

'Borges and I,' Perry and 'us'

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In his essay ' 'Borges and I' and 'I,' Perry discusses two interpretations of Borges' short story, 'Borges and I,' using ideas about the meaning and use of names and indexicals he has so critically contributed to develop. In this paper, I want to use those ideas to study an indexical expression that neither Perry nor most philosophers of language have paid much attention to ---the first-person plural pronoun 'we.'¹

My contention is that 'we' is an indexical, that is, a referential device. As all indexicals, and using Perry's (2001) terminology, it *refers*: it contributes with a plurality of individuals to the *referential* content of the utterance; and it *denotes*: it contributes with an identifying condition to the semantic minimal content of the utterance.

I'll begin reminding Perry's reflexive-referential account of utterance content applied to the use of the proper name ---'Borges'--- and the first-person singular pronoun ---'I'--- in Borges' text. In section 2, I'll focus on his account of indexicals, with special attention to the case of 'I,' 'now' and 'here' which provide various clues for an adequate account of 'we.' In section 3, I will elaborate my account of 'we,' which is referentialist in spirit, but accommodates the descriptivist insights about some of its uses. In my view

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¹ I'll use single quotation marks for mentioned words, phrases and sentences, and as 'scare' quotes as well. I'll keep double quotation marks for utterances of words, phrases and sentences.

'we' is not ambiguous, and its reference is partly *automatic* ---that is, determined in part by its *character* and certain objective contextual facts--- and partly *discretionary* ---determined by the speaker's directing intentions.

1. 'Borges and I' and Perry

In 'Borges and I' ('BI' for short),² the author, Jorge Luis Borges, uses two different ways ---the proper name 'Borges' and the first-person singular pronoun 'I'--- to refer to two characters that happen to be one and the same person, or in a second interpretation, two characters that correspond to two distinct *cognitive complexes* or *selves* of the same person.

In ' 'Borges and I' and 'I' ' (BII), Perry discusses BI with his usual modesty, clarity and wittiness, and explains how Borges exploits the difference between proper names and indexicals, in particular the *pure* indexical 'I,' as ways of referring to individual persons.

Proper names are 'third-person' ways to refer. Anyone can use a proper name to refer to a person ---or thing, place, building, etc.--- exploiting the naming convention that associates the name with the person. They are usually used to express *detached* information; information about other people or things.

In contrast, 'I' is used to express information acquired in *self-informative* ways. In general³ no one can use the pronoun 'I' to refer to anyone but oneself. That's why, the use of 'I' is the most natural way to talk about oneself, while the use of one's proper name sounds odd, something like trying to talk about a 'detached' self. Borges exploits this fact from the very beginning of the text:

The other one, the one called Borges, is the one things happens to. I walk through the streets of Buenos Aires and stop for a moment...

² See the appendix for its original version in Spanish and a translation into English.

³ I'm leaving aside here metonymical or deferred uses like "I am parked outside," referring to a car. I'll also leave aside, for simplicity, the case of 're-usable' utterances as the ones considered by Predelli (1998) and Perry (2003).

Using Perry's reflexive-referential theory (2001), we could consider these utterances from the following perspective: both proper names and indexicals are referential devices, that is, they are used to designate an individual that constitutes part of the *subject matter* of the utterance. In our case, given that "Borges" and "I" refer to the same individual, the *referential truth-conditions* of

(1) I walk through the streets of Buenos Aires

and

(2) Borges walks through the streets of Buenos Aires

are exactly the same. Following Perry's notation, I represent those truth-conditions as:

(P_{1-2loc}) That **Borges** walks through the streets of Buenos Aires.⁴

This is what Perry calls the referential content, official content or content_C, and what is usually considered, by the referentialists, the only content of the utterance, *what is said* by the speaker in making her utterance.⁵ It is a singular proposition about Borges, the individual, not about a person named 'Borges' or the writer or speaker of an utterance.

However, (P_{1-2loc}), the locutionary content of (1) and (2), doesn't explain the difference between the information conveyed by those utterances ---the difference exploited by Borges, the author. Perry's referential-reflexive theory explains it as a difference between the *reflexive* contents of each utterance.

(P_{1min}) That *the writer of (1)* walks through the streets of Buenos Aires.

(P_{2min}) That *the person that the writer of (2) is referring to by his use of 'Borges'* walks through the streets of Buenos Aires.

⁴ I leave aside the contribution of the predicate of the sentence, because it's not relevant for the present issue.

⁵ Korta and Perry (2007) call it the 'locutionary content' of the utterance.

In *BI*, the author plays with the contrast between the fact that while "Borges" and "I" both contribute with the same individual to the referential contents of their utterances, they contribute with different identifying conditions to their *semantic minimal* contents, and those contents impose different cognitive burdens on the reader's understanding.⁶

(P_{1min}) and (P_{2min}) are reflexive contents, because their truth-conditions involve the utterances themselves. And, in particular, they constitute what Korta and Perry call (2006b; 2007b) the 'semantic minimal contents' of (1) and (2), the contents provided by the conventional meaning of the sentences uttered and the fact that an utterance of those sentences has been made. This kind of content is the one that a hearer gets from his knowledge of English and the recognition of the utterance of a sentence; the kind of content that all utterances of the same sentence have in common. These minimal (and reflexive) contents of the utterance are not usually considered as *what is said* by the speaker, but they can play an important role in the speaker's plan of producing an utterance, and in the hearer's understanding of it.

Perry (2001) summarizes the differences among the contribution of proper names, indexicals and definite descriptions to the referential contents of the utterances in the following table:

	Refer	Describe
Name	Proper names	⁷
Denote	Indexicals	Descriptions

Both proper names and indexicals *refer*, that is, they contribute with an individual to the *referential* content of utterances of sentences containing them;

⁶ The story would go a bit different when considering the second interpretation studied by Perry in *BII*: the case where "Borges" and "I" refer to different selves of the same person. The referential contents of their utterances would also be different. The interpretation would then exploit the tension, alienation of those two selves... But 'Borges' and 'I' would still be different ways of referring. Anyway, I am leaving aside for the moment the second interpretation considered by Perry in *BBI*.

⁷ In Perry (1997) he places a triple question mark in this cell, which disappears in *Reference and Reflexivity* (2001).

but proper names *name*, that is, they do so in virtue of conventions that link the name with an individual, while indexicals do so in virtue of identifying conditions that are associated with them by linguistic conventions (Perry 2001, pp. 102-103).

For dealing with the contribution of 'we' to the content(s) of the utterance of a sentence containing it, I want to emphasize two features of Perry's reflexive-referential theory (2001), that are further developed in critical pragmatics (Korta and Perry (2007a; in prep.)):

- i. It adopts a pluripropositionalist view of utterance contents. According to this, any utterance has a plurality of contents with varying degrees of reflexivity or incrementality, from the minimal semantic content to the fully incremental content and possibly *enriched* contents.
- ii. It adopts a minimalist view of sentence meaning, but, at the same time, rejects the existence of 'incomplete' propositions or 'logical forms' with no truth-conditions in absence of contextual knowledge.

(1), for example, has both contents (P_{1min}) and (P_{1loc}). The first is minimal and reflexive. It doesn't constitute the subject matter of the utterance, *what is said*, but it is one of its contents; a content that plays an important part in the author's plan and a content that is grasped by any competent reader. Even a reader who doesn't know who the author is could understand those truth-conditions and use them for the inference or further implicatures. In general, it can be one of those reflexive contents, and not the referential one, what is critical to the speaker's plan as a content intended to be recognized by the hearer (see Korta and Perry 2006a).

These features will prove relevant when studying the meaning and use of the first-person plural pronoun 'we,' which is the main aim of this paper. The case of 'we' has rarely been addressed by philosophers of language. Nunberg (1993), Standefer (2006) and Vallée (1996) are the exceptions, but none of them takes advantage of Perry's rich account of indexicals.

In *BI*, Borges uses 'ours' once ('It would be an exaggeration to say that ours is a hostile relationship') and 'us' once, in the last sentence of the story, ('I do not know which of us has written this page').⁸ In *BBI*, Perry uses 'we' and 'ourselves' quite often ('we' 65 times, 'us' 15 times, six 'ourselves,' none 'ours'), but his use seems quite different. I'll try to build upon Perry's ideas about indexicals an adequate account of the meaning and use of 'we.'

2. Perry and 'I'

A natural move when studying the meaning and content of (utterances of) 'we' is to take it as the plural counterpart of 'I,' as 'they' is for 'he/she.'⁹ Indexicals are for Perry (2001), in the Kaplanian tradition, context-sensitive and directly referential, that is they contribute with an individual to the referential content of utterances, and they do so in virtue of their meaning (character) and features of the context of utterance. Now, by context, we could understand either a few objective parameters such as Kaplan's quadruple of speaker, time, space and world of the utterance ---the *narrow* context--- or those parameters plus any other fact, such as the beliefs and intentions of speaker and hearer, that could be relevant for determining reference ---the *wide* context. Besides, it can also be considered the relevance of the speaker's intentions in the determination of the reference, and thus classify indexicals as 'automatic' ---those which determine reference by their meaning and public objective facts about the utterance, irrespectively of the speaker's intention--- and as 'discretionary' ---those that do require its consideration:

	Narrow	Wide
Automatic	I, now*, here*, tomorrow	yea, dthat(α)
Discretionary	now, here	That, this man, there, he, she, it

⁸ Notice that in the Spanish original version there is no 'nosotros' in this (the last) sentence of the text, just 'los dos' [= 'the two']: 'No sé cuál de los dos escribe esta página.'

⁹ The case of 'you' in English breaks the analogy, of course. There might be different opinions about what's the best account here. Is 'you' an ambiguous word with two alternative meanings? Or are 'you (singular)' and 'you (plural)' two different homophonic words?

Among the singular personal pronouns, 'I' is the only one that is fully automatic and requires narrow context. Its designation is wholly determined by its meaning and a fact in narrow context: the identity of the speaker. Speakers who wrongly think they are Napoleon or wrongly think they are not Borges, or don't know they are in fact George H.,¹⁰ will nevertheless be referring to themselves and not Napoleon, to Borges and to George H., even if they don't know they are doing so, or do know, but want to play with language. Demonstrative pronouns like 'that' or 's/he' and 'it,' in contrast, are discretionary. There is no objective fact in the narrow context that, in conjunction with their linguistic meaning, determines their designation: it depends critically on the speaker's intention to refer to certain person or thing.¹¹

The case of 'now' and 'here' is a bit special. They are often regarded as 'pure' or 'essential' indexicals, that is, automatic and requiring only narrow context, as 'I.' In virtue of their meaning, plus the time and place of utterance, any utterance of them would automatically determine that time and that place, respectively. But the story is not so simple (that's why they are marked with a '*'). The time and place of utterance seem to be automatically *included* within the stretch of time and the area of the place referred to, but their limits depend on the speaker's intention. If I say, as I'm sitting in my office at 9:00 am on November 7th, 2007, "It's cold here now", the place referred to certainly includes my office, but am I speaking just about my office, or the Institute, or Donostia? And am I talking about just right that time or that morning, the whole day, these weeks? It seems clear those aspects depend on my intention when producing the utterance. 'Now' and 'here' are partly automatic --- determining a certain time, a certain place irrespectively of the speaker's intentions--- partly discretionary ---the temporal and spatial limits depending on the speaker's intentions.¹² As we'll see, 'we' is very similar in this respect.

¹⁰ 'George H.' is the name given to Castañeda's war hero in *BII*.

¹¹ Of course, one can take the speaker's intention or the demonstration, or even the demonstratum itself as another parameter of the narrow context. This tactic seems clearly *ad hoc*, and, anyway, since Perry doesn't adopt it, I'll not discuss it here. The cases of 'yea,' 'dthat,' or complex demonstratives will not be discussed either.

¹² The speaker may not have a definite idea of the exact limits of the region of space s/he is referring to in uttering 'here,' but s/he surely knows whether s/he is

Using another of Perry's distinctions, 'I' can be said to be both a 'secure' and a 'helpful' way of referring. It is secure as a way for the speaker to refer to him or herself. Given that the language is English, just uttering 'I' s/he will refer to her/himself ---it never fails. It is helpful for the hearer because its meaning provides an important clue for determining its referent contextually: the speaker of the utterance. Just knowing who the speaker is, the hearer will grasp what the constituent of the referential content is. 'He,' 'she' and 'it' are a bit less secure: the individual must exist (and, be of the appropriate gender), but otherwise it seems that the speaker who uses them can easily refer to any individual she is thinking of.¹³ That's why third-person singular pronouns are often unhelpful for the hearer in determining their referent. Somewhere in between are descriptive indexicals ('that man') and definite descriptions in their referential uses ('the man drinking a martini'). They are more helpful since they give clues to determine the reference, but they are unsafe for the speaker (see Perry 2006; forthcoming).

Now, let's address our main issue. What would be the appropriate place of 'we' among indexicals, according to Perry's view?

3. Perry and 'we'

It's intuitively clear that 'we' is generally used to refer to a plurality of individuals, among which, there is the speaker her/himself. Take Borges' use of 'ours' and 'us' in *BI*:

It would be an exaggeration to say that ours is a hostile relationship.

I do not know which of us has written this page.

It's quite clear whom the author is referring to. On the one hand, it is the author himself, the one referred to by 'I.' This is independent of the author's intentions, it is determined by the narrow context of the utterance

referring either to the room, the city, the nation or the world s/he is in. And the same goes for 'now.'

¹³ See Corazza (2002) for an interesting discussion on how to refer to hermaphrodites and the view that one can refer to an individual with 'he' or 'she' irrespectively of his or her (its?) gender.

(who the speaker is) and the conventional meaning of 'us' and 'ours.' To this extent, 'we,' 'us' and 'ours' are secure devices to refer to oneself, and as helpful for the hearer as 'I': with no more than knowledge of English, the hearer knows that the speaker is referring to her/himself. And, of course, on the other hand, their meaning tells us that the speaker is trying to refer to someone else beyond her/himself. But the determination of who that/those extra individual/s are is not that automatic. It seems to depend wholly on the speaker's intentions. In this case, the most reasonable candidate is clearly the individual designated by the author's use of 'Borges,' that is, Jorge Luis Borges. There are no more individuals available in the text and the context of *BI*. The peculiarity is that those two individuals happen to be one and the same. That's the intended effect of the author.

All this suggests that 'we' is an indexical that, first, like all indexicals is directly referential, that is, it contributes with individuals to the *referential* content of the utterance; and, second, like 'now' and 'here,' is partly automatic, partly discretionary; as a consequence, it's secure for the speaker and helpful for the reader, only in its automatic side. While 'we' is as secure as 'I' as a way to refer to oneself, it is not so secure as a way to refer to others. To begin with, the speaker can fail to refer to someone else just because there is no one else to refer to. In *BI*, the author's uses of 'ours' and 'the two [of us]' fail to refer to a second individual, because the author is Borges, and we have only one individual. Take also the case of Castañeda's war hero discussed by Perry. He could utter

We never met each other

trying to refer by 'we' to himself and George H. He achieves that result only in part: he refers to himself and, since *he* is George H., even if he doesn't know it, he is referring to George H. But, since there's only one individual involved, he fails to refer to someone else beyond himself. Otherwise, as long as the other individual intended to be referred to exists as a distinct individual from oneself, 'we' is a secure device for reference.

Now, due to its discretionary aspect, 'we' is not a helpful indexical. The hearer is required to reason about the speaker's intentions to discern whom the speaker is trying to refer to, beyond her/himself, and to whom s/he is *actually* referring.

These features of 'we' have been often (see Nunberg (1993), Vallée (1996) and Standefer (2006)) taken as a signal of its alleged ambiguity. 'We' would be ambiguous among:

1. 'you and I'
2. 'you and s/he and I'
3. 'you and they and I'
4. 'you (plural) and I'
5. 'you (plural) and s/he and I'
6. 'you (plural) and they and I'
7. 'S\he and I'
8. 'They and I'

'We' would have those eight different meanings or, alternatively, there would be eight different homophonic words. But the only reason to pose such an ambiguity seems an unmotivated aim to reduce the meaning of 'we' to a combination of meanings of other indexicals. And, as Grice's (1967) 'Modified Occam's Razor' establishes, meanings should not be multiplied beyond necessity. In my view, 'we,' no doubt, can be intended to include the addressee ('you') or addressees ('yous'), or some other people ('he'/'she'/'it'/'they'), but this does not show that 'we' is ambiguous among the multiple (combination of) meanings of those other indexicals, but only that, due to the discretionary aspect of its meaning, the meaning of 'we' doesn't wholly determine the referential content of an utterance, even when supplemented by facts of the narrow context of utterance. When the identity of the speaker is 'loaded' on the minimal content of the utterance, we still have to appeal to the speaker's intentions to determine who is trying to refer to

beyond her/himself. This is a case, not of ambiguity, but of *semantic underdetermination*: i.e, the meaning of 'we' underdetermines its contribution to the referential content of an utterance containing it. According to the ambiguity view, when we resolve the referent of 'ours' in *BI* as including 'both' the author of the text and Borges, first we choose one of the eight meanings ---'S/he and I'--- and then resolve, trying to ascertain the author's intention: who's the referent of s/he.¹⁴ But we have an alternative account.

Imagine that John Perry's first words in the April conference are

(3) We are shabby pedagogues.

What is he saying? Who is he referring to by his use of 'we'? What we know for sure, after understanding that utterance as competent English hearers, is that he is referring to himself and some other person or persons. So its minimal semantic content is:

(3_{min}) That *the speaker of (3)* and *other individual(s) referred to by the speaker's use of 'we'* are shabby pedagogues.

Given that we, the hearers, are looking at him as he speaks, we grasp also what is captured by this proposition:

(3_{rx1}) That *the person in front of us* and *other individual(s) referred to by that person's use of 'we'* are shabby pedagogues.

Given that we know that the person in front of us is John Perry, we get:

(3_{rx2}) That **John Perry** and *other individual(s) referred to by John Perry's use of 'we'* are shabby pedagogues.

¹⁴ Note that the issue would be even more complex. The disambiguated meaning of 'we' would be 'S/he and I', and the third-person pronoun should be taken as anaphoric on the proper name 'Borges.' That makes the ambiguity view even more implausible.

As I already said, this is fairly easy, due to the automatic, secure and helpful side of 'we.' But, on the other hand, we may wonder who is (are) the other individual(s) referred to. Is he referring to us, the audience at the workshop? Is he referring to his colleagues in the philosophy department in Stanford? Is he referring to all philosophers in the world? Well, it seems that all these possibilities and many more are open. All we can arrive at without appealing to his intentions in uttering (3) is (3_{rx2}). His intentions are what determine the contribution of 'we' to the referential content of the utterance. But notice that even if we cannot take (3_{rx2}) as its referential content or what John said in uttering (3), it is a full proposition, a proposition usable for the inference of further implicatures, without having to determine the referential content of his utterance, what he said uttering (3).

4. Non-referential uses of 'we'

Now, those possibilities can pose some doubts on the indexicality of 'we.' If John were referring to us, the audience at the workshop, as he is looking at us, we could take each of us as the individuals referred to by John, beyond himself. But what if John was talking about all living philosophers in the world? Would each individual be part of the reference of 'we'? Can John refer to someone without any knowledge of him/her? Can John refer to someone without knowing that he is so doing? Is it reasonable to say, in these circumstances, that John *intends* to refer to each individual living philosopher in the world? A negative answer to this kind of questions motivates the reconsideration of 'we' as a directly referential (indexical) device. The contribution of 'we' to the content of an utterance like (3), would be in those cases, not some individuals including the speaker, but *a property* that determines a set including the speaker, something like

(3_{des}) That *the philosophers in the world including the speaker of (3)* are shabby pedagogues.

We have another example in *BBI*. Perry does not seem to have in mind any individual in particular, beyond himself, in most, if not all, his uses of 'we,' like the following ones (my italics):

Jorge Luis Borges is the author of this short story, the one who wrote it, presumably edited it over a period of time, published it and who is similarly responsible for all of the other works *we* know by Borges.

So *we* have two identities: the author is the writer, and the writer is Borges.

In following the writer's thoughts, *we* must to a certain extent pretend that the writer is not Borges. But if *we* just think of it as a story about two people,...

It seems that the content of these uses of 'we' are the utterer ---'Perry'--- and a more or less undetermined property like '*the reader(s) of this text.*' Perry could hardly have had a particular person in mind, whom he intends to refer to with his use of 'we.' So, it could be argued that in these cases 'we' is half referential, half descriptive; and that the propositions expressed by utterances of sentences including 'we' are *quasi-singular*.

Now, in my view, a pluripropositionalist view of utterance content and the meaning of 'we' along the lines of the present Perry-inspired account can easily accommodate all these seemingly competing intuitions. According to this account, the *referential content* of an utterance of a sentence containing 'we' is a singular proposition that has the speaker and some other individuals, if they exist, as constituents. Its *minimal semantic content*, the product of sentence meaning and the fact that an utterance has occurred, is a general *reflexive* proposition about the utterance itself. More incremental propositions are easily determined due to the automatic aspect of 'we,' but because of its discretionary aspect, the particular individuals that constitute the referential content of the utterance can be hard to determine. Furthermore, the exact reference to particular individuals can also be excluded from the speaker's intentions in uttering 'we.' So the exact referential content of the utterance can be wholly irrelevant for the speaker's communicative plan and its recognition by the hearer. However, that doesn't mean that the utterance is devoid of content, or that its official content is better understood as a general proposition, following the descriptivist account. It only shows that the relevant content here is not a singular proposition ---its referential content--- but a *quasi-singular reflexive* one: the product of its semantic minimal content

plus other contextual facts, both narrow and wide, that contribute an individual ---Perry--- and a property ---'the reader(s) of *this* utterance'---

A similar account can be given for other interesting cases like the prisoner awaiting death penalty who utters "I am traditionally allowed to order whatever I like for my last meal" (Nunberg (1993), p. 20). To begin with, it's remarkable enough that it looks like the prisoner could have expressed a very similar content, if not the same, using the first-person plural, that is, by uttering "We are traditionally allowed to order whatever we like for our last meal". But I will leave this discussion for another occasion.

5. Conclusions

A Perry-inspired view of 'we' places it naturally among indexicals as a referential device, explaining at the same time the descriptivist insights about non-referential uses of 'we' that pose problems for a monopropositionalist referential approach like Vallée's. Perry's own use of 'we' in *BBI* is naturally understood as a case of one of partly non-referential use.

The particular use of 'ours' in *BI* is also naturally explained along the lines of Perry's account in *BBI* and elsewhere. He plays with the idea of referring to two different people using an indexical that is used to refer to a plurality of people.

A core, central meaning of 'we' as referring to a group (an agent of collective agency) as different from the mere plurality of individuals has often been taken for granted by philosophers of collective action and cognition (Gilbert 1989 or Tuomela 1995). From my point of view, that is not its core, basic meaning, common to all utterances of sentences containing 'we,' but rather part of a pragmatically enriched content. But this is also an issue to be addressed elsewhere.

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Appendix

"Borges and I" (From *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*. New York: New Directions, 1964, pp. 246-247)

The other one, the one called Borges, is the one things happen to. I walk through the streets of Buenos Aires and stop for a moment, perhaps mechanically now, to look at the arch of an entrance hall and the grillwork on the gate; I know of Borges from the mail and see his name on a list of professors or in a biographical dictionary. I like hourglasses, maps, eighteenth-century typography, the taste of coffee and the prose of Stevenson; he shares these preferences, but in a vain way that turns them into the attributes of an actor. It would be an exaggeration to say that ours is a hostile relationship; I live, let myself go on living, so that Borges may contrive his literature, and this literature justifies me. It is no effort for me to confess that he has achieved some valid pages, but those pages cannot save me, perhaps because what is good belongs to no one, not even to him, but rather to the language and to tradition. Besides, I am destined to perish, definitively, and only some instant of myself can survive in him. Little by little, I am giving over everything to him, though I am quite aware of his perverse custom of falsifying and magnifying things.

Spinoza knew that all things long to persist in their being; the stone eternally wants to be a stone and the tiger a tiger. I shall remain in Borges, not in myself (if it is true that I am someone), but I recognize myself less in his books than in many others or in the laborious strumming of a guitar. Years ago I tried to free myself from him and went from the mythologies of the suburbs to the games with time and infinity, but those games belong to Borges now and I shall have to imagine other things. Thus my life is a flight and I lose everything and everything belongs to oblivion, or to him.

I do not know which of us has written this page.

"Borges y yo" (From *Páginas escogidas*, Casa de las Américas, La Habana, 1988.)

Al otro, a Borges, es a quien le ocurren las cosas. Yo camino por Buenos Aires y me demoro, acaso ya mecánicamente, para mirar el arco de un zaguán y la puerta cancel; de Borges tengo noticias por el correo y veo su nombre en una terna de profesores o en un diccionario biográfico. Me gustan los relojes de arena, los mapas, la tipografía del siglo XVII, las etimologías, el sabor del café y la prosa de Stevenson; el otro comparte esas preferencias, pero de un modo vanidoso que las convierte en atributos de un actor. Sería exagerado afirmar que nuestra relación es hostil; yo vivo, yo me dejo vivir para que Borges pueda tramar su literatura y esa literatura me justifica. Nada me cuesta confesar que ha logrado ciertas páginas válidas, pero esas páginas no me pueden salvar, quizá porque lo bueno ya no es de nadie, ni siquiera del otro, sino del lenguaje o la tradición. Por lo demás, yo estoy destinado a perderme, definitivamente, y sólo algún instante de mí podrá sobrevivir en el otro. Poco a poco voy cediéndole todo, aunque me consta su perversa costumbre de falsear y magnificar. Spinoza entendió que todas las cosas quieren perseverar en su ser; la piedra eternamente quiere ser piedra y el tigre un tigre. Yo he de quedar en Borges, no en mí (si es que alguien soy), pero me reconozco menos en sus libros que en muchos otros o que en el laborioso rasgueo de una guitarra. Hace años yo traté de librarme de él y pasé de las mitologías del arrabal a los juegos con el tiempo y con lo infinito, pero esos juegos son de Borges ahora y tendré que idear otras cosas. Así mi vida es una fuga y todo lo pierdo y todo es del olvido, o del otro.

No sé cuál de los dos escribe esta página.