

FORTHCOMING IN “VARIACIONES BORGES”
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**Affect and Metaphysics in Borges’s night strolls:
 from “Sentirse en muerte” to “Boletín de una noche”**

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A NIGHT WALK IN THE SUBURB

Among Borges’s most compelling texts of the 1920s is “Sentirse en muerte,” one of the few pieces he published over and over – almost untouched – throughout his life.¹ While elements of Borges’s ecstatic strolls around the suburbs of Buenos Aires are disseminated in his poetry, “Sentirse en muerte” is the only prose piece to recount one such walk as an introspective, multi-layered narrative that blends poetry, psychology, and metaphysics. The argument, however, is fairly simple. The narrator sets out on a random night walk around the suburb, but a “gravitación familiar” (124) soon pulls him toward the old barrio where he grew up. As he stops at a corner to contemplate the serene moonlit surroundings – the clay street, the sidewalk, the little house-doors, a pink wall – he is overcome by tenderness. The scene, he realizes, is not just reminiscent of the one that took place there 20 years ago – it is exactly the same one. At this point he declares: “Me sentí muerto, me

¹ Borges first published “Sentirse en muerte” in *El Idioma de los Argentinos* (1928), reproduced it in *Historia de la Eternidad* (1936), and included it again in “Nueva Refutación del Tiempo” (1944-1946) – later incorporated to *Otras Inquisiciones* (1952).

sentí percibidor abstracto del mundo: indefinido temor imbuido de ciencia que es la mejor claridad de la metafísica.” What he experienced that night, he concludes, was “la inconcebible palabra *eternidad*” (125).

The emotional substratum of Borges’s vision of eternity is tenderness (*ternura*), a blend of sweetness and compassion vis-à-vis the modesty of certain cherished objects.² The conjunction between tenderness as an affect and its metaphysical product – the idea of eternity – is couched in the quasi-homophonic pairs *tierno/eterno*, *enternecido/eternizado*, or *enternecer/eternizar*. Ironically, tenderness appears to gain intensity from erasing all traces of a human other – beloved woman, friend, community – and from displacing the narrator’s emotions to a fragile city on the brink of extinction. Indeed, in “Sentirse en Muerte” what is even more striking than the metaphysical transfiguration of the old barrio is the complete elision of human presence. This affective erasure turns Borges’s tenderness into an affect without a human object, an immanent, solipsistic affect – it would be better called a *non-affect*. Access to the metaphysical idea of eternity, an experience of tenderness *sub specie aeternitatis*, is enabled by this radical affective occlusion.

“Sentirse en muerte” is anything but a self-contained unit. Although at a formal level the narrative is structurally complete, even concluding in a theorization of the events reported – thus anticipating Borges’s fictional epiphanies of the 1940s and 50s – on a deeper level the text remains substantially unfinished, truncated as it were. Sylvia Molloy insightfully calls it “one of Borges’s most memorable moments, as much personal *flânerie* as uncanny derivation” (128). Indeed, a fundamental question remains unsolved: why, precisely at the moment of maximum affective intensity, does the narrator feel himself

² Ana Peluffo aptly describes Borges’s tenderness as “una emoción cercana a la compasión que fetichiza lo pequeño y lo menor por oposición a lo sublime romántico” (8).

dead? Why, that is to say, does the effusion of tenderness he pours out onto the features of a fragile suburb turn him into an “abstract perceiver of the world,” instead of being this the instance when he feels most alive and real than ever?

To address this problem, we must turn to a relatively obscure text from the mid-1920s that received scarce critical attention, although it provides a decisive testimony of the exacerbated mood of isolation in the author’s night walks around this period. Borges gave this two-page manuscript to Donald Yates, telling him that he had written it while he and his family lived on Quintana Street – the house where they resided between 1924 and 1930 (Yates 319). In an article he wrote in 1973, Yates rendered the text’s title as “Boletín de una noche” (“Report on a night”) and transcribed two brief excerpts. The full version of Borges’s manuscript – composed as one clean and neatly flowing draft with few corrections³ – would remain unpublished until 1997, when it was given the outlandish title “Boletín de una noche toda.” Ever since, the text has remained one more among many other pieces in *Textos recobrados*. The narrative itself adopts a crudely confessional tone, as it chronicles a somber return home, in which a state of radical solitude induces not ecstasy but morbid dejection.

“Boletín de una noche,” I will argue, should be read as the continuation of “Sentirse en muerte.” The narrative trajectory that goes from one text to the other is better understood if they are taken to record not two separate episodes, but one experiential night with two different moments: egress and regress. “Sentirse” works as the moment of departure, of

³ In its fluid 27 lines (and 460 words), I only counted 9 places where the text was amended (most of these corrections substituting only 1 word, and in no case more than 3 words). The manuscript is kept in the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections at the University of Virginia. In his catalogue, Lowenstein states: “One of the earliest attempts by Borges to define and analyze his writing as it related to his being and personality” (140).

“adventure” – although Borges points out that it is “demasiado evanescente y estática” (123) to be called thus – and “Boletín” as the moment of return, in which the experience of solitude lays bare its destructive side. The transition from one text to the other effects a double reversal: from supreme clarity to inner shadow, from an abstract perception of death to corporeal annihilation. In metaphysical terms of experience, if the first text stages the revelation of the word “eternity,” we could infer that the second one lays out the concept of “nothingness.”

As a preliminary to the analysis of the text, this article points out an editorial slip in the publication of “Boletín de una noche” that could have dimmed its undeniable relevance. This amendment allows for a better elucidation of the strong genetic connection between “Boletín” and “Sentirse en muerte,” especially when their *avant-textes* are examined. The thematic correspondence between them is no less evident, a fact that comes to light in a close reading of “Boletín,” which, as a medullar text of Borges’s production during this period, shares key elements and motifs with “Sentirse en muerte,” but also with the poems “Motivos del Espacio y del Tiempo” and “Himno al Mar” and with the essays “La nadería de la personalidad” and “Palermo de Buenos Aires,” from *Evaristo Carriego*.

A NIGHT THAT IS EVERY NIGHT

A look at the manuscript reveals a misunderstanding in the full 1997 edition. The title in Borges’s autograph, on the top right corner of the first page, all in small caps and underlined, reads: “boletín de una noche.” But there is a curly bracket opened right in the middle of the title, between “boletín de” and “una noche,” and this bracket extends to the

line below to introduce, right under the word “una,” the single word “toda.” This word is also underlined, but here the handwriting is thicker:

boletín de | una noche
| **toda**

The title thus announces that this is both “a” night and “every night.” Thus, a more accurate way to transcribe it would have been: “boletín de una/**toda** noche” (“chronicle of a/**every** night”).⁴ For some reason, the editors took the word “toda” as a simple continuation of the line “boletín de una noche,” although if Borges had meant that, he would obviously have placed “toda” on the same line as the rest of the title –he still had plenty of room there – and, more obvious, he would not have opened a brace in the middle of the title.⁵

Borges could have initially titled the manuscript “Boletín de una noche,” but then think that the adjective “una ” was not clear enough, since it denotes the indefinite article “a/an” but it could also be taken as the numeral adjective “one.”⁶ Because what his chronicle tells is not one particular night, but every night, he decided to introduce “toda.” The fact that “toda” is stressed with a thicker handwriting would indicate that Borges gave predominance to this alternative version. If the text narrates “una noche,” which should be taken to mean “toda noche,” the title sheds light not only on this particular text, but more generally on Borges’s night strolls around the suburb during the 1920s. In other words, it narrates a customary experience, one that Borges would have interiorized through

⁴ The Spanish *un/una* translates into English as either the indefinite article “a/an” or the numeral adjective “one.” I chose to use the former, since it better conveys the notion of indeterminateness and universality: *a* night which is *every* night.

⁵ As is well known, Borges employed brackets in his manuscripts to introduce text variants. García, too, notices the mistake made in the transcription of the title in the 1997 edition (296-297).

⁶ As a matter of fact, English also presents cases in which the numeral carries an indefinite meaning, as when someone is asked to describe “one day at work.” The difference is that in Spanish there is no other form of the indefinite article than the one which is also used for the numeral (“un/una”).

repetition over time. Here, we are reminded of what Borges states about Carriego: “Las variantes raleaban; sus días eran un solo día” (OC 119).

There is a close genetic connection between “Boletín de una noche” and “Sentirse en muerte,” a fact that emerges when we look at two pieces of their *avant-texte*. First, there exists an annotated volume of Segovia’s *Diccionario de Argentinismos*, in which Borges scribbled, among other decisive notes, a list of 11 varied items, among them the title “Boletín de una noche” and – right next to it – “Sentirse en muerte.” Another telling item in this enumeration is “caminatas nocturnas,” the element that opens the list and is repeated again at the end.⁷ Second, there is a copy of the Spanish edition of Aulus Gellius’s *Noctes Atticae*, which contains the first notes for “Sentirse en muerte” – among them a powerfully gnomic dictum: “sentirse muerto, estado metafísico” (Balderston 52, 57). On another page of this volume, however, Borges wrote a summary list of titles for *El Idioma de los Argentinos*. What is remarkable about this list is that “Sentirse en muerte” is absent and its place, right next to the title “hombres pelearon,” is taken by “boletín de una noche.” These two titles appear under the general title “patria y metafísica” (62).

These facts open up at least two possibilities. The first hypothesis would be that “Boletín de una noche” was the original title of “Sentirse en muerte,” and only later was changed. The second conjecture is that Borges initially planned to include the manuscript “Boletín de una noche” in *El Idioma de los Argentinos*, but later decided to withhold the text and replace it with “Sentirse en muerte.” I am inclined to think that the latter is the case. Indeed, the crudely confessional tone of “Boletín de una noche” and the ruthless self-

⁷ The full list reads: “caminatas nocturnas – yo – barrio – Sentirse en muerte – Boletín de una noche – nota a *Cuaderno San Martín* – popular poem on death – compadritos – Chacarita – Osvaldo Horacio Dondo – caminatas nocturnas” (Balderston 97).

exposure it carries out makes it a testimony so personal that Borges could have decided to keep it to himself. What is beyond doubt is the close interrelation between the two pieces, not only because of their genetic connection in the two lists, but more importantly for their striking thematic and narrative correspondence.

“INCOMPRESIBLE POR MI ENTENDER; PAVOROSA A MI SENTIMIENTO”

The text begins with the narrator shuffling back home after a long night, his lingering on the street suggesting both weariness and a reluctance to reach his destination: “Atrasado el chambergo hacia la nuca a lo trasnochador, para que [en] la frente haya brisa, vengo de la calle despacio” (185). “Atrasado” refers to the hat rolled back, but it also means “delayed,” thus connoting a desire to linger in a previous state, as if putting off an undesired arrival. It is the gradual dissipation of his own self that awaits the narrator, as he moves from the reality of the street – symbolized in the freshness of the breeze⁸ – into the progressive non-existence of his home, of his room, of his bed. Remarkably, the act of crossing the threshold between the outward city and his home represents both the withdrawal into his inner self and the passage from life to death.⁹ Right before entering the house, he takes one final glimpse at the starry sky and utters the formula that most clearly inscribes “Boletín” as a continuation of “Sentirse en Muerte”: “Aspiro noche, en asueto serenísimo de pensar” (185).

The eminently corporeal gesture of taking the night in is also present in “Motivos del Espacio y del Tiempo (1916-1919),” published in Seville in 1920. In addition to the motif

⁸ Borges’s annotations for “Sentirse en muerte” in *Aulus Gellius* also feature “la larga brisa” (Balderston 57-58), which I regard as yet another element linking both texts.

⁹ The affective delimitation between street and house, between inner self and outward reality, is already stated in “Sentirse en Muerte”: “Ninguna casa se animaba a la calle.”

of inhaling the night as an immersive sensory experience (“y aspiraré la noche, plena de familiares fragancias...”), this narrative poem anticipates two other elements present both in “Sentirse” and in “Boletín”: an epiphany during a night walk (“el instante en que brilló como un fastuoso y estival mediodía / en la noche humilde y desnuda”) and an ambiguous sense of victory or defeat (“E ignoro aún si es el lictor de mi victoria / o de mi definitiva derrota”) (41). The lyrical voice of “Motivos” first narrates a dream (“Soñé”) and then goes on to recount an actual nocturnal walk that took place the previous night (“Anoche”). What is remarkable about this night stroll is that, although the poet is in the company of two friends, he conveys his incommunicable solitude by declaring that the “truth” revealed slept with him that night: “Y durmió esa noche a mi lado, / y al despertarme la encontré conmigo y me acompaña desde entonces.” In the last stanza, the poet projects this solitary intimacy into the future: “A mi retorno, / no iré enseguida hacia las gentes que amo.” Again, it is not his old friends whom he longs to meet in Buenos Aires, but the material features of a city that awaits his return: “y sabrán las cosas que he vuelto / y habrá en la noche como una fiesta escondida entre las viejas casas y mi alma” (41).

While in “Motivos” the gesture of taking the night in denotes a suspension of all reasoning that favors a quasi-oneiric brand of lucidity, in “Boletín,” instead, right before crossing the entrance door, it suggests one last draw of air before entering the seclusion of the house. The home, indeed, is not only locked up but thoroughly imbued in loneliness: “Arriba, cada persona es soledad en su cuarto aislado.” The narrator deerotizes his own body by turning his gaze inward in introspective intimacy. Far from either coziness or sensuality, this act of exploration unfolds as awkward self-loathing: “Me desnudo. Soy (un instante) esa bestia vergonzosa, furtiva, ya inhumana y como estrañada de sí que es un ser

desnudo.” The metaphysical category of “indisolubilidad de un momento,” that in “Sentirse en Muerte” marks the attainment of supreme emotional intensity, is here reduced to “(un instante),” bracketed and degraded to a humiliating snapshot of the naked flesh, a denigrating depiction of the narrator’s body image (185). Likewise, that highly emotional “reverencia en mi pecho” (124) felt for the barrios of his childhood is here transfigured into shame.

The morbid pessimism of Borges’s self-estrangement becomes even more evident when we turn to the picture offered in his 1918 “Himno del Mar,” of which “Boletín” reads as the absolute negative. Borges’s early hymn unrolls as a Whitmanian celebration of the poet’s swimming into the ocean, stressing an urge to get immersed in a pure present: “Oh instante de plenitud magnífica.” An exultant lyrical voice projects his vigorous complexion onto the “Sea” as an overflowing depository of erotic vitality: “Yo estoy contigo, Mar. / Y mi cuerpo tendido como un arco / lucha contra tus músculos raudos. Sólo tú existes.” A few lines below, he adopts the hypallage to transfer his own qualities onto the Sea: “Sólo tú existes. / Atlético y desnudo” (3). The bodily struggle with the incommensurable Sea denotes a striving toward uttermost immediacy, an identification with the mass of water as an alter ego. It is hard to think of a text more different from “Boletín,” where oceanic immersion and athletic nakedness evaporate into enervating dispossession and absorption into nothingness.

The diegetic present tense of “Boletín” suggests not an isolated happening, but a reiterated experience. We can assume that, when Borges recounts his solitary homecoming, his crawling into bed, and his falling asleep as a gradual process of annihilation, he is

setting down an enduring pattern.¹⁰ Moreover, if “Sentirse,” written in the past-tense – “aspiré,” “me sentí,” “me quedé,” “creí,” “conjeturé” – is placed next to “Boletín” with its present-tense verbs – “vengo,” “me demoro,” “aspiro,” “me desnudo,” “soy” – the two texts form a temporal succession, grasped in the act of writing as a “continuum.”¹¹ One is even allowed to conjecture that “Sentirse en Muerte,” too, reproduces not a mystical vision – as the text is sometimes construed – but a recurring experience in Borges’s nocturnal walks during this period. The thought preceding the 1936 version of “Sentirse” in *Historia de la Eternidad* would also favor that interpretation: “Congregamos las dichas de un pasado en una sola imagen; los ponientes diversamente rojos que miro cada tarde, serán en el recuerdo un solo poniente” (OC 365).

In “Boletín” the pure immersion in the present renders the process of falling asleep not just as the switching off of a consciousness but as a gradual plunging into nothingness: “Me apuro: a la cama, me dejo en ella como para morir. Casi me escamotea la oscuridad” (185). Granted, this would seem to stand in sharp contrast to “Sentirse en muerte,” especially regarding its climatic pronouncement: “Me sentí muerto, me sentí percibidor abstracto del mundo: indefinido temor imbuido de ciencia que es la mejor claridad de la metafísica” (125). However, it is precisely the fear of death that provides the emotional thread connecting both texts: while in “Sentirse” it remains undefined, thus enabling a privileged access to metaphysics, in “Boletín” it perpetrates a “dreadful” occlusion of all vision and understanding, an anxiety that cannot induce lucidity of consciousness, but only

¹⁰ The recurrence of his experience over an extended period of time is likely the reason that enabled him to remember – even decades later, as reported by Yates – that he had written the manuscript while living on Quintana Street.

¹¹ I borrow the concept from Balderston, who holds that Borges turns the nights separating the experience – in my argument, the experience of several nights – from its memorization “as a continuum that the writing hopes to preserve” (60).

the blunt certainty that mental darkness is taking over. The narrator broods: “La oscuridad es incomprendible por mi entender; pavorosa, a mi sentimiento” and later on extends the surrounding darkness to his own self: “Tal vez no soy intrínseca luz e intrínseco pensar, sino sombra interior y muerte interior” (185).

If the narrator of “Sentirse” states that the impression of being in the 1900s “dejó de ser unas cuantas aproximativas palabras y se profundizó a realidad” (125), the exacerbation of death from “Sentirse” to “Boletín” could be couched in those same terms: it ceases to be a mere sensation to deepen into an appalling reality. The narrator confesses not just to feel “en muerte,” but to be altogether “sombra interior y muerte interior” (185).

“IMPOSIBLE PARA LA TERNURA”

The subject’s eerie transformation determines his own constitution, insofar as in “Sentirse” the feeling of death by no means precludes – it even favors – his communion with the city. What is more, his position as “percibidor abstracto del mundo” raises him above all materiality and affords him a supernatural perspective on time, an insight that attains nothing less than eternity. When we get to “Boletín,” however, the narrator succumbs under his own corporeality and turns his gaze from the moon-bathed street to his dark anatomy, as we read in the striking sequence:

Nadie ha pensado la oscuridad. En oscuridad soy oscuro (me digo) y no pasa de labios adentro la frase. Soy hombre palpable (me digo) pero de piel negra, esqueleto negro, encías negras, sangre negra que fluye por íntima carne negra, imposible para la ternura, hombros negros. En oscuridad soy oscuro... (me digo) y si lo realizara, sería cosa de enloquecerme. (185).

In the pervasive darkness a key correlation to “Sentirse en muerte” comes to light. Borges had described the setting of his epiphany: “El revés de lo conocido, su espalda, son para

mí esas calles penúltimas, casi tan efectivamente ignoradas como el soterrado cimiento de nuestra casa o nuestro invisible esqueleto” (124). Only in “Boletín” – where the narrator finally arrives at the *calle última* – is that reverse side exposed: the buried foundation of his house turns into the home in which he gets buried, where his skeleton is no longer “invisible” but bluntly opaque. Even more important, amid the protagonist’s merciless self-dissection we are given the affective marrow of the text: “imposible para la ternura” (185).

As if lodged deep inside his black anatomy, the impossibility of tenderness cripples the narrator and confines him to his solitary bed. This seclusion reverberates in the repeated parenthetical remark “(me digo),” a confirmation of the text as a soliloquy. The dark nothingness suffusing “Boletín” is no mere abstract negation of light or clarity; rather, it spreads out as a metaphysical ramification of self-abhorrence, that now supersedes tenderness:

Peor que un leproso, soy. A mi alrededor la casa se va de la vida, despacio... De la ciudad sólo queda una campanada, que imagino alta. Así voy entrando en mi nadería como ya entré en mi sombra. (185).

The faint chiming from the street echoes the narrator’s own leper bell, warning people away but also imploring for alms, since in the locution “me digo” could also resonate the word “me(n)digo” (mendicant) that a few lines below is replicated in the word “limosnero.”¹² Just as in “Sentirse,” in “Boletín” too the notions of death and eternity prove inseparable. But precisely because tenderness has faded – or rather: it has revealed the nothingness of its object – here eternity does not arise from an instant of affective intensity, but from its absolute downfall. This leads the narrator to flee a dismal present in order to

¹² The motif of the beggar also comes up in “La vuelta a Buenos Aires,” of *Luna de Enfrente*, where the poet mentions “mi soledad pordiosera” (*Textos recobrados* 222).

rummage for endless recollections: “El Tiempo – maquinaria incansable – sigue funcionando, o quizá fluyendo de mí. Soy limosnero de recuerdos un rato ¿largo, breve? que los relojes no gobiernan y que se ancha casi en eternidad” (185-186). In a manner similar to “Sentirse” – but here causing despondence – limited time loses its grip and lets eternity take over.

The mention of the word “nadería” brings to mind Borges’s Schopenhauerian essay “La nadería de la personalidad,” where he demolishes the notion of the self (“yo”).¹³ In that text, among a barrage of philosophical arguments and literary quotes, Borges invokes a most personal testimony, by narrating his parting ways with a close friend and his disastrous failure to reveal his naked soul to him: “Hubiera querido desnudarme de ella y dejarla allí palpitante”. Borges goes on to bemuse: “nunca justificaría mi vida un instante pleno, absoluto, contenedor de los demás,” and concludes: “abominé de todo misteriosismo” (99). Under the strong influence of Macedonio Fernández, “La nadería de la personalidad” also confutes the existence of the five senses as support of the notion of the self. The excerpt is worth quoting at length, as its elements are replicated in “Boletín de una noche”:

Yo, por ejemplo, no soy la realidad visual que mis ojos abarcan, pues de serlo me mataría toda oscuridad y no quedaría nada en mí para desear el espectáculo del mundo ni siquiera para olvidarlo. Tampoco soy las audiciones que escucho pues en tal caso debería borrar el silencio y pasada de sonido en sonido, sin memoria del anterior. Idéntica argumentación se endereza después a lo olfativo, lo gustable y lo táctil [...] Esto es, no soy mi actividad de ver, de oír, de oler, de gustar, de palpar. (103)

¹³ This essay is inscribed in the fascination that idealism as a philosophical doctrine exerted upon Borges throughout his life (Blanco 31).

Borges, therefore, states that the self cannot identify with the senses, because if they left us, then that would plunge us into nothingness. But that is exactly what happens in the experience that closes “Boletín”:

Ya me dejó la visión, luego el escuchar, el soñar, el tacto. Soy casi nadie: soy como las plantas (negras de oscuridad en negro jardín) que no despertará el pleno día. Pero no en día, sino en tenebrosidad soy yacente. Soy tullido, ciego, desaforado, terrible en mi cotidiano desaparecer. Soy nadie. (186)

The shutting down of the senses does not merely plunge the narrator into a vegetative state – plants are not “excessive” or “terrible” – but it stifles the quintessentially human ability to affect or be affected by a real *other*. It is this radical impairment that turns the narrator into a “bestia vergonzosa” (185). Revealingly, the text ends not with an impersonal “Soy nada” (I am nothing), but with an eerie “Soy nadie” (I am nobody). This fact aggravates the sense of agony, as it reminds us that the victim of this metaphysical decimation is no abstract entity, but still a human being.

“Boletín” upends the sensorial expansion promised in “Motivos del Espacio y del Tiempo,” to vanish into an abyss of nothingness. The lyrical voice of “Motivos” had hesitated whether to call his nightly vision a victory or a downfall, and this uncertainty would still hold in “Sentirse en Muerte” and “Boletín de una noche” if we regarded them as forking paths, the former text displaying metaphysical ecstasy, the latter inexorable defeat. My reading of one text as the continuation of the other does not intend to subsume the tension between them into a seamless progression but to stress that what ends up prevailing in Borges’s night walk is emotional defeat. The promise of a “fiesta escondida entre las viejas casas y mi alma” (41) announced in “Motivos del Espacio y del Tiempo” – and consummated in “Sentirse en Muerte” – exposes in “Boletín” its somber underside.

HOME-THOUGHTS

In the coda to the section “Palermo de Buenos Aires” from *Evaristo Carriego*, Borges evokes the poem “Home-Thoughts from the Sea,” which Robert Browning composed as he neared the site of Trafalgar. Borges points out that Browning wrote it thinking of Vice-Admiral Nelson’s abnegation and fall in the battle (OC 111). He thus takes up Browning as a model of gratitude to one’s homeland and turns his expression “Here and here did England help me” into “aquí y aquí me vino a ayudar Buenos Aires.” Revealingly, Borges foregrounds the figure of Nelson – whom Browning does not mention – hence implying that it is less Browning’s exemplary gratitude than Nelson’s self-immolation, with its ambiguous sense of victory and defeat, that most accurately stands “como símbolo de noches solas, de caminatas extasiadas y eternas por la infinitud de los barrios” (112). The author then goes on to declare that he has obtained consolation from the city every time he sought it “en la desilusión o el penar.”¹⁴ It is this last word that interests me here because in two earlier notebook versions of “Palermo de Buenos Aires” Borges’s writing shows a vacillation between the verbs “penar” and “pesar” (Balderston 103). Now, if we juxtapose those two terms, we obtain “pensar,” a term that comes up three times in “Boletín,” denoting the act of melancholic brooding.

Borges’s own home-thoughts report the dead end of his solipsistic journey – a trip that runs aground upon reaching his house. “Sentirse” and “Boletín” work as two parts of one logbook, knotted together through a series of oppositions: outside and inside, spiritualization and corporeality, bliss and despondence, elation and annihilation. “Boletín”

¹⁴ The whole sentence reads: “Porque Buenos Aires es hondo, y nunca, en la desilusión o el penar me abandoné a sus calles, sin recibir inesperado consuelo, ya de sentir irrealidad, ya de guitarras en el fondo de un patio, ya de roce de vidas” (OC 112).

unveils the conflict lurking behind the “inesperado consuelo” that the city bestows upon the solitary walker of “Sentirse en muerte.” It is as if his sublimated affection were catching up with him, unmasking tenderness as an affect without a body – and therefore without a real other. The somber self-awkwardness of “Boletín” reveals the reverse side of the “anécdota emocional” of “Sentirse en muerte,” in which “la vislumbrada idea” was given in the “momento verdadero de éxtasis” (126).

Molloy construes “Sentirse en muerte” as a metaphor for the organization of Borges’s text according to the “magic” of his art of narrative and suggests that “feeling in death” also means “feeling in text” (“sentirse en texto”) (128). We can transpose her interpretation and affirm that “Boletín de una noche” presents the deconstructive moment in Borges’s writing, the instance where all its magic indeterminacy is fatally determined.

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