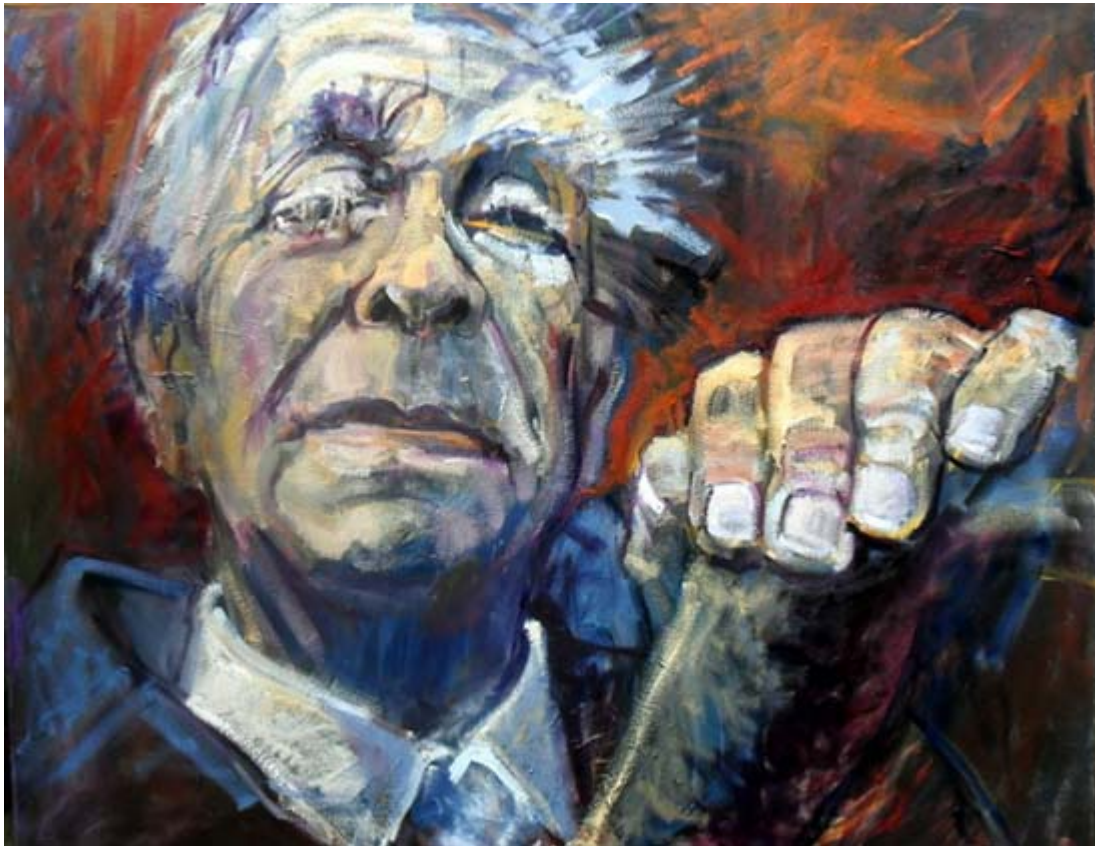


# Five Philosophical Poems of Jorge Luis Borges

*Translated from the Spanish*

by Evelyn Hooven (June 2018)



*Jorge Luis Borges, Beti Alonso*

**The Argentine essayist, storyteller, and poet** Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) was multi-lingual and truly embodied from early on a multi-cultural perspective. This compact selection comprises the foremost American Calvinist philosopher, Edwards, a rigorously inquiring Renaissance English thinker, Browne, and the transformative Jewish philosopher Spinoza. Borges, a philosopher himself in his modest way, was mysteriously attuned to the ways that memory may spring forth and attain several dimensions. Such an attunement was likely

intensified by enhanced inwardness linked to the process of his losing sight. He was evolving his own version of what I'll call the multi-temporal, including the Eternal (Everness, *Ewigkeit*).

## **Everness**

Solely one thing is not; it's oblivion.

God who saves the metal saves the dross  
and stores up in His prophetic memory  
the moons that will be and those that have been.

There everything *is*: thousands of reflections  
that, between all forms of waning light,  
your face has been leaving in mirrors  
and the ones it will go on leaving, always.

And all is part of the diverse crystal  
of this memory, the universe  
whose arduous corridors have no end

and whose doors close themselves at your step;  
only from the horizon's other side  
will you see the Archetypes and the Splendors.

## **Jonathan Edwards**

Far from the city, far from the clamorous thoroughfare  
and from time, which is mutable,  
Edwards, now eternal, dreams and advances  
in the shading of trees tinged with gold.  
Today is tomorrow and is yesterday. There's not  
one thing of God's in this serene ambience  
that does not exalt him mysteriously,  
gold of the afternoon or of the moon.  
He counts it felicity for the world to be  
an eternal instrument of wrath,  
that the longed-for celestial was created  
for very few, thus for nearly all, the inferno.  
In the exact center of the gigantic web  
there's another prisoner—God, the Spider.

### **With Sir Thomas Browne (Religio Medici, 1643)**

Defend me, Lord. (That I'm calling you  
implicates No One. It's only a word  
from the drill the disengaged can use,  
and this evening of dread, I write it.)

Defend me from me. They have also said this,  
Montaigne and Browne and a Spaniard I don't know;  
something stays in me amid all this gold  
that my darkening eyes still decipher.  
Defend me, Lord, from an impatient  
appetite for becoming marble or oblivion;  
defend me from being what I have been,  
the one I have been irreparably.  
Not from the sword or the blood-stained lance  
but, oh, protect me from expectation.

### **Baruch Spinoza**

A topaz fog, western light  
at the window. The careful manuscript  
waits, already weighted by the infinite.  
Someone in shadow constructs for the sake of God.  
A man engenders God. He is a Jew  
with sad eyes and olive-pallid skin;  
time bears him as the river carries  
a leaf in the waters that recede.  
It doesn't matter. The magical one endures  
and works towards God with delicate geometry;

from his infirmity, out of nothing,  
he keeps on building towards God with the word.  
For him the most prodigious love, authorized—  
the love that does not expect to be loved.

## **Ewigkeit**

I turn in my mouth the Castilian verse  
that says what always tends to be said  
since the Latin of Seneca: horrendous  
dictum that all we are is food for worms.

Let the pale ashes return to chant  
the tales of death and of a victory  
for that rhetorical queen who steps on  
our standard banners, our empty glory.

Not so. Whatsoever has blessed this hide  
I'm not going to deny like a coward.  
I know that one thing is not: oblivion.

I know that in eternity it all lasts  
and burns—the much and the precious that I've lost:

this forge of mine, that moon, this afternoon.

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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*.

More by Evelyn Hooven [here](#).

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