

BORGES ALL BORGES

Jorge Luis Borges

Ever since I had the idea of writing a small article on Borges, I wanted to pick out one of his books: impossible. Borges is all Borges. I don't know if this difficulty of choice is due to the fact that we both walked the same streets, I don't know if it is due to the fact that we had acquaintances in common (three times I was offered to meet him and three times I refused, not out of contempt but out of admiration), I don't know if it is due to the fact that some of his stories are set in the area where I grew up, south of Buenos Aires, although years ago.

The first book I read by Borges was *Fictions*. I was about thirteen or fourteen and, except for the story *The Garden of Forking Paths*, I was historically bored; yes, historically bored, because I still remember it. The second reading, I was already twenty-one, maybe twenty-two, was *The Aleph*, and I became a Borges fan, just as I could be a Real Madrid fan, a Boca Junior fan or a Liverpool Football Club fan. I returned to *Fictions*: it was a literary miracle. Certainly years and maturity helped me to make this discovery. I suppose my friends began to hate me in silence, because no one could celebrate a birthday without receiving *Fictions*, *The Aleph*, *Doctor Brodie's Report* or *The Book of Sand* as a present from me.

His poetry, which in those years (the 60s and 70s) was disliked or considered insignificant by many, also inspired me, from the verses '*The streets of Buenos Aires / are already my entrails*', which open *Fervour for Buenos Aires*, his first book (1923), to '*I have committed the worst sin / that a man can commit. I have not been / happy*', published in the newspaper *La Nación* in 1975, which I read when I was already living in Brazil.

As for Borges' essays, they are also a pleasure regardless of the ideas one may hold (as long as one can think the ideas, not feel them). Because Borges combines the conditions that I believe a writer-essayist-poet must have: thought, even acquired thought, knowledge of the language he is using, imagination about the language he is using, literary devices in that language and, of course, imagination to weave a plot (narrative) or develop a thought (essay) or an emotion (poetry).

Borges won much more than the Cervantes Prize (1979), he won universal recognition in his lifetime. I remember that in 1975, when the Swedish Academy awarded the Nobel Prize to the Italian poet Eugenio Montale, one of my great favourites (you should read him if you haven't), an Italian critic wrote something like (I am quoting from memory) '*Borges is not awarded the Nobel Prize because it is too small for him*'.

As I mentioned in my reference to Dino Buzzatti's *The Tartar Steppe*, almost all of Borges' work makes you jump for joy as you read it. His clarity astonishes.

Jorge Luis Borges was born in Buenos Aires (Argentina) in 1899 and died in Geneva (Switzerland) in 1986. As a personal anecdote, during one of his lectures, I was told by the person who introduced him to the audience at the San Martín Cinema-Theatre in Adrogué (there, precisely in Adrogué, where he used to spend long summer periods), he said that his stories were mostly Turderian (from Turdera, the

neighbourhood next door); there were people who got up and left. Perhaps, being Turderian myself, I am a Borgean story.