



Some Notes on the Tale “El Aleph” By Jorge Luis Borges

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Abstract

This short text takes as its subject a short tale by Jorge Luis Borges El Aleph. We try to give an idea that will awaken readers' appetite for the text and, from there, make them immerse themselves in the literary universe of the Argentine genius who left us masterpieces such as Ficciones. We use for this work the edition by Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1983.

Keywords: Jorge Luis Borges; Short Tales; El Aleph

Introduction

It is always a superlative pleasure to be able to return to texts whose reading moves us deeply and opens horizons of thought unsuspected until that encounter, while allowing us to enjoy unique levels of literary quality, artistic handling of language and creation of universes that indefinitely expand our world. Jorge Luis Borges is an author whose encounter and conviviality elevates us and allows us to fully enjoy life. The request for this review by the Journal of Educational Research found us in a perfectly appropriate circumstance for this return as we begin a summer period of work interruption and with a Borges' book ready to accompany us at the beginning of the week.

We take from that book a short story for this review. It is a magnificent text, which adorns like a precious stone the treasure of universal literature, came from the pen of the incomparable Jorge Luis Borges. We are referring to the short tale El Aleph, which also gives the title to a volume that includes other incomparable texts, and which is available in many editions easily found in bookstores.

Argentine by nationality, with Portuguese ancestors often claimed, Borges' soul is nevertheless, and by its very nature,

universal and open to spiritual manifestations from the most diverse origins. His work is one of the most important of the 20th century and will certainly have a timeless value, beyond the particularisms that literary taste presents and enshrines. This value is further reinforced by the Swedish Academy's steadfast refusal to award him the Nobel Prize for Literature, insofar as it does not cast upon his work the taint of suspicion concerning the involvement of interests other than purely literary and aesthetic ones that has affected that prize in recent decades.

Borges's work is permeated by the desire and nostalgia for infinity and eternity. It is up to man to find, in the everyday realities he encounters in his dealings with the world and with others, the infinite to which everything belongs, and which beings somehow represent in their singularity and limited concretion. Hence, in his texts, anything, no matter how insignificant, can be the occasion for opening the doors to the infinite, and any instant, no matter how fleeting, can be fully significant when it suddenly reveals to us the essential meaning of existence and our most authentic being. This thirst for the absolute is constitutive of the human soul and is clearly evident in the mystics (e.g., Master Eckhart) and in other

outstanding literary figures (e.g., W. Sommerset Maugham and Hermann Hesse).

In the case of the story we are considering, the Aleph appears as a point in space which contains all the others. It thus symbolizes the presence of everything in everything, the repercussion of any event on the whole cosmos, in short, the microcosm. The narrator is led to contemplate one of these Alephs situated humbly under the step of a staircase. In it, the totality is revealed to him in a contracted form, and in it the meaning of individual life is mirrored. The ineffability of this experience is explicitly acknowledged but, despite the writer's despair, something is communicated to us that allows the One to be shown.

The motivation for Borges' tale lies in the fact that Aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, signifies for Kabbalah the En Soph, the unlimited and pure divinity.

With pantheistic overtones, the text nevertheless has the power to show us the ontological linkage of everything and the artificiality and contingency of the limits of individuality. Thus, the words of Heraclitus echo from the ends of the centuries, reminding us that wisdom lies in the correspondence to Being and in knowing that everything is one:

Even I but hearing the Word.

He is always a wise man [Heraclitus, B50]

We indicate below two translations of the Heraclitan fragment in editions of Heidegger's text.

André Préau translates: "If it is not me, but the Meaning, that you have heard, it is wise then to say in the same sense: All is One" [1]. True to himself, more prolix, Jacques Lacan states that "If what you have heard is not mine, but meaning, it is also wise to say similarly to this meaning: The One is All Things" [2].

In both cases, we are faced with the presence of the infinite in the finite, which Borges masterfully explores in his tale.

By way of exordium, the author places his tale under the aegis of Shakespeare and Hobbes. From the first, we find: «O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a King of infinite space» (Hamlet, II, 2). Of the second, the following is quoted: « But they will teach us that Eternity is the / Standing still of the Present Time, a/ Nunc-stans (ast the schools call it); / which neither they, nor any else / understand, no more than they would a / Hic-stans for an Infinite greatness of / Place» (Leviathan, IV, 46). In Borges' short story, this coincidence of opposites (coincidence of opposites, Nicholas of Cusa) emerges from a concrete and prosaic reality: in a house, an angle of the basement dining room contains an Aleph, «one of the points of space that contain all points» [3].

The character Daneri clarifies: «It's in the basement of the dining room (...). It's mine, it's mine: I discovered it in childhood,

before school age. The basement staircase is steep, my aunt and uncle forbade me to go down, but someone said that there was a world in the basement. He was referring, I learned later, to a trunk, but I understood that there was a world. I went down secretly, I rolled down the forbidden staircase, I fell. When I opened my eyes, I saw the Aleph.

-The Aleph? -I repeated.

-Yes, the place where are, without confusion, all the places of the world, seen from all angles. To no one did I reveal my discovery (...)" [3].

The mystical experience that emerges here presupposes an attitude of affective adherence, the Augustinian charity: one cannot enter the truth without love / charity (truth is not entered into except through charity, Against Faustus, 32. 18).

Our author advocates that «truth does not penetrate a rebellious understanding» [3]. Spiritual openness to the truth transforms the subject, an experience that the narrator realizes at the end of the story [3]. The sheer enormity of the experience of the inconceivable universe overwhelms the individual, but the crushing that would ensue is balanced by forgetfulness: «Happily, after a few sleepless nights, oblivion worked on me again» [3]. Before entering another tale from Borges, Funes el memorioso (Funes the Memorious, Borges, Ficciones, pp. 132-146), let us invite our kind readers to the Aleph [4].

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest of any kind.

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