

Veinticinco de agosto, 1983

Jorge Luis Borges

Vi en el reloj de la pequeña estación que eran las once de la noche pasadas. Fui caminando hasta el hotel. Sentí, como otras veces, la resignación y el alivio que nos infunden los lugares muy conocidos. El ancho portón estaba abierto; la quinta, a oscuras. Entré en el vestibulo, cuyos espejos pálidos repetían las plantas del salon.

Curiosamente el dueño no me reconoció y me tendió el registro. Tomé la pluma que estaba sujeta al pupitre, la mojó en el tintero de bronce y al inclinarme sobre el libro abierto, ocurrió la primera sorpresa de las muchas que me depararía esa noche. Mi nombre, Jorge Luis Borges, ya estaba escrito y la tinta, todavía fresca.

El dueño me dijo:

— Yo creí que usted ya había subido.

Luege me miró bien y se corrigió:

— Disculpe, señor. El otro se le parece tanto, pero, usted es más joven.

Le pregunté:

— Qué habitación tiene?

— Pidió la peiza 19: fue la respuesta.

Era lo que había temido.

Solté la pluma y subí corriendo las escaleras. La pieza 19 estaba en el segundo piso y daba un pobre patio desmantelado en el que había una baranda y, lo recuerdo, un banco de plaza. Era el cuarto más alto del hotel. Abrí la puerta que cedió. No habían apagado la araña. Bajo la despiadada luz me reconocí. De espaldas en la

25th August, 1983

I saw on the clock of the small station that eleven had passed, and walking on toward the hotel felt as always the resignation and relief that invade us in places known too well. The slack gate was open; but the villa within lay dark. I entered the hall, whose fading mirrors repeated the arrangements of the parlour. The proprietor did not recognize me, curiously, and extended the register. I took up the pen that was fastened to the desk and dipped it in the brass inkstand, and, bending to the opened ledger, met with the first of the many surprises that night would afford me. My name, Jorge Luis Borges, was already written there, and the ink, still wet.

The master of the house apologised:

— I thought you had gone up already.

Then, looking me over, he corrected himself:

— Pardon me, sir. The other looks much like you; but you are younger.

I inquired of him:

— Which room has he taken?

— He asked for 19: it was given.

It was as I had feared.

I let the pen go and hurried up the stairs. Room 19 was on the second floor of the hotel, and gave on a crumbling verandah with a railing and, I remembered, a bench from the public square. It was their highest chamber. I opened a yielding door. The chandelier still flared: and under the pitiless light I recognized myself. Sunk back in the

angosta cama de fierro, más viejo, enflaquecido y muy pálido, estaba yo, los ojos perdidos en las altas molduras de yeso. Me llegó la voz. No era precisamente la mía; era la que suelo oír en mis grabaciones, ingrata y sin matices.

— Qué raro – decía – somos dos y somos el mismo. Pero nada es raro en los sueños.

Pregunté asustado:

— Entonces, todo esto es un sueño?

— Es, estoy seguro, mi último sueño.

Con la mano mostró el frasco vacío sobre el mármol de la mesa de luz.

— Vos tendrás mucho que sonar, sin embargo, antes de llegar a esta noche. En qué fecha estás?

— No sé muy bien – le dije aturdido –. Pero ayer cumplí sesenta y un años.

— Cuando tu vigilia llegue a esta noche, habrás cumplido, ayer, ochenta y cuatro. Hoy estamos a 25 de agosto de 1983.

— Tantos años habrá que esperar – murmuré.

— A mí ya no me está quedando nada – dijo con brusquedad –. En cualquier momento puedo morir, puedo perderme en lo que no sé y sigo sonando con el doble. El fatigado tema que me dieron los espejos y Stevenson.

Sentí que la evocación de Stevenson era una despedida y no un rasgo pedante. Yo era él y comprendía. No bastan los momentos más dramáticos para ser Shakespeare y dar con frases memorables. Para distraerlo, le dije:

— Sabía que esto te iba a ocurrir. Aquí mismo hace años, en una

narrow iron bedstead, very old, emaciated and blanched, there I lay, eyes gone in the scrolled plaster of the ceiling. The voice reached me. It was not precisely mine; it was what one might hear on a recording, disagreeable and flat.

— How singular – he said – we are two and we are the same. But nothing is strange in dreams.

I asked in alarm:

— Then this is all a dream?

— It is, I am sure, my last dream.

He gestured at the vial lying emptied on the lit marble of the table.

— You will have much to dream through, however, before you come to this night. What is the date?

— I am not sure – I said, bewildered. – But I turned seventy-one yesterday.

— When your vigil comes to this night you will have completed, yesterday, eighty years and four. Today is the twenty-fifth in the August of 1983.

— How many years await us – I murmured.

— To me already nothing remains – he said brusquely. – I could die any moment now, lose myself in I do not know what: and go on dreaming in my double. The tired theme bequeathed me by mirrors and by Stevenson.

The invoking of Stevenson was not a characteristic pedantry, I felt, but a farewell. I was he, and understood: the moment hadn't drama enough for Shakespeare and his memorable phrasing. To distract him, I said:

— I knew this was going to happen. It has been years since, right here, in one

de las piezas abajo, iniciamos el borrador de la historia de este suicido.

— Si – me respondió lentamente, como si juntara recuerdos. – Pero no veo la relación. En aquel borrador yo había sacado un pasaje de ida para Adrogué, y ya en el hotel Las Delicias había subido a la pieza 19, la mas apartada de todas. Ahí me había suicidado.

— Por eso estoy aquí – le dije.

— Aquí? Siempre estamos aquí. Aquí te estoy soñando en la casa de la calle Maipú. Aquí estoy yéndome, en el cuarto que fue de madre.

— Que fue de madre – repetí, sin querer entender –. Yo te sueño en la pieza 19, en el patio de arriba.

— Quién sueña a quién? Yo sé que te sueño, pero no sé si estás soñandome. El hotel de Adrogué fue demolido hace ya tantos años, veinte, acaso treinta. Quién sabe.

— El soñador soy yo – repliqué con cierto desafío.

— No te das cuenta que lo fundamental es averiguar si hay un solo hombre soñando o dos que se sueñan.

— Yo soy Borges, que vio tu nombre en el registro y subió.

— Borges soy yo, que estoy muriéndome en la calle Maipú.

Hubo un silencio, el otro me dijo:

— Vamos a hacer la prueba. Cuál ha sido el momento más terrible de nuestra vida?

Me incliné sobre él y los dos hablamos a un tiempo. Sé que los dos mentimos.

of the lower rooms, we began writing the first draft of this suicide.

— Yes – he returned, slowly, as if recalling one thing upon another. – But I do not see how that matters. In that version I had got a ticket out to Adrogué, and in the hotel Las Delicias had already gone up to Room 19, the one set away most from the rest. There I had killed myself.

— So here we are – I said.

— Here? We are always here. Here, I am dreaming you in the house on Calle Maipú. Here I am departing, in the room that was mother's.

— That was mother's – I repeated, not wanting to understand. – And I am dreaming you in Room 19, along the verandah on top.

— Who is dreaming whom? I know I am dreaming you, but I do not know if you are dreaming me. The hotel in Adrogué was demolished many years ago, twenty, maybe thirty. Who knows.

— I am the dreamer – I replied, with some challenge in my voice.

— You do not see that, before anything, it must be settled whether there is one man dreaming or two, dreaming each other.

— I am Borges, who saw your name in the register and came up.

— It is I who am Borges, who am passing away on Calle Maipú.

Upon a silence, the other said:

— Come, let us put it to the test. What has been the most terrible moment of our life?

I bent toward him, and both of us spoke at once. I knew we had both lied.

Una tenue sonrisa iluminó el rostro envejecido. Sentí que esa sonrisa reflejaba, de algún modo, la mía.

— Nos hemos mentido – me dijo – porque nos sentimos dos y no uno. La verdad es que somos dos y somos uno.

Esa conversación me irritaba. Así se lo dije.

Agregué:

— Y vos, en 1983, no vas a revelarme nada sobre los años que me faltan?

— Qué puedo decirte, pobre Borges? Se repetirán las desdichas a que estás acostumbrado. Quedarás solo en esta casa. Tocarás los libros sin letras y el medallón de Swedenborg y la bandeja de madera con la Cruz Federal. La ceguera no es la tiniebla; es una forma de soledad. Volverás a Islandia.

— Islandia! Islandia de los mares!

— En Roma, repetirás los versos de Keats, cuyo nombre, como el de todos, fue escrito en el agua.

— No he estado nunca en Roma.

— Hay también otras cosas. Escribirás nuestro mejor poema, que será una elegía.

— A la muerte de ... – dije yo. No me atreví a decir el nombre.

— No. Ella vivirá más que vos.

Quedamos silenciosos. Prosiguió:

— Escibirás el libro con el que hemos soñado tanto tiempo. Hacia 1979 comprenderás que tu supuesta obra no es otra cosa que una serie de borradores, de borradores misceláneos, y cederás a la vana y supersticiosa tentación de escribir tu gran libro. La superstición que nos ha infligido

A thin smile lit the aged face; I felt that it was, in some way, reflecting mine.

— We have both lied – he agreed – because we feel as two, not one. The truth is that we are two and we are one.

The exchange had irritated me, and, wanting to quarrel now, I said:

— And you, in 1983, are you going to reveal nothing to me of the years I lack?

— What can I tell you, poor Borges? The misfortunes you are accustomed to will repeat themselves. You will be left alone in this house. You will stroke these volumes that lack letters; and the medallion of Swedenborg, and the tray of wood which keeps the Cruz Federal. Blindness is not a confusion; it is a form of solitude. You will return to Iceland.

— Iceland! Iceland among the seas!

— In Rome you will repeat the verses of Keats, whose name, as with every other, was written in water.

— I have never been in Rome.

— There are other things as well. You will write our best poem, which will be an elegy.

— On the death of ... – I said. I dared not say the name.

— No. She will long outlive you.

We were both silent a while. He continued:

— You will write that book we have dreamt so many times. Around 1979 you will understand that your supposed works are no more than rough drafts, a miscellany of such; and you will succumb to the vain and superstitious temptation to write your grand book. The superstition that has inflicted on us

el *Fausto* de Goethe, *Salammbô*, el *Ulysses*. Llené, increíblemente, muchas páginas.

— Y al final comprendiste que habías fracasado.

— Algo peor. Comprendí que era una obra maestra en el sentido más abrumador de la palabra. Mis buenas intenciones no habían pasado las primeras páginas; en las otras estaban los laberintos, los cuchillos, el hombre que se cree una imagen, el reflejo que se cree verdadero, el tigre de las noches, las batallas que vuelven en la sangre, Juan Muraña ciego y fatal, la voz de Macedonio, la nave hecha con uñas de los muertos, el inglés antiguo repetido en las tardes.

— Ese museo me es familiar – observé con ironía.

— Además, los falsos recuerdos, el doble juego de símbolos, las largas enumeraciones, el buen manejo del prosaísmo, las simetrías imperfectas que describen con alborozo los críticos, las citas no siempre apócrifas.

— Publicaste ese libro?

— Jugué, sin convicción, con el melodramático propósito de destruirlo, acaso por el fuego. Acabé por publicarlo in Madrid, bajo un seudónimo. Se habló de un torpe imitador de Borges, que tenía el defecto de no ser Borges y de haber repetido lo exterior del modelo.

— No me sorprende – dije yo.– Todo escritor acaba por ser su menos inteligente discípulo.

— Ese libro fue uno de los caminos que me llevaron a esta noche. En cuanto a los demás ... La humillación de la

the *Faust* of Goethe, *Salammbô*, our *Ulysses*. You will, incredibly, fill up many pages.

— And you come to understand, finally, that you had failed.

— Something worse. I understood that a masterly work lay immured in words within my understanding. My diligence had not taken me beyond its first pages. The remainder kept the labyrinths, the knives, the man who believed himself an image, the reflection that supposed itself substantial, the tiger of night, the battles that recur in the blood, Juan Muraña blind and fatal, the voice of Macedonio, the ship made with the nails of the dead, the antique English recited at dusk.

— That museum is familiar to me – I observed, intending irony.

— False remembrances, besides, and the duplicity of symbols; long enumerations, the proper handling of the prosaic; the imperfect symmetries critics will loudly discover; the citations that are not always apocryphal.

— Do you publish this book?

— I entertained the melodramatic intent of destroying it, by fire perhaps. I ended by publishing it in Madrid, under an assumed name. A clumsy imitator of Borges, they said: who enjoys the defect of not being Borges, only, and who has reproduced the superficies of his model.

— I am not surprised – I said.– Every writer ends as his own and least intelligent disciple.

— That book was one of the ways that led me to this night. As for the rest ... The humiliation of

vejez, la convicción de haber vivido ya cada día. . .

— No escribiré ese libro – dije.

— Lo escribirás. Mis palabras, que ahora son el presente, serán apenas la memoria de un sueño.

Me molestó su tono dogmático, sin duda el que uso en mis clases. Me molestó que nos pareciéramos tanto y que aprovechara la impunidad que le daba la cercanía de la muerte. Para desquitarme, le dije:

— Tan seguro estás de que vas a morir?

— Sí – me replicó.– Siento una especie de dulzura y alivio, que no he sentido nunca. No puedo comunicarlo. Todas las palabras requieren una experiencia compartida. Por qué parece molestarte tanto lo que te digo?

— Por que nos parecemos demasiado. Aborrezco tu cara, que es mi caricatura, aborrezco tu voz, que es me remedo, aborrezco tu sintaxis patética, que es la mía.

— Yo también – dijo el otro.– Por eso resolví suicidarme.

Un pájaro cantó desde la quinta.

— Es el último – dijo el otro.

Con un gesto me llamó a su lado. Su mano buscó la mía. Retrocedí; temí que se confundieran las dos.

Me dijo:

— Los estoicos enseñan que no debemos quejarnos de la vida; la puerta de la cárcel está abierta. Siempre lo entendí así, pero la pereza y cobardía me demoraron. Hará unos doce días, yo daba una conferencia en La Plata sobre el Libro VI de la *Eneida*. De pronto, al

old age, the surety of having lived out each day already ...

— You do not write that book – I said.

— You will write it; and my word on it, certain enough to you now, will only be the memory of a dream then.

His dogmatic tone offended me; it was no doubt mine in my classes. That we should seem so much alike offended me; and that he made the most of the impunity given him by the nearness of death. Retaliating, I said:

— Are you sure that you are about to die?

— Yes – he replied – I feel a species of softness, and release, that I have never felt. I cannot describe it. All words require some shared experience. But why does what I say seem to offend you so?

— Because we seem too much alike. I abhor your face, which is mine caricatured, I abhor your voice, which parrots mine, I abhor your poor sentences, which are also mine.

— And I as well – said the other. – That is why I resolved to kill myself.

A bird sang in the eaves.

— It is the end – said the other.

He gestured me to his side. His hand searched for mine. I shrank away, fearing the confusion of our flesh.

— The Stoics teach that we must not complain of living – I heard him say – for the door of the prison is open. I have long thought so: but laziness and cowardice delayed me. It will be some twelve days now that I was lecturing, in La Plata, on the sixth book of the *Aeneid*. Of a sudden, while

escandir un hexámetro, supe cuál era mi camino. Tomé esta decisión. Desde aquel momento me sentí invulnerable. Mi suerte será la tuya, recibirás la brusca revelación, en medio del latín y de Virgilio y habrás olvidado enteramente este curioso diálogo profético, que transcurre en dos tiempos y en dos lugares. Cuando lo vuelvas a soñar, serás el que soy, y tú serás mi sueño.

— No lo olvidaré y voy a escribirlo mañana.

— Quedará en lo profundo de tu memoria, debajo de la marea de los sueños. Cuando lo escribas, crearás urdir un cuento fantástico. No será mañana, todavía te faltan muchos años.

Dejó de hablar, comprendí que había muerto. En cierto modo yo moría con él; me incliné acongojado sobre la almohada y ya no había nadie.

Huí de la pieza. Afuera no estaba el patio, ni las escaleras de marmol, ni la gran casa silenciosa, ni los eucaliptus, ni las estatuas, ni la glorieta, ni las fuentes, ni el portón de la verja de la quinta en el pueblo de Adrogué.

Afuera me esperaban otros sueños.

scanning a hexameter, I knew my way. I decided upon this; and since that moment I have felt myself invulnerable. My luck will be yours; and you will receive the brusque revelation amid the Latin of Virgil. You will by then have forgotten, entirely, our curious and divinatory exchange across two times and two places; and when you dream all this over, you will have become the one I am, and you will be my dream.

— I shall forget nothing; and I am going to write it all down tomorrow.

— It will remain in the depths of your memory, beneath the tide of dreams. When you do write it, you will suppose that you are plotting a fantastic story: and that will not be tomorrow, but many years thence.

He left off speaking: I knew he had died. In a certain way I had died with him. I approached, grieving, and bent toward the pillow: and already there was no one there.

I fled the room. Outside there was no verandah, no marble stair, no silent rambling house, no eucalypti, or statues, neither public square nor fountains, nor the slack gate in the railing of the villa in the suburb of Adrogué.

Outside other dreams waited upon me.

ghivarghese kuzhikandam

notes

Trawling the Web for mention of our narrative, I was astonished to find that it had been taken for an advertisement by Borges of his intended suicide, on the titular day: an undertaking he is reported to have excused himself from carrying through, in the event, on account of cowardice.

That he may have said so does not prove the case, of course: humouring just so some interlocutor intent on facts may have been prudence only. *Veinticinco de agosto, 1983* is what the late collection *La Memoria de Shakespeare* opens with: and its appearance there, in the company of frank fictions like *Tigres Azules*, might be thought proof enough that it too is a story.

I have, at any rate, read it so; and I have attempted, as it happens, to 'plot a fantastic story'. In what follows I shall list, and try to excuse, some of the liberties I have taken with the original: which will seem almost plain in its manner beside my mumming: as if the younger Borges who recounts its happenings had indeed 'written it all down' the next day, 'forgetting nothing', and in just such a way as to defeat the prognosis of the dying elder — even if that had been delivered in dream only.

That his translator should succumb where the author had resisted would not have displeased the person one imagines Borges to be: or so I fancy: accustomed as he seems to say he was, in *Borges y Yo*, to 'hearing himself more in the writings of others than in his own.' But however that may be, my exculpatory exercises might indicate why our seeming fiction might be read as a report of actual happenings, as well, made by the literary personage his admiring readers know as Jorge Luis Borges: or as an oblique and elaborate notice of intended suicide even: and that must excuse my imposing on the reader further with these notes.

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- *slack gate*
ancho porton

"Wide" would be the more natural rendering of "ancho" here : but I trust that the kinaesthetic emphasis of "slack" has been anticipated — or is sufficiently underwritten, at least — by the "places known too well" coming before it.

- *the arrangements of the parlour*
las plantas del salon

The natural rendering of "plantas" is "plants" : and the only excuse I have for "arrangements" is that "planta" can mean "plan" in its architectural uses. That is very flimsy, of course: and those who find my version egregious may put in "plants" for "arrangements" without too much loss.

- *the master of the house apologised.*
el dueño me dijo.

Literally "The proprietor said to me" : but I have tried thus to draw out and dramatise an exchange that is implicit in the original — or so I read it, and I can only hope that I have not exaggerated too much.

- *The chandelier still flared:*
No habían apagado el araña.

A literal rendering would be *The chandelier had not been extinguished*. But I have tried thusly to motivate the “pitiless light” immediately following.

- *eyes gone in the scrolled plaster of the ceiling*
los ojos perdidos en las altas molduras de yeso

I have made a little more picturable the generic “high mouldings of plaster” of the original — which seems a narrative propriety that literary English demands here — and perhaps exaggerated its “perdidos” with “gone”.

- *what one might hear on a recording*
la que suelo oír en mis grabaciones

“What I am used to hearing on my recordings” is what the original says: and my overwriting that just as I have will seem unpardonable licence. But I render the phrase as I do in order to preserve the fictiveness of the narrating voice: to let the narrator speak of *his* recordings — which he is *used to hearing*, moreover — would have invested him with too much of a life *outside* the fiction: or so it seems to me.

I find myself unable, though, to say just why that should be so: after all, just such feints of voice seems to have been managed well enough in *Borges y Yo*. But note that the gambit of the ending there — *I don’t know which of us wrote this*: which implies that *neither* does — isn’t a readily available move here. The vacuum between lyric and narrative, within which that “I” oscillates, is not easily inhabited: and seems to admit the briefest transit only.

I mean only to excuse my failure thus: the original surely reads well enough, as a story, in its own tongue. But I hope that some little success, on my apportioned ground, is not precluded by such failure: and that I have not embarrassed myself, only, by trying to plot a fantastic story.

- *the moment hadn’t drama enough for Shakespeare and his memorable phrasing.*
No bastan los momentos más dramáticos para ser Shakespeare y dar con frases memorables.

That the most dramatic moments, even, do not live up to Shakespeare’s memorable phrasing is what the original has the younger Borges saying: an assertiveness my redaction does not preserve. But I trust that I have gone on to make good a departure which, considered by itself, would be only egregious.

- *We have both lied — he agreed.*
Nos hemos mentado — me dijo.

My version makes the elder Borges more knowing than he is in the original: or seem more knowing to the narrating younger, at least.

- *and, wanting to quarrel now, I said:*
Así se lo dije. Agregué:

The younger Borges is a somewhat susceptible creature in my version: but the reader has been prepared enough for that, I hope, by now.

- *Iceland among the seas!*
Islandia de los mares!

My “among” attempts to draw out the suggestion of “belonging to” that I hear in the original.

- *that book we have dreamt*
el libro con el que hemos soñado

“The book we have dreamed of” would be a literal rendering: but I thought it proper to give dreaming some ‘active’ character here.

- *I understood that a masterly work lay immured in words within my understanding.*
Comprendí que era una obra maestra en el sentido más abrumador de la palabra.

“Overcome by words” would more properly translate “más abrumador de la palabra”. But I am closed in the grip, by now, of the ‘fantastic’ story I have bound myself to write: and the elder Borges who presides there seems as vain ‘the other one’ in *Borges y Yo* — and possessed as much by his “nasty habit of distortion and aggrandizement.”

- — *That museum is familiar to me — I observed, intending irony.*
— *Ese museo me es familiar — observé con ironía.*

Rendering “con ironía” with “intending irony” makes the younger Borges less sure of himself — more under the elder’s spell — than he seems in the original: and in my version the elder gets the better of the younger, rather, in the thrust-and-parry they fall to, again, after “she will long outlive you” : a bout which I mean to have the elder finish with “that is why I resolved to kill myself.”

The ‘judgement’ of the younger Borges that ‘every writer ends as his own and least intelligent disciple’ — however accurate — should give him only a fleeting advantage now: which should be entirely reversed by the elder’s emphatic “you will write it” : which latter should deflect the retaliatory “are you sure you are going to die?” even as that is said out.

- *I feel a species of softness, and release*
Siento una especie de dulzura y alivio

“A sort of” would more colloquially render “una especie de” : but I wanted to mark the emphasized strangeness of the feeling. Also, the echo of a technical register that “species” sounds should preserve the ‘dogmatic tone’ of the lecturer we have just heard; and serve, besides, to anticipate the circumstance that the ‘brusque revelation’ which decides the elder Borges comes to him as he is occupied in the scansion of Latin verse: which is, of course, a somewhat ‘technical’ engagement with poetry.

- *A bird sang in the eaves.*
Un pájaro cantó desde la quinta.

I resort to “in the eaves” because the workings of implicature in English seem to somehow disallow “A bird sang outside the villa.”

- *I shrank away, fearing the confusion of our flesh.*
Retrocedi; temi que se confundieran las dos.

The younger Borges is far more composed here, in the original, than mine is: he merely moves back: and fears only to mistake the other's hand for his. But mine does not, I trust, of a sudden become an excitable creature.

- *I approached, grieving, and bent toward the pillow; and already there was no one there.*
Me incliné acongojado sobre la almohada y ya no había nadie.

Narrative propriety in English seems to require the "approached" that I have interposed: and having had "I heard him say" interrupt the elder's recounting of how he 'knew his way', just before, should have placed the younger far enough from him — particularly after "shrank away" — to allow my "approached".

- *silent rambling house*
gran casa silenciosa

Rendering "gran" by a somewhat 'definite' epithet like "rambling" seems to be forced on me, again, by some obscure demand of implicature — by my having rendered "quinta" as "villa": rather than as "mansion" say — and none of the usual transcriptions of "gran" seem suitable now.

Veinticinco de agosto, 1983 seems to have been written a little after the stories in *Doctor Brodie's Report*: in the preface to which volume Borges announced that he had *given up the surprises inherent in a baroque style, and now preferred to satisfy an expectation rather than to provide a startling shock. For many years, he goes on to say, I thought it might be given me to achieve a good page by means of variations and novelties; now, having passed seventy, I believe I have found my own voice. Slight rewording neither spoils nor improves what I dictate, except in cases of lightening a clumsy sentence or toning down an exaggeration.*

Such indifference to *le mot juste* would still have surprised literary sensibility when *Doctor Brodie's Report* appeared, in 1970: how 'postmodernist' ever — however tentatively or assertively so — writing and writing upon writing had become by then. But my appeal to 'narrative propriety' and 'the workings of implicature' above might well seem reflexes merely vestigial, now, of a modernism long outmoded: and I may have compounded the formal error of plotting a fantastic story by searching too much for the 'right' words: which may be a bootless sort of scavenging, anyway, in the *koine* that 'global' English has become.

Modish anglophone readers who have been raised on a diet of French Theory — on Derrida pasteurized for American sophomores, perhaps, if they have not been particularly lucky in their teachers — might even now be brought up short by Borges' seeming conviction that *each language is a tradition, each word a shared symbol*: and the corollary confidence which decides that *what an innovator can change amounts to a trifle: we need only remember, he declares, the splendid but often unreadable work of a Mallarme or a Joyce*. But they will not be

abashed for long, if at all: for *it is likely*, Borges grants immediately after, *that this all-too-reasonable reasoning is only the fruit of weariness. My now advanced age has taught me to resign myself to being Borges.*

That brings us nicely back: the writer who believes he has just found *his own voice* — an assignable *person*, identified as such by his passport, say: Citizen Borges, let us call him, even though he has just declared that his being *a member of the Conservative Party* is *in itself a form of skepticism* — must nonetheless resign himself, even now, to *being Borges.*

Now for a man who lives almost entirely among words such an ‘other’ would be only as fictive as any ‘actual’ self he might own — or so I shall let myself suppose — and one might wonder then if our narrative means to involve its reader in the ontological uncertainties of ‘personal identity’. I must say that I did not keep the possibility in mind, at all, as I tried to bring the story over: for metaphysical dubiety may not be assayed in English by literary means anymore, it appears, and must be relinquished to the *paper* of the professional philosopher: though words might nowadays be much too closely sorted there — in the counting-house of Reason that protocol has latterly made of it — to catch at such fugitive intimation as selves must afford.

But I cannot say whether or not Borges’ intended readers would have pondered the identity of persons, as a theme, as they took in *Veinticinco de agosto, 1983*. Much of the later writing seems to presume, certainly, upon its readers acknowledging some more than usual commerce between the person of the author and the bodied voice, as it were, of the narrator or speaker. The late and valedictory poems are obvious examples now; and in the ending to our story the eucalypti would not show very suddenly to attentive readers of *Doctor Brodie’s Report*: which has a tale that Citizen Borges seems to relay, only, as a story told him *one summer evening out in Adrogué*: the *long chronicle of a feud and its grim ending, which are mixed up in his memory with the medicinal smell of the eucalyptus trees and the babbling voices of the birds.*

But I may be too much under Borges’ spell in my glossing here: and the seeming suddenness of the eucalypti may be formally accounted for otherwise. A friend and fellow-votary of Borges suggests that as Adrogué seems to have been known for its eucalyptus trees — to the intended readers of our story, at least: and known enough to need no mention at all, anyhow worked in, when the place is first mentioned — the notice of their absence at the very end, conspicuous there, would further prepare one for its last line.

I have already noted, and the reader with some Spanish will have remarked, how much more ‘baroque’ than the original my version of *Veinticinco de agosto, 1983* is. Now if ‘the identity of persons’ is indeed a ‘theme’ or *topos* there — however obliquely — then the liberties I have taken may have miscast the story: its plain and seemingly artless manner might well be how Citizen Borges contrives to hold the slippery ground between ‘speaking in his own voice’ and ‘resigning himself to being Borges.’ But any like manoeuvring would be permissible, one thinks, only in a translator who was himself a literary personage — as I most certainly am not: and as I haven’t the wit for it, regardless, I have risked the plotting of a fantastic story, only, rather than mumming an ‘artlessness’ I could not command.