Recuerdo...' pattern, the poet writes there of a 'tercer patio, que no alcancé'. In line 17, 'Recuerdo...' is substituted by 'Guardo memoria...', breaking the continuity.

In lines 2 - 6, the poet recalls things which have had the significant part of their past outside of his house; they have come to rest there. Lines two and three make use of alliteration: 'ruido de los hierros de la puerta cancel' evokes, with the /r/, the sound of the 'hierros' and amplifies the effect of the 'Recuerdo...' Line three repeats the sound /x/ in 'los jazmines y el aljibe, cosas de la nostalgia'; at the same time, the combined sound /lx/ creates increased assonance in the last two examples. This directs the reader's attention to a major theme in the poem, 'nostalgia'. In line four, the sound /s/ is repeated: 'una divisa rosada que había sido punzó'.²² This /s/ directs the reader to the following line, 'la resolana y la siesta', images of relaxation and retreat: the 'resolana' offering the house's inhabitants the chance to be outside without leaving the house, the 'siesta' being a period of withdrawal during the day. The 'jazmines y el aljibe' suggest the 'resolana'; 'jazmines' also contains the /s/. The next line also uses /s/: 'dos espadas que habían servido en el desierto'. Borges not only remembers these things in the poem, but he relates them to a past which the objects are said to have, and which he never saw. The objects - relics of wars and revolutions, the 'conquista' of the desert from the Indians, the 'emblema que había sido punzó', a relic from the times of the dictator Rosas - are now at rest, as if they were sleeping the

'siesta' mentioned in line 5.

In the next lines, we move outside of the poet's house. Until now, 'Buenos Aires' has been the interior of the family's house, although history and the outside world has crept into the house by way of relics and this is mirrored in the image of the 'aljibe' in the yard, where the water came into the house from the sky. Water is also a common symbol of time; the objects in the house brought the past into the house. The next lines move to the exterior of the house: 'los faroles de gas y el hombre con el palo' and 'el tiempo generoso, la gente que llegaba sin anunciarse'. The image of the house as a relaxed place where things are welcomed is developed. History, water, and people come to the house; although in the poem only people are said to arrive 'sin anunciarse', all three must have arrived that way. The next line, 'Recuerdo un bastón con estoque', recalls the image of the previous line, the 'gente que llegaba'.

In line ten, the midpoint, we read perhaps the key to the poem:

Recuerdo lo que he visto y lo que me contaron mis
padres

The poet's 'Buenos Aires' is a combination of personal experience and hearsay. In the poem the poet continues to create more versions of 'Buenos Aires' by handing on his impressions, which in turn become part of the reader's impressions of 'Buenos Aires'. The act of passing on a memory is considered as important as having memories. Of people who visited the house, Macedonio Fernández is mentioned. ²⁵ He is pictured 'en un rincón de una confitería del Once' ('Once' is a

district of Buenos Aires where there was once a railway station ²⁴); the poem goes on to images of outside the house in lines 12 and 13. In line 12 there are the 'carretas de tierra adentro en el polvo del Once', symbols of Buenos Aires invading the countryside. The mentions of Macedonio Fernández in line 11 and Estanislao del Campo in line 14 bring in literary men. Borges' vision of 'Buenos Aires' is very personal and literary, having at the same time many and few connections with the city of the past. History and literature, both ways of interpreting the past and forming abstractions, are part of this city. To illustrate this, line 16 contains a memory which Borges could not possibly have:

Guardo memoria del pistoletazo de Alem
en un coche cerrado.

Leandro Alem, a lawyer and politician, died in 1896, three years before Borges' birth. ²⁵

In 'Al adquirir una enciclopedia' we read 'el misterioso amor de las cosas/ que nos ignoran y se ignoran'. Here, the poet seems to feel a 'misterioso amor' for elements of Buenos Aires. The closing lines of the poem emphasize this:

En aquél Buenos Aires, que me dejó, yo sería un
extraño.
Sé que los únicos paraísos no vedados al hombre
son los paraísos perdidos.
Alguien casi idéntico a mí, alguien que no habrá
leído esta página,
lamentará las torres de cemento y el talado
obelisco. ²⁶

By its enumerative style, the encyclopaedia creates a distance between what it describes and the reader; each entry is related to the next by alphabetical order only. Here we find images of Buenos Aires personal to Borges, related only because for Borges they represent his idealized form of that city. Perhaps this idealized Buenos Aires is the 'secreta ciudad' which the young poets searched for. In the present day city, Borges feels an outsider; his city vanished long ago. He is alone. And yet, he knows that other people share, ironically, this experience of alienation with him, isolated in their own 'paraísos perdidos'.

The images presented by the poet in this poem, besides being personal, are autonomous both from Buenos Aires and the poet. They exist separately from the poet. They are lost to the poet, beyond his control, and form a kind of paradise, which is fossilized and seemingly unchanging, like the world of the encyclopaedia. He imposes an order on the images that epitomize Buenos Aires and creates 'Buenos Aires'. This recalls the way in which the 'sistema decimal de Bruselas' was imposed on the library catalogue in 'Las dos catedrales'. Because the poet has given form to his recollections and (presumably favourite) images of the city where he was born, and because he himself admits that this city vanished long ago, we must conclude that the city 'Buenos Aires' is part of the poet's personality rather than a place. It is then a singular place; the poet feels alienated from modern Buenos Aires, yet his memories of that city's past are an idealized, quintessential Buenos Aires, which he sees as a form of lost paradise. Experiences have to be lost to be paradise. The next poem, 'La prueba' is about death. ²⁷ Death is the

proof of whether this claim is true or not. Only then can we know if life has been paradise, as it will then have passed.

'Aquél' ends on a note of resignation: the poet, 'una tarde, igual a tantas otras, / se resigna a estos versos'. The next poem, 'La prueba', ends in a similar way: 'Agradecemos / los vermes y el olvido'. 'La prueba' is an appropriate title for the final poem of the first fourteen poems: its abstract quality puts it in the same opaque category as 'La cifra'. What is the 'prueba' proof of? The final poem in the volume is about death, oblivion as man's final resting place. In 'Aquél' we read the 'biografía / de un poeta menor del hemisferio / austral'. This created the impression that the poet had died. In the first of the second seven poems we again read of death:

Solo una cosa no gustada espero,
una dádiva, un oro de la sombra,
esa virgen, la muerte. (El castellano
permite esta metáfora.)

Death is an experience unique to each individual, but an individual's experiences condition how he perceives it. 'Dos formas del insomnio' is about a long wait for death, 'a querer hundirme en la muerte y no poder hundirme en la muerte, a ser y seguir siendo'; 'Epílogo' is an epitaph, both for the poet's dead friend and his lost youth. 'Buenos Aires' is also a lament for what is lost. 'The cloisters' and 'Nota para un cuento fantástico' also concern death, less directly. In 'The cloisters' the poet hears the voices of long dead people, 'esas voces resonaron en Aquitania / cuando estaba cerca el Islam'; in 'Nota...' we read of battles where many people lost their lives. Both poems centre

on the past.

In 'La prueba', as in 'La cifra', the reader of the poem is told he will die. The poem has an unusual image for Borges, one which recalls Vallejo's Trilce:

Del otro lado de la puerta un hombre
deja caer su corrupción. En vano
elevatorá esta noche una plegaria
a su curioso dios, que es tres, dos, uno,
y se dirá que es inmortal. Ahora
oye la profecía de su muerte
y sabe que es un animal sentado.

In another poem, 'Elegía' ²⁰, we find the first of these lines used as an epithet for the poet. The man's actions, which take place on an animal level, are immediately contrasted by the religious image of prayer: immediately we are presented with a being who is at once an animal and an animal with strivings towards the divine. These opening lines are given more impact by their being written as a series of three sentences, the second two beginning in mid-line. The god described is 'tres, dos, uno'; this recalls the Christian concept of the Trinity. The man hears the 'profecía de su muerte': he may or may not understand this. The contrast between the religious image and an animal image is emphasized by alliteration in 'deja caer su corrupción', on /k/, and the contrast between that phrase's sound and that of 'elevatorá esta noche'. The two aspects of man's behaviour seem at odds and incompatible. Man's hopes of immortality are 'En vano'; his god seems to be of his own creation, 'su curioso dios, que es tres, dos, uno'. If this god existed, the man would not have to tell himself, reassure himself, of his immortality. Man is an animal, alone

but for a set of ideas which he has created to reassure himself. The veneer of civilization, an attempt to raise man above the animals, is suggested by the closed door. In this animal act, man is reminded of his mortality.

As this man shares the epithet used by the poet to describe himself in another poem, he might represent the poet. However, in line 8, we discover that the man is the reader as well as the poet. The animal activity depicted in the poem's central image is common to all. The poet is a colleague of the reader; again he uses the word 'hermano' to suggest this, as he did when talking of his deceased friend as a fellow poet in 'Epílogo':

Eres, hermano, ese hombre. Agradecemos
los vermes y el olvido.

The man on the other side of the door seems to be distant and strange, and yet we are that man; no-one wants to admit his own mortality. For all the observations that make up the encyclopaedia (in 'Al adquirir una enciclopedia') and in spite of man's ability to create fictional worlds - where people can seemingly evade time ('la máquina del Tiempo', mentioned in 'Ronda') - he cannot escape his own mortality; it is the 'proof' of his existence.

In the first of the fourteen poems that we have examined, there are images of the rise and fall of empires. In the last, there is the rise and fall of a single human being who represents all human beings. Also present in the poems we have examined is the underlying theme of

man's ability to fill the world with his ideas, an idea expressed in Historia de la noche, particularly in its final poem:

A lo largo de sus generaciones
los hombres erigieron la noche. 29

In La cifra we have an addition to this idea. Supplementing fiction, man has created special types of writing, called theology, science and philosophy. For example, 'Descartes' represents philosophy, 'La prueba' touches on theology, while the idea of an encyclopaedia ('Al adquirir...') suggests the accumulation of ordered data, science. In addition to this, psychoanalysis is implied in the poet's many enumerations in search of his self, in 'Aquél' and 'Buenos Aires' for example. It is this ability to collect and process data which sets man off from the animals in 'La prueba'. He may be an 'animal sentado', but he has the possibility of a theology. However, the proof of whether all this has been worth the effort is perhaps man's mortality. In spite of all he has done, is man just another empire which rises and falls, another dinosaur, or is he genuinely related to God? Man finds the answer to this at his death, 'La prueba'.

Notes

¹ 'Ronda' LaC p. 13.

² 'Eclesiastés 1 - 9' LaC pp. 27 - 28. For a detailed study of biblical elements in Borges, see Edna Alzenberg, The Aleph Weaver: Biblical, Kabbalistic and Judaic Elements in Borges Potomac: Scripta Humanistica, 1984.

³ Whether Borges means Ecclesiastes 1 verse 9 or possibly Ecclesiastes verses 1 - 9 is not clear. The former, alluding to cyclic time and repetition, seems more probable: "What has happened will happen again, and what has been done will be done again, and there is nothing new under the sun." However, verses 2 - 8 are also based on this idea: "Emptiness, emptiness, says the Speaker, emptiness, all is empty. What does man gain from all his labour and his toil here under the sun? Generations come and generations go, while the earth endures for ever. / The sun rises and the sun goes down; back it returns to its place and rises there again. The wind blows south, the wind blows north, round and round it goes and returns full circle. All streams run into the sea, yet the sea never overflows; back to the place from which the streams ran they return to run again. / All things are wearisome; no man can speak of them all. Is not the eye surfeited with seeing, and the ear sated with hearing?" The New English Bible Oxford: The Bible Societies, 1973: p. 493.

⁴ The unicorn is also mentioned in 'The cloisters' and

'Himno'. The image of the unicorn and the virgin depicts the hunt of the unicorn. According to Odell Shepard, The Lore of the Unicorn

London: George Allen and Unwin, 1930, p. 47, the unicorn:

... is a small animal, like a kid, but surprisingly fierce for his size, with one sharp horn on his head, and no hunter is able to catch him by force. Yet there is a trick by which he is taken. Men lead a virgin to the place where he most resorts and leave her there alone. As soon as he sees this virgin he runs and lays his head in her lap. She fondles him and he falls asleep. The hunters then approach and capture him and lead him to the palace of the king.'

The unicorn possessed magical powers (for an account of these, see Borges El libro de los seres imaginarios Barcelona: Bruguera, 1981, pp. 195 - 196): because of this, men tried to capture it. The unicorn, being an imaginary animal, is impossible to capture. For this reason, in these poems, it may represent man's attempts to achieve the impossible. In 'Eclesiastés, 1-9' it comes between an the 'Máquina del Tiempo', a machine which could - if it existed - achieve the impossible, and 'si cambio de postura mientras duermo', an image of everyday reality. In his imagination man has created the impossible, represented by the unicorn. In 'The cloisters' the tapestry of the unicorn may underline the impossible, fantastic, nature of the dream related in the poem; in 'Himno', the unicorn is one of the things brought about by the magic of a kiss.

5 'El acto del libro' LaC p. 15.

6 'Dos formas del insomnio' LaC p. 29.

7 'The cloisters' LaC pp. 31 - 32. This poem is a rewriting of the poem 'The Cloisters' by Samuel Yellen. Yellen was born in Vilna, Lithuania in 1906. He emigrated to the United States. The poem

is found in Humphries ed New Poems by American Poets, New York:
Ballantine Books, 1953 (p. 176):

Here in the Cloisters a forth dimension evolves,
A remote time - place of monk, knight and herald;
Here other men once made *their* peace with the
 world,
And that much harder peace, peace with themselves.

Today I walk alone in the silence almost heard,
The seven-century hush transported stone by
 stone
To this alien ground. I listen here alone,
The little fountain trills the clear song of a
 bird.

Though much here is "restored", much remains the
 same:
Carved angel, beast, placid and tormented soul
Gaze down from corbel, lintel, capital
Upon the same fevered flesh in frantic search of
 balm.

The cloister flowers, blue, gold, purple, pink and
 white,
Are those once stained in glass, woven in
 tapestries -
Jonquils, hyacinths, daisies, violets,
 fleurs-de-lys,
The colors somewhat slack in this less brilliant
 light.

Through the western arches, as in painted fantasy,
Beyond the broad Hudson's rippling sheens and
 shades,
Rise the riven rusts of the sculptured Palisades,
And there for perspective against the sky a gull
 soars free.

Oh, I, I am a cheerless captive the cloister
 stones embrace.
I touch one stone decayed, not by time nor rain,
But by ingesting sorrow, passion, guilt and pain,
A stone worn soft and gentle as a human face.

The sour corrupting acids are sucked up from my
 breast.
Who gives me this stone gives me a healing herb
With infinite capacity to draw out and absorb:

A smile denotes the cheerless captive become the cheerful guest.

The poem is prefixed 'Fort Tryon Park, New York'. It is interesting to note that the other three poems by Yellen which are included in the volume have connections with Borges: 'Prognostic' (p. 175) is about the colour yellow; 'The wooden tiger' (p. 177) begins 'This tiger is not Blake's tiger burning bright'; and 'Discourse on the Real' (p. 178) mentions Dr Johnson and ends by alluding to Platonism.

• 'Der Asra' is a poem by Heinrich Heine. In it, a sultan's daughter asks her Arabic slave about his name and where he comes from. There is also a fountain:

Täglich ging die wunderschöne
Sultanstochter auf und nieder
Um die Abendzeit am Springbrunn,
Wo die weißen Wasser plätschern.
Täglich stand der junge Sklave
Um die Abendzeit am Springbrunn,
Wo die weißen Wasser plätschern;
Täglich ward er bleich und bleicher.
Eines Abends trat die Fürstin
Auf ihn zu mit raschen Worten:
Deinen Namen will ich wissen,
Deine Heimat, deine Sippschaft!
Und der Sklave sprach: Ich heiße
Mohamet, ich bin aus Yemmen,
Und mein Stamm sind jene Asra,
Welche sterben, wenn die leben.

(Heines Werke in Fünf Bänden vol. I. Weimar: Volksverlag, 1957. pp. 195 - 196.)

• The unicorn was a symbol of Christ. See: C G Jung, Collected Works London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968, vol XII, p. 438: "... the symbol of the unicorn as an allegory of Christ and of

the Holy Ghost was current all through the Middle Ages..."

¹⁰ 'Nota para un cuento fantástico' LaC p. 33.

¹¹ For a better example of parallelisms, see 'Alguien sueña', LosC pp. 43 - 45.

¹² According to Balderston The Literary Universe of Jorge Luis Borges Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986, p. 40, Pietro Damiano was 'Damiani, Pietro (St. Peter Damian, Italian Monk and theologian, Doctor of the Church, c. 1007-1072, author of *Liber Gomorrhianus*, *Officium Beatae Virginis* and other works.'

¹³ 'Epílogo' LaC p. 35.

¹⁴ For information on Bernárdez, see Thorpe Running Borges' Ultraist Movement and its Poets New York: International Book Publishers, 1981.

¹⁵ Nicolás Paredes, according to Balderston op. cit., p. 117, was an 'old Buenos Aires knife fighter, a friend of Borges in the 1920's'. In the 'Milonga de Nicanor Paredes' OP pp. 295 - 296, Borges calls him 'Nicanor'.

¹⁶ 'Las dos catedrales' LaC p. 19.

¹⁷ 'Beppo' LaC p. 21.

¹⁸ This epithet is given to Quevedo's verse in 'Al idioma alemán' OP pp. 392 - 393.

¹⁹ Thorpe Running, op. cit., p. 96.

²⁰ 'Buenos Aires' LaC pp. 37 - 38.

²¹ Estanislao del Campo (1834 - 1880) was the author of Fausto and other works in the style of poesía gauchesca.

²² 'Punzó' was a red colour adopted by the followers of the dictator Juan Manuel Rosas (1793 - 1877). See Balderston, op. cit. p.

132.

²³ According to Balderston, op. cit. p. 53, Fernández was an 'Argentine philosopher, poet and novelist, 1874 - 1952, author of *Papeles de reciénvenido, No todo es vigilia lo de los ojos abiertos, Museo de la novela de la eterna, Adriana Buenosayres* and other works.'

²⁴ 'Once' is a 'neighborhood in Buenos Aires surrounding the Once railroad station', according to Balderston, op. cit., p. 289.

²⁵ Leandro Alem was an 'Argentine lawyer and politician, 1842 - 1896, head of the Unión Cívica Radical': Balderston, op. cit., p. 7.

²⁶ See Todo Borges y..., p. 182: 'Pocas ciudades son tan feas como Buenos Aires. Y con el Obelisco y las macetas en la calle Florida terminaron de afearla.'

²⁷ 'La prueba' LaC p. 39. This poem, which questions man's immortality because of his digestive system, which is proof of his mortality, may be based on Aphorism 141 of Part Four of Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil London: Penguin Classics, 1984, p. 83: 'The belly is the reason man does not easily take himself for a god.'

²⁸ 'Elegía' LaC p. 45.

²⁹ 'Historia de la noche' OP pp. 555 - 556.

The third group of poems:

'Himno'

to 'El hacedor'

The second group of poems ends with images of death and decay in 'La prueba'. The next poems, 'Himno' ¹, and 'La dicha' ², begin with images of newness and beauty. If death was the only certainty in the first fourteen poems, in 'Himno' we find love as another certainty, or at least an equally powerful possibility:

Todo el pasado vuelve como una ola
y esas antiguas cosas recurren
porque una mujer te ha besado.

Here there is an image of renewal. The poem begins with the Garden of Eden:

Esta mañana
hay en el aire la increíble fragancia
de las rosas del Paraíso.

This biblical image is also present in the title of the poem, 'Himno'. The earlier 'La prueba' was also concerned with religion. Religion was man's futile attempt to make himself believe in his immortality in that poem. In 'Himno', however, religion is magical. 'Himno' also suggests a type of verse. In contrast to 'La prueba', where a physical act seems to belie man's hopes of immortality and suggest decay, here

a physical act - a kiss - creates a spiritual event and renewal.

The first three lines are characterized by alliteration on the sound /r/; this continues in lines 4 and 5. Here we see the place where civilization may have begun, 'la margen del Eufrates', coupled with the biblical first man, 'Adán'. The following two lines continue this mixing of traditions - classical, Mesopotamian and biblical - with a mention of 'el amor de Zeus'. Also present is the image of water, continued in lines 8 - 10. Until these lines we find the poet seeing events from a past which he can only have heard about and not experienced. In lines 8 - 10 a man recalls a previous life:

Salta del mar un pez
y un hombre de Agrigento recordará
haber sido ese pez. 3

Everything is happening for the first time and happening eternally; things in the past are evoked by the poet, and an image of the past in the past appears. This continues in the next lines: 'la caverna cuya nombre será Altamira'; 'Virgilio acaricia/ la seda que trajeron/ del reino del Emperador Amarillo'. In both these cases there is the image of the artist's hand: 'una mano sin cara traza la curva'; 'La lenta mano de Virgilio'. Only in the first of these cases do we have the future in the past. Both suggest that the events belong not to one occasion, but to two - the painting of the caves, and the caves receiving their present day name, Altamira, for example - while the reader, as he reads the lines, recreates them in his imagination, creating a third event.

Line 18 returns to the idea of the first of a series of events:

El primer ruiseñor canta en Hungría. ⁴

This short sentence interrupts the flow of the poem and introduces images of things which may have happened countless times or continuously, but which involve historic figures:

Jesús ve en la moneda el perfil de César.
Pitágoras revela a sus griegos
que la forma del tiempo es la del círculo. ⁵

Pythagorous is, according to Borges, more linked to the idea of the Eternal Return than any other occidental figure; Caesar, he tells us, believed that the idea came from the Druids. ⁶ In either case, the idea came from literature and myth. The next lines of the poem concern myth. Perhaps lines 26 and 27 are exceptions to this:

Whitman canta en Manhattan.
Homero nace en siete ciudades.

Whitman existed as a person; however, in the minds of his readers his poetry created a mythical identity. ⁷ Homer, also a real writer, has seven cities which claim to be his birthplace. These are myths growing out of the interface between literature and reality.

The other myths mentioned are unrelated to reality, or else their roots in reality have been lost: we find an island where 'los lebreles de plata persiguen a los ciervos de oro'; Sigurd's sword; and again the image of the maiden trapping the unicorn. ⁸ A woman trapped the unicorn: a woman's kiss sparked off all these recollections in the

poet. The poet then becomes a kind of unicorn. Just as it is impossible to trap a unicorn, it would be impossible for the woman's kiss to bring back 'todo el pasado'. Mythology, literature and history, the products of man's imagination, are described in the poem. Although the poet cannot bring back the events mentioned, he can evoke them, imagine them, and this the kiss has achieved. While a physical action in 'La prueba' brought despair, one brings hope and beauty here; these may be imaginary, but they are none the less real.

In the first two lines of the next poem, 'La dicha', again we find the image of a man and a woman:

El que abraza a una mujer es Adán. La mujer es
Eva.
Todo sucede por primera vez.

Two of the lines in this poem are taken from 'Descartes': ♡

He soñado a Cartago y a las legiones
que desolaron a Cartago.
He soñado la espada.

However, in the present poem, to the second of these lines is added 'y la balanza'; perhaps this is because of the underlying structure of the lines of the poem. While in the previous poem, each image was built on a single element, each image is built of two contrastive or complementary things in 'La dicha'.

The kiss in the previous poem creates, or is a catalyst for, beauty. In the present poem, the beauty is created by the poem:

He visto una cosa blanca en el cielo. Me
dicen que es la luna, pero
qué puedo hacer con una palabra y
con una mitología.

The moon, symbol of poetry, appears; the poet feels unable to express what this moon means to him, how beautiful it is for him. ¹⁰ The poet feels the newness of each sighting of the moon, never the same and impossible to capture in verse. This also happens in the next line with the trees. This suggests an image of the poet as Adam, naming things in the Garden of Eden:

Los árboles me dan un poco de miedo.
Son tan hermosos.
Los tranquilos animales se acercan para que
yo les diga su nombre.

Poetry becomes the garden; the Adán in the first lines becomes the poet, 'que abraza a una mujer', and who was kissed in the last poem. The poet takes on the role of creating words to express his perceptions of what surrounds him. In the next line, the creative process of renovation is extended to include the reader:

Los libros de la biblioteca no tienen letras.
Cuando los abro surgen.
Al hojear el atlas proyecto la forma de Sumatra.

The reader of a book also creates it; every person who carries out a given activity is in a sense the initiator of that act, that series of actions. Although someone else has already drawn the map, and written the books, the reader has the illusion of discovery. In a sense each

person reads a book differently, sees a map differently, and so we may say that we create what we see. Also, in Zen, a subject which Borges was interested in, the Self includes our every action, observation and perception; all is the Self. ¹¹ The idea of perpetual newness is related to this idea: each moment brings new things, renewal, to the Self. In the next line, this idea is extended to our physical actions:

El que prende un fósforo en el oscuro está
inventando el fuego.

To say that he who lights a match is discovering fire is to give the event a symbolic meaning; the action becomes a literary symbol. Each small event becomes a synecdoche, a symbol of something much larger. In this light, literature and its logic can be applied to life and this produces an aesthetic event for the poet:

En el espejo hay otro que acecha.
El que mira un mar ve a Inglaterra.
El que profiere un verso de Liliencron ha
entrado en la batalla. ¹²

The transformation of everyday events into literary symbols invades the poet's life, making itself a way of thinking. If we imagine our life as a dream, or as a book, we may interpret it as we would a dream or a book. Descartes, in 'Descartes', imagined that he had dreamt his world; he doubted all that he had experienced. Here, the poet repeats two lines from that poem, adding the image 'la espada y la balanza'. This suggests justice, the rise and fall of empires. This image reinforces the previous line's tone of ahistoricidad, which also

opened the poem. With these lines, the poem changes. We find two lines which suggest a balance of ideas, characterized by the same opening words, and a return to the things which cause 'La dicha':

Loado sea el amor en el que no hay poseedor
ni poseída, pero los dos se entregan.
Loada sea la pesadilla, que nos revela que
podemos crear el infierno.

The second of these statements contrasts strongly with the first; images of heaven and hell. Both are created by our imagination.

The next four lines are marked by the reiteration of 'El que...', and enumerate synecdochal ideas as before. Physical acts become viewed as literary ones. Events become symbols. In the poem, such events are specifically literary; although the language used is plain, the effect is poetic.

The events described are unusual: the river Ganges is more often used as a symbol than as a name for a specific river, for example. Similarly, in the present day, the idea of an hourglass is more often a literary figuration than a way of telling the time; a dagger is also more a literary symbol than a reality for most people. The idea that everyone who sleeps is 'todos los hombres' is also literary and philosophical. In these lines, then, we find various literary devices, which follow on from the ahistoricidad and synecdoche of the previous lines. The next line uses these ways of seeing things in order to produce an absurd sentence:

En el desierto vi la joven Esfinge,
que acaban de labrar.

The blind poet sees; there is the anachronism of Borges being present when the Sphinx was just built. However, the logic of this line is present in the context of a poem, in literary language. If one man sleeping is all men, the poet has slept and has been all men. Some of these men saw the new Sphinx. Logically, in the context of the poem, the poet has seen 'la joven Esfinge'; what produces the poet's 'dicha' is nothing other than language's ability to transform reality by the system of logic peculiar to literature.

The final tercet of this poem stresses the place of the reader with regard to the literary situation:

Nada hay antiguo bajo el sol.
Todo sucede por primera vez, pero de un modo
eterno.
El que lee mis palabras está inventándolas.

Here we find almost exactly the words of Ecclesiastes 1, 9, on which the earlier poem 'Eclesiastés, 1 - 9' is based. Just as he who lights a match invents fire, so he who reads a poem composes it. Although the events in a poem, the enumerations, only seem to happen when the poem is perceived by a person (either writing or reading it), in a sense the events happen continuously, as the words are there on the page even when the book is closed. This is illustrated in a poem in Historia de la noche, 'Un libro'.¹³ Happiness, for the poet, is the literary tropos.

In the next poem, 'Elegía'¹⁴ we pass from the joy that literature brings to the sadness from which it frequently springs: a

beautiful elegy may derive from an unhappy experience. In the opening lines, we find the poet alone:

Sin que nadie lo sepa, ni el espejo,
ha llorado unas lágrimas humanas.

In these lines there is a physical person. In the following couplet, his tears seem to be transformed by the tropos elaborated in the previous poem, into a symbol:

No puede sospechar que conmemoran
todas las cosas que merecen lágrimas:

His physical/ emotional reaction becomes symbolic.

The poem is written in three sections. Lines 1 - 2, where the figure of the poet is illustrated; lines 3 - 15 where his 'lágrimas humanas' become symbolic of the things enumerated; and the final lines, where the poet is connected to the figure symbolizing man's mortality, decay and death in 'La prueba', by means of an epithet taken from that poem, 'Del otro lado de la puerta un hombre'.

In this poem the poet uses the verb 'llorar' to describe his enumeration: more often poets use 'cantar' to describe their utterings. Here the poet prefers 'llorar' to 'cantar' to emphasize his idea that poetry springs from unhappiness. This idea is present in 'Arte poética' for example. ¹⁵ The human condition, ending in decay and oblivion, indicated here by the quotation from 'La prueba', is ideal as a circumstance for the production of poetry. Hence the poet, 'hecho de soledad, de amor, de tiempo', enumerates things. These are

ultimately symbolic of everything, 'todas las cosas', as all things are interconnected in the borgesian universe. It is noticeable that the things 'que merecen lágrimas' in the second section of the poem are things of beauty - beauty distanced from the poet. Perhaps the place of the poet is to bridge the gap between this beauty which he envisages and the reader. Although the poem bridges this gap, its existence commemorates the gap; this 'Elegía' is a poem of absence and longing. The subject of the first lines is not announced until the final section of the poem, 'un hombre/ hecho de soledad, de amor, de tiempo.'

What types of things does the poet include in 'todas las cosas que merecen lágrimas'? These are things distanced from the poet. The 'hermosura de Helena, que no he visto' is distanced by time, literature and blindness. Time itself is distanced by its being 'irreparable' and inconceivable in line 6. We also find various types of suffering: 'la mano de Jesús en el madero/ de Roma' with the ironic mention of Rome, future seat of the pope; 'la breve dicha y la ansiedad que aguarda', the fleetingness of happiness. There is also poetry, 'de marfil y de música Virgilio,/ que cantó los trabajos de la espada' and 'el ruiseñor del húngaro y del persa'. The second of these images alludes to a frequent image in poetry, the nightingale, mentioned by the poet in the essay 'El escritor argentino y la tradición'. There he writes, 'el ruiseñor es menos un pájaro de la realidad que de la literatura, de la tradición griega y germánica'.¹⁶ The 'marfil y . . . música' suggests the classical Elegy form, which commemorated the death of an important person. Virgil is pictured 'cantando', contrasting with the poet's use of

'llorar' in these lines. Death is implied in many of these images: Helen of Troy is dead, Jesus died on the cross, Virgil died, the empire of Carthage ended, and 'la breve dicha' passes. Although these things and people have died, they live on in books. Contrasting with the images of finality in these lines, rebirth is present towards the end of the poem:

las configuraciones de las nubes
de cada nuevo y singular ocaso
y la mañana que será la tarde.

The sadness which causes the poet to 'llorar' these things is caused by their fleeting nature, his inability to fix them in verse, to defy time. And yet, their temporal nature is at the heart of their beauty. There is an eternal slipping away of things; at the same time, an eternal renewal, illustrated in these lines. Also, the poet is distanced from the earlier images as they belong to an ancient literature. Yet, they belong to literature and he may read and reread them. The distance afforded by literature is also an intimacy. For these reasons the poet 'acaba de llorar' all things, happy and sad. The poet celebrates the central irony of poetry: we may cry because of happiness or sadness. This relates the poem to the previous one, 'La dicha', which illustrates the literary device behind 'Elegía'. Both poems have sharply contrastive titles, but both see poetry as a kind of happiness. Both relate in turn to the previous poem, 'Himno', an enumeration of literary images, where we also find 'El primer ruiñeñor canta en Hungría'. Through the three poems, the poet as craftsman emerges: both a reader of others' verse and a writer of verse.

The next poem, 'Blake' 17, brings in another part of the poet's existence: his relationship to previous poets, and traditional symbols. The poem is an investigation of the archetypal rose, a common theme in Borges' work. 16

The poem is in three sections. In the first, lines 1 - 2, the poet asks:

¿Dónde está la rosa que en tu mano
prodiga, sin saberlo, íntimos dones?

The other two sections are lines 3 - 6, where the poet tells us what this 'rosa' is not, and lines 7 - 14, where he tells us about the infinite nature of the 'rosa'.

The 'rosa' is beyond form, beyond our perception. We can only perceive it indirectly. In the second section we read of the physical characteristics of the rose:

No en el color, porque la flor es ciega,
ni en la dulce fragancia inagotable,
ni en el peso de un pétalo. Esas cosas
son unos pocos y perdidos ecos.

Underlying this description is a philosophical point: what is the rose? The attributes of 'roseness' described in these lines refer to what we recognize and perceive as a rose. The poet calls these attributes 'unos pocos y perdidos ecos'. These aspects of the thing which we call 'rosa' may well be echoes of a distant archetypal form. The poet suggests that what we perceive as a rose with our limited

powers of perception is but a small part of 'roseness'.

This idea is developed in the third section of the poem:

La rosa verdadera está muy lejos.
Puede ser un pilar o una batalla
o un firmamento de ángeles o un mundo
infinito, secreto y necesario,
o el júbilo de un dios que no veremos
o un planeta de plata en otro cielo
o un terrible arquetipo que no tiene
la forma de la rosa.

The 'rosa verdadera' may have many forms; it is mysterious. It is similar to a poetic symbol, rich in ambiguity. The archetypal rose was also the subject of an earlier poem, 'The unending rose', which concluded with images suggesting those of the present poem:

Soy ciego y nada sé, pero preveo
Que son más los caminos. Cada cosa
Es infinitas cosas. Eres música,
Firmamentos, palacios, ríos, ángeles,
Rosa profunda, ilimitada, íntima,
Que el señor mostrará a mis ojos muertos. 19

In the earlier poem, the rose was 'infinitas cosas'. In 'Blake', the rose becomes something not obviously related to the rose of lines 3 - 6: it may ultimately be a 'terrible arquetipo que no tiene/ la forma de la rosa'. In both 'Blake' and 'The unending rose' there is religious imagery. In the former this is underlined by the presence in the title of William Blake, a Christian mystic and writer of symbolic poetry: this emphasizes the existence of the rose as a poetic symbol with many meanings. At the beginning of the poem, the 'íntimos dones' of the rose are 'en tu mano'. The hand could be either Blake's, or

that of the reader. Blake seems to have attracted the poet's interest to the rose as a symbol by his 'hand', his writing of poetry, perhaps in his enigmatic poem, 'The sick rose', where the rose could symbolize many things. ²⁰ On the other hand, the opening couplet could refer to the place of the reader in the interpretation of the poetic symbol: in the reader's hands, in his imagination, the rose becomes infinite.

In 'Himno' and 'La dicha', poetry brings the poet happiness; in 'Elegía' sadness brings the poet poetry; in 'Blake' another poet has attracted his attention to a vast symbol. Poetry is the product of the poet: the final poem of this group, 'El hacedor' ²¹, is about Borges being a poet and his relation with the poetic persona created in his poems. 'El hacedor' is a translation of the Ancient Greek word ποιητής, which means maker, creator or poet. ²² The title of this poem is ironic: although the poet 'makes' the poetry, the poetry ultimately 'makes' him.

'El hacedor' is in two stanzas. The first is a long enumeration prefixed by an opening sentence; in the second, the poet stands back from the images of the first and comments on them. The first stanza begins by introducing a list of images:

Somos el río que invocaste, Heráclito.
Somos el tiempo. Su intangible curso
Acarrea leones y montañas,

The images which follow recall Borges' poetry, and almost form a self portrait. Many of the recurring themes of his work are present: unrequited love, regret, in 'llorado amor, ceniza del deleite, / Insidiosa esperanza interminable'; the passing of time, 'Vastos

nombres de imperios que son polvo', 'la secreta/ labor de relojes en la sombra'. Also present are the worlds of myth and literature, the products of man's imagination: 'leones y montañas', 'Hexámetros del griego y del romano', 'Las dos caras de Jano que se ignoran', 'La roja mano de Macbeth que puede/ Ensangrentar los mares', and 'Las dos caras de Jano que se ignoran'. This last line is also present in another poem, 'La trama', in a modified form: 'y lo que ven las caras de Jano'.²⁵ In addition, there are the philosophical obsessions which seem to motivate Borges' own contribution to literature: 'los laberintos de marfil que urden/ Las piezas de ajedrez en el tablero'; 'Un incesante espejo que se mira/ En otro espejo y nadie para verlos'; 'El sueño, ese pregusto de la muerte'. Insomnia is also present: 'Pesadas campanadas del insomnio'.

The 'sombra' in which the mirror and clocks are hidden is also present in 'Lóbrego un mar bajo el poder del alba'. The mention of 'Las armas y el guerrero, monumentos' seems to suggest Borges' regret at being a man of letters rather than a military man of action; this line in turn is related to 'Láminas en acero, letra gótica'. This 'letra gótica' introduces a medieval image, continued in the following line, 'Una barra de azufre en un armario'. The final couplet of the first stanza seems to sum up what has gone before:

Auroras y ponientes y crepúsculos,
Ecos, resaca, arena, líquen, sueños.

These lines punctuate and end the first stanza by means of their rhythm and images. The first symbolizes time passing. This ties in

with the opening statement of the poem, that 'Somos el tiempo'. If all things are of time, these images of time passing in a cycle symbolize all things. The second is more complex. Both 'ecos' and 'resaca' are consequences of earlier actions and transformations of events. 'Arena' is often used as a symbol of infinity in Borges: for example, in 'Ronda', he writes of 'el idioma infinito de la arena'. ²⁴ The final couplet of the stanza seems to be built on the images of 'Lóbrego un mar bajo el poder del alba' The echoes of past events contrast with the events; 'sueños' exist as an echo of, or a counterpoint to, what we call reality.

The second stanza of the poem punctuates both it and the group of poems which it closes. In it the poet attempts to define himself. He does this in terms of the images which make up the first stanza:

Otra cosa no soy que esas imágenes
Que baraja el azar y nombra el tedio.
Con ellas, aunque ciego y quebrantado,
He de labrar el verso incorruptible
Y (es mi deber) salvarme.

The poet is the sum of the images which make up his texts; the poetic persona, the figure which represents the poet in the texts, is made of these images which in turn derive from the poet's interests, obsessions and experiences. In addition to the poet declaring himself a textual figure - the speaker in the poem says that he is not the poet, but the images in the text - he also states the reason for this activity. He is obliged to save himself, and to do this he must work at his poetry, in order to be able to produce a perfect line: 'el verso incorruptible'. Poetry is the product of the words on the page:

the poet, the 'hacedor', is the instrument of these words, not their originator. The images in the poem are infinite in meaning and by definition beyond the control of the poet or reader. Poetry's origin, like the rose in 'Blake', is mysterious. The poet takes part in the joy that it brings in much the same way as any other reader; in an essay on 'La poesía', Borges writes:

La poesía es el encuentro del lector con el libro... Hay otra experiencia estética que es el momento, muy extraño también, en el cual el poeta concibe la obra... 25

This group of poems has the joy, 'La dicha', which poetry can bring as its theme. The poet, ultimately, is only a reader; he can neither control nor understand poetry's magical qualities. Although in 'his' texts, 'que baraja el azar y nombra el tedio', he appears as a poet, his amazement and wonder at poetry strongly suggest that he feels like a reader of poetry, and is outside poetry, as it were. We see this in all five of these poems. In 'El hacedor' we find that the speaker in the poems we have been reading is nothing more than a figure made up of the images in the poems we have read, autonomous from Borges the man. Poetry has given this figure, the poetic persona in these poems, his identity; it also gives the reader his role as reader. These poems, then, contrast with the previous group, which concentrated on death and man's physical, mortal nature. In this group of poems, man's salvation is seen in the beauty and glimpse of eternity or anachronism which exists in poetry.

Notes

¹ 'Himno' LaC pp. 41 - 42.

² 'La dicha' LaC pp. 43 - 44.

³ See SN p. 88: 'Hay un pasaje de Empédocles de Agrigento que recuerda sus vidas anteriores: "Yo fui doncella, yo fui una rama, yo fui un ciervo y fui un mudo pez que surge del mar."'

⁴ The line 'El primer ruiseñor canta en Hungría' possibly alludes to the earlier poem 'Al primer poeta de Hungría', OP pp. 396 - 397. In 'El escritor argentino y la tradición' (PC I p. 218) Borges writes that the nightingale has always been more a literary symbol than a bird: 'el ruiseñor es menos un pájaro de la realidad que de la literatura'. In this line it represents poetry. The earlier poem is an apostrophe where the poet speaks to the unknown first poet of Hungary.

⁵ This incident is described in Matthew 22, vv. 19 - 21: "They handed him a silver piece. Jesus asked, 'Whose head is this, and whose inscription?' 'Caesar's', they replied. He said to them, 'Then pay Caesar what is due to Caesar, and pay God what is due to God.'" The New English Bible Oxford: The Bible Societies, 1973: p. 747.

⁶ See SN p. 88: 'En el Occidente esa idea [la transmigración] está vinculada a varios pensadores, sobre todo a Pitágoras.'

⁷ See Willis Barnstone Borges at Eighty Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 136: 'So Walt Whitman is compounded of Walt Whitman the man, of Walt Whitman the myth, and also of the reader, because he thought of the reader as being also the hero of the book,

being also the central man of the picture.'

⁹ Many tapestries and illustrations of Unicorns in similar scenes, perhaps alluded to here, can be found in C G Jung's Collected Works London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968, vol XII: pp. 435 - 472. 'La dame á la licorne' is depicted on p. 463. However, Borges seems more likely to be writing of an imaginary, archetypal unicorn scene here, especially when we consider that the unicorn and the maiden are essentially mythical symbols.

⁹ LaC p. 17.

¹⁰ This is the central theme of an earlier poem, 'La luna'.
OP p. 131 - 134.

¹¹ See Dōgen and Uchiyama, Refining Your Life New York: Weatherhill, 1983, p. 43: "When you are born, your world is born with you, and when you die, so dies your entire world. Your true self includes the entire world you live in, and in this world there is no possibility of exchange."

¹² According to Balderston The Literary Universe of Jorge Luis Borges Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986, p. 92, Liliencron was a German lyric poet, who lived from 1844 to 1909.

¹³ 'Un libro' OP p. 532.

¹⁴ 'Elegía' LaC p. 45. This poem was originally published in the literary supplement of La Nación 31st December 1978: p. 1. In that version, the colon at the end of line 4 is replaced by a semi-colon; the last four lines are separated from the rest of the poem and form a second stanza; and in line 16, a comma is added after 'puerta'.

¹⁵ 'Arte poética' OP pp. 161 - 162.

¹⁶ PC I p. 218.

17 'Blake' LaC p. 47. It is unusual the Borges mentions Blake in connection with the rose. Borges usually mentions Blake when he writes of tigers, citing Blake's poem 'The tyger'.

18 For a study of the rose in Borges' work, see Emma Susana Speratti - Piñero, 'The rose in Borges' work'. In Cortínez ed. Simply a Man of Letters Orono: University of Maine at Orono, 1982, pp. 191 - 198.

19 'The unending rose' OP p. 465.

20 William Blake, 'The sick rose'. See David Wright ed., The Penguin Book of English Romantic Verse London: Collins, 1976: pp. 73-74:

O Rose, thou art sick!
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy;
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

21 'El hacedor' LaC pp. 49 - 50. This poem was originally published as 'La arcilla' with some modifications in the literary supplement of La Nación 23rd April 1978: p. 1. In line 4, 'gastado amor' replaces 'llorado amor'; in line 16, 'noche' replaces 'sombra'; lines 20 - 21 are replaced by 'Cargadas campanadas del insomnio, / Buenos Aires de aljibes y de patios,'; in line 26 'efímeras y usuales' replaces 'ciego y quebrantado'; line 27 becomes 'Debo labrar desde mi sombra el verso' instead of 'He de labrar el verso incorruptible'.

22 Dr Karl Feyerabend Langenscheidt's Pocket Greek Dictionary (Greek - English) London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963. See p. 311.

23 'La trama' LaC p. 53.

24 'Ronda' LaC p. 13.

25 SN p. 106.

'Yesterday'
to 'El Apice'

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The fourth group of poems:

'Yesterdays'

to 'El ápice'

With 'El hacedor', the third group of poems ends on the theme of identity. Zunilda Gertel has noted the importance of this theme in Borges:

The elucidation of the problem of identity - as a unity, and as a plurality of being - is a constant in the trajectory of Borges' production, which extends from the days of 'ultraism' to his most recent creation, La rosa profunda.

She also notes that

For Borges identity means, therefore, the unity of many beings within the same objective frame of reference, which can be represented in one concept. The poet should thus identify himself with the reader, since both integrate the circle of participation in the poetic phenomenon and constitute a unity. ¹

The poetry gives the poet his identity. In 'Yesterdays', the next poem, the poet enumerates memories and attempts to find his identity. Just as in 'El hacedor' the poet is present in all the images of his verse, here the poet finds that he is 'cada instante de mi largo tiempo'. In the final poem of this group, 'El ápice', the same idea is repeated:

Tu materia es el tiempo, el incesante
Tiempo. Eres cada solitario instante.

Identity is seen as the contact between the individual and his present.

In 'Yesterdays', 'La milonga de Juan Murafia' and 'Andrés Armoa' there is a preoccupation with the Argentine identity. Whereas in 'Yesterdays' there is the identity of a man who has become a symbol in his poems, a poet, and in 'La milonga...' a man has become a folk hero, a myth and then a poetic persona, in 'Andrés Armoa' we read of a more universal symbol of argentinidad. In that text there is a taste of the alienation felt by many Argentine writers, the questioning of national identity, and the wondering at the cost in human terms of arriving at this homogeneous identity. The latter is emphasized in this poem by understatement. Because Armoa represents this integral part of Argentine culture, he is implicated in 'Yesterdays'. There is also a parallel strand in 'La milonga...': there the compadrito can be seen as a reluctant hero, a figure perhaps more concerned with fulfilling a social role of providing heroes than his own personal one. He lives out his reputation rather than his own personality. This idea, of a person being trapped in a personality created by other people, is also present in 'Yesterdays': 'Soy un espejo, un eco. El epitafio.' The poet owes his identity to someone else. This idea was also present in 'El hacedor', where the poet is seen as prisoner of his identity, dictated by fate and chance:

Otra cosa no soy que esas imágenes.
Que baraja el azar y nombra el tedio.

In 'La milonga...' and 'Andrés Armoa' we are struck by the distance between Muraña and Armoa, and ourselves; although we learn much information about them, the more we find out, the less we know, and our curiosity is heightened.

In 'Yesterdays' ², the poet searches through memories in order to identify himself. He is from two races: his English and Spanish ancestors:

De estirpe de pastores protestantes
y de soldados sudamericanos
que opusieron al godo y a las lanzas
del desierto su polvo incalculable,
soy y no soy.

The English heritage and the Spanish are identified with alliteration on /p/ and /s/ respectively. While both sounds are present in 'opusieron', they appear separately in 'desierto' and 'polvo'. Ultimately, with the repeated /s/ in 'soy y no soy', the poet defines himself as being a mixture of races, but identifies himself more with the Spanish part of his heritage.

Although he does this, the statement is qualified:

... Mi verdadera estirpe
es la voz, que aún escucho, de mi padre,
conmemorando música de Swinburne,
y los grandes volúmenes que he ojeado,
hojeado y no leído, y que me bastan.

The poet defines his father as being English literature. His true race is that of the 'grandes volúmenes'. He is related to Swinburne's poetry. He writes of his 'verdadera estirpe' as poetry: as a poet, as

a poetic, textual entity, he can have no ancestor other than other poets. ³ In the first sentence of this poem, the poet Borges talks of Borges the man, while in the second the man talks of the poet. The two images are connected by the dual image of his biological father reading poetry aloud, becoming his 'poetic' father. That the poet and the man, both called Borges, are one, is emphasized by the enjambement in line 5. All other sentences in the poem, with the exception of the last, which forms both a punctuation and a climax, begin with a new line.

In the first 9 lines, we read of Borges' ancestors. There is a rich stream of irony in these lines: his ancestors were military while he is not; his father was Argentinian but is remembered reading an English poet; the poet has not read the books he talks of. This last case alludes to the poet's blindness, emphasized by a play on words, 'ojeado, / hojeado y no leído'. His blindness, hereditary in his family, is also part of his inheritance.

In line 10, the tone of the poem changes; in place of reading about the poet's ancestry, we read of what the poet is. The rhythm of the poetry becomes less flowing, and the rest of the poem consists of statements which begin with 'Soy...'. First, the poet sees himself as the product of what he has been taught by philosophy. This again alludes to his father, who taught him about this subject: ⁴

Soy lo que me contaron los filósofos.
El azar o el destino, esos dos nombres
de una secreta cosa que ignoramos,
me prodigaron patrias: Buenos Aires,
Nara, donde pasé una sola noche,
Ginebra, las dos Córdoba, Islandia...⁵

Philosophy has shaped the poet's world view, and to take 'el azar o el destino' into an analysis of one's identity is itself a philosophical decision. The poet takes them into account and sees them as something which we cannot understand or comprehend. In addition, the poet is all of the places where he has been. In this part of the poem, a secret side of the poet appears: 'la noche', 'la secreta cosa', which could correspond to the place of poetry in the first section, with its mention of Swinburne. This is extended in the next section:

Soy el cóncavo sueño solitario
en que me pierdo o trato de perderme,
la servidumbre de los dos crepúsculos,
las antiguas mañanas, la primera
vez que ví el mar o una ignorante luna,
sin su Virgilio y sin su Galileo.

The poet sees himself trying to take refuge in a 'cóncavo sueño solitario', literature; mixed with this is an awareness of time having passed in cycles, 'la servidumbre de los dos crepúsculos', and of the contrasting finite nature of our lives, 'la primera/ vez que ví el mar'. Finally the poet mentions two men of letters, Virgil and Galileo. They have in part modelled his view of the world: Galileo has determined the poet's view of the moon with regard to the earth's place in the cosmos, while Virgil has enriched the moon and the sea with literature. However, the poet can remember seeing the moon before his ideas of it were changed by acquaintance with the work of Galileo and Virgil: then he saw 'una ignorante luna'. Writers, in this case Virgil and Galileo, can modify other people's conceptions of the world around them; philosophers can also do this, hence the line, 'Soy lo

que me contaron los filósofos'.

Implicit in the images of the moon and the 'crepúsculos' is the idea of time. Both cyclic and linear time are present in the next section:

Soy cada instante de mi largo tiempo,
cada noche de insomnio escrupuloso,
cada separación y cada víspera.

The poet is every instant of his life, increasing with the passing of time; each experience, not only action but also the expectation of action, is part of the poet. All things perceived by the poet - all things he includes in his poetry - are part of his being. This idea, that everything is part of the self, was also seen in 'El hacedor'.

Therefore the poet is not only his perceptions and his memories; he is also his misperceptions and the distortions of his memories:

Soy la errónea memoria de un grabado
que hay en la habitación y que mis ojos,
hoy apagados, vieron claramente:
El jinete, la Muerte y el Demonio.

Both the engraving in the room and the one in his memory are part of the poet. The ability to forget creates and recreates images from the past. This 'grabado' recalls the 'láminas en acero, letra gótica' of the previous poem. ⁶ In that poem identity and time are inextricably linked. As in a poem or a picture, a moment is 'captured', time seems to stand still, to form a kind of eternity. Yet this eternity is dependant upon its perception in the temporal world by the viewer or

reader.

The next section possibly recalls a moment from the poet's past:

Soy aquel otro que miró el desierto
y que en su eternidad sigue mirándolo.

Just as the artist has captured a moment in his engraving, a moment from the poet's life has been captured in a memory, seemingly fossilized in a type of eternal present. This brings us to the question of time and memory. The poet's memories seem static and fossilized, as if his life was composed of separate events, all of which occur in an eternal present. It is here perhaps that we begin to see that this poem deals with the identity not of Borges the man, but of Borges the author: the identity of the poet lies in the texts that he has created. These consist of images caught in the eternal present of literature. In the last line, the poet states that he is not a single thing, but a plurality, a diversity of things which are connected in some way:

Soy un espejo, un eco. El epitafio.

While echoes, mirrors and epitaphs are the obvious results of previous things, effect rather than cause, they are more than that. A mirror not only reflects; it can distort, providing a new image. It can also multiply images if it is reflected in another mirror or is seen by anyone. An epitaph might be words describing someone, but an epitaph has a life of its own as a verbal artifice: a particularly well

written one might indeed overshadow, and be remembered longer than, the person it commemorates. An echo of a sound is not the sound: it is a modification. Perhaps each cause is no more than an inspiration for its effect, which might in turn cause more. This is what the present poem suggests. Aspects of Borges' identity have belonged to other people and will belong to others. As well as being the echo of others' actions, his actions shall be echoed by others. He is an end and a beginning, both cause and effect.

In the next poem, 'La trama' ⁷, the poet builds on the idea of time including everything, including identity and personality. Time continues endlessly, 'fatal como la muerte de César', but it also has two aspects which we use in everyday thought: past and future. The present is the standpoint of the onlooker, in this case Janus. Time, 'la trama', has already begun when the poem begins. This device, of starting a poem with the second part of a cycle of events, is also used in 'Heráclito', in Elogio de la sombra: ⁸

En el segundo patio
la canilla periódica gotea,
fatal como la muerte de César.

The transferred epithet of 'canilla periódica' emphasizes these lines. Here we have two things: a faulty tap dripping, suggesting irritation as well as the passing of time, like an hourglass - an image which recalls 'Caja de música' from Historia de la noche ⁹ - and the death of Caesar. The seeming triviality of the tap seems at odds with the historical and literary Caesar. Both, however, are aspects of a single thing, 'la trama':

Las dos son piezas de la trama que abarca
el círculo sin principio ni fin,
el ancla del fenicio,
el primer lobo y el primer cordero,
la fecha de mi muerte
y el teorema perdido de Fermat.

The image of a circle without beginning or end recalls the pythagorean idea of the universe as a serpent biting its own tail; just as there may be only one 'trama', the date of the poet's death is singular, as are the first wolf and lamb. Fermat's lost theorem illustrates the puzzling, contradictory and unmanageable nature of our conception of the universe. 10

The next line characterizes time as unchangeable and immovable:

A esa trama de hierro
los estoicos la pensaron de un fuego
que muere y que renace como el Fénix.

'Trama de hierro' is an austere, powerful image. This is continued in the image of fire and to an extent in that of the Stoics. If they imagined time to be a fire - again recalling Heraclitus - they imagined time to be a transformation. However, if the fire then begins again, from its own ashes, it, like the poet's identity, is both cause and effect, an end and a beginning. It is continuity. Time and eternity are intangible: to describe them man resorted to myth, to the idea of a mythical bird, the phoenix. The idea of cause and effect is also prevalent in the next lines:

Es el gran árbol de las causas
y de los ramificados efectos;

en sus hojas están Roma y Caldea
y lo que ven las caras de Jano.

Again we find images reminiscent of 'El hacedor'. Time is more than cause and effect; it is the mesh of accumulated causes and effects. We may glimpse parts of it, causes and effects, enough to guess at the vast structure that underlies all things, but the whole remains inconceivable because we are part of it. It is this point that the poet makes in the closing tercet of the poem:

El universo es uno de sus nombres.
Nadie lo ha visto nunca
y ningún hombre puede ver otra cosa.

Man can neither leave the world of his perception nor see beyond it; he is trapped in this 'trama de hierro'. As literature is a world of perception, the poet is unable to define himself in a poem, the only place he exists as a poet, in 'Yesterdays'. In 'El hacedor' he lists images out of which poetry has made him. Poetry, the images which create the poet, and the events which inspired the images, are all part of 'La trama', as are the reader and every reading of the poem.

The next poem, 'La milonga de Juan Muraña' ¹¹, moves from talking of the vastness of the universe and the infinity of the self to talk of a compadrito. This figure, often mentioned in Borges' work, seems here to symbolize the mystery created by incomplete information. Because we do not know anything about Muraña other than his legend, as it were, the man becomes a type of myth, a repository for the imagination of others. Borges seems to be attracting our attention to

the difference between who the man was, who he would like to be remembered as, and who he has become as a folk hero.

The milonga creates an atmosphere similar to that of the tango, which in the earlier poem, 'El tango':

. . . crea un turbio
Pasado irreal que de algún modo es cierto,
El recuerdo imposible de haber muerto
Peleando, en una esquina del suburbio.

In the same poem, Muraña himself is mentioned:

¿Qué oscuros callejones o qué yermo
Del otro mundo habitará la dura
Sombra de aquel que era una sombra oscura,
Muraña, ese cuchillo de Palermo? ¹²

At the end of 'El tango' the poet mentions his yearning to have been a man of action instead of a literary figure: Muraña is both. The present poem is a discussion of the connections between Muraña the man of action and Muraña the myth, his fictionalized form.

The poem is written as seven stanzas of a quatrain each. ¹³ In the case of the milonga, Borges considers the music to be more important than the words:

En el modesto caso de mis milongas, el lector debe suplir la música ausente por la imagen de un hombre que canturrea, en el umbral de su zaguán o en un almacén, acompañándose con la guitarra. La mano se demora en las cuerdas y las palabras cuentan menos que los acordes. ¹⁴

In addition to the perhaps forced musicality of the language (regular rhyme and so on), the overt formal nature of this text expresses the idea of artifice. This suggests the artifice of the poet and of Muraña's myth. Underlying this poem, which at first sight may seem trivial and 'costumbrista', is a concern for Muraña. Although the poet uses his legend in the poem, in the first quatrain he might be anyone:

Me habré cruzado con él
En una esquina cualquiera.
Yo era un chico, él era un hombre.
Nadie me dijo quién era.

Here we have a matrix of different perspectives: the poet saw the man when he was a child, which he no longer is. No-one told the poet who the man was; perhaps the poet never saw him - if he did he did not recognize him as Muraña. At the same time, the fact that the poet did not come into contact with the compadrito is itself not definite; neither is the place where he saw him. The poet feels connected to the man, but has no concrete explanation. This connection, undoubted and yet mysterious, is underlined in the second quatrain:

No sé por qué en la oración
Ese antiguo me acompaña.
Sé que mi suerte es salvar
La memoria de Muraña.

Muraña appears in various of Borges' texts; they are connected 'en la oración', in literature. ¹⁵ Muraña has become one of the author Borges' themes. Why else should he 'salvar/ La memoria' of the man? This implies that Muraña had, in the poet's view, redeeming qualities.

This emphasis on the poet's actions, his intention of saving - and amending - Muraña's memory creates the impression that in the poem lie two poems. The first is an account of Muraña, the second the poet's remarks about this. The first two verses tell us about the poet's connections with Muraña, rather than about Muraña himself. This underlines the idea that we are reading not about a man and his actions but about a man and other people's reactions to him, his myth.

In stanzas 3 - 6, we read of Muraña. The poet clearly admires him:

Tuvo una sola virtud.
Hay quien no tiene ninguna.
Fue el hombre más animoso
Que han visto el sol y la luna.

A nadie faltó el respeto.
No le gustaba pelear,
Pero cuando se avenía,
Siempre tiraba a matar.

He represents a ne plus ultra for the poet, an archetype of all men of action or of all compadritos. In the fourth, central stanza, we find what is obvious: because of his violent nature, the man was respected. On the other hand, it is precisely at the midpoint of the poem that we find the central contradiction in Muraña's mythical image: 'No le gustaba pelear'. He owes his fame, his existence as a literary persona, to his ability to fight, and yet this was not an activity which he liked. He may even have rejected what has become his most important facet. In the next two stanzas there is the image of a Muraña abused by those in authority, a rather pathetic image which is balanced by more images of his bravery:

Fiel como un perro al caudillo
Servía en las elecciones.
Padeció la ingratitud,
La pobreza y las prisiones.

Hombre capaz de pelear
Liado al otro por un lazo,
Hombre que supo afrontar
Con el cuchillo el balazo.

Rather than brave and independent, Muraña seems violent, manipulated and unrewarded. The penultimate stanza rounds off our picture of Muraña by giving us images more in keeping with the myth of the compadrito: the brave man who attempts to fight modern technology, the gun, with his traditional weapon, the 'cuchillo', and is almost an anachronism. Here the poet acknowledges that although he wants to 'salvar /La memoria de Muraña', he cannot. Time has built the myth and the poet cannot undo time. His poem itself acknowledges, and is built upon, the myth that it seems to seek to change. As this is the last mention of Muraña, the reader might assume that he met his death in this way. Finally, the man becomes not only a symbol of the compadrito and his qualities, but also of a fictionalized Buenos Aires, that of the tango and milonga.

In the final stanza, the poet underlines Muraña's existence as a literary persona, and ends the poem on an enigmatic note:

Lo recordaba Carriego
Y yo lo recuerdo ahora.
Más vale pensar en otros
Cuando se acerca la hora.

Muraña preoccupied another poet, Carriego. The relation of poetry and the myth/hero is underlined: poetry and literature create heroes. The poem is written in an overtly poetic style, drawing our attention to its artifice; frequent alliteration emphasizes this. The final couplet gives the text a cryptic, fatalistic, moralizing quality, typical of the milonga, leaving us puzzled by Muraña. Perhaps the ultimate lesson in the poem is that everyone dies, as did Muraña. We are no different from him; yet he is a myth.

The identity of Muraña is seen as stemming from a central contradiction, placed at the poem's midpoint: in 'Andrés Armoa' ¹⁶, we read of another mysterious figure from Argentine history. His roots in history are emphasized, as is his probable fictionality, in the note to the poem:

ANDRÉS ARMOA: El lector español debe imaginar que su historia ocurre en la provincia de Buenos Aires, hacia mil ochocientos setenta y tantos. ¹⁷

The name in the title creates in the reader a desire to know who the man was, and in the poem the poet sketches parts of this information. Ultimately, however, he remains a mystery.

The action is set at the time of General Roca's campaign against the indigenous indians of the pampa. ¹⁸ Perhaps because he is an 'amigo de un indio', Armoa has reason to be secretive. In addition to this, Armoa may be based on a character who Borges' father had met. In interview, Borges said:

... mi padre había conocido a un viejo soldado, degollador de oficio, de Urquiza - un buen hombre que cumplía con su

deber -, y procedía siempre de la misma manera. Los prisioneros estaban sentados en el suelo con las manos atadas a la espalda. Urquiza estaba a caballo, tomando mate, con la pierna boleada sobre el recado y viendo degollar a la gente. El degollador se les acercaba, les daba una palmadita en el hombro y les decía siempre lo mismo: "Ánimo, amigo, más sufren las mujeres cuando paren." Luego los degollaba rápidamente, de un solo tajo. Parece que era indoloro... '9

The poem is written as a series of seventeen prose paragraphs of varying length; in them the reader is given pieces of information about who Armoa is. They are usually qualified in some way, for example in paragraph 1 we read that Armoa has some guaraní, 'pero que no podría traducir sin algún trabajo'. This device of first stating and then qualifying information has the effect of making it seem detailed and meticulous; this creates the illusion that the poem is a case history of a non fictional character. It reads like a dossier of information gathered about him.

The poem begins by alluding to Armoa's distant past:

Los años le han dejado unas palabras en guaraní, que sabe usar cuando la ocasión lo requiere, pero que no podría traducir sin algún trabajo.

Here, alliteration is used to heighten the distance between the man and his origins: because of the man's strangeness, the other soldiers find him unusual, and for this reason, perhaps, he is a solitary man:

Los otros soldados lo aceptan, pero algunos (no todos) sienten que algo ajeno hay en él, como si fuera hereje o infiel o padeciera un mal.

Este rechazo lo fastidia menos que el interés de los reclutas.

No es bebedor, pero suele achísparse los sábados.

In these lines there is the image of a man, who is alone among other people. Again we have images of self control, preciseness: 'suele achispase', not 'emborracharse'. Self control and solitariness suggest that he has something to hide. The poem then goes on to broaden the image of isolation, not only from his comrades but also from his family:

Tiene la costumbre del mate, que puebla de algún modo
la soledad.
Las mujeres no lo quieren y él no las busca.
Tiene un hijo en Dolores. Hace años que no sabe nada de
él, a la manera de la gente sencilla que no se escribe.

Here, the image of social drinking on a Saturday is replaced by one of the solitary drinking of mate, a drink which symbolizes the world of the gaucho. This world is as fictionalized and yet as Argentine as the 'pasado irreal' mentioned in 'El tango'. Another thing which could 'poblar la soledad' is love: Armoa, however, has no need for women, although in the past he did. This illustrates 'la vieja convicción gauchesca de que las mujeres no valen nada y de que en la pampa un compañero es el ser más importante del mundo'.²⁰ He also cannot write - although this is not stated explicitly - and seems to need no-one, being a self-contained character, who has done everything he has to in the past. The central device of this text is the mystery arising from the man's total lack of need for company: we read in order to find what has kept him isolated from the other soldiers.

The next paragraph gives us an example of how Armoa seems to live in the past: he talks of the past from a distance:

No es hombre de buena conversación, pero suele contar, siempre con las mismas palabras, aquella larga marcha de tantas leguas desde Junín hasta San Carlos. Quizá la cuenta con las mismas palabras, porque las sabe de memoria y ha olvidado los hechos.

Armoa remembers not the events of his past, but rather a kind of literature which his memory has developed from them. This literature insulates him from contact with the present; perhaps his job necessitates this distance from his surroundings:

No tiene catre. Duerme sobre el recado y no sabe qué cosa es la pesadilla.

Tiene la conciencia tranquila. Se ha limitado a cumplir órdenes.

Goza de la confianza de sus jefes.

Es el degollador.

Without a bed Armoa can sleep: he has a clear conscience, even though, as we find out, he is the 'degollador'. This profession might be at odds with the quiet, tranquil Armoa; however, his tranquillity underlines his mechanical, ruthless nature. The poem turns to speak of his work:

Ha perdido la cuenta de veces que ha visto el alba en el desierto.

Ha perdido la cuenta de las gargantas, pero no olvidará la primera y los visajes que hizo la pampa.

Nunca lo ascenderán. No debe llamar la atención.

Armoa is adept at his work; it is, however, a routine task. The dawn in the desert is linked by a parallelism to the act of cutting throats; each beginning is an end. What Armoa does remember points to

what holds interest for him: not the people he comes into contact with, but the ways of the desert, 'los visajes que hizo la pampa'. Armoa holds secrets which he does not want anyone to know: for this reason 'No debe llamar la atención'. Armoa's present situation depends upon his ability to keep himself to himself and to cut throats.

In the final two paragraphs we return to his past:

En su provincia fue domador. Ya es incapaz de jinetear un bagual, pero le gustan los caballos y los entiende.
Es amigo de un indio.

While the last paragraph explains both Armoa's forgotten guaraní and his solitary nature, in the context of General Roca's campaign, the penultimate one refers back to his previous life. The idea presented by the words 'su provincia' is that he is now in exile, both geographically and culturally. He came from the pampa, and was skilled in training horses; he is now an empty shell, working in the Argentine army. He has crossed from what Sarmiento termed 'barbarie' to what he termed 'civilización'.

In Borges' most famous work dealing with the different peoples that form Argentina, 'Poema conjetural', the side of 'civilización' is represented by Francisco Laprida, 'barbarie' by 'los bárbaros, los gauchos'.²¹ Ironically, with the passing of time, the gaucho became part of Argentine national iconography, along with the tango. The 'barbarie' is absorbed into the 'civilización': Armoa has been absorbed into European culture. To do this he has had to forget his origins, his identity. He exists as a shadow; although he is physically with Europeans, mentally he is lost.

The more we find out about Armoa the more the reader's curiosity is heightened. The unknown is also a major factor in the next poem, 'El tercer hombre'. ²² This poem, according to the 'notas', is about 'los secretos vínculos que unen a todos los seres del mundo'. ²³ Here the poet discusses the identity of a man he has never met, 'el tercer hombre'. This man, unaware of it, has acquired an identity in the poet's imagination. The poem begins by questioning its own existence as a poem:

Dirijo este poema
(por ahora aceptemos esa palabra)
al tercer hombre que se cruzó conmigo antenoche,
no menos misterioso que el de Aristóteles. ²⁴

This questioning of what poetry is is emphasized by the poem's anecdotal style:

El sábado salí.
La noche estaba llena de gente;
hubo sin duda un tercer hombre
como hubo un cuarto y un primero.

In this quatrain the definiteness of 'El sábado salí' contrasts with the other three lines, which tell us what is probable. Although 'noche' is often a symbol for literature in Borges' poems, here it is used in both a figurative and concrete sense. The poet went out in the night, and yet as he has written a poem about it, this night is also literature. In the next seven lines the poet gives us more information and conjecture about the 'tercer hombre':

No sé si nos miramos;
él iba a Paraguay, yo iba a Córdoba.
Casi lo han engendrado estas palabras;
nunca sabré su nombre.
Sé que hay un sabor que prefiere.
Sé que ha mirado lentamente la luna.
No es imposible que haya muerto.

The man is now a creation of literature, just as the men in the previous three poems were. In the poet's mind there is a gap left for details of the man, and again the mystery surrounding the figure points to our curiosity. The man must have experienced things in the past, and the poet writes of the man's present, the likes and dislikes he has acquired in the past. In addition to this the lines that begin 'Sé' are, ironically, supposition rather than fact, as is the man's existence outwith the poem.

The next line begins the second half of the poem. The poet directs his attention to the future, to the poet's relationship to the man. The poet is impressed by the idea that although he may never meet the man, and would not know him were this to happen, the link between them forged by this poem is untouchable regardless of what may happen between them:

Leerá lo que ahora escribo y no sabrá
que me refiero a él.
En el secreto porvenir
podemos ser rivales y respetarnos
o amigos y querernos.
He ejecutado un acto irreparable,
he establecido un vínculo.

The poet has created the 'tercer hombre'. The poem is a monument to the 'vínculo' he has created in his thought and in the poem. Without

the poem, the 'tercer hombre' would be known to Borges and perhaps his close friends only; with the poem, he has become a piece of literature, available to anyone. The writing of the poem is a magical act: it has transformed the man in the street into the 'tercer hombre' of the poem, and, more importantly, has begun a series of events. This series of events is what concerns us in the remaining lines of the poem:

En este mundo cotidiano,
que se parece tanto
al libro de las Mil y Una Noches,
no hay un solo acto que no corra el albur
de ser una operación de la magia,
no hay un solo hecho que no pueda ser el primero
de una serie infinita.
Me pregunto qué sombras no arrojarán
estas ociosas líneas.

Here again there is the vague reluctance to regard these lines as poetic displayed at the opening of the poem in 'estas ociosas líneas'. The words are beyond the control of the poet; he doubts if they constitute a poem. At the same time, they are literature, and therefore subject to the reader's interpretation, as is the 'tercer hombre', who has been given his identity by this poem. This man is as much myth as Armoa, Muraña and the poet himself.

The next poem dwells on a different aspect of identity: our desires and dreams. These drive our personalities and bridge the gap between our inner and outer selves. In 'Nostalgia del presente' ²⁵, this gap produces the idea in the poem. The title emphasizes the gap between reality and desire. In keeping with the ambiguity suggested in the title, the poem itself is capable of at least two interpretations:

either the man in the poem is in Iceland, or else he is far away from Iceland, perhaps in Buenos Aires, and his imagination transports him to another place and another time. This would account for the 'nostalgia' in the title; perhaps he is longing for a lost past, which has become perfect in his memory, recalling the line from 'Buenos Aires',

Sé que los únicos paraísos no vedados al hombre
son los paraísos perdidos. ²⁶

The poem is written in two parts: these are marked by the reiteration of 'En aquel preciso momento'. In the first part the man talks of his desire:

En aquel preciso momento el hombre se dijo:
Qué no daría yo por la dicha
de estar a tu lado en Islandia
bajo el gran día inmóvil

He talks to himself; perhaps he is with the woman - who is only identified in the last line - and wishing to be with her elsewhere. He addresses someone in his imagination, an ideal person. The image of 'gran día inmóvil' seems to perform two roles: it suggests a stillness, a permanence, and lends importance, monumentality, to the event; it also represents the immovable, unyielding nature of reality. This echoes the image of time, 'esa trama de hierro', in 'La trama'. ²⁷ It is the unyielding nature of reality, which frustrates our desires to be who we think we are, or who we would like to be, which makes the reader identify with the man in the poem. When we see

what the man wants, the unrealistic nature of his hopes, which typify and symbolize the impossibility of people ever sharing anything, as perceptions belong to individuals and cannot be shared, we see the futility of his desires:

y de compartir el ahora
como se comparte la música
o el sabor de una fruta.

How could people ever share these things? They are impossible, and perhaps it is this unknown present, infinitely distant, of the woman which the man longs for. As distant as his own past is the present of the woman who stands beside him in the last line. Neither can enter the other's head; both are ultimately alone, whether they are physically close or apart. As individuals they will always be apart. The man longs not for his own present, which is a longing, but for an insight into the woman's present. The couple may listen to music or taste fruit at the same time, but for each the experience will be different. Only through words can they express to one another what they have experienced. It is perhaps worth noting that the man addresses the woman in words only; there is no mention of 'body language' or gestures. The final couplet underlines the impenetrability of the couple's reality by its abrupt, direct nature:

En aquel preciso momento
el hombre estaba junto a ella en Islandia.

The two parts of the poem occur simultaneously; yet we read one after the other. This points to the multilayered nature of reality and of the self.

In this poem we see another aspect of identity: that of the gap between the real and the ideal. At the same time this poem illustrates the solitude of the individual, alone in his world of perceptions, where he is ultimately a perception himself. However, whilst the man perceives himself to be alienated, he is alienated from something which he is unable to experience, and in this lies the man's identity: his identity is more than what he is in reality. It is also what he dreams and desires.

In the next poem we find a synthesis of what the poet has been saying in these poems about identity. This poem, 'El ápice', appeared in an earlier book with the title 'No eres los otros'. ²⁰ With the earlier title, the poem's emphasis shifts: it centres on the solitude of the individual and the singularity of each person's life and universe. With the title 'El ápice', the emphasis is placed on the message of the final couplet of the poem:

Tu materia es el tiempo, el incesante
Tiempo. Eres cada solitario instante.

The identity of a person is not only the sum of their past actions (as 'No eres los otros' suggests), it is also in the point of contact between the individual and the present, which is fleeting and intangible. All the universe is the self, and this mirrors the idea of the last three lines of 'La trama':

El universo es uno de sus nombres.
Nadie lo ha visto nunca
y ningún hombre puede ver otra cosa. 29

'El ápice' is written in sonnet form, with the rhyme scheme abba cddc effe gg. Because of an enjambement in the fifth line, the poem has two main sections: lines 1 - 8 and lines 9 - 14. The final couplet of the poem forms almost an envoi, providing a climax point for this poem, and a punctuation for this group of poems, a pause for thought.

The poem begins by underlining the uniqueness of each person's destiny, and the fear which this realization brings:

No te habrá de salvar lo que dejaron
Escrito aquellos que tu miedo implora;
No eres los otros y te ves ahora
Centro del laberinto que tramaron tus pasos.

This first sentence is in two parts: the poet begins by denying that his poem may be of any use to the reader in understanding his universe. In fact, no writings by other people are of any use; the individual is on his own, in a universe of his own making. There is the contrast between the practical image of the 'laberinto que tramaron/ Tus pasos' and the literary image, emphasized by the word order used, in 'lo que dejaron/ Escrito aquellos'. This suggests that the poet writes not to help his reader but in order to help himself. This idea is also present in 'El hacedor': 'He de labrar el verso incorruptible/ Y (es mi deber) salvarme.' 30

The second part of the octet which opens the poem intensifies the image of solitude in the individual:

No te salva la agonía
De Jesús o de Sócrates ni el fuerte
Siddharta de oro que aceptó la muerte
En un jardín, al declinar el día.

If the writings of others are of no help in the individual's attempts to make sense of his situation as the 'centro del laberinto', an image which also places an infinite labyrinth between the individual and the rest of the universe, neither are philosophers or religious figures. These figures have deciphered their own reality, but every individual has a different reality. The image of a particular man, Jesus, acting on behalf of all men in a moral and philosophical sense is also central to a later poem, 'Cristo en la cruz', where the poet writes of Jesus being crucified to save humanity. The poet concludes:

¿De qué puede servirme que aquel hombre
haya sufrido, si yo sufro ahora? 31

Whereas Christianity argues that one man can suffer on behalf of all men, Buddhism argues that each man must suffer on his own behalf. In Buddhism, each individual's experience is his and his alone, and there is no possibility of exchange between individuals. Kōshō Uchiyama Rōshi describes the Zen concept of the self thus:

None of your personal experiences can ever be the same as anyone else's. More so, then, is your way of thinking bound to be different from everyone else's. When you are born, your world is born with you, and when you die, so dies your

entire world. Your true self includes the entire world you live in, and in this world there is no possibility of exchange. 32

It is this kind of scenario which the self finds at the 'centro del laberinto que tramaron/ Tus pasos'.

In the next four lines of the poem, the poet amplifies the idea of other people's writings and acts being useless to the individual; in addition, the individual's writings and words are futile:

Polvo también es la palabra escrita
Por tu mano o el verbo pronunciado
Por tu boca. No hay lástima en el Hado
Y la noche de Dios es infinita.

Alliteration gives emphasis to these lines. The second of these sentences presents us with two images of irony: 'lástima en el Hado' might mean that for some reason Fate is unable to hurt the individual; on the other hand, it could mean that Fate has no pity, which suggests the opposite. Similarly, 'la noche de Dios es infinita', suggests that for God, 'noche' is infinity. This could be the 'noche' either created, or experienced, by God. If he sleeps forever, he will continue to dream us forever; his night is our day. On the other hand, if he is asleep he cannot help us, and the individual is on his own. If we think of eternity in the context of Borges, we think in terms of the rise and fall of empires. Each end is a beginning; this idea is found, for example, in 'La trama'. When the Buddha finds enlightenment, in 'El ápice', he dies. He 'aceptó la muerte/ En un jardín, al declinar el día'. He finds enlightenment to a higher

reality and leaves material reality behind.

The final couplet of the poem recalls a line from 'Yesterdays': 'Soy cada instante de mi largo tiempo'. ³³ This couplet sums up much of what has been said about the problem of identity in this group of poems. Man is neither his past nor his future: he is the ironically real and intangible present. He is at the apex where his consciousness and time, 'tu materia', meet. If man exists at the apex of his relationship with time, of which Borges often states we are made, our identities are in a permanent state of flux. Only the illusion of fixed identity is constant.

Part of this illusion is words. Names are given, and this seems to fix identity. For example, in 'Yesterdays' and 'El hacedor', we know that the identity in question is Borges'. In 'La milonga...' and 'Andrés Armoa', the persons' names are in the poems' titles. Although we do not know these people, they seem to take on an identity by having been given names. The unknown man in 'El tercer hombre', about whom the poet says, 'nunca sabré su nombre', is given the name 'tercer hombre'. In 'Nostalgia del presente', we have a different situation. We have a pair of lovers, unnamed, but they are archetypal and represent all people in their situation. They are unnamed but are identified. 'Islandia', on the other hand, although named as a specific place, becomes symbolic of any place where the lovers could be together. In the last two poems, the poet talks of all our identities in 'La trama', and of the reader's identity in 'El ápice'. The reader is unnamed; he is a symbol of all readers of the poem.

Names are important because they are necessary if we are to build up a picture of a person. In order for us to create a file, as it

were, on a person, we must have a name to call the file in which to place information about that person. It also enables us to differentiate between information which we have received about A and about B. Although we may amass a great amount of information about a person, we are never able to know how they feel, see them from the inside, as it were. This is demonstrated in 'La milonga...' for example. Observation, as is also the case in 'Andrés Armoa', is no substitute for insight.

Perhaps the identity of the self is the most obscure and intangible of all. This is shown in 'Yesterdays'. At the same time as the universe is perpetually in movement, our selves offer a plurality of identities, as is shown in 'Nostalgia del presente'. When we consider that in 'El tercer hombre', all acts are infinite in effect, so that everything - including the poet's poem - is out of control, what remains of identity, and any fixed, singular idea of it, is a chaos.

Out of this chaos comes one certainty: the 'ápice', our point of contact with time, the present in the instant we experience it. This present, however, is not the sum of our past actions, as 'Yesterdays' almost suggests, but rather the instant to which our past actions have led us. This moment is fleeting and intangible, and therefore indescribable. All intellectual activity - describing, communicating - is posterior to that moment. We can never communicate our experience of it - or of our selves - to anyone. We are irrevocably alone at the 'Centro del laberinto que tramaron/ Tus pasos'.

Notes

¹ Z. Gertel 'Identity as discourse and image in the poetry of Borges' in Cortínez ed., Simply a Man of Letters Orono: University of Maine at Orono, 1982. pp. 115 and 115 - 116 respectively.

² 'Yesterdays' LaC pp. 51 - 52.

³ This idea of a poet belonging to a line of poets is studied in Harold Bloom A Map of Misreading Oxford: OUP, 1975.

⁴ In his 'Autobiographical Essay' Borges remarks about his father:

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

(Quoted in Emir Rodríguez Monegal Jorge Luis Borges: A Literary Biography New York: E P Dutton, 1978: p. 9)

⁵ Nara is a town in Japan near Osaka.

⁶ 'El hacedor' LaC pp. 49 - 50.

⁷ 'La trama' LaC p. 53. There are also texts in El hacedor and Los conjurados with this title. In El hacedor, the 'trama' is destiny: 'Al destino le agradan las repeticiones, las variantes, las simetrías...' Caesar's death is also mentioned, as it is in the present poem. (PC II, p. 326) In Los conjurados, it is the universe of causes and effects:

No hay una sola de esas cosas perdidas que no proyecte
ahora una larga sombra y que no determine lo que haces hoy o

Lo que haces mañana. (LosC) pp. 23 - 24.

• 'Heráclito' OP pp. 321 - 322.

• 'Caja de música' OP p. 520.

•¹⁰ Fermat's Theorem: this was a mathematical proof, created by Pierre de Fermat, a seventeenth century French mathematician. Fermat, a contemporary of Descartes, left fragments of this proof in a notebook. It proves the statement that there exist no natural numbers x , y and z such that $x^n + y^n = z^n$ where $n =$ a natural number > 2 . Although Fermat's proof has been lost, mathematicians have been unable to prove or disprove this proof, except for various specific values of n . (Encyclopaedia Britannica Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1974: Micropaedia vol. 4 p. 102.)

•¹¹ 'La milonga de Juan Muraña' LaC pp. 55 - 56.

•¹² 'El tango' OP pp. 209 - 211.

•¹³ Borges' milongas were long ignored by his readers and his critics alike. Ana Cara-Walker remarked in her 'Borges' Milongas: The Chords of Argentine Verbal Art' in Cortínez ed., Borges the Poet Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1986: pp. 280 - 295 that:

'Not only have the milongas remained quietly ignored even by scholars who treat traditional Argentine elements in Borges' work, they are conspicuously absent from the text and indices of books devoted to the author's comprehensive works. In contrast to the recognition and critical acclaim received otherwise by this noted Argentine writer, the lack of response to his milongas is particularly dramatic and puzzling. It poses the question: Why is it that readers have failed to respond to Borges' milonga compositions?' (p. 280)

Since this article was published in 1986, at least one other has appeared: Paul Verdoye 'Jorge Luis Borges et la milonga'. In F. Cerdan ed., Le Tango Toulouse: University of Toulouse - Le Mirail, 1986. pp. 133 - 154.

¹⁴ OP p. 287.

¹⁵ Juan Muraña is involved in other texts by Borges, most notably in 'Juan Muraña', PC II, pp. 395 - 399.

¹⁶ 'Andrés Armoa' LaC pp. 57 - 58.

¹⁷ 'Notas' LaC p. 107.

¹⁸ In Ricardo Levene, A History of Argentina New York: Russel and Russel Inc., 1963 p. 483 we read of General Roca's campaign in the 1870's against the indians:

This campaign also signalled the extermination of the savage Indian and consequently the elimination of that factor from the miscegenation of races which is taking place in our country.

¹⁹ See María Esther Vázquez. Borges: Imágenes, Memorias, Diálogos Caracas: Monte Ávila, 1977 p. 211.

²⁰ See Borges, Emir Rodríguez Monegal ed., Ficcionario Madrid: FCE, 1981 p. 470.

²¹ OP pp. 186 - 187.

²² 'El tercer hombre' LaC pp. 59 - 60.

²³ 'Notas' LaC p. 107.

²⁴ The 'tercer hombre' in the title of this poem may be an allusion to a famous criticism of Plato's theory of forms, which Aristotle supported:

The most famous [criticism of Plato's theory of Forms], known as the 'third man argument' depends essentially on a motivation for the Forms, known as the one over many principle', which Plato mentions in only one other place. The one over many principle says that where a plurality of things is called by a single name, say 'man', there is an ideal (Form of) man apart from these, which is preeminently man and is that in virtue of which each member of the plurality is recognized as man. The 'third man' argues that the original plurality plus the ideal will form a new plurality which is called by a single word (all are 'men') and so there is a need for yet another ideal man for this plurality. This launches an infinite regress, for each ideal

introduces the need for yet another ideal.

(Antony Flew ed., A Dictionary of Philosophy. London: Pan, 1984. p. 272.) However, Borges writes that his third man is 'no menos misterioso' than Aristotle's: this suggests that his 'third man' is not the same as Aristotle's. In the poem, he celebrates the power of poetry to give identity to an anonymous man: the poet, writing in the first person, is the first man; the reader the second. The third man is the one magically created in the poem.

25 'Nostalgia del presente' LaC p. 61.

26 'Buenos Aires' LaC pp. 37 - 38.

27 'La trama' LaC p. 53.

28 'El ápice' LaC p. 63. 'No eres los otros' OP p. 505.

29 'La trama' LaC p. 53.

30 'El hacedor' LaC pp. 49 - 50.

31 'Cristo en la cruz' LosC pp. 15 - 16.

32 Dōgen and Uchiyama, Refining Your Life New York: Weatherhill, 1983. pp. 42 - 43.

33 LaC p. 52.

The fifth group of poems:

'Poema' to 'Correr o ser'

In the fifth group of poems in La cifra, the theme which gives the poems their identity as a group is dreams. Many of the ideas expressed in these poems - which link dreaming to subjects like eternity, archetypes, time and literature - are also to be found in other Borges works, most notably, because of its chronological and intellectual proximity to the present work, in the talk on 'La pesadilla' published in Siete noches.¹ Ana María Barrenechea has noted Borges' use of dreams:

Dreams are another way of suggesting the undefined boundaries between the real world and the fictitious world. . . they hold roles which are . . . allusive to infinity.

She also adds that

Dreams may be intense and false; they may possess a sticky consistency, like dough, into which man is submerged and from which he emerges, or they may be like tight nets which encumber him.²

Dreams are mentioned in earlier parts of La cifra, although they do not take on the main role, in such poems as 'Descartes', 'The cloisters', 'Dos formas del insomnio' and 'Nota para un cuento fantástico'. Nevertheless, in the last example, although dreaming is

not specifically mentioned, we read a series of images which seems like a dream; in 'Descartes', the speaker imagines that he has dreamt everything; in 'The cloisters' the poet concludes that he is not accustomed to the sensation of eternity that dreams can give; in 'Dos formas del insomnio' the poet expresses his desire to be able to sleep and to dream.

At the end of the previous group of poems, we have the poetry addressing the reader. This continues in the first poem of the present group, 'Poema'. ³ Here the metaphor of sleep is used to describe the reader's state prior to reading the poem: he wakens to the world of poetry. The reader is 'woken' by the poem:

Dormías. Te despierto.
La gran mañana depara la ilusión de un principio.
Te habías olvidado de Virgilio. Ahí están los hexámetros.
Te traigo muchas cosas.

The image of poetry as 'la gran mañana' introduces the idea that we are not reading a single poem, but a poem about all poems, the vastness of poetry; just as we can reread a work, the 'mañana' image suggests repetition. The image of 'depara la ilusión de un principio' adds to the idea of repetition, whilst also giving a note of scepticism; time only appears to begin afresh, as it has continued during the night while the reader has slept, or not read poetry. It is at this point that poetry is mentioned, with the image of Virgil, of whom Borges has said: 'For me, he stands for poetry'. ⁴ Virgil is also mentioned in the poem which closes the volume. The sentence 'Ahí están los hexámetros' points to Virgil and to poetry, and to the poem or to

the speaker in the poem. The latter distances himself from the 'hexámetros', which are distanced from the reader also. What the mention of Virgil, the hexameters and poetry itself does is detract the reader's attention from the poem itself (the text on the page) and point him towards the intertextuality of the words. The first part of the poem is designated 'Anverso', while the second is 'Reverso'. This recalls a line from an earlier poem, 'Cambridge':

Como en los sueños,
detrás del rostro que nos mira no hay nadie.
Anverso sin reverso,
moneda de una sola cara, las cosas. ⁵

If things really are a 'moneda de una sola cara', why does Borges write two contradictory poems here, in the 'anverso' and 'reverso'? It would seem at first sight that what he is doing is suggesting that waking up both to the world of poetry (in the 'anverso') and to the world of non-literary reality (in the 'reverso') are essentially variants of the one thing. Both would be simulacra of a single archetype.

Also, it could be postulated that in this poem, Borges is suggesting both by the (poetic) form of the text and its archetypal title 'Poema' what poetry does: here it uses an everyday physical action (being woken up) as a metaphor for something else: an intellectual activity, poetry. This idea of poetry transforming 'ordinary' events into something more significant and positive is also present in other poems. ⁶

What does the poem bring us? The remaining lines enumerate examples:

Las cuatro raíces del griego: la tierra, el agua, el fuego,
el aire.
Un solo nombre de mujer.
La amistad de la luna.
Los claros colores del atlas.
El olvido, que purifica.
La memoria que elige y que reescribe.

The first line, in keeping with the image of classical times created by the mention of Virgil, lists the four elements from which - to the Greeks - everything sprang, listed in order of decreasing tangibility. The following two lines are of a more personal nature; they suggest that the poem does not address the reader in general as much as the reader to whom the book is dedicated: María Kodama. The earlier poem 'La luna' ⁷ was also dedicated to her. In that poem, María Kodama is seen as the mediator between the poet and the world around him that inspired his poetry; the line 'la amistad de la luna' is echoed in 'La cifra'. The next line, accentuated with alliteration, returns us to the world of civilization in the first line cited here: the colours of the atlas represent man's attempts to classify countries, to show his importance in those areas. The colours show his political organization. Within the bounds of each colour, a different culture exists, and this is represented by the colours of the atlas. The image of 'claros colores' also suggests that these distinctions are not valid, or are less so, in the world of the dreamer. There, the dreamer might speak in a language he does not understand. The next two lines represent the way the individual's mind takes things from what

surrounds the individual and creates an idiosyncratic world, by forgetting some things and modifying others.

In the remaining six lines of the 'anverso', we see a continuing of this juxtaposition of the world of the individual and the world of civilization. This idea of waking up is clearly expressed in an earlier poem, 'El despertar': the dreamer leaves 'los sueños' and enters the world of the 'sueño compartido'. The dreamer wakes and is returned to wakefulness, a state where things are remembered. This idea is echoed in the third line of the present poem, where waking brings back things forgotten: 'Te habías olvidado de Virgilio'. This idea is further strengthened in the 'reverso', which begins 'Recordar a quien duerme', where it is used to mean 'despertar a quien duerme'. The ambiguity makes this an apt image. The suggestion in lines 9 and 10 of 'Poema' is that while dreaming we can forget the details of our surroundings, and think about them more abstractly. By the distance afforded us by sleep, we gain a better perspective; this allegory could be extended to the idea of the reader awakening to a poem. After the book is closed, the reader thinks about the poem, and this distance between reader and poem is what gives the poem perspective.

In the last six lines of the 'anverso' we find both images of individual life and of civilization:

El hábito que nos ayuda a sentir que somos inmortales.
La esfera y las agujas que parcelan el inasible tiempo.
La fragancia del sándalo.
Las dudas que llamamos, no sin alguna vanidad, metafísica.
La curva del bastón que tu mano espera.
El sabor de las uvas y de la miel.

In the first of these lines there is an image of religion, society's way of addressing the problem of the individual; this reminds us of 'La prueba', which is also sceptical about man's possible immortality. The idea of an 'hábito' underlines this scepticism. The next line talks of man's attempts to measure time, to encompass time. This is another image of man's futility; time remains 'inasible'. The next line, on the other hand, recalls what can only be a personal subjective memory, a vague and intimate one. Metaphysics also seems futile, a 'vanidad' of man's imagination, an attempt at formulating what cannot be formulated; it also represents man's curiosity about things which he feels but barely begins to understand. This contrasts with the simple, physical but emotional sensation of the walking stick in the following line. While metaphysics points to investigation, to an increasing number of unknown elements in the universe, the walking stick is reassuring. The final line continues this, while at the same time bringing in another type of beauty: that of taste. The walking stick is returned to in another poem, 'El bastón de laca'.

Poetry, then, can bring us all these things: both things that create beauty and things that create perplexity; certainty and doubt. We may relate to a poem either as part of a society, or as individuals. Although there is the idea that the reader wakes to poetry when he reads, the sleep from which he awakes gives him room to think about, and gain perspective on, that poetry. Waking is made a poetic image in this 'anverso'; in the 'reverso' the reader wakes up to the 'interminable/ prisión del universo'.

The second part of the poem, the 'reverso', is written in a less enumerative and more assertive style than the first part. At the same

time, the 'reverso' displays a more complex form; in the first part we have what are poetic images used in an enumerative stanza; here we find plainer words and concepts, connected and interrelated by a more complex use of form - parallelisms, alliteration and so on. The first six lines of the 'reverso' illustrate this:

Recordar a quien duerme
es un acto común y cotidiano
que podría hacernos temblar.
Recordar a quien duerme
es imponer a otro la interminable
prisión del universo.

We have the two groups of three lines, marked by 'Recordar'; the second lines of both contain alliteration - on the /k/ and then on the /i/ - and the last line of each has the sound /p/ in an emphatic position. The two tercets are therefore linked in parallel; the 'acto común y cotidiano' of the first becomes 'imponer a otro la interminable prisión del universo' in the second. The seventh line is punctuatory, both extending what has been said and halting the series of images: the woken person is both in the prison of the universe, where he is a very small part, and also 'de su tiempo sin ocaso ni aurora'. His own personal identity is infinite and as intimate to him as the universe is remote. The dreamer exists on both these levels simultaneously.

The rest of this poem is given over to a list of definitions of what it is to 'recordar a quien duerme'. This section is characterized by the repetition of 'Es...':

Es revelarle que es alguien o algo
que está sujeto a un nombre que lo publica
y a un cúmulo de ayerés.

Returning to the world of wakefulness, the dreamer takes up his place in society and language, represented by 'un nombre que lo publica'; he also returns to the sense of time of this society, with its implication of a sense of cause and effect. Here the external world imposes on the individual. In the next lines the dreamer returns to mortality from a world of eternity when he awakes:

Es inquietar su eternidad.
Es cargarlo de siglos y de estrellas.
Es restituir al tiempo otro Lázaro
cargado de memoria.
Es infamar el agua del Leteo.

To wake someone up, then, is to place him in a world of decay; it is to return him to his accumulated memories, to the 'trama de hierro', with its sense of chronology and history. 9

Among the things returned to by the dreamer on waking up or on reading the poem is 'el hábito que nos ayuda a sentir que somos inmortales', religion. In 'El ápice', the last poem of the previous group, we read the line 'Y la noche de Dios es infinita'. 10 God is the being that dreams our reality; his night, 'infinita', is our day, our wakefulness.

In the main part of the next poem, 'El ángel', 11 the poet addresses himself to the idea that mankind has a guardian angel sent by God. In the central part of this poem, the poet writes of man's relationship with this angel, whilst in the couplet which is set apart

from the main stanza, he modifies this to talk of his own relationship with the angel; he moves from the world of the 'sueño compartido' to his own private world. The poem is written almost as a prayer, although this is not made explicit until the final couplet, which is marked by the word 'Señor'; the images used in the main stanza, however, point to the idea of a prayer. The poem is a series of things which the poet hopes for, each introduced by 'Que...'.
The first wish of the poet is that man is worthy of this angel:

Que el hombre no sea indigno del Ángel
cuya espada lo guarda
desde lo engendró aquel Amor
que mueve el sol y las estrellas
hasta el Último Día en que retumbe
el trueno en la trompeta.

Here we have a series of apocalyptic images of great love, great power and magnitude, and also of violence or justice; the angel's sword seems to suggest that he is not only there to guard us, but also to watch if we are 'indigno' of him. This ties in with the emphatic image of Judgement Day, marked by constant alliteration on the /t/. There is a strong moralizing tone in these lines, which is unusual in the sceptical Borges' poetry. The next three lines continue this moralizing tone:

Que no lo arrastre a rojos lupanares
ni a los palacios que erigió la soberbia
ni a las tabernas insensatas.

While the images of violence and love in the first sentence are contrastive, they are also familiar and immediately suggest religion; here this is extended to list what we recognize as sins: we move from an idea of the future, of reality which we identify with the church, to a list of prohibitions. In these lines we see three of the Deadly Sins: lust, pride and avarice. However, beyond this, the poet sees that the Angel, and by extension God, is not against man:

Que no se rebaje a la súplica
ni al oprobio del llanto
ni a la fabulosa esperanza
ni a las pequeñas magias del miedo
ni al simulacro del histrión;
el Otro lo mira. ¹²

Man must not lose hope, as the Angel is present, and 'el Otro', God, watches him. An interesting facet of this poem is the use of capital letters on words which refer to God or the Angel - who is then seen as an attribute of God, having no other role than that assigned to him by God. These capitalized words connect in the mind of the reader to form a composite image. In the first part of the poem, we find the presence of the Angel. This is followed by the 'Amor. . . que lo engendró', his beginning; this contrasts with the image of finality in the 'Último Día', his end. God is a continual presence, a beginning and an end, an idea which recalls another of the epithets which Borges uses for God:

Yo que soy el Es, el Fue y el Será. ¹³

It is interesting that Borges, who usually characterizes theology as a form of fantastic literature, opposes the presence of the 'Otro' in these lines, as a certainty, with the futility of 'la súplica', 'el oprobio del llanto' and so on. Here as well he contrasts imagination, 'fabulosa esperanza', 'pequeñas magias del miedo' and also fiction, 'simulacro del histrión', with a certainty: 'el Otro lo mira'.

This idea is amplified in the final four lines of the stanza:

Que recuerde que nunca está solo.
En el público día o en la sombra
el incesante espejo lo atestigua;
que no macule su cristal una lágrima.

Man has as his duty 'que no macule su cristal una lágrima'; he is with the Angel whether he is alone or in 'el público día'. He must not give in to despair; if the person does wrong, the Angel, a mirror of the person's conscience, is 'deshonrado': all through this main stanza, the poet talks in general terms about humanity's relationship with God. In the closing envoi, however, he talks of his own life:

Señor, que al cabo de mis días en la Tierra
yo no deshonre al Ángel.

Here we have the image of divinity created by the capitalized words extended to the 'Tierra'; the Angel is seen as a record of the poet's actions, by which the latter will be judged 'al cabo de mis días'. If our lives are God's dream, our deaths are a form of waking up, of returning to a previous state both close to us and infinitely far from our consciousness, as is wakefulness to the dreamer.

In the first two poems of this group, then, we have two metaphors of sleep / dreams and wakefulness: the reader before he reads, contrasted with the reader awake to poetry; life as a dream from which we wake up. The next three poems form a group within the group: 'El sueño', 'Un sueño', and 'Al olvidar un sueño'. In the three titles there is a progression from the archetypal to the specific, and then to the individual's experience of a dream: forgetting it.

The first of these, 'El sueño', deals with the idea of the 'tarea mágica' of the night. ¹⁴ The poem consists of an elaboration of what this 'tarea mágica' is, in a long enumeration followed by a statement that seems to detract from the magical quality of 'sueño', but which causes the poem to be reassessed by the reader. The poem begins with the statement:

La noche nos impone su tarea
mágica.

What is this 'tarea mágica'?

... Destejer el universo,
las ramificaciones infinitas
de efectos y de causas, que se pierden
en ese vértigo sin fondo, el tiempo.

Here we have images of vastness: the universe is time itself, with its chains of cause and effect linking everything. What is suggested here is that this great chain of cause and effect is but one dimension, perhaps the physical one, of the universe, and that sleep liberates us from this plane and allows us briefly to glimpse a world detached from

the restrictions of this temporal one. At the same time it frees us from the awareness that every action we do forms part of a chain of cause and effect, that our actions have consequences; in a dream we may act without thinking. The next part of the poem enumerates many of the things of the world of the wakeful; the 'noche' is given the status of a presence, a being:

La noche quiere que esta noche olvides
tu nombre, tus mayores y tu sangre,
cada palabra humana y cada lágrima,
lo que pudo enseñarte la vigilia,

Firstly, the night makes us forget what is most important to our external identity: our name, which is how we are identified, differentiated, in society. We are freed from the obligations of the external world, and our connections with society, through the family, 'tus mayores y tu sangre'. Also, we are freed from our physical situation, 'tu sangre'; this word seems to intensify the identification with the biological family and also with our own body. From the physical side of civilization, the poet moves to our attempts at intellectualizing our experience: in words, and our reactions in emotions. 'Lágrimas' are both symptoms of certain emotional states and expressions, signals to other people who form part of the same cultural group about something felt by the person; they are involuntary. They also cross the barriers between societies, which are usually built on linguistic differences; the 'palabra humana' could not be understood by different linguistic groups, but the adjective 'humana' seems to point to the archetype of words, to something that

ironically we all share. Both tears and words could be said to belong to the world of 'vigilia', to the 'sueño compartido'; so does the objective world of science, of knowledge, 'lo que pudo enseñarte la vigilia'. It is with this that the poem continues:

el ilusorio punto de los geómetras,
la línea, el plano, el cubo, la pirámide,
el cilindro, la esfera, el mar, las olas,
tu mejilla en la almohada, la frescura
de la sábana nueva...

Ironically the first of man's 'discoveries' to be mentioned is said to be 'ilusorio'; something as rational and fundamental to our world view as geometry is based on supposition rather than demonstrable fact. The next line lists geometrical forms in order of increasing number of dimensions; the following line continues this list of archetypal forms, before detaining itself on forms which are perhaps beyond man's grasp, but which must be formed from the archetypal forms mentioned above. What could be more complex in shape - if we attempted to analyse it in geometrical form - than something so changing as 'el mar' and 'las olas', part of the sea? Man's knowledge and potential for analysis of the world around him is still limited, and in a way the 'mar' and 'olas' although physical and tangible are no easier to understand than the sensation of 'tu mejilla en la almohada', and 'la frescura / de la sábana nueva'. All these things have to be forgotten for the night to carry out its 'tarea mágica'; the night is placed in the role of refreshing our consciousness. This part of the poem seems to reach a climax, or a pause, after the mentions of the sheets, the sleeper's immediate environment. This is similar to the experience of

the sleeper waking up: he becomes aware of his surroundings first, and then memories spring into his mind:

los imperios, los Césares y Shakespeare
y lo que es más difícil, lo que amas.

The dots in the previous line seem to form a blank period in the poem where the reader might insert his own experience without thinking; these memories of the past, of history, a literary, fictionalized version of the past, are forgotten in sleep. Perhaps what is suggested here is that literature - a kind of dream - and 'lo que amas' are able to become part of the dreamer's world, able to cross from the world of wakefulness to the world of sleep. In this poem we have a series of images suggesting what the sleeper forgets, which in turn suggests what goes through the sleeper's mind. What could be more remote from the sleeper than 'los imperios, los Césares y Shakespeare' had they not been part of literature, a type of dream? Sleep is seen as a way for the individual to escape - for a time - from the 'prisión interminable del universo' ('Poema') and the 'público día' ('El Ángel'). As in sleep the individual is no longer subject to a 'nombre que lo publica', perhaps it is in dreams that the individual becomes who he is inside as opposed to who he is externally to other people. In this poem, the poet elaborates the seemingly mysterious 'tarea mágica' of the night; in the last two lines he qualifies this and tells us that it is the state of being asleep that he is talking about, not the time of day or how we reach this state:

Curiosamente, una pastilla puede
borrar el cosmos y erigir el caos.

The 'tarea mágica' is defined as 'borrar el cosmos y erigir el caos'. Sleep takes the individual away from the temporal world and into a magical state; ironically, something as mundane as a sleeping tablet could have the same effect.

The next poem, 'Un sueño', written as a prose paragraph, is an example of the type of situation which a dream can present us with, and which in a dream seems perfectly logical and believable, but which could not be perceived as part of 'objective' reality. ¹⁵ In this type of dream we find something which, although believable in the mind of the dreamer, would be inconceivable as part of everyday reality. Borges has suggested, in the lecture on 'La pesadilla' in Siete noches, that the dream may be the oldest form of literature; he also cites several cases of dreams inspiring literature, and in the previous poem we have the idea of literature invading the subconscious mind of the dreamer. Literature both feeds on and feeds dreams; in 'Un sueño' we have a glimpse of a dream which presents almost a plot for a piece of fantastic writing. The paragraph is formally structured: the reader is led into the illusion of reality by the mixture of known and unknown elements in its introductory sentence. Here we read of the location where the 'actions' take place:

En un desierto lugar del Irán hay una no muy alta torre de
piedra, sin puerta ni ventana.

The non-specificity of 'desierto lugar', which also suggests that the place is lost, both in history and geographically, that it is isolated from the push of civilization, contrasts with the specificity of 'Irán', a large country which is easily identifiable on the map. It is on the border of East and West, of the world we know and the world which is alien to Europe. The tower itself is described in detail, building the illusion of reality; however, it has neither 'puerta ni ventana'.

The central image of the poem, that of an isolated tower in the desert coupled with a literary activity, is common to a sonnet which Borges included in his Antología poética of Quevedo: 'Desde la torre'.¹⁶ In that poem the poet is situated in an isolated tower, surrounded by books, and when he reads, he has contact with dead writers. In the present poem, the man in the tower is writing. The description of the tower continues:

En la única habitación (cuyo piso es de tierra y que tiene la forma del círculo) hay una mesa de madera y un banco.

The tower seems to be no more than an empty cylinder, with furniture inside. However, in this inhospitable place there is a man:

En esa celda circular, un hombre que se parece a mí escribe en caracteres que no comprendo un largo poema sobre un hombre que en otra celda circular escribe un poema sobre un hombre que en otra celda circular...

This passage is reminiscent of the story 'Las ruinas circulares', which begins with a quotation from Carroll, 'And if he left off

dreaming about you...'. ¹⁷ We dream the man as we read of him, he dreams another, who dreams another, and so on. The suggestion is that perhaps someone else dreams the reader. If this is the case, the dream referred to in the title of this text would be that of the individual's life, all of his experience of reality.

Although this man is isolated from human contact, he is writing - a form of human contact. He is not free from the chain of cause and effect mentioned in the previous poems; he is physically isolated, but still part of the universe. However, the connection he has with the other writers would be out of place in 'objective' reality, and fits only in a dream. What this poem suggests is that even in 'objective' reality there exist connections between people and actions which they are unaware of, but which exist none the less. ¹⁸ At the same time, the man in the cell looks like the poet who we are reading; he is writing about a man in a 'celda circular'; Borges is the dreamer of the action, and also the first man in the series of men who write this infinite poem. It could also be suggested that there were many other poets who prefigured Borges in earlier poems about the man in the cell: Quevedo, for example. The poem performs the role of allowing the reader to intervene in this series of poets. It is interesting that the dreamer, the poet, cannot understand the letters written in the tower although he understands the poem. This points to the idea of a universal poem, a vast intertext, which all poems are part of. It might also suggest a poetic archetype, which is written and rewritten in the language and form of its time, but which remains faithful to its archetype, independent of the words used. This idea is articulated in an earlier poem: 'Mateo, XXV, 30'. ¹⁹

The poem, like 'el proceso', is infinite; the poem is defined as 'largo' - the man in the poem has been waiting for a time when the dreamer begins to dream him. This suggests that the poet is not dreaming him on his own, but that he has been dreamed for some time already. The last line of the poem seems to seal the impenetrability of the events in the dream / poem:

El proceso no tiene fin y nadie podrá leer lo que los prisioneros escriben.

Here we have a definite end point, a conclusion: this contrasts with the previous sentence, which ends in dots to express the unending nature of the image. ²⁰ In this line we find alliteration on the sound /p/, which seems to emphasize that the man is a 'prisionero'; at this point the dream / poem seems like an allegory of the situation of the poet, any poet, who is together with all other writers performing a variant of an archetypal activity, literature, and who is connected to these other people although he may never have met them. In this poem the man in the tower is isolated, but he must have existed elsewhere first - he is old, he resembles the eighty year old Borges; the man is a prisoner of the urge to write. His poems are not really accessible to everyone; they are written in a symbolic language - in this poem the writing is indecipherable to the poet. He imagines what it means, he projects himself into the text, as does the reader of poetry. By intertextuality all poets are related, in the reader's mind, no matter how far apart they are physically or in time. In the same way, distances are annulled in dreams, as in the dream / poem. The poet is

both the man in the poem and the writer of the poem; in the images of this poem the poet expresses ideas which in objective terms are complex, but which in terms of a dream are simpler, more natural. Although the first man in the poem resembles the poet, we are not informed if the other men do; this suggests that they do not. The others may be different, related to an infinite number of other poets, some more immediately than others. This suggests that the poem explains the idea of intertextuality by using a dream image. Literature is a kind of dream; Borges talks of 'sueño' and 'sueño compartido'. Perhaps the latter is analogous with intertextuality. The poem, unread (asleep), might be self contained; but when it is read (awake), it becomes part of a vast intertext.

This image, of the poet communing with other writers via the text, is very similar to that employed in Quevedo's 'Desde la torre'. In that poem, the poet is reading; in the present one, he is writing. The speaker in Quevedo's poem writes the lines of his poem in the tower as well; like Borges, like the man in 'Un sueño', like the men in the man's poem, and those in theirs, Quevedo is a 'prisionero' in the circle formed by reading and writing, from which by definition the poet cannot escape. This is what the 'torre de piedra' represents: the circularity of literary expression, the unavoidable intertextual nature of poetry. Even although Quevedo escapes to 'estos desiertos', to a tower, and the man in 'Un sueño' is in a tower with neither doors or windows, neither can escape from the intertext that forms literature. The aridity of the desert in both poems cannot stop the fertility of the poet's mind; inspiration comes from inside the poet, perhaps, as may be the case here, from a dream.

In 'Un sueño' there are no doors or windows: in the next poem the poet talks of a dream he scarcely remembers, but in which there were 'muchas puertas'. In this poem the poet talks of forgetting a dream: were he able to remember it, he writes, 'sabría todas las cosas'. This preoccupation about what is lost with a dream is the subject of an earlier poem also entitled 'El sueño', where we read:

Si el sueño fuera (como dicen) una
Tregua, un puro reposo de la mente,
¿Por qué, si te despiertan bruscamente,
Sientes que te han robado una fortuna? ²¹

In the same poem, dreams are called 'reflejos / Truncos de los tesoros de la Sombra'. Dreams, by their elusiveness, have acquired a value; people try to predict the future with their images, people write literature based on experiences they have had in dreams. Dreaming is where we experience what cannot otherwise be experienced. It is the place where we live in a fictional world.

In 'Al olvidar un sueño' ²², Borges completes the trilogy begun with 'El sueño': having established the magical nature of sleep and dreams, the 'tarea mágica' of the night, and having given us a rich example of what we may perceive in a dream, he now turns to the destiny of most dreamt experiences: 'el olvido'.

The poem begins:

En el alba dudosa tuve un sueño.
Sé que en el sueño había muchas puertas.
Lo demás lo he perdido. La vigilia
ha dejado caer esta mañana
esa fábula íntima, que ahora
no es menos inasible que la sombra

de Tiresias o que Ur de los Caldeos
o que los corolarios de Spinoza. 23

Waking has distanced the poet from his dream in the same way as time has from the distant chronology he mentions; in 'Poema', the waker returns to the world of chronology, of time, of cause and effect. Here, the poet does the same. What Spinoza said or wrote may be within our reach, but not the implications of his work, which are infinite and incomplete even if we were able to trace them. What distances the poet from his dream is 'La vigilia'; what distances him from the past is the 'ahora'. In these lines the past is likened to a dream. The dream itself happened in the past. The title of the poem immediately places the dream in the past of the poet; it is the loss of the dream which concerns us here, and not the presence of the dream. That the dream took place in the 'alba dudosa' suggests doubt as to the dream having taken place at all. However, the poet feels the loss of the dream, as he lies trying to remember it: 'Sigue la duda y la penumbra crece'. This line suggests that the poet is still in bed; on the other hand, he may have wondered about the dream all day, and be waiting for sleep and the dream to return, at nightfall.

In the next six lines we read what is a counterpart to the idea at the end of the poem, that if the poet could remember his dream he might be able to know everything. He talks of his life, exploring philosophy:

Me he pasado la vida delectando
los dogmas que aventuran los filósofos.

His wide reading of other writers' explorations of reality and the nature of the universe have not given him anything that could help in remembering the dream. It is lost; all the philosophical speculation accumulated over the ages cannot change this. The suggestion is that no matter how much Borges wonders, he shall never regain possession of his dream; he has it only as a gap in his memory. He contrasts his impotence in this situation with what God is able to do:

Es fama que en Irlanda un hombre dijo
que la atención de Dios, que nunca duerme,
percibe eternamente cada sueño
y cada jardín solo y cada lágrima. ²⁴

Here we have various levels: the poet writes of something he has heard and which he expects the reader to recognize ('Es fama...'). He includes himself with the reader; the anonymity of 'un hombre' includes the poet and the reader with this man. These are contrasted with God, who perceives equally man's dreams, actions, and emotions. We have again the image of 'lágrimas', used before in 'El sueño' in contrast to 'palabra humana'. Here the image which God perceives seems beyond words: he perceives dreams, emotions and 'cada jardín solo', man's acts. Whereas God perceives dreams, and everything that happens, man cannot. It is interesting that here we read 'Dios, que nunca duerme', which seems to contradict the idea expressed earlier in 'El ápice', 'Y la noche de Dios es infinita'. ²⁵ However, together these lines suggest that God neither dreams nor is awake, and knows neither night nor day: these things are of the world of cyclic time, while He exists in eternity, outside of any temporal reality.

In the final four lines of the poem, the poet expresses why he considers dreams to be such an important part of human experience, with alliteration on /s/, which recalls 'sueño', the poem's central idea:

Sigue la duda y la penumbra crece.
Si supiera qué ha sido de aquel sueño
que he soñado, o que sueño haber soñado,
sabría todas las cosas.

The first of these lines creates an impression of balance with the /s/ sound at either end of the line. At the same time, what the words suggest is that the change between night and day, which recurs, and which will recur again without the poet having learned anything about his dream. The word order also expresses this, by having verb - noun - conjunction - noun - verb, symmetrically. The idea of symmetry also points to the idea of impenetrability, a thing continues, a pattern emerges, but we do not get behind this pattern. The other three lines here also point to a similar situation: the result is that the dream within a dream is a possibility. If we consider this and reread the poem, it is possible that the poet - who speaks to us in a kind of dream, a poem - is writing of something he only has dreamt that he has learned, and so on. We begin to clarify the complexity and impenetrability of the situation, just as in the case of time.

In the three poems about dreams, we see perhaps the difference between man and God: God does not forget, 'percibe eternamente cada sueño/ y cada jardín solo y cada lágrima'. We see this also in the eternal vigilance of the Angel in 'El Ángel'; we then have two

parallel realities. The divine, eternal, unsleeping one; the cyclic, fragmented imperfect vigilance of the human condition. It is with this dual distinction that 'Poema' opens this group of poems; immediately, the reader is aware of the duality of our experience, what we dream or glimpse and what we feel sure of, what the 'sueño compartido' of the earlier poem 'Al despertar' confirms when we wake each day. In 'Poema' we are aware of either of the two worlds at any time, whether we are awake or asleep (or: reading or not reading poetry). In 'El Ángel' we see both worlds coexisting simultaneously, and in the poems specifically about dreams, Borges explores what we may experience of what we can sense but not perceive as we do in objective reality.

In 'Poema' there is the dual image of a poem seemingly wakening the reader together with the idea of the poet waking someone up, perhaps the reader; poetry is the wakeful state, whilst its absence is equated with sleep. In the next poem, which is based on a verse from Dante's Inferno, 'Inferno, V, 129', ²⁶ the characters are reading - taking part in a dream, we might say - and they wake up to the realization that they are the characters in the book, because they, too, are lovers. This poem combines the ideas about literature found in 'Poema' with the ideas about dreams in the three dream poems, and also with the religious idea of God dreaming our world, from 'El Ángel':

Dejan caer el libro, porque ya saben
que son las personas del libro.
(Lo serán de otro, el máximo,
pero eso qué puede importarles.)

The title of the poem is ironic in that the two people in it seem to be very happy, more as if they were in Heaven. The quotation refers to the couple Paolo and Francesca beginning their fall to Hell; it is therefore fitting that the couple allow the book to fall. They, in a sense, give way to temptation. Dropping the book, stopping reading, is equated with evil, and reading with good. This is another parallel to the idea in 'Poema' of reading being wakefulness, as opposed to sleep. Immediately, the two people are the couple in Dante's text. They are also in 'el máximo', reality. In turn the reader, in a sense, becomes these people as well. The poem is marked by a lack of overtly poetic language; this may point to what is perhaps the redundancy of literature after it has served its purpose in the first line: the couple see themselves and immediately drop the book. It has pointed to something in their reality and having done this they need the book no more:

Ahora son Paolo y Francesca,
no dos amigos que comparten
el sabor de una fábula.
Se miran con incrédula maravilla.
Las manos no se tocan.
Han descubierto el único tesoro;
han encontrado al otro.

The plainness of the words used heightens the central image of the poem, that of the two friends realizing that they are the people in the text; the simplicity of the language conveys the directness of that experience. While the characters in the poem feel the sensation of being the people in the text so strongly that they need the book - physically - no more, here the simplicity of the poem dispenses with a

complex structure, in a similar way. The plain language and the naturalness of the couple's actions contrast with the artifice of the book. The couple need not even touch; their identification is complete. They have found their 'otro'. The 'otro' may either be the couple finding each other or the couple finding the couple in the book.

At this point, the poet brings in irony: for the complete identification of the couple with Paolo and Francesca, their lives would have to include the rest of Inferno: they do not. However, this does not deter the couple from their misreading / selective reading of Dante. Rather, as we read in 'Funes el memorioso', 'Pensar es olvidar diferencias, es generalizar, abstraer', and this is what the couple have done. ²⁷ Borges goes on to mention what they have omitted, but agrees with their selective reading:

No traicionan a Malatesta
porque la traición requiere un tercero
y sólo existen ellos dos en el mundo.
Son Paolo y Francesca y también la reina y su amante
y todos los amantes que han sido
desde aquel Adán y Eva
en el pasto del Paraíso.

The couple are archetypal lovers and represent all lovers. The poet endorses their realization; he might argue that the couple are not the characters in the book because of their circumstances, but he chooses to ignore this. In the final section of the poem, the poet stands back from his characters (which are not his, but archetypal) to comment on their experience:

Un libro, un sueño les revela
que son formas de un sueño que fue soñado
en tierras de Bretaña.
Otro libro hará que los hombres,
sueños también, los sueñen.

Here again we have the repetition of /s/ and words derived from the word 'soñar' which also marked the previous poem. This again underlines the endlessness of the dreamer's universe, the dream within a dream illustrated perhaps most overtly in 'Un sueño'. We also find the formulation 'un libro, un sueño', which emphasizes and restates the point made in 'Poema'. We also find an allusion to La cifra in the final line: this book and this poem has made the reader dream the couple. At the same time, the reader of this book is also part of another book, 'el máximo' - this could be a dream dreamt by God. In a sense the levels on which the characters in the poem and the reader live are not different. All are essentially dreamers - or readers.

The last poem of this group, 'Correr o ser' ²⁸, concerns 'los arquetipos platónicos', according to the 'notas'. ²⁹ In the lecture on 'La pesadilla' in Siete noches, Borges relates platonic archetypes to the idea that 'La vida es sueño', when he talks of Virgil's Aeneid:

Para Virgilio, el mundo verdadero era posiblemente el mundo platónico, el mundo de los arquetipos. Eneas pasa por la puerta de marfil porque entra en el mundo de los sueños - es decir, en lo que llamamos vigilia. ³⁰

Aeneas had to choose between either the 'puerta de marfil' or the 'puerta de cuerno'; one led to false dreams, the other to prophetic ones. When Aeneas came back from the world of dreams he entered the

reader's world and this itself was a dream, as for Virgil ultimate reality was the world of platonic archetypes. This world could only, therefore, be reached through dreams. The contrast between the temporal world and the eternal world of archetypes is the theme of 'Correr o ser'.

In the title we can see the two worlds: the changing, temporal 'correr' and the unchanging, eternal 'ser'. The choice of words in the first line alludes to archetypes: the first word, 'fluye', is related to the German word for river, 'Fluß', itself derived from 'fließen', to flow. The poet wonders if there are two rivers, one existing in the temporal world and the other as an archetype:

¿Fluye en el cielo el Rhin? ¿Hay una forma
universal del Rhin, un arquetipo,
que invulnerable a ese otro Rhin, el tiempo,
dura y perdura en un eterno Ahora
y es raíz de aquel Rhin, que en Alemania
sigue su curso mientras dicto el verso?

Here is the idea that several simulacra of the 'Rhin' exist, on distinct levels. There are words linked by sound and by position on the page: 'Ahora' and 'Alemania'; the repetition of 'Rhin' also underlines the idea of plurality. This repetition also points to the idea that beyond both rivers lies a single archetype. In these lines there is alliteration on /r/, again underlining the idea of repetition and archetypes. The assonance of 'dura y perdura' emphasizes the eternal nature of the archetype, comparing and contrasting it with the poet's temporality, 'mientras dicto el verso'.

The poet then goes on to develop the idea of platonic archetypes and offers another idea:

Así lo conjeturan los platónicos:
así no lo aprobó Guillermo de Occam.
Dijo que Rhin (cuya etimología
es *rinan* o correr) no es otra cosa
que un arbitrario apodo que los hombres
dan a la fuga secular del agua
desde los hielos a la arena última.
Bien puede ser. Que lo decidan otros. 31

William of Occam is mainly famous on account of the rhetorical device known as 'Ockham's razor', his idea that we should exclude anything extraneous from an argument. His interpretation of 'Rhin' is different. He excludes the supposition implied in the Platonists' belief in forms and archetypes, and bases his argument on demonstrable proof. The supposition of the Platonists is expressed here by 'conjeturan', whilst the logic and rationalism of Occam is expressed by 'aprobó'. While the Platonists believe that the river and the word are both temporal forms of an archetypal 'Rhin', Occam said that in place of thinking in terms of archetypes and simulacra, we should think in terms of natural phenomena and man's naming of these. There is a river: man has given it an arbitrary name, which - ironically and logically - derives from the Old German word '*rinan*', to run, to flow. Occam's argument suggests that man has made a symbol out of what he has perceived. The Platonists have the idea that there exists an eternal 'rhin': this corresponds to the 'ser' in the title. Occam, on the other hand, is implied in the title by 'correr', because he believes that the river has logically been named after its primary

action: it flows. Although the poet gives us both these ideas, he is not interested in deciding which is the true one: 'Bien puede ser. Que lo decidan otros'.

What really concerns the poet in this poem is the problem of identity. If the Rhine is both an archetype and a simulacrum, which is the 'realer' of the two, and what are the implications for the poet? In the final part of this poem the poet goes on to question his concept of identity:

¿Seré apenas, repito aquella serie
de blancos días y de negras noches
que amaron, que cantaron, que leyeron
y padecieron miedo y esperanza
o también habrá otro, el yo secreto
cuya ilusoria imagen, hoy borrada
ha interrogado en el ansioso espejo?
Quizá del otro lado de la muerte
sabré si he sido una palabra o alguien.

He wonders if there is more to his identity than the sum of his experiences; this is parallel to the discussion of whether the Rhine is its temporal form solely or an archetype as well: whether it is a case of 'correr' or of 'ser'. The question of identity can be seen as a simulacrum of the same archetype as 'Rhin'. The poet is the same as the river; however, he has a consciousness and can wonder about these things while the river, as far as we know, cannot. Death is the poet's only hope of finding his true identity. Until then he is stuck in a series of repetitions: this is emphasized by the word order of 'blancos días y negras noches', and the list of verbs, with the actions attributed not to the poet but to his days, his routine. This creates a distance between who we perceive as the 'real' poet and his

actions, which belong not to him but to his temporal form. However, in these lines we read the temporal, verbal poet, as he strives toward something of which he has only a vague idea, 'cuya ilusoria imagen, hoy borrada / he interrogado en el ansioso espejo'. What he searches for is an absence of his temporal self; this search, however, is ironic as, whether he has been a 'palabra o alguien', both these things belong to the material world. These words, 'palabra o alguien', suggest the poet as both a poetic persona and as a man. Much as the temporal world is inescapable (until death when it becomes irrecoverable), a dream may be inescapable to the dreamer (and irrecoverably lost when he awakes).

What the poet does with the idea of 'sueño' in this group of poems is use it as a type of consciousness which although part of everyday existence is also, in a way, outwith that experience. It is seen as an alternative state of mind, where all our conceptions of the universe may be left behind until we waken and rejoin the 'sueño compartido'. It is the state where we may perceive the imperceptible: platonic archetypes, or the 'prisionero' in 'Un sueño', for example. Although the type of 'logic' found in dreams may have little in common with the logic of the wakeful, the poet believes that we can learn from dreams. Unfortunately, the barrier of forgetfulness and oblivion which separates us from our dreams prevents us from having more than a glimpse of what dreams may have shown us.

Notes

- ¹ 'La pesadilla' is found in SN pp. 33 - 54.
- ² Ana María Barrenechea Borges the Labyrinth Maker New York: NYUP, 1965, p. 126.
- ³ 'Poema' LaC pp. 65 - 66. The second line of this poem recalls a line from 'Otro poema de los dones' OP pp. 267 - 269, 'Por la mañana, que nos depara la ilusión de un principio'.
- ⁴ Di Giovanni et al, Borges on Writing London: Allen Lane, 1974. p. 81.
- ⁵ OP p. 323.
- ⁶ For example, see 'Arte poética' OP pp. 161 - 162.
- ⁷ 'La luna' OP p. 486.
- ⁸ OP p. 216.
- ⁹ LaC p. 53.
- ¹⁰ LaC p. 63.
- ¹¹ 'El Ángel' LaC p. 67.
- ¹² According to the Diccionario de la Academia Madrid: Espasa Calpe SA, 1984 p. 739, a 'histrión' is 'El que representaba disfrazado en la comedia o tragedia antigua.'
- ¹³ OP p. 319.
- ¹⁴ 'El sueño' LaC p. 69.
- ¹⁵ 'Un sueño' LaC p. 71.
- ¹⁶ 'Desde la torre' Quevedo (Borges ed.): Antología poética Madrid: Alianza - Emecé, 1985. p. 24.

¹⁷ PC II p. 435.

¹⁸ This was part of an earlier poem, 'El tercer hombre'. La cifra pp. 59 - 60.

¹⁹ 'Mateo, XXV, 30' OP pp. 194 - 195.

²⁰ For a study of the infinite regression in this poem, see Mireya Camurati, 'Borges, Dunne y la regresión infinita'. Revista Iberoamericana no 141 (1987) pp. 925 - 931.

²¹ 'El sueño' OP p. 272.

²² 'Al olvidar un sueño' LaC p. 73.

²³ Ur was an 'important city of ancient southern Mesopotamia (Sumer), situated about 140 miles (225 kilometres) southeast of the site of Babylon and about 10 miles west of the present bed of the Euphrates river' according to Encyclopaedia Britannica Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1985, Micropaedia vol 12 pp. 192 - 193. According to J Lemprière Lemprière's Classical Dictionary London: George Routledge and Sons, 1879 (p. 141), Chaldea was 'a country of Asia between the Euphrates and Tigris. Its capital is Babylon, whose inhabitants were famous for knowledge of astrology.' Both the mention of Ur and that of the 'caldeos' point to the ancient Middle East, to the birthplace of civilization, Mesopotamia. Tiresias, on the other hand, is a figure from Classical civilization. According to Lemprière (op. cit., pp. 618 - 619), he was 'a celebrated prophet of Thebes, son of Everus and Chariclo'. When he was a youth he saw 'two serpents in the act of copulation on Mount Cylene'. He attempted to separate them with a stick and 'found himself suddenly changed into a girl'. Seven years later the same thing happened again, and he returned to being a man. Jupiter and Juno had wanted to find out whether men or women

enjoyed sex more - as Tiresias replied that it was women, agreeing with Jupiter, Juno blinded him. As a consolation, Jupiter 'bestowed upon him the gift of prophesy, and permitted him to live seven times more than the rest of men.' Like Borges, Tiresias lived long and was blind. While Tiresias was given the gift of prophesy, Borges was given the gift of poetry.

24 The Irish man could be either the philosopher Berkeley or Scotus Erigena: see Atlas pp. 14 - 16, 'Ireland'.

25 'El ápice' LaC p. 63.

26 'Inferno, V, 129' LaC pp. 75 - 76. Dante's original verse is: 'Soli eravamo e senza alcun sospetto' / 'we were alone and without any dread'. La divina commedia vol. 1: "Inferno". New York: S F Vanni, 1949, p. 52 (Italian), p. 53 (English).

27 PC I, p. 484.

28 'Correr o ser' LaC p. 77.

29 'Unas notas' LaC p. 107.

30 SN p. 41.

31 Guillermo de Occam was 'William of Occam, the *Doctor Singularis et Invincibilis* (d. 1349), the great Franciscan Scholastic philosopher, was probably born at Ockham, Surrey, *Occam* being the latinized form of that name.' His contribution to thought was '*Occam's Razor: Enta non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem* (entities ought not to be multiplied except from necessity). These exact words do not appear in Occam's works but the principle expressed occurs in several other forms. Occam's razor cuts away superfluities.' (Ivor E Evans ed. Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable London: Cassel 1981, p. 801.)

The sixth group of poems:

'La fama' to 'El bastón de laca'

In the sixth section of La cifra, the characters in the poem find their existence justified by their activities and their work. Their identity is in their actions. In the first poem the poet considers what his own work has brought him, 'La fama'.¹ The poem is written as a single stanza enumerating the poet's memories. In the first line the poet describes what he considers in other poems to be the central theme of his life:

Haber visto crecer a Buenos Aires, crecer y declinar.

Buenos Aires, the city of his birth and the place which in many poems, notably in 'New England, 1967', he claims spiritually never to have left, is the starting point for this discussion of his fame.² He goes on to recount childhood memories, suggesting the poem 'Buenos Aires, 1899' from Historia de la noche:

Recordar el patio de tierra y la parra, el zaguán y
el aljibe.
Haber heredado el inglés, haber interrogado el sajón.
Profesar el amor del alemán y la nostalgia del latín.
Haber conversado en Palermo con un viejo asesino.³

This evocation of the young child's early life in the family home in Buenos Aires leads into images of the child's (and later the poet's)

interest in language, fostered by his father. We read the poet in Spanish, while he writes of his 'other' language, English, which was given him by his Grandmother and Father. It is striking that among the first memories chosen by the poet to represent himself here we find those of language. However, whereas English and Spanish were discovered by the poet in his early childhood, it was not until the onset of his blindness - which he inherited from his father - that he found 'el sajón'. Language has been a recurring theme and marker in the poet's life. English and Anglosaxon have been both the poet's origins and his destination. His ancestors spoke them and now, late in his life, he has returned to them. The poet's geographic environment is a circumstance; the poet traces his (poetic) lineage through language further back, to its European origins. Beyond having inherited English, which attaches the poet to the culture which belongs to that linguistic group, and having explored Anglosaxon, its ancestor, he has had contact with related languages. He tells us that he has professed a love of German and a nostalgia for Latin; from the passive, impressionistic character found in the opening two and a half lines, that is until '...el inglés', we move to a character who not only has felt things, but expresses them. Feeling a love for German and a nostalgia for latin is not the same as 'professing' these feelings. Similarly, the idea of the poet conversing with a murderer in a poor quarter of Buenos Aires is different from his passively viewing the city 'crecer y declinar', although the two activities are not mutually exclusive. The next lines of the poem are also dedicated to activities external to the poet:

Agradecer el ajedrez y el jazmín, los tigres y el
hexámetro.
Leer a Macedonio Fernández con la voz que fue suya.
Conocer las ilustres incertidumbres que son la
metafísica.
Haber honrado espadas y razonablemente querer la
paz.
No ser codicioso de islas.

Here we find some of the poet's obsessions, to be found in his work; he mentions his friend, the poet Macedonio Fernández, who for Borges was a philosopher and metaphysician * and the metaphysical quest which has been at the heart of his poetry. We also find his reverence for the idea of the military, and ironically his tendency to pacifism, mixed with reason: 'razonablemente querer la paz'. This leads into what might be read as an allusion to the Falklands War, but for the fact that the work was published in December 1981, before the islands were invaded in May 1982. However, the Falkland Islands had long been an issue in Argentine politics, and as Borges in this poem links himself with England and Europe rather than with Buenos Aires, this line is perhaps an allusion to the question of the Falklands. He is both European and Argentine and here seems to say that the "quarrel" over the Falklands Islands is irrelevant. He sees himself as a person culturally linked with Europe who lives in Buenos Aires; he has seen Buenos Aires wax and wane. This image of ephemerality contrasts with the permanence of his European cultural models.

In the first lines there is a growing image of the poet's alienation within Buenos Aires. In the next lines, he addresses himself to the literary element in his life; he expresses this as a series of limitations, of failings:

No haber salido de mi biblioteca.
Ser Alonso Quijano y no atreverme a ser Don Quijote.
Haber enseñado lo que no sé a quienes sabrán más
que yo

It is ironic that a poem concerned with the fame a poet has earned through his poetry should include lines such as these; however, they help convey an idea which is central to the poem. The poet feels unworthy of the fame bestowed on him, and finds it incomprehensible. The poet has read and lived through literature, as did Alonso Quijano, but he has not had the bravery to be as extreme in his belief in literature as was Don Quijote. The enumeration in this poem is an attempt to discover the origin of the poetry and of the fame of the poet, but it is futile; it points to the mysterious nature of poetry and the fame which it brings. Borges achieved fame not only on account of his poems and prose works, but also, perhaps to a greater extent, on account of his controversial political views and the way in which the media 'packaged' him. Emir Rodríguez Monegal calls this phenomenon "'Borges'".⁵ The first line here reminds us of the consciously 'literary' nature of Borges' work; it also reminds us that the character we read in the poem does not exist outside of the confines of the library, or the book, apart from the existence granted the literary persona in the minds of his readers, a branch of 'la fama'. The poet often writes of the importance to him of his father's library, and it is probably of this first library in the family home that he writes. The things he discovered there were to follow him throughout his life: tigers, encyclopaedias, mythology, philosophy and so on. The distance afforded him from the reality of Buenos Aires by

the library gave him a romantic idea of the world of the compadrito, a frequent feature in his work. In this poem, for example, we read of the poet having conversed with a 'viejo asesino'. We also read here of the poet's career as a professor of literature, and this remark seems to echo his idea stated in Siete noches that literature cannot be taught, but has to be felt. ⁶ It is possible that his students shall eventually know more than he about literature as they will be able to read and know the literature of the future, while Borges' age, blindness and death prevented him from doing so. At the same time, these lines are indicative of an excessive and perhaps false modesty as far as literature is concerned, something which was a major element of the personality of "Borges".

In the next lines, the poet returns to literature:

Agradecer los dones de la luna y de Paul Verlaine.
Haber urdido algún endecasílabo.
Haber vuelto a contar antiguas historias.
Haber ordenado en el dialecto de nuestro tiempo las
cinco o seis metáforas.
Haber eludido sobornos.

He mentions the 'dones de la luna', the subject of other poems he has written, and one which he almost always links with Virgil. Here we find it mentioned beside another poet, Verlaine. ⁷ The sensual poetry of Verlaine is placed beside the richness of the moon as a poetic image, it having perhaps symbolized all poetic imagery elsewhere in Borges' work, for example in 'La luna'. ⁸ These images are followed by images of austerity: they represent his later, austere, poetry. He sees his poetry as repetition of previous, greater poets' work; he

denies originality in the content of his poems, and claims it in respect of his presentation only. He claims to have avoided excess; his is the poetry of an ascetic. This is heightened by the contrast with Verlaine's sensual and innocent poetry. That the word used to express excess here also means 'bribes' suggests that the poet believed that poetic excess was an easier but less honest way to write poetry, as if the poet might be seeking effect rather than truth. On the other hand, as the primary subject of the poem is 'la fama', perhaps 'sobornos' refers to bribes, symbolizing the poet as a public figure attempting to maintain his integrity.

In the next lines, Borges reiterates the idea that although he is geographically rooted in Buenos Aires, spiritually he is a citizen of the world:

Ser ciudadano de Ginebra, de Montevideo, de Austin y
 (como todos los hombres) de Roma.
Ser devoto de Conrad.
Ser esa cosa que nadie puede definir: argentino.
Ser ciego.
Ninguna de esas cosas es rara y su conjunto me
 depara una fama que no acabo de comprender.

The poet expresses his alienation from Buenos Aires in terms of his being from many cities. In the prologue to Los conjurados, he concludes: 'Dicto este prólogo en una de mis patrias, Ginebra', for example. ♡ Borges tended to reject contemporary Buenos Aires in his later life. This is the subject of 'Buenos Aires':

He nacido en otra ciudad que también se llamaba
 Buenos Aires
(...) En aquel Buenos Aires, que me dejó, yo sería un
 extraño.

(...) Sé que los únicos paraísos no vedados al hombre
son los paraísos perdidos. ¹⁰

Just as the poet feels alienation in his city, he feels alienated by the incomprehensible fame which his work and his life, his experiences, 'su conjunto', have brought him.

In the next poem, we read a list of images of people carrying out everyday tasks; these tasks are seemingly unimportant, but they acquire value in the final line:

Esas personas, que se ignoran, están
salvando el mundo. ¹¹

These people are working toward a secret aim, unknowingly. The first four lines of the poem form an interesting pattern of overlapping images:

Un hombre que cultiva su jardín, como quería
Voltaire.
El que agradece que en la tierra haya música.
El que descubre con placer una etimología.
Dos empleados que en un café del Sur juegan un
silencioso ajedrez.

Here we read an enumeration of people performing various tasks: the first is both of a man working with nature and an allusion to Voltaire's well-known remark, 'Il faut cultiver son jardin', which suggests that we spend more time on practical things and less on philosophical speculation. ¹² The second line also juxtaposes artifice (music) with a down-to-earth sentiment, enjoyment. The third line also

presents a picture of intellectual enjoyment, as does the fourth, where the players are defined by their activities as 'empleados'. The next two lines show people in their work situations:

El ceramista que premedita un color y una forma.
El tipógrafo que compone bien esta página, que tal
vez no le agrada.

Both these activities are concerned with the realization of a previously designed product; this suggests how all the actions of the people in the poem contribute to the universe, 'salvando el mundo', perhaps in a predestined way.

The sense of perfectionism inherent in these two lines is mirrored in the next line, where a couple read:

Una mujer y un hombre que leen los tercetos
finales de cierto canto.

What they read is the fruit of the poet's labour, mixed with that of the 'tipógrafo' of the previous line, perhaps. This line could refer to the couple in 'Inferno, V, 129' ¹³, who, although they are not reading the actual 'tercetos finales' of Dante, could be said to be reading 'tercetos finales' in that when they read the verses mentioned in the title they drop the book and so stop reading, making the words they read 'finales'.

The title of 'Los justos' suggests the idea of the Elect, a Calvinist idea, and the poem as a whole almost suggests the Calvinist 'work ethic'. ¹⁴ While the people perform their activities, they save

the world: when Paolo and Francesca stop reading, the couple begin their descent to Hell. Acts save the world, while inactivity leads to Hell. With Paolo and Francesca, the poet moves from 'work' to literature. The poem takes on a philosophical, ethical tone:

El que acaricia a un animal dormido.
El que justifica o quiere justificar un mal que le
han hecho.
El que agradece que en la tierra haya Stevenson.
El que prefiere que los otros tengan razón.

Here we have images unrelated to 'work', but related to an ethical view of the world; images of compassion, modesty and humility. There is also a mutation of the second line of the poem, with only one change: 'música' is replaced by 'Stevenson'. ¹⁵ The biblical tone of these lines, which allude to the Beatitudes, recalls an earlier poem, 'Fragmentos de un evangelio apócrifo'. ¹⁶ The present poem ends in an all-enveloping idea,

Esas personas, que se ignoran, están salvando
el mundo.

The suggestion behind 'Los justos' is one borrowed not only from Calvin, but also from Zen Buddhism; the people in this poem, by acting out their part in the universe, are living out their karma. ¹⁷ We find in this poem the idea that a job well done is not only worthwhile in the material sense, for our actions have far-reaching consequences, which are mysterious.

The next poem concerns the poet's task. ¹⁸ In each text he writes,

he must be all the things in the poem; this is seen as a kind of deception, which is accentuated in the title, 'El cómplice':

Me crucifican y yo debo ser la cruz y los clavos.
Me tienden la copa y yo debo ser la cicuta.
Me engañan y yo debo ser la mentira.
Me incendian y yo debo ser el infierno.

The poet must take on fictional personae, for example Christ and Socrates. The repeated forms of the first four lines have the effect of emphasizing that in his poems the poet is both subject and object. This is heightened by the alliteration on the sound 'c' in the first line. We have a stoic image of the work of the poet, comparable to the stoic image of the soldiers to be found in 'El desierto'; however, this lack of differentiation between what is good and bad is extended in the next lines. All things are potential material for poetry to the poet:

Debo alabar y agradecer cada instante del tiempo.
Mi alimento es todas las cosas.
El peso preciso del universo, la humillación, el
júbilo.

The poet must praise each thing; he must be able to convert everything in the universe into poetry. Here again there is alliteration, on the sound /p/. The poem concludes with the idea that the poet's own personal sadness is also material for poetry:

Debo justificar lo que me hiere.
No importa mi ventura o mi desventura.
Soy el poeta.

This poem is a concise statement by the poet of what he feels about his work, about the occupation of being a poet. These feelings are divided into three sections: in the initial quatrain, he stresses that the poet must be able to be both subject and object. In the second and third parts of the poem, written as tercets, he stresses that everything is possible material for a poem, and then concludes that his happiness is not the issue in writing poetry, that his occupation as a poet is more important to him than his personal feelings. For example, there is an element of self-sacrifice in these lines: the poet is crucified on a cross of his own making, and burns in a hell created by his own fire. The title gives us the idea that the poet is not in charge of his activity, but that he is operating alongside another force. This force is probably, in Borges' case, the Muse. ¹⁹

In 'El cómplice', then, we have the idea of the man who is so committed to an occupation that he is willing to suffer on its behalf; in 'El espía', we find a similar case. ²⁰ The poem begins with the assumption that the work of the spy is seen as less brave and worthy of commemoration than the work of other defenders of the state, like soldiers. Because the work of the spy is based on deception, it is worth less:

En la pública luz de las batallas
Otros dan su vida a la patria
y los recuerda el mármol.

Here we find a balance achieved by the repetition of the sound /p/ at the start and finish of the first clause, in 'pública' and 'patria'; this is the most accentuated consonant in the title: 'El espía'. In

the next lines, the speaker, after having set up a hierarchy of honour in the first tercet, contrasts his own position:

Yo he errado oscuro por ciudades que odio.
Le di otras cosas.

The speaker's contribution to the 'patria' is characterized not by the sound /p/, but by /o/: 'oscuro', 'odio', 'otras'. It is suggested that the world at large sees the soldiers as the 'otros'. The spy, however, sees himself as one of these 'otros', equally valid in his contribution as those who 'recuerda el mármol'. He is characterized by the sound /o/, the sound which predominates in 'otros'. He is in the same business; his reward is unjust. There is ambiguity in the poem as we do not know for certain whether the spy is spying on behalf of, or on, the 'patria'. However, as he seems primarily to be comparing himself with the defenders of the 'patria' and expressing his dissatisfaction with the way he has not been rewarded by being remembered as a hero, he seems to have been working on behalf of the 'patria', not against it. At the close of the poem, nevertheless, his dissatisfaction seems to indicate that he may have considered working for the enemies of the country, in an attempt to 'get his own back' for the lack of reward he has received from the 'patria' for his difficult job.

Before this final line, he lists the things his work has involved:

Abjuré de mi honor,
traicioné a quienes me creyeron su amigo,
compré conciencias,

abominé del nombre de la patria.
Me resigno a la infamia.

These things are called 'otras cosas'; this links them to the activities of the 'otros' in the first tercet, and also to the spy, with the sound 'o'. The four things he has done seem hardly honourable, they seem deceptive, as did, in the previous poem, the task of the poet, who must be both the hero and the villain of the poem. The reader identifies the hero with himself and the poet, forgetting that the villain is also as much part of himself and the poet as the hero. It is interesting that this spy ends by resigning himself to 'la infamia'; this may allude to Borges' earlier book, Historia universal de la infamia, 1935. ²¹

In the next poem, 'El desierto', we return to the subject of the those 'que recuerda el mármol', to soldiers. ²² This poem is written in a rhapsodic style. It consists of three similar 'parables', linked by a repeated refrain which is varied on each occasion. The refrain is highlighted in the text, italicized. This is a device which Borges seldom uses, but also one which is used in the final poem of this volume. The poem uses the device in order for the 'parables' to be seen as variations of a single parable. The poem begins with the soldiers:

Antes de entrar en el desierto
los soldados bebieron largamente el agua de la
 cisterna.
Hierocles derramó en la tierra
el agua de su cántaro y dijo:
Si hemos de entrar en el desierto,
ya estoy en el desierto.
Si la sed va a abrasarme,

que ya me abrase.
Esta es una parábola. ²³

The term 'desierto', although being used in a literal sense, is also a metaphor for whatever mental state the soldiers are about to be put through. This becomes clearer in the next 'parábola':

Antes de hundirme en el infierno
los lictores del dios me permitieron que mirara una
rosa.
Esa rosa es ahora mi tormento
en el oscuro reino. ²⁴

For this man, the 'desert' is the state of being in hell, after having experienced beauty; because he has experienced beauty, hell is all the more painful. He experiences a sense of loss, of deprivation. It may be that Hell is that loss. There is also a kind of judgement here: the man has presumably been judged by the god referred to. The mention of 'lictors', the carriers of the symbols of justice in Roman law courts, heightens this. This introduces an image of weighing things up, the idea of balance; the soldiers will feel thirsty because they lack water, while the man will experience hell as a result of having been given the privilege of having seen the rose. ²⁵

Thirst and memories of beauty are images depicting the most archetypal sense of loss in the poem, the loss of love. This type of solitude is the most pervasive, and it is this kind that Borges reserves for the final variety of 'desierto' in the poem. The 'desierto' is, ultimately, solitude:

A un hombre lo dejó una mujer.
Resolvieron mentir un último encuentro.
El hombre dijo:
*Si debo entrar en la soledad
ya estoy solo.
Si la sed va a abrasarme,
que ya me abrase.*
Esta es otra parábola.
Nadie en la tierra
tiene el valor de ser aquel hombre.

Just as water is a frequent symbol of love in Lorca, for example, here Borges uses the image of the desert in order to express the idea of the loss of love, of deprivation and solitude. In all three cases of 'desierto' in the poem we find men facing up to loneliness or loss. Water evaporates in the desert; the rose is only given to the man in order to make his stay in hell more unbearable; the woman leaves the man. Hell is depicted as the a form of deprivation of what is regarded by the person as 'paradise'.

The poem 'El desierto' ends with the idea of loss. The last poem in this group, on the other hand, celebrates how a walking stick has added to the poet's life. In this poem, 'El bastón de Iaca', Borges is linked to the orient - and to the culture of María Kodama, the dediquée of the book and the poet's future wife - by virtue of a walking stick made by an unknown oriental craftsman. ²⁶ A work activity has again formed one of the links which in earlier poems have been seen as necessary to the universe. The poem is written in three sections: the first paragraph, which introduces the walking stick; the section of three paragraphs which record the poet's reactions, characterized by the repetition of 'lo miro'; and the final section, characterized by 'No es...', which records the poet's speculations on

the walking stick. The first part is objective, the second imaginative, and the third part is speculative, philosophical.

In the first paragraph the poet makes the point that the stick is noteworthy:

María Kodama lo descubrió. Pese a su autoridad y
a su firmeza, es curiosamente liviano. Quienes lo
ven lo advierten; quienes lo advierten lo recuerdan.

The stick possesses a mystery: no-one can understand how such a light walking stick can be so strong. The next part of the poem deals with the poet's imagination, with what the walking stick evokes in his mind:

Lo miro. Siento que es una parte de aquel
imperio, infinito en el tiempo, que erigió su muralla
para construir un recinto mágico.

The walking stick belongs to a strange magical world. In a later poem in the volume, 'Nihon', the poet talks of the Orient, concluding: 'En ese delicado laberinto no me fue dado penetrar.'²⁷ This 'delicado laberinto' is another version of the 'recinto mágico' which we find in the current poem. However, in this poem, the part of the Orient referred to is China, whereas in 'Nihon' it is Japan. Part of the charm of the orient for the poet is that it 'erigió su muralla', that it cultivated its otherness. This 'otherness' which the stick possesses contrasts with the immediateness and familiarity (Borges was almost always photographed with a walking stick; it was an essential

part of his 'image') with which the poet feels the walking stick in the final paragraph of this section of the poem:

Lo miro. Pienso en el artesano que trabajó
el bambú y lo dobló para que mi mano derecha pudiera
calzar bien en el puño.

The second paragraph of this middle section of the poem is a reiteration of the legend of Chuang Tzu; this is found, in almost the same words, in the 'notas' in Historia de la noche: '*Unos quinientos años antes de la Era Cristiana, alguien escribió: Chuang Tzu soñó que era una mariposa y no sabía al despertar si era un hombre que había soñado ser una mariposa o una mariposa que ahora soñaba ser un hombre.*' ²⁸ This note refers to a poem, 'Las causas', with a theme not unrelated to that of the present one. 'Las causas' is a long enumeration of seemingly unrelated events, which in the poet's opinion were necessary in order for the present to happen. The last lines are:

Se precisaron todas esas cosas
Para que nuestras manos se encontraran. ²⁹

The theme of 'El bastón de laca' is, according to the 'notas', 'los secretos vínculos que unen a todos los seres del mundo'. ³⁰ Whereas, in this poem, we are tracing one such 'vínculo', that between the poet and the craftsman, in 'Las causas' the poet enumerates many links; the two poems are similar, although they approach their theme from different angles. In addition to this, in the 'Notas' we find that 'El tercer hombre' is also comparable: we read the line

he establecido un vínculo.

and the poet considers that:

No hay un solo acto que no corra el albur
de ser una operación de la magia,
no hay un solo hecho que no pueda ser el primero
de una serie infinita. 31

In the context of 'El bastón de laca', the legend of Chuang Tzu introduces the idea of dreams and reality, the subject of other poems in La cifra; it also points to the eternal return and this in turn points to fatalism, the possibility of a predetermined universe. In the fourth paragraph, the poet reinforces this by suggesting that the walking stick might have been made for his own hand. The poem ends with the idea of a predetermined universe.

The connection between the poet and the craftsman having been established, the poet goes on to consider the latter in detail: he does not know whether the man is dead or alive, or what religion or philosophy he follows. That man will never see the poet. He is lost in the 'recinto mágico'; however,

Algo, sin embargo, nos ata.

Beyond the two men's differences, beyond the physical walking stick, the two men share the link formed by the walking stick. This is seen by the poet as evidence of the universe's complexity:

No es imposible que Alguien haya premeditado este
vínculo.

No es imposible que el universo necesite este vínculo.

The product of this craftsman's work has been to forge a secret link between the poet and himself, unknowingly.

In this group of poems, there are many images of aspects of work. Work is an activity where personal considerations, such as thirst in 'El desierto', are given less importance than the duty and obligation attached to a profession. This is also seen in 'El cómplice' and 'El espía'. Just as the links formed by people's activities are mysterious and secret, so is the poet's task: this is seen in 'La fama' and 'El cómplice'. The links which form the universe and are created by everyday actions like work are to the fore in 'Los justos' and 'El bastón de laca'. In this last poem we return to the idea of the poet as a physical person, external to the poetry, an idea with which 'La fama' is also concerned. In addition, this section of La cifra is also concerned with the way the poet's life has been affected by his work, which is an activity with consequences beyond what are normally considered its rewards.

Notes

¹ LaC pp. 79 - 80.

² OP p. 325.

³ OP p. 537.

⁴ See Rodríguez Monegal, Jorge Luis Borges: A Literary Biography New York: EP Dutton, 1978, pp. 170 - 172, for information on this influential figure.

⁵ See Emir Rodríguez Monegal, op. cit. pp. 433 - 440, 'The birth of "Borges"'.

⁶ SN pp. 107 - 108.

⁷ Verlaine is mentioned by Borges in at least two other poems: 'Límites' (OP p. 166), where we read 'Hay una línea de Verlaine que no volveré a recordar'; and in 'Otro poema de los dones' (OP p. 267), where he thanks God for, amongst other things, 'Verlaine, inocente como los pájaros.' Moreover, in SN, Borges quotes a famous line from Verlaine, 'De la musique avant toute chose' (p. 153).

Verlaine represents a sensual, not intellectual, type of poetry, musical and innocent.

⁸ OP p. 487.

⁹ LosC p. 14.

¹⁰ LaC pp. 37 - 38.

¹¹ LaC p. 81.

¹² For information regarding the place of Voltaire in Borges, see Michael Berveiller Le cosmopolitisme de Jorge Luis Borges Paris:

Didier, 1973, pp. 216 - 217.

¹³ LaC pp. 75 - 76.

¹⁴ Borges was buried in the same cemetery as Calvin, Plainpalais; see La Nación, Edición Internacional, June 23rd., 1986, pp. 1 & 3. In addition to this, Calvinism is an extreme form of Protestantism, with which the 'protestant work ethic' is linked.

¹⁵ See Borges, Introducción a la literatura inglesa, p. 51; also 'Borges y yo', PC II, pp. 347 - 348: "Me gustan los relojes de arena, los mapas, la tipografía del siglo XVIII, las etimologías, el sabor del café y la prosa de Stevenson..." It is worth noting that Stevenson is the only other author to be mentioned in this highly significant piece apart from Spinoza.

¹⁶ OP pp. 356 - 357.

¹⁷ Borges' comment on 'la ética' and Stevenson in the prologue to Elogio de la Sombra is worth noting: "... dos temas nuevos: la vejez y la ética. Ésta, según se sabe, nunca dejó de preocupar a cierto amigo muy querido que la literatura me ha dado, a Robert Louis Stevenson. Una de las virtudes por las cuales prefiero las naciones protestantes a las de tradición católica es su cuidado de la ética." (OP, p. 316). The mention of Stevenson in the present poem, then, strengthens the possibility that it is a poem about the 'work ethic'. For information on Borges' ideas about karma, see Borges: 'El budismo', in SN, pp. 77 - 97.

¹⁸ LaC p. 83.

¹⁹ See SN, pp. 99-121: 'La poesía'

²⁰ This poem is also included in La rosa profunda, Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1975, p. 60. There we find the poem in its present form

apart from a subtle change in the final line. Instead of 'Me resigno a la infamia' we read 'Me resigné a la infamia'.

²¹ In that book, Borges celebrates the idea of infamy. Here he seems to be celebrating the interesting idea that things normally considered 'bad', for example the deception employed by the spy, are 'good' in other situations. A similar idea, occurs in 'Tres versiones de Judas' from Ficciones, PC I pp. 515 - 524, where without Judas' treason, Christ would not have been crucified and consequently would not have become the Messiah.

²² LaC pp. 87 - 88.

²³ Hierocles was, according to Lemprière's Classical Dictionary, London: George Routledge and sons, 1879, p. 275: 'a persecutor of the christians under Diocletian, who pretended to find inconsistencies in Scripture, and preferred the miracles of Thyaneus to those of Christ.' It is noteworthy that the literary form most associated with Christ, the parable, is used in this context. For a study of Borges' short stories and Christ's use of the parable see J. D. Crossman, Raid on the Articulate: Comic Eschatology in Jesus and Borges, New York: Harper and Row, 1976. On the other hand, in Sir Paul Harvey, Oxford Companion to English Literature, Oxford: OUP, 1969, we find Hierocles to be 'the name of several philosophers and writers of the early centuries of our era, among them the author, probably in the 4th. cent., of facetious moral verses, a translation of which was absurdly attributed to Dr. Johnson.' It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that in 'A cierta isla' we find a reference to Samuel Johnson.

²⁴ This could refer to the experience of Giambattista Marino, who sees the archetypical rose on his deathbed in 'Una rosa amarilla',

PC II, pp. 329-330. Also, the illustration by Gustavo Doré, in SN p. 75, of 'La visión del Empíreo o la Rosa Mística' which he drew for an edition of Dante's Paraíso repeats the idea that Paradise may be symbolized in the beauty of a rose.

²⁵ The theme of the rose which seems to outlast its viewer and its physical state is present in many of Borges' texts, notably in the poem 'Una rosa y Milton' (OP, p.213), and in the story 'La rosa de Paracelso' Veinticinco Agosto 1983 y otros cuentos, Madrid: Siruela, 1983: pp. 19 - 25. The rose as an infinite symbol is the theme of 'Blake': LaC p. 47.

²⁶ LaC p. 89.

²⁷ LaC pp. 103 - 104.

²⁸ OP p. 559.

²⁹ OP pp. 552 - 553.

³⁰ LaC p. 107.

³¹ LaC pp. 59 - 60.

The seventh group of poems:

'A cierta isla' to 'Nihon'

In Borges at eighty, Borges states:

All poetry consists in feeling things as strange, while all rhetoric consists in thinking of them as quite common, as obvious

In this section of La cifra, the poet concentrates on the puzzling nature of reality. For the poet, the main fascination of this theme is its insolvability:

I think of the world as a riddle. And the one beautiful thing about it is that it can't be solved. ' 1

The first poem is 'A cierta isla'. 2 The poem is in three parts: lines 1 - 7, lines 8 - 30, and lines 31 - 34. Besides listing a series of images, 'símbolos', which epitomize England for the poet, the poem also contains a discussion on how to write a poem on the 'cierta isla'. The first seven lines are made up of a list of things the poet discounts:

¿Cómo invocarte, delicada Inglaterra?
Es evidente que no debo ensayar
la pompa y el estrépito de la oda,
ajena a tu pudor.
No hablaré de tus mares, que son el Mar,

ni del imperio que te impuso, isla íntima,
el desafío de los otros.

Here we have an allusion to what Borges sees as an essential part of English literature: 'Lo típico de Inglaterra es el *understatement*, es el decir un poco menos de las cosas.' ³ The poet decides to avoid writing in an declamatory style, as this would not fit in with his idea of England. The third sentence alludes to the British Empire and its demise following the end of World War 2; here, as in the title, we find an allusion to an earlier poem, 'A cierta sombra, 1940'. ⁴ In the first seven lines there is an image of England tinged with compassion for a once great power, which although powerful is characterized by restraint. This civilized image is continued in the second part of the poem where the literary image introduced by the mention of the 'oda' in the second line prevails.

This part of the poem also contains a commentary on itself: the poet begins by categorizing what he is about to enumerate as 'símbolos':

Mencionaré en voz baja unos símbolos:
Alicia, que fue un sueño del Rey Rojo,
que fue un sueño de Carroll, que soy un sueño,
el sabor del té y de los dulces,
un laberinto en el jardín,
un reloj de sol,
un hombre que extraña (y que a nadie dice que
extraña)
el Oriente y las soledades glaciales
que Coleridge no vio
y que cifró en palabras precisas,

Here, Borges eulogizes English Literature. The mention of Carroll ⁵ introduces the idea of fantastic literature and the idea of life as a dream. This idea is central to the set of poems earlier in the book about dreams. ⁶ At the same time, the repetition of 'un sueño' emphasizes the extent to which the reader, and by extension the poet, is captivated by the text. For him, England is a text rather than a physical place. Following this, there are images of what might be termed civilized behaviour, for example afternoon tea in a garden. ⁷ There is also the image of summer weather in the sun dial. In line 14 there is an allusion to Kipling, who wrote of the East in terms of the West: 'se impuso la tarea de revelar a sus distraídos compatriotas la existencia del dilatado Imperio Británico.' ⁸ The next image is of Coleridge, a blind poet who, like Milton, is part of what emerges in Borges' essay 'La ceguera' as a tradition of blind poets which begins with Homer and includes Borges himself. ⁹ The alliteration of 'palabras precisas' emphasizes that Borges considers Coleridge's writing to be of a high quality.

The second part of the poem continues:

el ruido de la lluvia, que no cambia, ¹⁰
la nieve en la mejilla,
la sombra de la estatua de Samuel Johnson,
el eco de un laúd que perdura
aunque ya nadie pueda oírlo,
el cristal de un espejo que ha reflejado
la mirada ciega de Milton,
la constante vigilia de una brújula,
el Libro de los Mártires,
la crónica de oscuras generaciones
en las últimas páginas de una Biblia,
el polvo bajo el mármol,
el sigilo del alba.

In the first of these lines there are allusions to the changeable weather typical of the British Isles. In this part of the poem we find 'soledades glaciales', a 'reloj de sol', and then images of rain and snow. Rain, 'que no cambia' is seen as unchanging, essential. The mention of Samuel Johnson's statues, and a possible allusion to William Drummond continue the literary theme. ¹¹ Although the lute can be heard by no-one, it continues in the words of the poet. Just as the poetry has outlasted the lute's sound, the mirror reflecting Milton's gaze has outlasted Milton. The 'brújula' is perhaps an allusion to Greenwich, from where longitude and latitude are measured. Lines 26 - 28 allude to the post-reformation religious tradition of England; the Book of Martyrs is a book about people persecuted because they were against Rome ¹², whilst in 'El evangelio según Marcos' ¹³, we read of a tradition in the British Isles, that of the family Bible. Line 29 seems to epitomize a sense of the past, with the image of the remains of a body in a tomb. This sense of the past was, according to Borges, only felt by Kipling in Europe ¹⁴; perhaps to an Argentinian from the New World, this sense of the past is lacking in South America. The 'sigilo del alba' recalls the earlier 'A cierta sombra, 1940' where images of darkness prevail. The 'isla' is an image of light amidst a sea of darkness; in the earlier poem, England represents civilized values against the forces of darkness, 'el jabalí alemán y la hiena italiana'. In that poem, England's best defences against the Italians and Germans were in De Quincey's dreams: 'Que por sus laberintos de tiempo/ Erren sin fin los que odian.'

In the present poem, England comprises a mixture of civilized behaviour, changeable weather, and literary tradition. For Borges,

the literary tradition is perhaps the most important part of England.

The poem ends with the poet addressing 'England', his personal concept of that country:

Aquí estamos los dos, isla secreta.
Nadie nos oye.
Entre los dos crepúsculos
compartiremos en silencio cosas queridas.

The poet talks to his personal 'isla secreta'; his relationship with it is in his own mind. It belongs to the world of dreams and literature. 'Entre los dos crepúsculos', he shall sleep and dream of England. This 'Inglaterra' belongs to Borges' imagination, but is no less real on account of that; it is his personal experience, his personal truth, what 'Inglaterra' is for him.

The next poem, 'El go' ¹⁵, is also about something which the poet seems to possess and which ultimately belongs to something greater than him. The poet has his personal view of England, but this is only part of a greater reality; here the poet holds in his hand a 'pequeño disco' used to play Go, but fails to penetrate the labyrinth from which it has come to him.

The poem is in two parts, marked by repetition of the first line; the first part is itself divided in two, lines 1 - 5 and lines 6 -11.

The poem begins with a date:

Hoy, nueve de setiembre de 1978,
tuve en la palma de la mano un pequeño disco
de los trescientos sesenta y uno que se requieren
para el juego astrológico del go,
ese otro ajedrez del Oriente.

The ninth of September 1978 fell on a Saturday. This points us towards a poem from Historia de la Noche with a similar tone, 'Un sábado'.¹⁶ In both poems we find the poet in a contemplative mood of resignation. However, the mention of the date brings in the idea of cycles: each year relates to the cycle of years, each day to a cycle of days, and each month to a cycle of months. Similarly, the 'pequeño disco' is round, like a cycle, and the number of discs used in the game is roughly equal to the number of days in the year. In addition to this, go is described as an oriental version of chess; the connection between variants of a single essential thing is similar to the relationship between the elements of a cycle. To emphasize the cyclic image of months and years and chess games (which obey rules and in a sense follow a predetermined cycle, each game being an enactment of a cycle), go is described as a 'juego astrológico'. The planets go through cycles, and astrology is the study of how these cycles affect man.

The poem continues:

Es más antiguo que la más antigua escritura
y el tablero es un mapa del universo.
Sus variaciones negras y blancas
agotarán el tiempo.
En él pueden perderse los hombres
como en el amor y en el día.

If go is a 'juego astrológico', its board will be both a 'mapa del universo' and symbolically a map of man's actions. This idea, of a type of chess somehow controlling man is also present in the earlier sonnets, 'Ajedrez'.¹⁷ Go is eternal and repeats itself; it is close

to being an archetype, it is essential. Its repetitions and rules can absorb a man totally, just as his life, 'el amor y ... el día', can absorb him.

The first part of the poem describes the game of go. The second part of the poem describes what the discovery of go means to the poet:

Hoy, nueve de setiembre de 1978,
yo, que soy ignorante de tantas cosas,
sé que ignoro una más,
y agradezco a mis númenes
esta revelación de un laberinto
que nunca será mío.

The reiteration of the opening line of the poem again emphasizes the idea of cycles. However, what follows differs from the first part of the poem. The poet, far from having discovered and understood something new, has discovered something new which he shall never understand; he has become aware both of his own limitations and of the infinite nature of the universe. In a similar way he has become acquainted with the game of go, but not with all its permutations. He knows that the board is a 'mapa del universo' but will never be able to explore more than a part of it. A similar idea is expressed in the poem 'La trama': 'El universo es uno de sus nombres./ Nadie lo ha visto nunca/ y ningún hombre puede ver otra cosa.' 15

There are two allusions in this poem to Shinto, the subject of the next two poems. Firstly we read that the game of go is 'más antiguo que la más antigua escritura'. This points to the poem, 'El forastero', where we read, 'Guarda escrituras tan arcaicas que ya están casi en blanco'. Secondly we read of the poet's 'númenes': this

points both to the 'númenes' and 'divinidades' which we read of in 'Shinto' and 'El forastero'. The poet's 'númenes' bring him go; they also rescue him from sadness in 'Shinto'. In addition to the two allusions to Shinto, there is a line which recurs in the last poem in this group, 'Nihon': 'esta revelación de un laberinto/ que nunca será mío'. In 'El go' these words signify the way in which the poet seems physically to possess the world of go, as he holds the disc in his hand, while at the same time the universe of go remains as elusive and distant from him as ever. Go's universe is both the Orient, the 'recinto mágico' mentioned in 'El bastón de laca' ¹⁹, and the universe, immediate and infinite.

The next poem, 'Shinto' ²⁰, is in two parts: lines 1 - 19 and lines 20 - 23. The first part is in two sections. The first four lines form an explanation of and an introduction to the enumeration of lines 5 - 19:

Cuando nos anonada la desdicha,
durante un segundo nos salvan
las aventuras ínfimas
de la atención o de la memoria:

The 'númenes' which come into the poet's mind at these times are varied. By their fragmented nature they point to the types of image used in '17 haiku'. Let us examine them:

el sabor de una fruta, el sabor del agua,
esa cara que un sueño nos devuelve,
los primeros jazmines de noviembre,
el anhelo infinito de la brújula,
un libro que creíamos perdido,
el pulso de un hexámetro,

la breve llave que nos abre una casa,
el olor de una biblioteca o del sándalo,

While these images seem spontaneous and immediate, many of them might be taken from other poems written by Borges. They are small glimpses of seemingly unrelated greater entities. The mention of 'agua' in proximity to the 'jazmines' (although these are 'los primeros de noviembre' and hence from the southern hemisphere) reminds us of 'Ronda'. ²¹ The 'brújula', whilst reminding us of the story 'La muerte y la brújula' ²² is also present in 'A cierta isla'. In line 6 we see an allusion to both '17 haiku' and the group of 'sueño' poems ²³; the 'hexámetro' is also mentioned in 'Epílogo'. ²⁴ We have images of things returning from oblivion: a lost book and evocative smells. The key phrase here is line 11; a small, insignificant thing in itself, like a key, can open much larger things up to us, like a house. A brief glimpse remembered can trigger off a mood change, and save us from 'la desdicha'.

The enumeration continues:

el nombre antiguo de una calle,
los colores de un mapa,
una etimología imprevista,
la lisura de la uña limada,
la fecha que buscábamos,
contar las doce campanadas oscuras,
un brusco dolor físico.

Here we have the gravitation to the past (the 'nombre antiguo') which is related to the figure of Kipling, alluded to in 'A cierta isla'; the colours of the atlas are also mentioned in 'Poema'. ²⁵ The

etymology recalls a line from 'Los justos', 'El que descubre con placer una etimología.' ²⁶ Line 16 also fits in with the theme of 'Los justos', that of a job well done. The 'colores de un mapa' and 'la fecha que buscábamos' both recall 'El go', which begins with a date and mentions that the board is a 'mapa del universo'. The remaining two lines 18 - 19 are unusual in that they describe things which would normally provoke sadness rather than remove it: insomnia and pain. Perhaps the poet is suggesting that even these things can change our emotional state for the better.

In the last four lines of the poem, the poet suggests an analogy between these small glimpses which seem to come from oblivion and change our mood in a special way and the 'divinidades del Shinto':

Ocho millones son las divinidades del Shinto
que viajan por la tierra, secretas.
Esos modestos númenes nos tocan,
nos tocan y nos dejan.

While glimpses of things from outside of our current mental state can save us, they are also elusive and vanish. They come from oblivion and return; this is illustrated by the form of the final two lines, with almost an echo effect. At the same time as the 'númenes' are immediate to the poet, their number is almost infinite and they are 'secretas'. We may sense them, as we may the universe, but not possess them.

In the next poem, 'El forastero' ²⁷, the poet tells us of his own contact with Shinto. He does this by writing a long poetic prose monologue spoken by a shinto priest. The priest describes the poet's visit to his temple. The poem is in a single stanza but has a

repetitive, rhapsodic form. ²⁰ The first six lines introduce the priest and shinto:

En el santuario hay una espada.
Soy el segundo sacerdote del templo. Nunca
 la he visto.
Otras comunidades veneran un espejo de
 metal o una piedra.
Creo que se eligieron esas cosas porque
 alguna vez fueron raras.
Hablo con libertad; el Shinto es el más
 leve de los cultos.
El más leve y el más antiguo.

The last line here echoes the previous one and creates a pause in the flow of the poem. The poem's words are put into the mouth of a shinto priest perhaps in order to accentuate the gap between East and West. We would expect that the priest would be able to explain Shinto clearly; however, he speaks with a distance and a vagueness. This could be because he is only the 'segundo sacerdote' and he has never seen the sword which the community worships. Shinto seems arbitrary and irrational; the idea of worshipping things 'porque alguna vez fueron raras' is strange. The first of these lines seems abrupt; to western eyes an instrument of violence might seem out of place in a 'santuario'. The priest goes on to enumerate aspects of shinto:

Guarda escrituras tan arcaicas que ya están
 casi en blanco.
Un ciervo o una gota de rocío podrían profesarlo.
Nos dice que debemos obrar bien, pero no ha
 fijado una ética.
No declara que el hombre teje su *karma*.
No quiere intimidar con castigos ni sobornar
 con premios.
Sus fieles pueden aceptar la doctrina de Buddha

o la de Jesús.
Venera al Emperador y a los muertos.

Again we have images of vagueness; Shinto seems not to oblige its followers to a code of behaviour other than that suggested by 'debemos obrar bien', which is vague. Shinto's followers can even follow other religions; we have the idea that shinto exists beyond man's actions, beyond rules. In these lines shinto is not a belief system but a living entity, beyond man. For this reason it is shinto itself which 'guarda escrituras' illegible to man's eyes; it is shinto itself which 'nos dice que debemos obrar bien'; it is shinto itself which 'venera al Emperador'. Whether man understands shinto or not it exists independently of him; for this reason it is unimportant to the priest to have seen the sword or to have understood why the sword was worshipped. Shinto is an acceptance of basic facts. On the other hand, lines 13 to 17 could be commands rather than statements. However, the general tone of the poem suggests that the priest is describing shinto rather than telling us what to think.

The poem ends its description of shinto with four lines marked by repetition:

Sabe que después de su muerte cada hombre
es un dios que ampara a los suyos.
Sabe que después de su muerte cada árbol
es un dios que ampara a los árboles.
Sabe que la sal, el agua y la música pueden
purificarnos.
Sabe que son legión las divinidades.

Here, in place of the vague imagery of the earlier parts of the poem, we find certainty. This definiteness is emphasized by the repetition of 'Sabe que...'. In the first two lines here both trees and men have what might be termed souls; beings become gods when they die and 'son legión las divinidades'. It is interesting that here the priest talks of purification. For something to become pure it must first be impure; the only directive shinto gives - as far as the information in this description of shinto tells us - is that we must 'obrar bien'. Impurity must come as the result of mistaken actions. The mention of 'música' here points to the later poem 'Nihon'.²⁹ In that poem we find the paradoxical line 'una música que es casi el silencio'. There, the theme of things we can never understand is developed further.

In the closing eight lines of the poem the priest describes the poet's visit to the temple:

Esta mañana nos visitó un viejo poeta
peruano. Era ciego.
Desde el atrio compartimos el aire del jardín
y el olor de la tierra húmeda y el canto de
aves o de dioses.
A través de un intérprete quise explicarle
nuestra fe.

First, we find humour in the "mistaken" nationality of the visiting poet. This also serves to heighten the contrast between East and West; ironically, what the men shared in the next line could be in any country, either in the East or West. The idea that the birdsong was the 'canto de ... dioses' echoes the idea that 'son legión las divinidades' and that all beings become gods on dying. This also adds to the poetic effect of the language in the poem. The priest attempted

to explain shinto. The gap between East and West may have prevented him from doing so:

No sé si me entendió.
Los rostros occidentales son máscaras que no se
dejan descifrar.
Me dijo que de vuelta al Perú recordaría nuestro
diálogo en un poema.
Ignoro si lo hará.
Ignoro si nos volveremos a ver.

The priest neither understands his own faith, nor is he bothered about explaining it to the poet. It seems that shinto is not to be understood but rather is a thing which we are to be aware of. Again we have the gap between East and West and the mistaken identity of the poet. The last two lines repeat the same words and we have a pausing device similar to that used in lines 5 and 6 of the poem; here it is used more emphatically. Shinto seems to have vanished into oblivion, and for the priest, the poet has also disappeared, the priest being certain only of his uncertainty.

Two words that could be used to describe the priest's remarks on Shinto are rhapsodic and fragmented. The next poem, '17 *haiku*'³⁰, is also fragmented and rhapsodic. The title suggests that what we are to read is one long haiku, each poem of the seventeen representing one of the seventeen syllables of the haiku form. However, this creates only an illusion of form, as although the poems fit together, they do so only in a fragmented way among themselves rather than adding up to a single unity. That the individual haiku are numbered adds to this.

Ironically, haiku poems are written with words in order to convey what cannot be expressed or felt in words.³¹ Perhaps, more than with

any of the other poems in La cifra, individual reader response determines how these unusually abstract poems are read. As María Kodama concludes in her article about these poems, 'The brief *haiku* is the apex of a vast pyramid.' ³² These poems seem to evoke the type of 'númenes' that rid the poet of his 'desdicha' in 'Shinto'. For this reason I shall limit myself to giving an outline of how the '17 *haiku*' fit together rather than attempting to interpret the work. The first three haiku concentrate on perceptions which are beyond words and which are exclusive to the poet:

1
Algo me han dicho
la tarde y la montaña.
Ya lo he perdido.

2
La vasta noche
no es ahora otra cosa
que una fragancia.

3
¿Es o no es
el sueño que olvidé
antes del alba?

In the first haiku the poet depicts a perception which is particular to him, beyond words and forgotten; it has been shared with no-one. He shares its absence with the reader in the haiku. What the 'tarde y la montaña' told the poet has been converted into an absence by time passing; in the second haiku the 'vasta noche' has been converted into a fragrance. The night, significant ('vasta'), has passed and now a perfume is left of it. Here again we have a non-verbal experience. In the third haiku the poet asks rhetorically about a dream that has

passed into oblivion. This dream is a product of the 'vasta noche'; we have a situation where imperceptibility is associated with the night.

In the fourth and fifth haiku, again there are images of things which have been lost:

4

Callan las cuerdas.
La música sabía
lo que yo siento.

5

Hoy no me alegran
los almendros del huerto.
Son tu recuerdo.

The first three haiku concentrate on the idea that the poet's consciousness is isolated from others; only he has experienced the dream which he has forgotten, remembers what has been lost. In the fourth haiku the poet is connected to another person's reality. He shares an emotion with the music; whoever wrote the music, or whoever plays it, could understand the poet's state. However, as the poet's emotion is posterior to that of the music, it is possible that the emotion itself has come from the music, which is animate: 'la música sabía'. In either case, the poet shares an experience. The fifth haiku also depicts a link between the poet and another person, 'tú', who most critics of '17 *haiku*' have taken to be María Kodama.³³ As in the first three haiku, we are concerned here with an absence. At the same time, the alliteration in the fourth haiku points to a gap between the poet and the music.

The next five haiku introduce or continue the theme of the poet's inaction:

6
Oscuramente
libros, láminas, llaves
siguen mi suerte.

7
Desde aquel día
no he movido las piezas
en el tablero.

8
En el desierto
acontece la aurora.
Alguien lo sabe.

9
La ociosa espada
sueña con sus batallas.
Otro es mi sueño.

The sixth haiku alludes to the poet's life as a celebrity; again there is the alliteration on /s/ which marked number four. Also, there is alliteration on /l/ which continues visually in the 'll'. Just as the first three poems mention the 'tarde', 'noche' and 'alba' respectively, as if the poet was awakening, in poems 6 - 8 we find images of darkness, 'día' and 'la aurora'. The eighth haiku returns to the world of dreams, mentioned in haiku three. However, the overall image in these haiku is that of inaction. The poet becomes a passive figure; fame, in number 6, seems to have happened to him, 'oscuramente'. He has not created it. This is an idea which is also expressed in the poem 'La fama'.³⁴ Fame is mysterious; the poet does not understand why he is famous. In the seventh haiku there is alliteration on the /d/ sound, which is continued in the eighth. This adds to the coherence of the verses. Inaction: the poet has not moved the chess pieces. This is a type of absence, continuing the theme of the first haiku. The poet abstains from physical actions; the sword,

'la ociosa espada', does the same. However, the poet also dreams; his dream is different. He does not tell us what his dream is. This is another form of absence.

In haiku 1 - 9, then, the poet is a spiritual, cerebral presence, devoid of physical action; in haiku 10 this idea is extended to the idea of a man for whom his body possesses a life of its own, apart from its inhabitant:

10
El hombre ha muerto.
La barba no lo sabe.
Crecen las uñas.

The man is absent from his own body; if the man's body can function without his consciousness, in dreams our consciousness functions without the body.

In the next five haiku, the poet introduces his own physical actions, and there is a short cycle of poems using the moon as a central image.

11
Esta es la mano
que alguna vez tocaba
tu cabellera.

In this haiku, he reintroduces the addressee of the poems, 'tú'; he also introduces the figure of his hand, to which he returns in the final haiku. Here there is a physical action, but it is distanced by time. The hair could be María Kodama's. The earlier poem, 'La luna' ³⁵ was dedicated to her: the next four haiku centre on the moon.

12

Bajo el alero
el espejo no copia
más que la luna.

13

Bajo la luna
la sombra que se alarga
es una sola.

14

¿Es un imperio
esa luz que se apaga
o una luciérnaga?

15

La luna nueva.
Ella también la mira
desde otra puerta.

In the twelfth haiku, the moon is reflected in a mirror in a rather mundane setting; in the next haiku, the idea of uniqueness ('no copia/más que la luna') is continued ('la sombra.../ es una sola'). If the moon represents a specific person, it, like the person, is unique. However, in a sense the mirror multiplies the moon; in the fourteenth haiku the poet's imagination, like the mirror, multiplies what he sees. This is perhaps an allegory of poetry: a small image becomes a great, ambiguous one, capable of symbolizing other otherwise unrelated images. However, mirrors multiply the same image over and over. In haiku fifteen we return to the moon, to the new moon; this suggests the idea of cycles. Significantly, the woman watching this moon stands in a doorway; Janus, the roman god of ends and beginnings, was also the god of doorways. He is alluded to here and mentioned in 'La trama' ³⁶ and 'El hacedor'. ³⁷ Moreover, the woman stands in 'otra puerta'. Again the poet is distanced in one way and close in another: he watches the same moon.

In haiku sixteen we return to themes present in the earlier haiku; just as the music affected the poet, and the absence of the addressee affected him, a bird's song affects the addressee:

16
Lejos un trino.
El ruiseñor no sabe
que te consuela.

Neither the music nor the bird know the effect of their actions. The bird is distant; in the final haiku, the poet reflects on the distant fate of his poems:

17
La vieja mano
sigue trazando versos
para el olvido.

The poet's hand, his physical actions, result in 'olvido'; just as all the perceptions and forgotten things mentioned in the haiku have become absences, his poems too shall become an absence. Here also we have the figure of the modest poet, as in haiku six, whose only certainty lies in poems and oblivion.

In the final poem of this section of La cifra, 'Nihon', ³⁸ the poet concludes his discussion of things which he cannot understand, 'En ese delicado laberinto no me fue dado penetrar.' The experiences mentioned in '17 *haiku*' were also elusive and incomprehensible. The poem is written in poetic prose, in four paragraphs. The first two begin with the same phrase, 'He divisado...'; the first three end with the same line, which is abbreviated in the third paragraph in order to

create a pause and a climax. The first two paragraphs take two philosophers, Russell and Spinoza, whose ideas pervade Borges' pieces. Ironically, the poet seems distanced and in a way alienated from them. For Borges, philosophical writing is a branch of fantastic literature which creates its own world. The irony is that the world which Borges has created might in turn have been taken from these two philosophers, from whom he feels alienated. His descriptions make their ideas seem borgesian. First, Russell:

la doctrina de los conjuntos, la *Mengenlehre*,
que postula y explora los vastos números que no
alcanzaría un hombre inmortal aunque agotara
sus eternidades contando, y cuyas dinastías
imaginarias tienen como cifras las letras del
alfabeto hebreo.

Second, Spinoza, who appears in an ambiguous light. The 'infinita sustancia' might be Spinoza's thought and therefore Spinoza itself, or - more probably - his concept of God:

la infinita sustancia de Spinoza, que consta de
infinitos atributos, entre los cuales están el
espacio y el tiempo, de suerte que si pronunciamos
o pensamos una palabra, ocurren paralelamente
infinitos hechos en infinitos orbes inconcebibles.

Although in the second example we find alliteration on the /p/, the overall impression of these lines is not one of poetic writing but rather that the philosophers' ideas are typically borgesian. Ironically, both paragraphs end:

En ese delicado laberinto no me fue dado penetrar.

Both Russell and Spinoza ³⁹ based their ideas on mathematics and logic. It is significant that Borges, a poet, finds the ideas of these men both attractive and distant. He has adapted their ideas but does not live in the world of reason that they have created.

The third paragraph also contains the phrase 'He divisado..', but it is postponed, creating a climactic effect. It is stated at the end of the paragraph, creating the illusion of the poem beginning again. The first three paragraphs seem to form a unit, the fourth forming a kind of envoi. In the third paragraph, the poet leaves behind philosophy, and writes of his alienation from the Orient. He sees Japan, but through the eyes of a foreigner; Verlaine intervenes in his view: 'Desde montañas que prefieren, como Verlaine, el matiz al color'. His description of Japan at times seems like a description of his own poetry: we find 'una escritura que ejerce la insinuación y que ignora la hipérbole'; 'una música que es casi el silencio'. These phrases point to the preciseness, brevity and ascetism of Borges' late work. We also find ideas which might be out of Borges' texts: 'tigres pintados por quienes nunca vieron un tigre y nos dan casi el arquetipo' ⁴⁰; 'una nostalgia de espadas'. We also find his preoccupation with ethics: 'el camino del honor, el *bushido*'. Perhaps in Japan the poet might feel at home, but as is the case with the philosophers, he feels alienated. He has only discovered Japan's surface:

he divisado tu superficie, oh Japón. En ese
delicado laberinto...

The dots which end the paragraph, together with the pause they create, seem to suggest that the poet feels he might be able to understand Japan one day. It is interesting that three important influences on his work, Japan, Russell and Spinoza, seem strange to him. Their intrinsic strangeness arouses in his mind a curiosity which retains his interest and inspires him.

In the final paragraph, the poet departs from the key phrases of the previous paragraphs. He gives us an image of the gap between cultures:

A la guarnición de Junín llegaban hacia 1870
indios pampas, que no habían visto nunca una
puerta, un llamador de bronce o una ventana.
Veían y tocaban esas cosas, no menos raras
para ellos que para nosotros Manhattan, y
volvían a su desierto.

Each person lives in his own 'desierto'; perhaps this refers to the deserts in '17 *haiku*'. There, the poet perceives things unseen by other people. Other deserts in La cifra are those in 'El desierto', ⁴¹ which represent not the world of the individual, but absence. The 'indios' returned to a place where doors, windows and door knockers were absent; they return to a world perhaps closed to outsiders. There emerges, then, an image of 'desierto' in these lines which adds to that already created elsewhere in the book. What these indians symbolize is essentially the same as what the priest in 'El forastero' symbolizes: just as foreign cultures seem alien to us, our culture is

alien to people from other cultures. Although these 'indios' were from Argentina, 'European' Argentina was alien to them. In a similar way, while he has created his own literary world and by extension his own view of 'reality' through his perceptions, the poet finds both strange and alien.

In this group of poems the poet writes of his fascination for things which he cannot understand. He believes that he will never fully comprehend them, and because of their unfathomableness, they fascinate him. They possess an endless quality: he shall never fathom completely the work of Spinoza or Russell, for example, or fully understand what the Orient is for an oriental, no matter how hard he tries. English literature is also infinite; each person creates his own 'cierta isla' from reading it. No matter how much information one amassed about every reader's response to English literature, or even about only Borges' response to it, there would still be more to learn. On the other hand, the poet is also fascinated by parts of his own self which he cannot comprehend: the memories and brief glimpses seen in the haiku fascinate him because of their fleetingness and intangibility. To attempt to write a poem about them, to fix them in words on a page, is to attempt the impossible. If something is impossible, we can make endless attempts at achieving it without any worry of losing what Borges has called the aesthetic event, 'esa inminencia de una revelación, que no se produce, es, quizá, el hecho estético.' ⁴² This idea is developed in the final poem in the volume.

Notes

- ¹ Willis Barnstone, Borges at Eighty Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1982: pp. 15 and 81 respectively.
- ² LaC pp. 91 - 92.
- ³ BQ, Barcelona: Bruguera, 1980: p. 21.
- ⁴ OP pp. 333 - 334. This poem ends in a similar way to 'A cierta isla': '¿Me oyes, amigo no mirado, me oyes/ A través de esas cosas insondables/ Que son los mares y la muerte?'
- ⁵ C L Dodgson created a fictional author - Carroll - in his books. Both his interest in mathematics and his creation of a fictional reality relate him to Russell and Spinoza, who are in turn mentioned in 'Nihon', and who created philosophical (fictional) worlds, based on mathematics, from which Borges expresses his alienation. Another connection between Dodgson and Spinoza is their interest in religion.
- ⁶ LaC pp. 69 - 76.
- ⁷ Although Henry VIII is not mentioned in the poem, this labyrinth is probably the one in the gardens of Hampton Court Palace .
- ⁸ OCEC II, p. 372.
- ⁹ See SN: pp. 143 - 160, 'La ceguera'.
- ¹⁰ The mention of rain 'que no cambia' recalls the earlier poem 'La lluvia' (OP p. 135) which begins:

Bruscamente la tarde se ha aclarado
Porque ya cae la lluvia minuciosa.
Cae y cayó. La lluvia es una cosa

Que sin duda sucede en el pasado.

The rain brings back memories from the past for the poet.

¹¹ According to Eagle ed., The Oxford Illustrated Literary Guide to Great Britain and Ireland, Oxford: OUP, 1981: p. 295, Johnson has statues "in St. Paul's Cathedral, at St. Clement Danes (Strand), and Lichfield." William Drummond was author of the poem 'To his lute'.

¹² The 'Book of Martyrs' is the popular name of Foxe's Actes and Monuments of These Latter Perilous Times Touching Matters of the Church. This book, according to The Oxford Companion to English Literature, 1969, p. 5, is "a violent indictment of 'the persecutors of God's truth, commonly called papists'." It was published first in Latin in Strasbourg in 1559, and in English in 1563. The latin title was Rerum in Ecclesia Gestarum... maximarumque per Europam persecutionum...

¹³ 'El evangelio según Marcos', PC II, pp. 424 - 429.

¹⁴ According to OCEC II, pp. 372 - 373, Kipling "Nació en Bombay y murió en Inglaterra; podríamos decir que de la geografía pasó a la historia, del espacio al tiempo. Sintió en Europa lo que casi no había sentido en Asia, la gravitación del pasado."

¹⁵ 'El go' was published in the literary supplement of La Nación 8th. October, 1978: p. 1. That version differs slightly from the present one: in lines one and twelve, 'nueve' is substituted by '9'; line nine does not end with a full stop, but takes a semi colon, the second sentence running from line six to line eleven; the last two lines become 'esta revelación de laberintos/ que ya no exploraré.'
Go, according to Collins English Dictionary (London: Collins, 1979) is

'a game for two players in which counters are placed on a board marked with a grid, the object being to capture the opponent's counters.' It is a Japanese form of chess.

¹⁶ 'Un sábado', OP, p. 551.

¹⁷ In the earlier poems 'Ajedrez' OP, pp. 124 - 125, we have the idea of chess being a repetition of cycles: chess is described as a 'rito'; 'También el jugador es prisionero/... de otro tablero/ De negras noches y de blancos días' ; 'este juego es infinito'.

¹⁸ LaC p. 53.

¹⁹ LaC p. 89.

²⁰ LaC pp. 95 - 96.

²¹ LaC p. 13.

²² 'La muerte y la brújula', PC 1, pp. 495 - 506.

²³ LaC pp. 69 - 76.

²⁴ LaC p. 35.

²⁵ LaC pp. 65 - 66.

²⁶ LaC p. 81

²⁷ LaC pp. 97 - 98.

²⁸ José Miguel Oviedo notes, in his 'Borges el poeta según sus prólogos' Revista Iberoamericana 51 (1985) pp. 209 - 220, that

Los libros de Borges suelen ser rapsódicos; la unidad de su obra no está allí, sino en los textos que ellos contienen y en el diálogo que entablan entre sí, rebasando los límites de cada colección, que son laxos y convencionales. Reiteradamente, Borges ha señalado, pidiendo disculpas por esa falta de unidad, que sus libros son fruto de 'mi resignación, mi descuido y a veces mi pasión.' (p. 218)

²⁹ LaC pp. 103 - 104.

³⁰ LaC pp. 99 - 101.

³¹ Haiku are used in Zen as objects of contemplation; in SN,

Borges writes of the Zen student: "Tiene que hacer un continuo ejercicio de irrealidad". (see. p. 93)

³² See María Kodama, 'Oriental Influences in Borges' Poetry; the Nature of the *Haiku* and Western Literature', in Cortínez ed., Borges the Poet Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 1986: pp. 170 - 181: p. 181.

³³ In particular, see Miguel Enguídanos, 'Diecisiete Apuntes para descifrar a Borges (glosas)', Ínsula 461, 1985: pp. 1 + 12.

³⁴ LaC pp. 78 - 80.

³⁵ In the last line of 'La luna' (OP p.487), Borges identifies the moon as Kodama's mirror: 'Mírala. Es tu espejo.'

³⁶ LaC p. 53.

³⁷ LaC pp. 49 - 50.

³⁸ LaC pp. 103 - 104.

³⁹ In 'Entretiens avec James E Irby' (L'Herne [1964] p. 400), Borges says that he read F Mauthner's Wörterbuch der Philosophie (Leipzig: Georg Müller Verlag, 1910). In that book we are referred to the same author's Das Spinoza Büchlein (München: Georg Müller Verlag, 1912), a short book of articles on Spinoza. There we read, about Spinoza's 'sustancia infinita' (see p. 5):

'Die Spinozisten behaupten: wir selbst und die sinnliche Welt ausser uns seien nichts für sich Bestehendes, sondern blosse Modifikationen der unendlichen Substanz. [. . .] Gott, sagt der Spinozist, ist die einzige notwendige und auch nur die einzige mögliche Substanz, alles übrige lebt, webt und ist nicht ausser Gott, sondern Modifikationen des göttlichen Wesens. Eins ist alles und alles ist eins.'

Both Russell and Spinoza created philosophical theories of infinity based on mathematical principles and logic. Russell found a paradox, a flaw in Set Theory. This Set Theory was the invention of Georg Cantor

(1845 - 1918), professor of mathematics at Halle University. Set theory - Mengenlehre in the original German - was the first formal theory of the infinite. (See Antony Flew ed., A Dictionary of Philosophy [London: Pan, 1984]: 'Russell', 'Set theory' and 'Cantor'.)

Borges talks at length on Spinoza in an interview with Enrique Krauze, '*Desayuno more geométrico*' (Vuelta vol 29 [1979] pp. 28 - 31).

*0 See Atlas p. 48:

I would like to recall, but cannot, a sinuous tiger in a brush drawing by a Chinese who never saw a tiger but doubtless had seen the tiger's archetype. That Platonic tiger can be found in Anita Berry's *Art for Children*.

*1 LaC pp. 87 - 88.

*2 PC II, p. 133.

... of its nature, it is too large and heavy to be

at

Borges finds his destiny in the ministry of finance and performs his job, to the end, as an artist, not a man of business, and goes to beyond what is possible to be said, into a symbol, into a poem, into a model, and what better symbol for a man whose work is of intellect, than the moon, the moon in his last published book of poems, the title of which refers to the great lunar cycle of the moon, the cycle which we all explore. The day before Constantine learned to walk a pencil and drew a large circle, a circle of possibility, he was his full circle, his moon, his circle in this last poem, and urges us to draw a circle, a circle.

'La cifra':

a poem of hope or of hopelessness?

How do we approach this poem? ¹ It is set in a special position of prominence within the collection. At first sight it seems to epitomize the hopelessness expressed in the other poems. The seventh group of poems ends with the idea that we are trapped as human beings within a frame of reference limited both by our experience, background and life span, and this the poem emphasizes.

The poem was originally published with the title 'La luna' ²; the cifra is the moon, a common symbol of poetry in Borges, and is used to represent life; life is circular and yet like the moon we may only glimpse at its reality, it remains too large and remote for us to perceive:

Borges finds his destiny in the ministry of words, and he performs his job, to the end, as an artist. In his mission of self-discovery, he must go beyond words into silence, project himself into a symbol, into some object outside himself. And what better symbol for a poet, unafraid of beauty as he is of intellect, than the moon? In *La cifra*, his last published book of poems, the title poem "La cifra" refers to the great lunar cycle of the night, the zero to which we all aspire. The day before Constantine Cavafy died he took a pencil and drew a large Plotinian circle on a hospital napkin. It was his full circle. Borges composes a circle in this last poem, and urges us strongly to contemplate it... ³

The arabic word from which 'cifra' derives ('sifr') originally meant 'zero'. ⁴ Both the word and the shape of what it denotes - the

circular moon - then, suggest a zero, nothing, oblivion. The poem restates Borges' comment in Borges the Poet that after life, he is 'out for oblivion'. 5

The moon is also a borgesian symbol of poetry, especially in the earlier poem 'La luna'. 6 Perhaps what is underlined here, by analogy with the symbolism of life and death, is that poetry can never be possessed by the poet - its meanings are out of his control, and part of someone else's reality - or by the reader, who may find a different poem each time he reads the same page. In contrast to the fatalism of the final lines of the poem, which suggest that there lies at least one certainty behind our existence, death, the circularity of the moon, together with its unyielding nature - unyielding in the secrets it may hold about poetry for example, as in 'La luna' - suggests that on the other hand, perhaps even these 'certainties' may lead to nothing. This is the case in the earlier poem, where 'detrás del rostro que nos mira no hay nadie'. 7

What is this poetic, eternal moon? Is it an individual's image of a universal symbol, or is it ultimately a vast zero suspended above our hopes of avoiding oblivion? For Borges, of course, oblivion is both inevitable and desirable: it is a form of eternity, a side-stepping of time. In interview, Borges has said that

In English you have that fine, lingering word, "moon". You have to say it slowly. It's as slow as the moon itself. "Moon" is a word you can go on pronouncing forever and forever. I may die, and go on saying "the moon". 8

These ideas show us that the image of the moon is not unrelated in the poet's mind to what it tends to depict in the poem: both the permanence of the symbol and the transient nature of life, and also the certainty of death. These ideas are also expressed in 'La cifra'.

The poem begins with a conscious misquotation. This is unusual for Borges, who normally does not draw attention to his misquotations:

La amistad silenciosa de la luna
(cito mal a Virgilio) te acompaña
desde aquella perdida hoy en el tiempo
noche o atardecer en que tus vagos
ojos la descifraron para siempre.

In these lines the poet sets out his thesis: at one point in the life of an individual, he finds what a particular symbol means for him. His relationship with the object in the sky, the moon, becomes defined. However, although an individual's past might define his view of the present, his memory of that past is itself ill-defined. Olvido and the faults of the memory modify the past (this is the subject of many of Borges' poems), sometimes enriching experience, while at other times impoverishing it. The symbol of the moon here is one which has been improved by olvido and its blurring effect; literature has filled it with symbolic meaning. This process of man filling everyday events with symbolic meaning, which accumulates over the centuries, forms the backbone of the thematics of Historia de la noche.

Aside from the idea that the past becomes blurred in the memory of the individual, the choice of line quoted by the poet,

Tacitae per amica silentia lunae. ♪

is itself significant. When we consider that the misquotation of another line from Virgil is dealt with in Borges' piece on The Venerable Bede in his Introducción a la literatura inglesa ¹⁰, it becomes obvious that the line is used in order to draw attention to the idea that there is a tradition of misquoting - perhaps unintentional in the case of Bede, intentional in Borges' case - just as there is a tradition of blind poets, to which Borges belongs. The moon and the poetic tradition which it represents go on forever; Borges, Bede and the blind poets are temporal. Beyond this lies the idea that all poetry is misquotation; if language is, as Emerson maintains, fossil poetry, then the poet's task is to corrupt language with meaning in new unusual ways. The symbols are eternal while each individual's interpretation of them is transient. ¹¹ Poetry and words continue in eternity; man is mortal. The poet uses the words which are available to him. Although the poet writes from his individual viewpoint he writes as part of a continuum, part of a literary or linguistic tradition.

The individual's eyes are 'vagos': although this could be seen as an expression of the poet's later blindness, perhaps, in a sense, what our eyes see is always 'vague'. 'Vagos' becomes a transferred epithet. All the things seen by the individual are seen from an individual viewpoint, and so the individual's experience of the world is narrow and restricted to what is comprehensible from that viewpoint. In global terms, the individual's view may be said to be 'vague'.

The garden and patio have been consigned to dust, they are no more than a vague memory, and literature is given an archaic

character, represented by Virgil and the archaic word order of the third line. Against these images of things which have passed - or in the case of the individual, things which are passing - into oblivion, the moon continues to shine overhead, inspiring, maintaining its secrets, unchanging.

The poem continues, somewhat at a tangent:

¿Para siempre? Yo sé que alguien, un día,
podrá decirte verdaderamente:
No volverás a ver la clara luna.
Has agotado ya la inalterable
suma de veces que te da el destino.
Inútil abrir todas las ventanas
del mundo. Es tarde. No darás con ella.

From the certainty of the symbol existing throughout the individual's life, changing in his perceptions but not in its form, we move to a certainty in the individual's destiny: death. That it is the death of the individual and not that of man in general is underlined by the reference to the poet knowing that someone else will be able to tell the reader his destiny. Here there are three people implicated (the poet/speaker, the person who will tell you this, and the reader/addressee), and the moon, which is bigger than them and outlasts and predates them. The image of 'la clara luna' emphasizes the idea of cycles : life's cycle. No matter what man does, death is certain: 'Inútil abrir todas las ventanas del mundo'. There is a fixed number of times for an individual to see the moon. In the original version of this poem, 'La luna', 'inalterable' was substituted by 'prefijada'. Behind 'prefijada' lies the idea that someone somewhere has fixed the number; if it has been fixed, there is hope that it

could be changed. However, if the number is 'inalterable', it cannot be changed, and the suggestion is that not only is this the case, but that there exists no force which could alter fate.

The poem ends with a kind of envoi:

Vivimos descubriendo y olvidando
esa dulce costumbre de la noche.
Hay que mirarla bien. Puede ser última.

Ironically, it is in the process of life that we encounter death ('Vivimos descubriendo...'); the moon (or death) is a 'dulce costumbre de la noche'. In 'La cifra', 'descubriendo y olvidando' the noche suggests the rise and fall of ideas, tides of ideas. Tides are also linked to the moon. Water, that symbol of life, is controlled by the moon. In 'El go', the chess board becomes a map of the universe, governed by the stars: man's outlook and reality is governed by planets. Here, his interpretation of symbols, epitomized by his reaction to the moon, governs his view of reality. This idea is also present in Historia de la noche, where the night seems to represent literature and the world created by man's imagination. ¹²

'La cifra', then, would seem to portray a fatalist, hopeless, vision of man's fate. He understands nothing and can perceive only that he cannot perceive; he is locked in the world of his perceptions, in his own subjectivity. If this is the case, why should the poet try to reach outside of his own world, for example into the world of literature or of the Orient? What could justify curiosity about the external world? In the final lines of the poem, we find a justification for all the meditation and doubt which has preceded

them: although the individual is locked in his own world, he can glimpse what lies beyond, as in the haiku. He has the hope that in some way or other he may step beyond the confines of his perceptive solitude. This is the reason for art, for relationships, for investigation and research. We hope to find something which justifies the search.

The poet's existence in the poems of La cifra is a form of searching. The enumerating and questioning which form the material of the poems in La cifra are their existence. The poet's existence is in his enumeration, a device he uses not in order to evoke contrasts as is the case with Whitman, but rather in order to cipher in words a complex whole. ¹³ This whole is the poet's reality, his testament. However, his reality remains incomprehensible for the outsider, the reader, who is a visitor in his world. And the only way in which the poet can express himself is in a series of ciphers, symbols which seem to sidestep linguistic and literary barriers. Ironically, they in turn create new linguistic barriers. The search for meaning in a poem is the waiting for perspective. And the only reason for the search, for the poet not giving up either life or poetry, lies in the fact that he must take advantage of every opportunity he finds to search for this ultimate reality: 'Hay que mirarla bien. Puede ser última.' Not to search is to leave oneself open to missing something. To continue the search is to leave oneself open to revelation. 'La cifra' is, then, a poem not of hopelessness but of hope; although it acknowledges death and finality it points out that while we are still alive, each moment can bring a new insight into reality.

Notes

¹ 'La cifra', LaC p. 105.

² 'La cifra' was first published as 'La luna' in the literary supplement of La Nación, 19th. March 1978: p. 1. In that version, 'inalterable' in line 10 is substituted by 'prefijada'; an extra line is also added between lines 15 and 16, 'La luna está en el cielo - todavía.'

³ See Willis Barnstone, 'Borges, poet of ecstasy'. In Cortínez ed., Borges the Poet Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1986 (p. 134 - 141): pp. 140 - 141. Constantine Cavafy, according to Patrick Hanks ed., Collins Dictionary of the English Language, Glasgow: Collins, 1979, a 'Greek poet of Alexandria in Egypt' and lived from 1863 - 1933; his Greek name was *Kavafis*. (See p. 241.) According to Balderston, The Literary Universe of Jorge Luis Borges, Cavafy is mentioned nowhere in Borges' work.

⁴ See the Diccionario de la Real Academia, Madrid: 1984, p. 315.

⁵ Cortínez ed., op. cit., p. 31:

QUESTION (Donald Shaw): Señor Borges, after a lecture you gave at Harvard a long time ago, someone asked you a question about life after death. And you said something I've never forgotten. You said, "I am out for oblivion." Are you still out for oblivion?
BORGES: Yes, I am.

⁶ 'La luna', OP pp. 131 - 134.

⁷ 'Como en los sueños, / detrás del rostro que nos mira no hay

nadie.' OP p. 324.

• Cortínez ed., op. cit., p. 77.

• Virgil, Aeneid II, 255. Quoted in Miguel Enguídanos, 'Diecisiete apuntes para descifrar a Borges (glosas)'. Ínsula 461 (1985) p. 12.

10 OCEC II, p. 413. The line is 'Ibant oscuri sola sub nocte per umbra'. It is also to be found in SN, p. 105.

11 Borges talks of this Emersonian concept in Cortínez ed., op. cit., pp. 87 - 88:

'Of course I suppose all people are benefactors, even the ones you don't know. They may be doing good to you. Since language, Emerson said, language is fossil poetry. And in that case, if you use a language, you are indebted to those unknown poets who made the language. But when I am speaking in English, I am receiving the gifts of many dead men, the gifts of many ghosts, and in the case of Spanish the same thing, of course. In the case of all languages. All those dead men are still giving me their gifts. And I'm duly thankful for them, though I don't know their names.

He also talks of this concept in Atlas (p. 70):

Emerson said that language is fossil poetry. As confirmation of this dictum, we need only remember that all abstract words are, in effect, metaphors, including the word *metaphor*, which in Greek means "transfer".

12 For further discussion of Borges' tendency to create a personal language of symbols in his poetry, see Arturo Echavarría Ferrari, 'From expression to allusion: towards a theory of poetic language in Borges'. Cortínez ed., op. cit., pp. 110 - 120.

13 I take this division of enumeration into two categories from Jaime Alazraki, 'Enumerations as evocations: On the use of a device in Borges' latest poetry'. Cortínez ed., op. cit., pp. 149 - 157.

The book as a whole

The final poem in La cifra seems to reinforce what is an underlying theme in the book: that although we may search for definitive meaning in life, or in a poem, or in a book of poems, this search is endless. Life, like a poem and a book of poems, is also endless, until death, when it becomes irretrievable. To seek final perspective on any of these things involves one in nothing more than informed speculation. A similar situation exists with the poet's personality: identity, although always present, is impossible to define in words.

The form of La cifra is fascinating. It affords the reader many insights into the nature of 'the book'; ultimately, however, the links between the poems seem tenuous. The overall impression left by the book is similar to that left by the haiku; while they seem on the surface to form into a single work, contemplation of the poems denies this. However, the game played between the poet and reader serves to maintain the latter's interest: this allows him to feel in the privileged position of being able to 'see through' the possibility of the text and feel as if he is in a position similar to that of the creator of the lines, feeling that he can comprehend the artifice and its failings from backstage, as it were.

Much has been written of the 'privileged' Borges reader, a reader who has made a study of Borges' works - and who can read them without studying them? - and here, in the form of La cifra, this figure

reemerges. Just as the haiku create and subsequently dispel the idea of a single unity in a text, the form of the book creates an illusion which the reader is then allowed to destroy. The book is rhapsodic - the themes gel, but only partially; although the last poem forms a climax to the book, it could not be said to 'sum up' what has gone before. Rather it punctuates the set of poems which is the book. It states clearly and efficiently the idea that the book seems to drive towards, an all-enveloping idea. This idea does not depend on the rest of the book for meaning, but for effect.

The final poem, intriguingly entitled 'La cifra' - what could be more elitist and suggestive of the 'privileged' reader? - could say what it does as eloquently outside of the collection. However, it could not carry so much weight on its own; here it stands with the force of the other forty five poems behind it. Similarly, the idea of a cifra depends on its context. A cipher is meaningless without a key; where is this key to be found?

The key to the cifra in a poem, of course, lies in the reader's mind. On an objective level, therefore, each reader brings a new key to the poem and the poems, like the book, and the figure of the poet, are infinite. To define the poem, the cipher, the form of the book or the reader's frame of reference would be impossible, especially in the case of this book, the structure of which is elusive. For example, the first seven poems seem to mirror the second seven. Here we may see emerging a kind of form. The sueño poems gel; the Japanese poems also. However, although what I have called the fifth group of poems in this study seem to gel particularly well, their function in the book is almost one of defying the reader to seek form.

While the poems in the other groups seem to flow together, they do not seem to culminate in one overall statement about a theme as do the groups of poems in Historia de la noche. Here perhaps lies the key to form in La cifra: the poems flow one to the next without all developing a single idea in an intellectual pyramid. While the poems refer to each other frequently, creating parallels and varied lines of enquiry, there emerges no one form but rather a mesh of micro forms.

In Historia de la noche the subject under discussion is literature and its relation to life; it is a history, and as such uses a chronological, linear development of theme to arrive at its conclusion. In La cifra the subjects are perception and our life as individuals. There are two suggested ways of viewing the past; as a single stream of incidents leading to the present, or as a vague set of fragments which lead up to a multiplicity of presents. The latter is the case in La cifra and it is for this reason that the structure of the book is so loose.

In Historia de la noche Borges holds up man's reaction to reality and fiction as something to be proud of and which he understands. However, in La cifra he holds up reality, the world of our perceptions, life and death, as things which are unfathomable. The structures of the two books underline their concerns. Fiction and history are both linear; reality is spiral, circular, disjointed, strange and inconceivable. It is also rhapsodic, like the structure of La cifra, offering temporary meaning and then taking it away.

Conclusion:

Borges, the poem and the book

Borges meant his books to be read. For him, they only really became poetry when read by the reader:

Lo esencial es el hecho estético, el *thrill*, la modificación física que suscita cada lectura. '

It is logical, then, that Borges paid attention to the presentation of his poems, as it influenced the reader of his work. The words I have quoted above come from the 'Prólogo' to Obra poética; at the beginning of that book, the reader is immediately reminded of his importance in the poetic event which follows. Perhaps more than any other writer, Borges continually reminds us of the importance of the reader and of the contextualization of a text in its interpretation: this is perhaps demonstrated more clearly in 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote' than anywhere else in his work.

The factor which this study has attempted to emphasize, in comparison to studies by other critics, has been the way in which the individual poems function within the context of the book. In these studies of Historia de la noche and La cifra the tendency of the poems to come together into the larger structures of the book has been demonstrated and explored from a reader's point of view.

The book, rather than the poem, is the point of contact between

the poetry and the reader where the 'hecho estético' takes place. The book is the interface between the participants in the poetic act: within the book the individual poems both gain and lose their identity. The poems become contextualized and interact within the book, and this affects the meaning which the reader may assign them. At the same time as this increases their standing as individual poems, it enriches them and makes them dependant on the surrounding poems, and ultimately on the rest of the book, for their effect. The book becomes the background of the poems and yet is itself formed from the poems; the book and the poems have a symbiotic relationship.

The event, the 'hecho estético', which takes place between the reader and the poem has another concomitant, however: Borges. Borges makes special use of the semi-fictional, self-conscious, author in his books. ² Before the reader even opens the book, he is aware of what he is about to read: Borges. The reader familiar with Borges knows the way in which he is about to be manipulated, he knows in advance the type of themes and obsessions which the poems will contain. He is aware that the ideas are more important than the verbal beauty of the poems in Borges, and that ironically the poems' beauty lies in the matrices of ideas which they present. These are often contradictory, ironic and paradoxical. ³ In fact, Borges' texts are often seen as puzzling by his most ardent readers; it is perhaps because of this that Borges has attracted so much critical attention. Each new book has been a puzzle to be solved, almost in the manner of a detective story, one of Borges' preferred literary genres. ⁴

Borges wrote as a self-conscious author; he was in the privileged position of an internationally successful author who was widely

written about, and who knew what people looked for in his work. He was present at conferences on his own work. In this study we have seen how Borges manipulates the reader. Borges knew who his readers were and the success of his work may be due to how well he wrote for that audience. His books were going to be read like detective stories: in the texts he left clues. These are 'red herrings' on occasion, but his aesthetic code, 'esta inminencia de una revelación, que no se produce, es, quizá, el hecho estético', accounts and allows for this. ⁵ Even if there are 'red herrings', they are part of the aesthetic event. Interpretation of Borges is essentially a postponing of that interpretation.

What this study has shown of the form of Borges' books of verse is varied. In both cases, the form of the book is dependent on the figure of Borges, on the poems and on the reader. In Historia de la noche, the poet's use of a book structure is fairly straightforward. The circle which begins at the start of the book seems to close and begin again at the end. Each group of poems has its own momentum and builds up to its climax in the concluding envoi. The four main groups of poems build up to the final poem; the circle closes. And yet it begins again, with each new reading of the volume; this is emphasized by the similarities between the first and last poems. Before and after the poems, in the 'Inscripción' and in the 'Epílogo', the poet appears. He serves the purpose of being a person who is half way between the 'real' world, which is chaos and is where the reader lives, and the poetic world of the poems, which depends on symmetries, patterns, logic, symbols and artifice. He can bridge the gap between the two worlds for the reader. He also, ironically, emphasizes both

that gap and the difference between literature and reality. In doing so, he points the reader toward looking for structure and form within the book.

In La cifra, the poet plays a similar role. The book, however, has a much more complicated form. There are groups of poems, the oriental poems and the Argentine poems, for example, which cluster together; then there are whole sections of the book, like the first fourteen poems, which cohere by means of the repetition of images and ideas.

Overall, the structure of La cifra is more subtle than that of the previous volume. In the latter there is a constant image of literature and story-telling throughout the work; this is echoed in the linear progression of the poems towards the final poem. In La cifra the constant central theme is one of elusiveness. It is this elusiveness which the book's structure is based on. The form mirrors the content; the groups of poems in La cifra are loose, subtle and complex. They are more nebulous than those found in Historia de la noche and therefore require more subjective input from the reader in their interpretation. The structure then becomes much more ambiguous and complex than is the case with Historia de la noche. Where Historia de la noche has a linear structure, La cifra has a patchwork of suggestions of form within the volume.

These suggestions of form - repeated images and motives, poems that seem to connect together and so on - direct the reader to read in a certain way: their main role is one of creating the awareness in the reader that the poems about to be read form a book, a single expressive unit. Although the initial suggestion of form within the

book comes from Borges, when he introduces the poems in the 'Inscripción', and 'Prólogo', the form of La cifra ultimately depends more on the reader than on the text itself. This form is partial; it seems to gel and then it disappears, like the moon in 'La cifra' and the 'númenes' in 'Shinto'. It parallels Borges' definition of the aesthetic event:

Esto concordará con la tesis de Benedetto Croce; ya Pater, en 1877, afirmó que todas las artes aspiran a la condición de la música, que no es otra cosa que forma. La música, los estados de felicidad, la mitología, las caras-trabajadas por el tiempo, ciertos crepúsculos y ciertos lugares, quieren decirnos algo, o algo dijeron que no hubiéramos debido perder, o están por decir algo; esta inminencia de una revelación, que no se produce, es, quizá, el hecho estético. ⁶

Form in La cifra is the expectation of form, created in the reader's mind by textual devices. It is suggested rather than stated.

The participation of the reader is essential for the realization of both books of poems. The role assumed by the poet in the prologue and 'Inscripción' is primarily one of inciting the reader to this act. In the prologue and 'Inscripción' in La cifra and the 'Inscripción' in Historia de la noche the poet transfers responsibility for the aesthetic event which is about to take place from himself to the reader. By writing a prologue, or dedication, the poet acknowledges that the process of writing is over; the process of reading may now begin. These texts mark the end of the creative process with regard to the poet, who has worked to produce the poems, editing and rewriting, and the beginning of the reader's creative process. The poems now belong to the reader, who completes the poetic act with his

Imagination and interpretation. This ties in with what Borges writes in the 'Prólogo' to Obra poética:

la poesía está en el comercio del poema con el lector, no en la serie de símbolos que registran las páginas de un libro. 7

Perhaps for Borges, suggested form is the most aesthetically pleasing of all: it allows the reader room to interpret the book and to experience the 'hecho estético' without being crowded, as it were, by the author. Suggested form also allows for more ambiguity and provides another source of richness in the text. In terms of Borges' idea of the 'hecho estético' and the place of the reader in the poetry, La cifra, then, is much more successful than Historia de la noche.

In conclusion, both books which have been studied in the present thesis show contrasting uses of the book as an expressive unit. Both depend on Borges, the self-conscious author who suggests form, and on the interaction of the poems with the reader, who has been, to a great extent, manipulated by Borges. The reader, together with Borges, the poem and the book, creates the 'hecho estético' - the ultimate aim of Borges' poetry.

Notes

¹ OP p. 21:

El sabor de la manzana (declara Berkeley) está en el contacto de la fruta con el paladar, no en la fruta misma; análogamente (diría yo) la poesía está en el comercio del poema con el lector, no en la serie de símbolos que registran las páginas de un libro, Lo esencial es el hecho estético, el *thrill*, la modificación física que suscita cada lectura.

² See John Sturrock. Paper Tigers: The Ideal Fictions of Jorge Luis Borges (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) on the semi-fictional author:

Authorship is a transformation; it creates authors, who exist only by virtue of what they have published, out of men, who from a literary viewpoint do not exist at all, since they are incapable of representation in a text without undergoing this very transformation. (p. 193)

As we have seen in many of the poems studied in this thesis, Borges was fascinated by the process by means of which literature creates authors in the mind of the reader.

³ In his 'Variaciones borgianas sobre un tema platónico' (Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana vol. 11 pts. 21 - 22 [1985]: pp. 165 - 171), Eduardo Urdanivia underlines the importance of the idea content of Borges' poetry in Borges' success.

⁴ In '17 apuntes para descifrar a Borges (glosas)' (Ínsula 461 [1985]: pp. 1 - 12), Miguel Enguíanos writes of the detective-like nature of the Borges reader, and of La cifra as a puzzle to be solved.

⁵ PC II: p. 133.

⁶ PC II: p. 133. Walter Pater was an 'English essayist and

critic, 1839 - 1894, author of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance, Marius the Epicurean, Imaginary Portraits, Plato and Platonism, Appreciations* and other works', according to Balderston The Literary Universe of Jorge Luis Borges, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986, p. 117.

7 OP p. 21.

... the isolated images of the poem in a similar order of words, the poems are placed in order and context for the reader's interpretations of his poems; for the reader to read the poems were as integral to the poem as the reader's reading of the text as his writer.

... the prologues, prologues and notes in his books; Borges appears both as the creator and a reader of his own work; in these texts, the reader is the poet and creates the reader, the poet and the reader, the context of Borges' other work and of the series of his work 'Borges'.

... Historia de la noche (1977) and La noche (1967) are two works, Historia de la noche has been translated both by thematic means and by the use of...

Appendix

Abstract of thesis

"Borges, the poem and the book:

a study of Historia de la noche and La cifra"

In the later poetry of Jorge Luis Borges, the poetic device used most frequently is enumeration. This device gives a context to and modifies the isolated images of the poem. In a similar way, in his books of verse, the poems are placed in order and contextualized. This affects the reader's interpretations of his poems: for Borges, the reader and how he read were as integral to the 'hecho estético' created by the reading of the text as its writer.

In the epilogues, prologues and notes in his books of poems, Borges appears both as the creator and a reader of his work. By writing as a self-conscious author in these texts, he further contextualizes the poems and directs the reader. The poems are also placed in the context of Borges' other work and of the semi-fictional literary persona 'Borges'.

Historia de la noche (1977) and La cifra (1981) are studied. The earlier of the two works, Historia de la noche, has an implicit structure, created both by thematic means and by the use of envois placed at the end of five of the poems. These divide the poems into groups and give the reader direction and impetus in his reading.

La cifra has a structure which is more elusive and subtle,

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