

*Jorge Luis Borges*

ARGENTINA  
1899–1986

Although he was educated in Switzerland and England, Jorge Luis Borges returned to his native Argentina (in 1921) a more passionate advocate of its potential than he had been when he left it. In the prologue to his first book of poems, *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (*Passion for B.A.*, 1923), Borges defined the tenets of the *ultraísta* movement, of which he was the most influential theorist and practitioner. The literary qualities he advocated there were defined largely in contradistinction to the ornate and musical art of Darío and his followers. Instead of the decorative rhetoric of *rubendarismo*, Borges insisted on the power of the Image (“our universal password and sign”). Instead of the purely auditory or musical phrase, the young Borges admired the forward momentum of free verse. Instead of the early Modernist vision of contemporary life as mechanical and urban and dominated by an elegantly melancholic “nostalgia for Europe,” Borges proposed a more immediately local, profound, and mythic reality as the focus of poetic energies.

Borges learned these lessons early, adapting to the idiom of Buenos Aires concepts derived from Lugones, from German Expressionism, from José Hernández’ epic *El gaucho Martín Fierro* (1812), and from his own mythic conceptions of Argentine history and identity. By his thirties Borges had come to consider some of the Vanguardist elements of his early poems too sensationalistic, striving too stylishly after effect. Although Borges would later become more interested in questions of narrative truth, metaphysics, memory, and the labyrinths of intertextuality, some of those early

Vanguardist ideals—the primacy of the Symbol, for instance—continued to influence Borges through his long career as a poet, fiction writer, essayist, critic, and author of detective fiction. As he went blind, during his later years, Borges became an iconic figure of world literature, the creator and interpreter of an *oneiric literary world*. Tightened by his early work in poetry, his allusive prose style—like the glancing brilliant play of sunlight on ice—shapes a glacially ironic imaginative locus: both text and its own interpretation, both source and parody, word and echo, voice and void. In the late pieces of short prose for which he is best known in North America, Borges’ “metaphysical restlessness” takes the form of complex ironic parables of the mysteries of time and human consciousness. For many years Borges served as an official of the state library system in Buenos Aires. Although Juan Perón dismissively had him reassigned for a time as an inspector of meat products, Borges later served as director of the National Library of Argentina.

### *Un patio*

Con la tarde  
se cansaron los dos o tres colores del patio.  
La gran franqueza de la luna llena  
ya no entusiasma su habitual firmamento.  
Patio, cielo encauzado.  
El patio es el declive  
por el cual se derrama el cielo en la casa.  
Serena,  
la eternidad espera en la encrucijada de estrellas.  
Grato es vivir en la amistad oscura  
de un zaguán, de una parra y de un aljibe.

1923

### *Casas como ángeles*

Donde San Juan y Chacabuco se cruzan  
vi las casas azules,  
vi las casas que tienen colores de aventura.  
Eran como banderas  
y hondas como el naciente que suelta las afueras.  
Las hay color de aurora y las hay color de alba;  
su resplandor es una pasión ante la ochava  
de la esquina cualquiera, turbia y desanimada.  
Yo pienso en las mujeres  
que buscarán el cielo de sus patios fervientes.  
Pienso en los claros brazos que ilustrarán la tarde  
y en el negror de trenzas: pienso en la dicha grave  
de mirarse en sus ojos hondos, como parrales.  
Empujaré la puerta cancel que es hierro y patio  
y habrá una clara niña, ya mi novia, en la sala,  
y los dos callaremos, trémulos como llamas,  
y la dicha presente se aquietará en pasada.

1925

### *Patio*

With evening  
the two or three colors of the patio grew weary.  
The huge candor of the full moon  
no longer enchants its usual firmament.  
Patio: heaven’s watercourse.  
The patio is the slope  
down which the sky flows into the house.  
Serenely  
eternity waits at the crossway of the stars.  
It is lovely to live in the dark friendliness  
of covered entrance way, arbor, and wellhead.

trans. Robert Fitzgerald

### *Houses like Angels*

Where San Juan and Chacabuco intersect  
I saw the blue houses,  
the houses that wear colors of adventure.  
They were like banners  
and deep as the dawn that frees the outlying quarters.  
Some are daybreak color and some dawn color;  
their cool radiance is a passion before the oblique  
face of any drab, discouraged corner.  
I think of the women  
who will be looking skyward from their burning dooryards.  
I think of the pale arms that make evening glimmer  
and of the blackness of braids: I think of the grave delight  
of being mirrored in their deep eyes, like arbors of night.  
I will push the gate of iron entering the dooryard  
and there will be a fair girl, already mine, in the room.  
And the two of us will hush, trembling like flames,  
and the present joy will grow quiet in that passed.

trans. Robert Fitzgerald

*Fundación mítica de Buenos Aires*

¿Y fue por este río de sueñera y de barro  
que las proas vinieron a fundarme la patria?  
Irían a los tumbos los barquitos pintados  
entre los cámalotes de la corriente zaina.

Pensando bien la cosa, supondremos que el río  
era azulejo entonces como oriundo del cielo  
con su estrellita roja para marcar el sitio  
en que ayunó Juan Díaz y los indios comieron.

Lo cierto es que mil hombres y otros mil arribaron  
por un mar que tenía cinco lunas de anchura  
y aun estaba poblado de sirenas y endriagos  
y de piedras imanes que enloquecen la brújula.

Prendieron unos ranchos trémulos en la costa,  
durmieron extrañados. Dicen que en el Riachuelo,  
pero son embelecos fraguados en la Boca.  
Fue una manzana entera y en mi barrio: en Palermo.

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

Un almacén rosado como revés de naipe  
brilló y en la trastienda conversaron un truco;  
el almacén rosado floreció en un compadre,  
ya patrón de la esquina, ya resentido y duro.

El primer organito salvaba el horizonte  
con su achacoso porte, su habanera y su gringo.  
El corralón seguro ya opinaba YRIGOYEN,  
algún piano mandaba tangos de Saborido.

Una cigarrería sahumó como una rosa  
el desierto. La tarde se había ahondado en ayer,  
los hombres compartieron un pasado ilusorio.  
Sólo faltó una cosa: la vereda de enfrente.

A mí se me hace cuento que empezó Buenos Aires:  
La juzgo tan eterna como el agua y el aire.

*The Mythical Founding of Buenos Aires*

And was it along this torpid muddy river  
that the prows came to found my native city?  
The little painted boats must have suffered the steep surf  
among the root-clumps of the horse-brown current.

Pondering well, let us suppose that the river  
was blue then like an extension of the sky,  
with a small red star inset to mark the spot  
where Juan Díaz fasted and the Indians dined.

But for sure a thousand men and other thousands  
arrived across a sea that was five moons wide,  
still infested with mermaids and sea serpents  
and magnetic boulders which sent the compass wild.

On the coast they put up a few ramshackle huts  
and slept uneasily. This, they claim, in the Riachuelo,  
but that is a story dreamed up in the Boca.  
It was really a city block in my district—Palermo.

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

A general store pink as the back of a playing card  
shone bright; in the back there was poker talk.  
The corner bar flowered into life as a local bully,  
already cock of his walk, resentful, tough.

The first barrel organ teetered over the horizon  
with its clumsy progress, its habaneras, its wop.  
The cart-shed wall was unanimous for YRIGOYEN.  
Some piano was banging out tangos by Saborido.

A cigar store perfumed the desert like a rose.  
The afternoon had established its yesterdays,  
and men took on together an illusory past.  
Only one thing was missing—the street had no other side.

Hard to believe Buenos Aires had any beginning.  
I feel it to be as eternal as air and water.

*trans. Alastair Reid*

*Poema conjetural*

El doctor Francisco Laprida, asesinado  
el día 22 de setiembre de 1829 por los  
montoneros de Aldao, piensa antes de morir:

Zumban las balas en la tarde última.  
Hay viento y hay cenizas en el viento,  
se dispersan el día y la batalla  
deforme, y la victoria es de los otros.  
Vencen los bárbaros, los gauchos vencen.  
Yo, que estudié las leyes y los cánones,  
yo, Francisco Narciso de Laprida,  
cuya voz declaró la independencia  
de estas crueles provincias, derrotado,  
de sangre y de sudor manchado el rostro,  
sin esperanza ni temor, perdido,  
huyo hacia el Sur por arrabales últimos.

Como aquel capitán del Purgatorio  
que, huyendo a pie y ensangrentando el llano,  
fue cegado y tumbado por la muerte  
donde un oscuro río pierde el nombre,  
así habré de caer. Hoy es el término.  
La noche lateral de los pantanos  
me acecha y me demora. Oigo los cascotes  
de mi caliente muerte que me busca  
con jinetes, con belfos y con lanzas.

Yo que anhelé ser otro, ser un hombre  
de sentencias, de libros, de dictámenes,  
a cielo abierto yaceré entre ciénagas;  
pero me endiosa el pecho inexplicable  
un júbilo secreto. Al fin me encuentro  
con mi destino sudamericano.  
A esta ruinosa tarde me llevaba  
el laberinto múltiple de pasos  
que mis días tejieron desde un día  
de la niñez. Al fin he descubierto  
la recóndita clave de mis años,  
la suerte de Francisco de Laprida,  
la letra que faltaba, la perfecta  
forma que supo Dios desde el principio.  
En el espejo de esta noche alcanzo  
mi insospechado rostro eterno. El círculo  
se va a cerrar. Yo aguardo que así sea.

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

*Conjectural Poem*

Doctor Francisco Laprida, set upon and killed the  
22nd of September 1829 by a band of gaucho militia—  
serving under Aldao, reflects before he dies:

Bullets whip the air this last afternoon.  
A wind is up, blowing full of cinders  
as the day and this chaotic battle  
straggle to a close. The gauchos have won:  
victory is theirs, the barbarians'.  
I, Francisco Narciso Laprida,  
who studied both canon law and civil  
and whose voice declared the independence  
of this entire untamed territory,  
in defeat, my face marked by blood and sweat,  
holding neither hope nor fear, the way lost,  
strike out for the South through the back country.

Like that captain in Purgatorio  
who fleeing on foot left blood on the plain  
and was blinded and then trampled by death  
where an obscure river loses its name,  
so I too will fall. Today is the end.  
The night and to right and left the marshes—  
in ambush, clogging my steps. I hear the  
hooves of my own hot death riding me down  
with horsemen, frothing muzzles, and lances.

I who longed to be someone else, to weigh  
judgments, to read books, to hand down the law,  
will lie in the open out in these swamps;  
but a secret joy somehow swells my breast.  
I see at last that I am face to face  
with my South American destiny.  
I was carried to this ruinous hour  
by the intricate labyrinth of steps  
woven by my days from a day that goes  
back to my birth. At last I've discovered  
the mysterious key to all my years,  
the fate of Francisco de Laprida,  
the missing letter, the perfect pattern  
that was known to God from the beginning.  
In this night's mirror I can comprehend  
my unsuspected true face. The circle's  
about to close. I wait to let it come.

My feet tread the shadows of the lances  
that spar for the kill. The taunts of my death,  
the horses, the horsemen, the horses' manes,  
tighten the ring around me... Now the first  
blow, the lance's hard steel ripping my chest,  
and across my throat the intimate knife.

*Poema de los dones**A María Esther Vázquez*

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

De esta ciudad de libros hizo dueños  
 A unos ojos sin luz, que sólo pueden  
 Leer en las bibliotecas de los sueños  
 Los insensatos párrafos que ceden

Las albas a su afán. En vano el día  
 Les prodiga sus libros infinitos,  
 Arduos como los arduos manuscritos  
 Que perecieron en Alejandría.

De hambre y de sed (narra una historia griega)  
 Muere un rey entre fuentes y jardines;  
 Yo fatigo sin rumbo los confines  
 De esta alta y honda biblioteca ciega.

Enciclopedias, atlas, el Oriente  
 Y el Occidente, siglos, dinastías,  
 Símbolos, cosmos y cosmogonías  
 Brindan los muros, pero inútilmente.

Lento en mi sombra, la penumbra hueca  
 Exploro con el báculo indeciso,  
 Yo, que me figuraba el Paraíso  
 Bajo la especie de una biblioteca.

Algo, que ciertamente no se nombra  
 Con la palabra *azar*, rige estas cosas;  
 Otro ya recibió en otras borrosas  
 Tardes los muchos libros y la sombra.

Al errar por las lentas galerías  
 Suelo sentir con vago horror sagrado  
 Que soy el otro, el muerto, que habrá dado  
 Los mismos pasos en los mismos días.

¿Cuál de los dos escribe este poema  
 De un yo plural y de una sola sombra?  
 ¿Qué importa la palabra que me nombra  
 Si es indiviso y uno el anatema?

Groussac o Borges, miro este querido  
 Mundo que se deforma y que se apaga

*Poem of the Gifts**To María Esther Vázquez*

Let no one impute to self-pity or censure  
 The power of the thing I affirm: that God  
 With magnificent irony has dealt me the gift  
 Of these books and the dark, with one stroke.

He has lifted these eyes, now made lightless,  
 To be lords of this city of books, though all that they read  
 In my dream of a library are insensible paragraphs  
 Disclosed to their longing

Each passing day. Vainly dawn multiplies book  
 After book to infinity, each one  
 Inaccessible, each lost to me now, like the manuscripts  
 Alexandria fed to the flame.

Greek anecdote tells of a king who lived among  
 Gardens and fountains, and died of thirst and starvation;  
 I toil in the breadth and the depth and the blindness  
 Of libraries, without strength or direction.

Encyclopedias, atlases, Orient,  
 Occident, dynasties, ages,  
 Symbols and cosmos, cosmogonies  
 Call to me from the walls—ineffectual images!

Painfully probing the dark, I grope toward  
 The void of the twilight with the point of my faltering  
 Cane—I for whom Paradise was always a metaphor,  
 An image of libraries.

Something—no need to prattle of chance  
 Or contingency—presides over these matters;  
 Long before me, some other man took these books and  
     the dark  
 In a fading of dusk for his lot.

Astray in meandering galleries,  
 It comes to me now with a holy, impalpable  
 Dread, that I am that other, the dead man, and walk  
 With identical steps and identical days to the end.

Which of us two is writing this poem  
 In the I of the first person plural, in identical darkness?  
 What good is the word that speaks for me now in my  
     name,  
 If the curse of the dark is implacably one and the same?

En una pálida ceniza vaga  
Que se parece al sueño y al olvido.

1960

### *El otro tigre*

And the craft that createth a semblance  
MORRIS: *Sigurd the Volsung* (1876)

Pienso en un tigre. La penumbra exalta  
La vasta Biblioteca laboriosa  
Y parece alejar los anaqueles;  
Fuerte, inocente, ensangrentado y nuevo,  
El irá por su selva y su mañana  
Y marcará su rastro en la limosa  
Margen de un río cuyo nombre ignora  
(En su mundo no hay nombres ni pasado  
Ni porvenir, sólo un instante cierto)  
Y salvará las bárbaras distancias  
Y husmeará en el trenzado laberinto  
De los olores el olor del alba  
Y el olor deleitable del venado;  
Entre las rayas del bambú descifro  
Sus rayas y presiento la osatura  
Bajo la piel espléndida que vibra.  
En vano se interponen los convexos  
Mares y los desiertos del planeta;  
Desde esta casa de un remoto puerto  
De América del Sur, te sigo y sueño,  
Oh tigre de las márgenes del Ganges.

Cunde la tarde en mi alma y reflexiono  
Que el tigre vocativo de mi verso  
Es un tigre de símbolos y sombras,  
Una serie de tropos literarios  
Y de memorias de la enciclopedia  
Y no el tigre fatal, la aciaga joya  
Que, bajo el sol o la diversa luna,  
Va cumpliendo en Sumatra o en Bengala  
Su rutina de amor, de ocio y de muerte.  
Al tigre de los símbolos he opuesto  
El verdadero, el de caliente sangre,  
El que diezma la tribu de los búfalos  
Y hoy, 3 de agosto del 59,  
Alarga en la pradera una pausada  
Sombra, pero ya el hecho de nombrarlo  
Y de conjeturar su circunstancia  
Lo hace ficción del arte y no criatura  
Viviente de las que andan por la tierra.

Groussac or Borges, I watch the delectable  
World first disfigure then extinguish itself  
In a pallor of ashes, until all that is gone  
Seems at one with sleep and at one with oblivion.

trans. Ben Belitt

### *The Other Tiger*

And the craft that createth a semblance  
MORRIS: *Sigurd the Volsung* (1876)

A tiger comes to mind. The twilight here  
Exalts the vast and busy Library  
And seems to set the bookshelves back in gloom;  
Innocent, ruthless, bloodstained, sleek,  
It wanders through its forest and its day  
Printing a track along the muddy banks  
Of sluggish streams whose names it does not know  
(In its world there are no names or past  
Or time to come, only the vivid now)  
And makes its way across wild distances  
Sniffing the braided labyrinth of smells  
And in the wind picking the smell of dawn  
And tantalizing scent of grazing deer;  
Among the bamboo's slanting stripes I glimpse  
The tiger's stripes and sense the bony frame  
Under the splendid, quivering cover of skin.  
Curving oceans and the planet's wastes keep us  
Apart in vain; from here in a house far off  
In South America I dream of you,  
Track you, O tiger of the Ganges' banks.

It strikes me now as evening fills my soul  
That the tiger addressed in my poem  
Is a shadowy beast, a tiger of symbols  
And scraps picked up at random out of books,  
A string of labored tropes that have no life,  
And not the fated tiger, the deadly jewel  
That under sun or stars or changing moon  
Goes on in Bengal or Sumatra fulfilling  
Its rounds of love and indolence and death.  
To the tiger of symbols I hold opposed  
The one that's real, the one whose blood runs hot  
As it cuts down a herd of buffaloes,  
And that today, this August third, nineteen  
Fifty-nine, throws its shadow on the grass;  
But by the act of giving it a name,  
By trying to fix the limits of its world,  
It becomes a fiction, not a living beast,  
Not a tiger out roaming the wilds of earth.

Un tercer tigre buscaremos. Este  
 Será como los otros una forma  
 De mi sueño, un sistema de palabras  
 Humanas y no el tigre ~~vertebrado~~ —  
 Que, más allá de las mitologías,  
 Pisa la tierra. Bien lo sé, pero algo  
 Me impone esta aventura indefinida,  
 Insensata y antigua, y persevero  
 En buscar por el tiempo de la tarde  
 El otro tigre, el que no está en el verso.

1960

*Arte poética*

Mirar el río hecho de tiempo y agua  
 Y recordar que el tiempo es otro río,  
 Saber que nos perdemos como el río  
 Y que los rostros pasan como el agua.

Sentir que la vigilia es otro sueño  
 Que sueña no soñar y que la muerte  
 Que teme nuestra carne es esa muerte  
 De cada noche, que se llama sueño.

Ver en el día o en el año un símbolo  
 De los días del hombre y de sus años,  
 Convertir el ultraje de los años  
 En una música, un rumor y un símbolo,

Ver en el muerte el sueño, en el ocaso  
 Un triste oro, tal es la poesía  
 Que es inmortal y pobre. La poesía  
 Vuelve como la aurora y el ocaso.

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.

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

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

We'll hunt for a third tiger now, but like  
 The others this one too will be a form  
 Of what I dream, a structure of words, and not  
 The flesh and bone tiger that beyond all myths  
 Paces the earth. I know these things quite well,  
 Yet nonetheless some force keeps driving me  
 In this vague, unreasonable, and ancient quest.  
 And I go on pursuing through the hours  
 Another tiger, the beast not found in verse.

*trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni**Ars Poetica*

To look at the river made of time and water  
 And remember that time is another river,  
 To know that we are lost like the river  
 And that faces dissolve like water.

To be aware that waking dreams it is not asleep  
 While it is another dream, and that the death  
 That our flesh goes in fear of is that death  
 Which comes every night and is called sleep.

To see in the day or in the year a symbol  
 Of the days of man and of his years,  
 To transmute the outrage of the years  
 Into a music, a murmur of voices, and a symbol.

To see in death sleep, and in the sunset  
 A sad gold—such is poetry,  
 Which is immortal and poor. Poetry  
 Returns like the dawn and the sunset.

At times in the evenings a face  
 Looks at us out of the depths of a mirror;  
 Art should be like that mirror  
 Which reveals to us our own face.

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

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

1960

*trans. W. S. Merwin*

*Límites*

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

*De Inscripciones (Montevideo, 1923)*  
*de Julio Platero Haedo.*

1960

*Everness*

Sólo una cosa no hay. Es el olvido.  
 Dios, que salva el metal, salva la escoria  
 Y cifra en Su profética memoria  
 Las lunas que serán y las que han sido.  
 Ya todo está. Los miles de reflejos  
 Que entre los dos crepúsculos del día  
 Tu rostro fue dejando en los espejos  
 Y los que irá dejando todavía.  
 Y todo es una parte del diverso  
 Cristal de esa memoria, el universo;  
 No tienen fin sus arduos corredores  
 Y las puertas se cierran a tu paso;  
 Sólo del otro lado del ocaso  
 Verás los Arquetipos y Esplendores.

1964

*Spinoza*

Las traslúcidas manos del judío  
 Labran en la penumbra los cristales  
 Y la tarde que muere es miedo y frío.  
 (Las tardes a las tardes son iguales.)  
 Las manos y el espacio de jacinto  
 Que palidece en el confin del Ghetto  
 Casi no existen para el hombre quieto  
 Que está soñando un claro laberinto.  
 No lo turba la fama, ese reflejo  
 De sueños en el sueño de otro espejo,  
 Ni el temeroso amor de las doncellas.  
 Libre de la metáfora y del mito

*Limits (or Good-byes)*

There's a line of Verlaine's that I'm not going to  
 remember again.  
 There's a nearby street that's forbidden to my footsteps.  
 There's a mirror that has seen me for the last time.  
 There's a door I've closed until the end of the world.  
 Among the books in my library (I'm looking at them)  
 There are some I'll never open again.  
 This summer I'll be fifty years old:  
 Death invades me, constantly.

*From Inscripciones by Julio Platero Haedo*  
*(Montevideo, 1923)*

trans. Alan Dugan

*Everness*

One thing does not exist: Oblivion.  
 God saves the metal and he saves the dross,  
 And his prophetic memory guards from loss  
 The moons to come, and those of evenings gone.  
 Everything is: the shadows in the glass  
 Which, in between the day's two twilights, you  
 Have scattered by the thousands, or shall strew  
 Henceforward in the mirrors that you pass.  
 And everything is part of that diverse  
 Crystalline memory, the universe;  
 Whoever through its endless mazes wanders  
 Hears door on door click shut behind his stride,  
 And only from the sunset's farther side  
 Shall view at last the Archetypes and the Splendors.

trans. Richard Wilbur

*Spinoza*

The Jew's hands, translucent in the dusk,  
 Polish the lenses time and again.  
 The dying afternoon is fear, is  
 Cold, and all afternoons are the same.  
 The hands and the hyacinth-blue air  
 That whitens at the Ghetto edges  
 Do not quite exist for this silent  
 Man who conjures up a clear labyrinth—  
 Undisturbed by fame, that reflection  
 Of dreams in the dream of another  
 Mirror, nor by maidens' timid love.  
 Free of metaphor and myth, he grinds

Labra un arduo cristal: el infinito  
 Mapa de Aquél que es todas Sus estrellas.

1964

### *El mar*

Antes que el sueño (o el terror) tejiera  
 Mitologías y cosmogonías,  
 Antes que el tiempo se acuñara en días.  
 El mar, el siempre mar, ya estaba y era.  
 ¿Quién es el mar? ¿Quién es aquel violento  
 Y antiguo ser que roe los pilares  
 De la tierra y es uno y muchos mares  
 Y abismo y resplandor y azar y viento?  
 Quien lo mira lo ve por vez primera,  
 Siempre. Con el asombro que las cosas  
 Elementales dejan, las hermosas  
 Tardes, la luna, el fuego de una hoguera.  
 ¿Quién es el mar, quién soy? Lo sabré el día  
 Ulterior que sucede a la agonía.

1967

A stubborn crystal: the infinite  
 Map of the One who is all His stars.

trans. Richard Howard and César Rennert

### *The Sea*

Before our human dream (or terror) wove  
 Mythologies, cosmogonies, and love,  
 Before time coined its substance into days,  
 The sea, the always sea, existed: was.  
 Who is the sea? Who is that violent being,  
 Violent and ancient, who gnaws the foundations  
 Of earth? He is both one and many oceans;  
 He is abyss and splendor, chance and wind.  
 Who looks on the sea, sees it the first time,  
 Every time, with the wonder distilled  
 From elementary things—from beautiful  
 Evenings, the moon, the leap of a bonfire.  
 Who is the sea, and who am I? The day  
 That follows my last agony shall say.

trans. John Updike