

## A Writer's Destiny

*The following is an edited transcription of a talk given by Jorge Luis Borges before an overflow audience at The University of Iowa, February 19, 1976. In transcribing Mr. Borge's words we have attempted to preserve the flavor of the original lecture, which was delivered in a hushed, melodious voice, often hesitant and searching, as in a remembrance of things past. After the talk at Iowa, which concluded his American lecture tour, Mr. Borges returned to Argentina via Spain and Chile, where he received a national literary prize. He does not expect to visit the United States again during the next few years.*

*We would like to thank Professor Donald A. Yates of Michigan State University for his assistance in editing this lecture.*

*T. Coraghessan Boyle  
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Ladies and gentlemen, I am going to speak of the writer and his destiny—not an average writer or a Platonic writer whose works are personal—but a particular writer, myself, and my particular destiny. I cannot speak about any other writer, yet I can say something concerning myself—and I warn you that my experiences are not too dramatic, but they do stand for a lifetime given over to literature.

I was born way back in 1899, and I will go back to my first memories. Those memories are of several kinds. For example, I think of a rainbow. I do not know whether that rainbow was being looked at from the right bank or from the left bank of the Silver River, the Río de la Plata, from Uruguay or from Buenos Aires. I also think of some dirt streets of a slummy neighborhood, of trees, of many trees—but really, all those things are of no avail. My essential memories go back to my father's library. And the chief event in my life is the fact that he gave me free run of his library. That is, perhaps, the only event of my life.

As a child, I found my way into that library, a large rambling library of English books, and I was made to feel that I was being given the free run of that library, of all those (perhaps there were only hundreds, but I think

of them as being thousands, or as endless) English books. And I knew that I could pick up any book I wanted.

My father knew the way things should be done. At least I think he did. So he never advised me about my reading. I cannot look back on a time when reading was unknown to me: I seemed to have been born with the gift of reading (though perhaps I have not attained the gift of writing—that is up to the literary critics to decide).

Now if I were to state the first books I read, perhaps I might talk in terms of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, as done into English, since I have done most of my reading in English. Thus, when I speak of the Bible, I do not talk in terms of a Hebrew holy book; I talk in terms of the King James Bible. When I speak of *The Arabian Nights*, I am really thinking of Edward William Lane, and later on of Captain Burton.

Poetry too came to me through my father. At first, of course, I did not understand the words. But why should words be understood? Perhaps the idea of understanding words in poetry is a mistake. Perhaps poetry stands for what Bernard Shaw, a very wise man, called "word music." That notion is far more important. I remember, as a child, hearing my father sing out verses—Swinburne perhaps—they might have come from "Dolores" or "Hail and Farewell," or perhaps from those sonnets, "And when white England brings black Spain to shame," or whatever it might be, or they might have come from Tennyson also. My father loved Tennyson. I know he was being quite old-fashioned, but after all, what do I care for time? I am thinking in terms of eternity and not of time. And also I remember Shelley and I remember Keats. My mother used to tell me (she died in July of this year) that when I went over, let's say, the "Ode to a Nightingale" or the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," I said those verses with the very intonation of my father, so that in a sense I kept him immortal. At least for some time after his death I sang those verses in his own voice, and perhaps, in some strange way, I was being my father—since I must have felt the same emotions, as I said the same verses in the same way.

After *Grimm's Fairy Tales* there came other books. Among those books there came one—I must have read it in an English translation of a French translation by Galland—*The Arabian Nights*. Those books filled me with wonder, and they still do. I do not think anything like *The Arabian Nights* has ever been written. And I think of them as a very strange gift—I suppose they were evolved in India, then found their way to Persia, then Egypt. They were written down in the fourteenth century in Cairo, and since then they have been a delight to men of all countries.

It is a strange thing, as Macaulay remarked, that the fancies of one man should become the memories of another. And yet this is what happens. After all, we are compounded of our memories. And perhaps our best

memories are not those of things that have really happened to us, but of things that we have read. So that when I think of my childhood I am not thinking of the things I loved in my boyhood, of Palermo—that came later, I suppose, and was something not quite true. My first memories are of sailing up the Mississippi River on a raft with Nigger Jim and Huck Finn. Those are the first memories of a South American writer. I am speaking the literal truth. I think perhaps it is a mistake to say that I was their companion, that I was their invisible companion, when they were sailing up the Mississippi on the raft. I suppose it would be truer to say that I was both Nigger Jim and Huck Finn, or that perhaps I was both rolled into one—these marvels are common when one is reading.

I remember that some time after reading *Huckleberry Finn*, I found my way into two other books, and those books are also part of my personal memories. Those books are *Roughing It* and *Flush Days in California* by Mark Twain. They are among my personal memories. Not only the books, but the engravings. Of course, I was always near-sighted. I am sorry to say that at this moment you are faceless—I can hardly make you out—I feel your presence, I feel your kindness and your friendship, but I can hardly see you. And when I was a boy I was near-sighted also. So that my memories—let's say of my father, of my English grandmother, of my *criollo* grandfather, and of my mother, of course—are not of faces. (Why should I not speak of my mother—I am always thinking of her—she died last July at the age of 99, and she has not quite died for me: I think of her as living on. She would be very happy to know that I am speaking today in Iowa before an American audience, since she loved America. She discovered it some time after Eric the Red—in 1961 in Texas. But still, she discovered it.)

I remember the faces far less than the maps and engravings. Because as a child I fell in love with maps, even as Baudelaire, Milton, and John Donne did. I always felt the wonder of maps. Perhaps, as Baudelaire said, they are stranger than countries. Perhaps the blue sea and the yellow continents are stranger than the lands themselves, since they are symbols. Symbols, I suppose, are far more real than real men, since we are passing away and they are everlasting.

When I remember *The Arabian Nights*, I remember other books, and I recall that when I read them I did not think of them as being inventions. Because when you are a child you read everything as it comes along—you don't think of a book as being fantastic or as being realistic (those are wild notions worked up by grown-up people, but the child takes everything in). I remember my father allowed me to read *The Thousand Nights and the Night* in Burton's translation. It contains many things that a child should not have read. But of course a child cares far less for those elemental mysteries, the erotic mysteries, than for the very real mystery of having a ring

that made him the master of an all-powerful slave, the genie. I remember that I went in for the magic of *The Arabian Nights*. That stood me in good stead.

And then I remember the engravings—I think I can remember every single engraving of those books—and I have done my best to recover all those books after they were scattered, so that when I find, let us say, an edition of Mark Twain with original illustrations, I pay a fancy price for it because I feel I am going back to my childhood. When I get a new edition I feel I am being let down—cheated out of my due.

I remember those books, and I also remember a book that has meant much to me—the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and *Chamber's Encyclopedia*, or the plagiarized edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, called the *Anglo-American Encyclopedia*. Those books meant a great deal to me. My father did not tell me to read them. He never allowed me to see that in a sense he was educating me. He gave me, as I said, the free run of his library. And I think that such home reading is the only real kind of reading. Compulsory reading is, after all, reading for examinations, reading for oblivion, reading for forgetfulness—that kind of thing does you no good. If you don't think of reading as a personal happiness, then your reading is utterly worthless.

I was never led into compulsory reading. My father never told me, "here is a quite famous Spanish novel, called the *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, written by Cervantes Saavedra," but he let me find the book. And I read it, put off at first by the rather cramped Spanish style—the clumsy style—of the writer, but then becoming interested in the adventures of the hero. And when I found my way into the second part, I had already found two friends, two lifelong friends, Don Quixote and the squire, Sancho Panza, as well. But above all Alonso Quijano who dreamed himself into being Don Quixote and who finally became Don Quixote. In the last chapter he repents of course, and finds his way into sanity—one regrets that last chapter—and then he knows that he is only Alonso Quijano who had been Don Quixote, and he dies sane. Of course I could not share that feeling. I thought of him as a traitor, even as Almafuerte, the Argentine poet, did. I thought he should have lived up to his madness, that he should have died as Don Quixote, not as a mere country gentleman.

Then I remember other books. I remember Stevenson's *New Arabian Nights*. I remember those wonderful stories of the Suicide Club, stories wherein Stevenson invented or discovered—of course the two words stand for the same thing—a fairy London, the fairy London that was also discovered or invented after him by G. K. Chesterton. When you read the Father Brown saga, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, *The Wisdom of Father Brown*, and when you read *The Man Who Was Thursday* or *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, you find your way into fairy London, and that

London was discovered or invented by Stevenson. And I suppose that when Stevenson came to London, he thought of it as a fairy town, since he came from puritanical Edinburgh, a very charming city, but a city quite unlike London. He must have thought of London as being endless, quite worthy of being an *Arabian Nights* city. In those stories that go to make up the Suicide Club, "The Advent of Hansom Cabs" and then in "The Rajah's Diamond," you get this idea of London as a fairy place. The idea can be found, though in lesson form, in the works of Conan Doyle, a lesser writer, of course.

When I went to London, of course I was not seeing the real London at all, if there be such a thing as a real London. I was rediscovering the London of Stevenson, of Chesterton, of Conan Doyle, of Dickens. When you go to London, you feel that you know as much of the many characters in fiction as of the real characters who have lived there. You think, "Well, here Mr. Pickwick stood," or "Here Oliver Twist was kidnapped by the thieves," or "Here Mr. Chuzzlewit found his way after murdering the blackmailer."

I went on reading those books, and they made up a part of my real life. At the same time I was being trained in something. But my father would **not allow me** to reject that training. He was teaching me philosophy, but not in the professorial way of dates and names—things of no avail whatever. Instead, he used to train me thus in philosophy. Let's say that after dinner he would hold up an orange to me: "Tell me," he would say, "where do you think the taste of the orange is?" I would answer very proudly (I thought he was asking a silly question): "In the orange, of course." Then he would ask me: "So you think that the orange is tasting itself all the time?" And I would be rather taken aback and say: "Well, I wouldn't go as far as that."

Two or three nights before (the whole thing was done in a very wise way—he was a professor of psychology and knew how to set about it) my father had asked me: "What do you make of the color of the orange?" I answered like the young prig that I was: "The orange is orange-colored." But instead of getting applause and a loud cheer for that sentence, I got another question: "What do you mean by orange-colored?" Then I said, as a logician should: "Well, I should think of the orange as being, let's say, between reddish and yellowish." "Yes, that's right," he said, "but what if I turn out the light?" I answered: "In that case I think everything turns black and so does the orange—so the orange is really colorless." "Or," he said, "you don't have to turn out the light—you can merely close your eyes. What color is the orange now?" "The orange is no color now," I said, "but I know that the orange is still orange-colored."

Then, some night or so after, he would make me take the orange in my

hand (we always had oranges for this sort of thing), and he would say: "What is the shape of the orange?" I would say: "It is a roundish shape, more like an apple." "But doesn't that depend on the shape of your hand?" he would ask. Then of course I would have to admit that it did. And for some time I was made to feel that I was being taught the mystery of oranges, or, what is better still, the mystery of the universe. I had to answer of course that the taste of the orange depends on my mouth, on my lips, on my palate; the color depends on my eyes; the shape depends on my hands, as does the weight. He would tell me that after all, my hands, my eyes, my mouth were as much a part of the external universe (he wouldn't have used those words, of course; he was far too intelligent), that they were quite as mysterious as the orange and could not be thought of as explaining the orange away. Then I would feel a dim sense of living in a mysterious and uncomfortable universe: that was the beginning of philosophy.

Later on, many years afterward, my father gave me a book—Lewis' *Biographical History of Philosophy*. And then I found that he had been teaching me the elements of Berkeleyan philosophy.

He would also, for instance, take out the chess board and say: "Look here. Here we have eight squares." And I would say: "Yes, you are right." "Suppose a rook had to find its way to the square with the other rook," he would say. "How would it set about it?" "What? How to traverse eight squares?" I would say. And he would say: "Yes. In that case you would have to go to the fourth square, right?" "Why, of course," I would say. The thing seemed rather silly at the time, I suppose. Then he would say: "But in that case you would have to go over to the knight's square." I would agree. Then he would say: "Well, the first points are endless—movement is impossible." And he would tell me the story of Achilles and the tortoise. I was later to find that he had been teaching me the elements of philosophy, teaching me without using a single name.

I think I was made to read everything. The only advice my father gave me was this: "Read everything you like—if you dislike a book, throw it away. This means that the book was not meant for you. Compulsory reading is nonsense. Go ahead and read all you like." And so I thought of paradise as a library, because I thought that I might go on reading in that wonderful library—my father's library—all my life.

It was then that I was led into thinking that my destiny was to be a literary destiny. I found out afterwards—a long time afterwards—that my father had been cheated out of that destiny by his blindness. And so he had wanted me to work out that destiny for him. I had to inherit that destiny. Thus my father, at some time in my life (I suppose it was in Geneva or some time thereafter), said to me: "You should read as much as you can."

I knew that. I had already been learning Latin, and I had taught myself German in order to read Schopenhauer in the original text. "Read as much as you can," he told me, "and write as much as you will. You should tear up most of what you have written, or all of it—it is mostly worthless. And you should try to imitate authors: that is the best training."

Afterwards I found that Stevenson had said that he began by playing the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to De Quincey, to Addison, to Baudelaire, and to other writers. So when my father told me to play the sedulous ape to such writers as I cared about, he also said: "And above all, don't rush into print." Now this is the advice I can give to young writers. They should do as much home reading as possible—they should not (I am sorry if I am saying the wrong thing) follow the professor's advice. I've never cared for compulsory reading—compulsory reading is reading for oblivion, for examinations, for hack work—that's useless. You should think of reading as a kind of happiness, and it is a kind of happiness. And so, when the moment comes, is writing.

I remember, after my discovery of Walt Whitman—of course the discovery of Walt Whitman is something very important in one's life—that I began reading him in a rather strange way. I had taught myself German, as I said (now I have come from 1899 to Geneva in 1916—I'm sorry to say that I've omitted the voyage, the crossing of the ocean and so on). I was reading a German Expressionist magazine, and I came upon a poem wherein I read those quite remarkable words, "Als ich in Alabama meinen Morgengang machte"—the word "Alabama" rang a kind of bell. At the end of the poem was the name "Walt Whitman." I remembered having read that name in Williams James's *The Variety of Religious Experience*, and recalled that I had attempted some pieces by Whitman and had failed. I said to myself, "this poet is quite remarkable—why should I read him in Johannes Schlaf's translation when I may read the original in English?", since I knew English and since my German was rather shaky (it was shaky and still is shaky).

I ordered the book from London, and then of course I got the first impression that one gets when he reads Walt Whitman—he thinks that Walt Whitman is the only poet. He thinks that all poetry up to the time of Walt Whitman is an attempt to be Walt Whitman, that it has signally failed. You get that impression when you are young and you read a great author. I thought of Swinburne in the same way; I thought of Shakespeare, Hugo, and later on of Quevedo in the same way. I thought of all literature as leading up to them—everything was in rough draft.

Now at last I had found poetry, and it was my bounden duty to imitate it, to ape it. When I got that book I remember reading the poem that I have since done into Spanish, the poem "Song of Myself." Not "Song to My-

self,” as some translators have it, out of mere vanity, but “Song of Myself.” Not a “Song to Myself”—he was not attempting an ode to himself—he was writing about himself, trying to analyze himself. Those lines are still ringing in my memory. For example:

These are really the thoughts of all men in all ages  
and lands, they are not original with me,  
If they are not yours as much as mine they are nothing,  
or next to nothing.

And then the splendid lines:

This is the grass that grows wherever the land is and  
the water is,  
This is the common air that bathes the globe.

I thought how strange a thing it was that all poets—let’s say from Baudelaire to Whitman—have tried to make us feel that what they are saying is extraordinary, but Walt Whitman was doing a far stranger thing. He was insisting on the fact that what he was saying was common to all men, that these were really the thoughts of all men of all ages and lands. That was his way of singing democracy—the idea that the common man stands for something, not that the extraordinary man stands for something. I mean he was against, let’s say, Carlyle’s hero worship (another writer who also dazzled me). Well, I read Walt Whitman, and attempted to imitate him. Then the writing began. I remember that I destroyed my first three books.

When I came back to Buenos Aires from Europe, I remember thinking, “what a strange city this is—a long, straggling, shabby city of low buildings with flat roofs that goes on forever and forever into the pampas.” I remembered that in Walt Whitman’s poems of the pampas he had spoken of the gaucho, saying: “I see the incomparable rider of horses, with his lasso on his arm.” I felt duly grateful to him for his mention of the gaucho. It was then that I wrote the three books and tore them up—those books were quite bad—if I gave you the titles alone you would know that they were quite bad. For example, *Red Rhythms*, poems written about the Communist Revolution in Russia, or a book—I can’t even remember the titles—I blush when I think of them.

At last I wrote *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, a book about discovering my hometown after many years abroad—in Switzerland, in Spain, and in different parts of Europe. I said to myself, “I must write down my experiences of rediscovering Buenos Aires after all these many years: here is a book.” Of course I was closely following Whitman—I was trying to ape, to imitate



his rhythms. I said to my father: "I think I have written a book that may be worthwhile printing." And my father said: "We'll find out how much that means." We were well off in those days—and we found that the cost would be 300 *pesos*, a *peso* a copy. My father gave me the money. And then, since he was a fine critic and poet in his own right, I asked him to look over the book. "No," he said, "I won't. Because if I do, it may never find its way into print. I don't think anybody can help anybody else. The idea of helping somebody is wrong. You should publish the book and then discover all the mistakes when it is too late to amend them."

The book was printed in a hurry, as we were off to Europe again. It had to be done in a week (it was done in six days), and it came out full of misprints, though the misprints were of no importance—they were far better than the errors I had actually committed in writing the book. So the book came out while I spent the year in Europe. When I returned I found that the book had been taken seriously, though I had never thought of sending copies to the papers or bookshops. I had merely given away my copies to friends. Since most of them were kind, they hadn't said a word about it. After my father's death, a second edition was wanted and we found that he had kept a copy and had hidden it away. It was full of emendations. Some poems, and even whole pages had been struck out. There were also interrogation marks and emendation marks, and many words had been changed. I used that copy for the second edition published by Emecé Editores in Buenos Aires.

After the first edition, people began to take me seriously. Alfonso Reyes, that great Mexican writer, the best writer of Spanish prose who has ever lived, took me seriously. He did not think of me as being the son of Leonor Acevedo or the grandson of Colonel Borges who fell in action in 1874. He thought of me as being someone in my own right. People began to take me seriously and I began to publish books. My father never gave me his opinion of them. I suppose he didn't like them really, but he didn't want to discourage me. And so I went on writing. Since then I have discovered a few things. Those few things will be the last words of this perhaps all too long lecture.

Firstly, I have discovered that being a writer is very difficult—if you are anything else but an artist, you have certain hours of working. You have, let's say, work time, and then a holiday. Writing, however, is a full-time job, because every experience should be of some value to you. You find out in the long run that your misfortunes should be made into your tools, since happiness is an end unto itself and does not need to be written about. In fact, I do not think there has been any single poet of happiness. Perhaps Walt Whitman spoke of happiness, but of course he spoke in terms of past happiness or of fancied happiness. But if a man is happy in the present

(and I suppose that that may happen to somebody—it never happened to me as far as I know), then that happiness has no need of being written down. Happiness has to be transmuted into something else, into art—so that all experiences are grist to the mill of the writer.

All experiences can be taken into account, especially unhappy experiences: misfortune, failure, being disgraced, feeling unhappy, even feeling sorry for oneself—all those hateful things—being hated, not being loved by the person you love (that's the worst of all). Walt Whitman had it, surrounded by people, and yet none of them the right person. Even that should be transmuted into art, and it's your duty to do it.

If you are an artist, you feel that things are heaping up on you and you have to make them into art. I suppose that to a real artist every moment is worthwhile. The idea, let us say, of a sunset, of a military victory or defeat, or perhaps of meeting a great man or woman especially worthy of being worked into art—those things are wrong. To a true artist, every moment of his life should be something precious. Of course I am not a true artist. I can only think of some things in my life as being precious, and those are the things that I have lost. For example, my boyhood in Palermo, the first time I read those books, my father's library, my mother, the women I have loved, the women who have not loved me and whom I loved—those are the real things. And I think of the others as being mere accidents, mere favors, mere fictions. But that is wrong—the other thing is real. Even the present is real though we never think of it as such. We always think of the past—we think of things far away and long ago as being real. We try to think that had we lived in Shakespeare's time we might have been Shakespeare. But this is not so. Shakespeare lived in his time and he had to be Shakespeare. That is far more difficult of course. We are living not in Shakespeare's time but in the only real time—the present. And we have to make the present time precious to us, and that is what is difficult about being an artist.

Of course, an artist—a writer—tends to use certain symbols. I may have been going in for certain private myths—or manias for all I know—mirrors, labyrinths, mazes, nightmares, daggers, the life of the gauchos, the life of hoodlums in my slum of Palermo. Those things may be real to me. But actually everything is real. This moment is as real as any moment—and were I a poet, I would make this moment into poetry. But of course this cannot be done now. It may be done when I am back in Buenos Aires and thinking back on this strange day that I spent in Iowa when I was lecturing in America and being taken seriously by people. Those things will stand out in my memory, I know. At the moment they are but experiences, they are but the present. And the present of course hardly exists, as it glides into the past, foresees the future, becomes the present, and then dissolves

into the past. We know not if the river of time is flowing from the past or from the future. We know very little about things. The work of an artist is to accept those things.

This morning I was asked about my ideology. Now I think I have always made my opinions very clear. I wish to state them over again. I am not a Fascist. I am not a Nazi. I am not a Communist. I do not think that at this moment I can be a party to democracy in my country—not in America, of course—since democracy in my country stands for a mistake. We shall see.\* But I have always had my say on those things. I have never hidden my opinions, never tucked them away. I think that I have always taken care of those opinions, even sometimes when I have been threatened for doing so. For example, when I resigned my job as head of the National Library because I did not want to serve the present government, everybody knew why I had done so. Yet these opinions do not find their way into my poetical output. Because what I write is poetry or is fiction (the same thing after all—I don't suppose anything essentially different between writing a story or writing a poem as they both stand for the same experience). Well, poetry and fiction represent something beyond my opinions. After all, the opinions of a writer are not on the surface. I suppose the Catholic Church or the Catholic faith was all right for Dante, if it made him write that finest of all poems, the *Commedia*. The British Empire was all right, if it made Kipling write his poems. Democracy was right for Walt Whitman since it made him write his *Leaves of Grass*. But those opinions are far less important than what came out of them, than the work into which they were interwoven.

I am always being asked about the duty of a contemporary writer, and I say that the duty of the contemporary writer is to write as well as he can in order to be loyal to his dream, loyal to the way he imagines things. I don't think you should write a story if you don't believe in it. At least your imagination should believe in it, not of course as the natural thing that happened, but as something that you can accept as a dream or a believable dream rather than a mere concoction of words—since words after all are but tools and poor tools at that. I remember that Stevenson wrote about the strange ambition of the painter who thought that with cakes of paint he might give a picture of “the insufferable sun,” as he put it. That cannot be done—but you can do something with those strange tools of our trade, words. Words, of course, are mere blocks, mere symbols; they are a kind of algebra, and yet they are something more. They can also, as my father taught me when he intoned verses by Swinburne, Keats, Shelley, and

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\* This talk, delivered on February 19, 1976, precedes the fall of Isabel Peron's government.

Fitzgerald, be made into a kind of witchcraft, a kind of music—and if a man is a poet, he can do that.

After all, what do the meanings of verses mean? They stand for very little. If I say, for example, “And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars/ From this world-weary flesh,” we may not believe in astrology, but the verses are very fine. (They are by Shakespeare, incidentally.) And then of course we have the many Saxon words and the fine Latin word, “inauspicious”: “And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars.” Then the Saxon words, “From this world-weary flesh,” that have come out of Old English poetry: there you have witchcraft. And that is not enough. For example, when Shakespeare wrote,

Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?  
Sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy:  
Why lov'st thou that which thou receiv'st not gladly?

you should feel that the idea of being amazed at someone enjoying sad music is really a silly idea. I think I could feel the beauty of “Sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy,” even without comprehending the meaning of the words, since the meaning is after all something added to the verses. The verses stand for a witchcraft of their own: they are strange verbal objects in their own right.

And now, I suppose I have spoken too much. . . .

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## CRITICISM / ROBERT SCHOLES

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### The Reality of Borges

*“Fame is a form of incomprehension,  
perhaps the worst.” J. L. B.*

My title is presumptuous—as is the very act of writing about an author who is not only well-known but has actually shaped many of our perceptions about the possibilities of literature. Borges needs neither praise nor explanation from me or anyone else. My discussion of him, then, must be neither of these, though it may partake of both. It is a personal statement