

# Two Poems of Jorge Luis Borges

Translated from the Spanish by  
[Evelyn Hooven](#) (April 2019)



*Jorge Luis Borges*

*The detailed uncertainties of our selves, our world, nature and destiny stir a longing for the eternal and immutable. Borges tends to investigate the transcendent and finds that even the realm of the lasting has its own variants, unforeseeable dynamic, unknowable tempo.*

*For him, unmistakable beauty can reach us fully, without forfeiting its mystery.*

*It is in its way profoundly reliable, helping us to be.*

*–Evelyn Hooven*

## In Which Nothing Knows Itself

The moon doesn't know it is tranquil and clear  
and it may not know it *is* the moon,  
the sand that it's the sand. There may not be one  
thing that knows that its form is distinctive.  
Figures of ivory are as different from  
an abstract chess game as from the hand  
that ranges them. Maybe human destiny  
with short-lived benefits and large sorrows  
is an Other's instrument. We don't know;  
to give it the name of God does not help us.  
Equally vain are the trembling, the doubt  
and the pleadings we begin and cut off.  
Whose bow–archer or musician–hurled forth  
the arrow that I am? Towards which final hill?

De que nada se sabe

La luna ignora que es tranquila y clara

y ni siquiera sabe que es la luna;  
la arena, que es la arena. No habrá una  
cosa que sepa que su forma es rara.  
Las piezas de marfil son tan ajenas  
al abstracto ajedrez como la mano  
que las rige. Quizá el destino humano  
de breves dichas y de largas penas  
es instrumento de Otro. Lo ignoramos;  
darle nombre de Dios no nos ayuda.  
Vanos también son el temor, la duda  
y la trunca plegaria que iniciamos.  
¿Qué arco habrá arrojado esta saeta  
que soy? ¿Qué cumbre puede ser la meta?

## Music Box

Music of Japan. Avariciously  
the hourglass dispenses droplets  
of slow honey or unseeable gold  
that in their tempo repeat a dream  
eternal, frangible, lucid, mysterious.

I'm afraid that each one may be final.

Are they yesterday returned? From which temple,

from which garden, fragile on its mountain,

from which vigil before a sea I don't know,

from which reticent melancholy,

from which lost and rescued afternoon

does the remote future return for me?

I don't know. It doesn't matter. In this music

I am. I want to be. I shed my blood.

Caja de Música

Música del Japón. Avaramente

de la clepsidra se desprenden gotas

de lenta miel o de invisible oro

que en el tiempo repiten una trama

eterna y frágil, misteriosa y clara.

Temo que cada una sea la última.

Son un ayer que vuelve. ¿De qué templo,

de qué leve jardín en la montaña,

de qué vigiliass ante un mar que ignoro,

de qué pudor de la melancolía,  
de qué perdida y rescatada tarde  
llegan a mí, su porvenir remoto?  
No lo sabré. No importa. En esa música  
yo soy. Yo quiero ser. Yo me desangro.

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**Evelyn Hooven** graduated from Mount Holyoke College and received her M.A. from Yale University, where she also studied at The Yale School of Drama. A member of the Dramatists' Guild, she has had presentations of her verse dramas at several theatrical venues, including *The Maxwell Anderson Playwrights Series* in Greenwich, CT (after a state-wide competition) and *The Poet's Theatre* in Cambridge, MA (result of a national competition). Her poems and translations from the French have appeared in *ART TIMES*, *Chelsea*, *The Literary Review*, *THE SHOp: A Magazine of Poetry* (in Ireland), *The Tribeca Poetry Review*, *Vallum* (in Montreal), and other journals, and her literary criticism in Oxford University's *Essays in Criticism*.

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