

## **Sir Jorge Luis Borges,**

### **Everything and a pound of your dear flesh:**

A Poet among the few who become immortals by the grace of the Verb, Borges came to the world in Buenos Aires, the 24 August 1899.

From his father and his Anglican grandmother, Francis Haslam, *Georgie* (thus Borges was called by relatives) inherited Shakespeare's language. He started to write, trying to be Walt Whitman and also practicing Verlaine's verse.

*From his first sojourn in Spain in 1919, when he espoused the 'Ultraist movement', the language of Cervantes became his favourite instrument to pay back to God a few coins from the incommensurable treasure poured in his hands.*

With Homer, with Tiresias and with Milton, Borges shares the gift of seeing without eyes; while he became blind in the middle of the journey in life (as it had happened to his father). Borges senior published one book, "El Caudillo" (The Leader), bearing witness that his unique son, Georgie, was destined to Literature and warned against commerce with women. Georgie often said that he was born in the vast English library of his father, where he learn the happiness of thinking anew the essential paradoxes of Philosophy. In the love of books, Borges found freedom from a family dominated by strong women: his "Mother" (sic), two grandmothers and even his younger sister Norah (the only playmate he was allowed by his possessive mother). His grandfathers were all killed young. These biographical facts help to understand why the very few women in Borges' works are endowed with sadistic (Emma Zunz, Beatriz) or virile traits (Ulrike, the queen of wolves) and his cult of "guapos" (= good looking ones) and brave or daring men, including criminals, all idealized "machos".

You may remember "The Name of the Rose". It is a tribute to Borges where Umberto Eco sums up Georgie's life, namely in the character of a monk and blind librarian, Jorge de Burgos, who treasures a knowledge every scholar would die for. Indeed, Borges spent his life as a monk devoted to books, as a reader and as a poet, true to a determination confessed in his early works: he will *marry no other woman but Literature*. Georgie spent his life with his

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adored “Mother”<sup>1</sup>, under her rule. In his own words: she was the leader (also his younger sister Norah) and he the follower, the docile and the submissive one. This passive or masochist mode of relating to women imposed on him from childhood, which is reflected in his tales, has continued throughout his life until the final act.

In Christmas 1938, a few months after his father’s<sup>2</sup> death, Borges had the most significant “accident”<sup>3</sup> of his life, as he indicates in many autobiographic tales: “The South”, “Deutches Requiem”... It was the terrible prize to free his demiurgic genius from his Mother’s grip and the way to follow his Eros, protector of life and poetry.

Later in the 60, his mother complained in a Cahier de L’Herne number dedicated to Borges that her son might not be sane after that accident which frustrated her purpose, because *she could not understand what he wrote since his recovery from February 1939 onwards* [“The circular ruins”, “The sect of the Phoenix”, “The house of Asterion”, “The intruder”<sup>4</sup>, etc.].

Those were the mortal limitations of a man who, by the grace of sublimation, overcame them creating immortal works; because: *the Spirit blows where it wants*; as he recalls in The Other.

In a tribute to Shakespeare, Borges indicates that the craft of verse, made of true and just words, is a secret theology beyond the consciousness of the author. Like the philosopher Michel Foucault, Borges knew that any inspired

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Leonor Acevedo, the domineering Mother of Borges, died aged 99, in 1975, when Georgie was 76 years old, after living all their lives together. Borges kept her Mother's room intact and every day came to her empty room to talk to her ghost, as if in Hitchcock's 'Psycho', a favourite film of Borges.

<sup>2</sup> His father, Jorge (Guillermo) Borges (Haslam), was an agnostic and a non practising lawyer who taught in English at a select High School of Buenos Aires the “love of Psychology”. His vocation was to become a writer, he printed his only known novel “El caudillo” (The Leader) in Majorca. Borges senior entrusted to his son the Literary destiny that the Fates did not allow him to accomplish.

<sup>3</sup> On the orders of his domineering Mother, Georgie was to bring a female friend for a meal at three; but when climbing the stairs of the building to call on the, he managed a deep cut to his forehead with an iron corner of an open window (an iron like the knife in The South and those daggers of his tales that men introduced in the flesh of other men.). To resist thus the Nativity meeting his Mother would have planned, became a matter of life or death, as he has to fight for his with the help of medical intensive care for many weeks.

<sup>4</sup> As Borges was blind, his Mother –the only true Borges’ widow- assisted Georgie by taking his dictation; but Mother dared to impose a different end to 'La intrusa' (The intruder) his autobiographical fiction of homoerotic desire.

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work of Art is also the ob-scene biography of the author. Art is made of passions erupting into manifest life from secret dreams and desires, acting from behind the scene of our slumbered consciousness.

Beyond his lifelong Jocasta, Borges only knew another enduring and passionate companionship. It was with a handsome, rich, young man, of half his age, Adolfo Bioy-Casares, whose education as a writer-to-be was entrusted by the young man's mother to Borges' care on the advice of a wise patron of the arts, Victoria Ocampo. It was a memorable night of 1932 when they first met and started a lasting "English friendship" (as they called it): working together every afternoon, often until dawn, Adolfo blossomed into an excellent writer. Borges and Bioy recreated thus the ideal of companionship from the golden age of Socrates and Plato<sup>5</sup>.

In his 'Autobiographical Essay', dictated in English to his Harvard assistant Thomas Di Giovanni, he declares at 70 that the beginning of his friendship with Adolfo was a *chief event of his entire life*. In 1975, after 43 years of companionship, Borges declared in a heartfelt public tribute to his lifelong friend that *he was indebted for any qualities of his works to his young master, whom he loved so dearly*. The chaste Borges never expressed such a deep love for anyone else, let alone in public. In 1934, before losing his sight, Borges wrote the famous "Two English poems" (his only verses written out of desire for a real *pound of flesh*), in the trace of Shakespeare's Sonnets<sup>6</sup>. Borges never allowed their translation. This, he indicates, was to *safeguard a confession hidden away in some corner of his work*. For how to translate into any other language this central confession: "*; and you so lazily and incessantly beautiful*" without betraying a marriage of true minds? Of course, Watson, regardless of sex.

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<sup>5</sup> This lifelong friendship between Georgie y Adolfo started in 1934 when Borges was 34 and Adolfo was only 17 years of age, a minor by the law then. In the intelligent tribute to Borges by Umberto Eco, 'The Name of the Rose', this unique companionship is represented by William of Baskerville and his young disciple Adso. We can also add that the omnipotent rule of the Mother of Borges, a fundamentalist Roman Catholic as the sadist mother of Arthur Rimbaud, is represented in Eco's novel by the omnipotence of the RC Church, ruling the life of all in the characters. It is also masterfully convey the homoerotic desire in the background driving the action.

<sup>6</sup> Borges adhered to the analyse developed in 'The portrait of Mr W. H.' by Oscar Wilde to discover the god Eros inspiring the works of Shakespeare.

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Death caught up with Georgie<sup>7</sup> in Geneva (as did with Lord Byron) the 14 June 1986. Since then the mythomania of a false widow<sup>8</sup>, who managed to get exclusive exploitation of Borges' estate, has been imposing the doctrine of a "Dark Lady" that, like in the case of Shakespeare<sup>9</sup>, is utterly false (despite the growing number of believers). Nevertheless, this false credo has the power to obscure the understanding of the god Eros who truly inspired the entire works of Borges forcing thus wrong readings.

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<sup>7</sup> Borges died the 14<sup>th</sup> June 1986 in Geneva while reciting his everyday Lord's Prayer, faithful to a promise made to his Mother as a child. He suffered from a pancreatic cancer, discovered a few years earlier, which treatment prescribed a complete rest from travelling abroad from Buenos Aires.

<sup>8</sup> A few weeks before Borges death, Miss Kodama Schweitzer bought the false certificate of marriage to the personal ambassador of Paraguayan dictator Alfredo Stroessner.

<sup>9</sup> "Dark Lady" was not woman but the euphemism currently used in the XV and XVI centuries to refer to the sexually transmitted illness "syphilis"