

# **“Anotación al 23 de Agosto de 1944”: Reflections on a Newly Acquired Manuscript<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** The aim of our work is to analyze a Borges manuscript from 1944 that was recently acquired by Special Collections at the Hillman Library of the University of Pittsburgh. The manuscript deals with the liberation of Paris (23 August 1944) but it also is intimately concerned with Borges's reactions to Argentine nationalists, some of whom were Nazi sympathizers.

**Keywords:** Jorge Luis Borges – Manuscript – Liberation of Paris – *Sur*

## **“Anotación al 23 de Agosto de 1944”: algunas reflexiones sobre un manuscrito de reciente adquisición**

**Resumen:** El objetivo de este ensayo es analizar un manuscrito de Borges del año 1944 que fue adquirido recientemente por Colecciones Especiales de la Hillman Library de la Universidad de Pittsburgh. Dicho manuscrito trata de la liberación de París (23 de agosto de 1944) pero también gira en torno a las reacciones de Borges frente a los nacionalistas argentinos, algunos de los cuales fueron simpatizantes del nazismo.

**Palabras clave:** Jorge Luis Borges – Manuscrito – Liberación de Paris – *Sur*

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the conference “Le legs de Borges à travers le monde: lecteurs et lectures” at the Université Moulay Ismaïl in Meknes, Morocco in November 2019. I am grateful to Professor Zohra Lhioui for the invitation and for the splendid event.

For the last decade or so I have been working on Borges's manuscripts, which has resulted so far in the publication of a number of articles, in the book *How Borges Wrote* (University of Virginia Press, 2018), already translated into French as *La méthode Borges* (Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2019) and being translated into Spanish for publication by Ediciones Ampersand next year, and two volumes of facsimiles of Borges manuscripts with typographical transcriptions (with a third one going to the printer shortly). The initial phase of this project was figuring out what manuscripts existed, getting access to those in which it was possible to do so, obtaining high resolution scans or good photographs of them, creating a virtual archive of Borges manuscripts for my own analysis, and acquiring permission to publish some of them. Borges's papers are widely dispersed, command high prices when they come to auction, and are largely held privately. It is therefore big news when Borges manuscripts are acquired by libraries where they can be accessed by scholars, which has happened in several cases recently: the Fondation Martin Bodmer acquired “Dos semblanzas de Coleridge” and published an excellent facsimile edition of it (*Bodmeriana / Borgesiana: Un hommage multiple à Jorge Luis Borges*), the University of Virginia bought eleven new manuscripts in addition to their already extensive collection, and the University of Pittsburgh acquired first a Cuaderno Avon (in 2018) that has the first draft of the story “La espera” and six pages of notes for “El escritor argentino y la tradición” (as well as several other things, including plans for courses on crime fiction and on “problems of the novel”) and this year acquired four more manuscripts: the 22 page manuscript of “La nadería de la personalidad” from 1922, the one page manuscript of “Anotación al 23 de Agosto de 1944,” the two page manuscript of “El otro tigre” and the one page manuscript of “Poema conjetural”. Here I will discuss the manuscript of the essay on the liberation of Paris, because it is a working manuscript rather than a fair copy, so it allows us to reconstruct important aspects of Borges's compositional practices. Because it is a very recent addition to the Pittsburgh library collection, I am confident that everything I will say here is new (and newsworthy).

“Anotación al 23 de Agosto de 1944” is one of only two political texts that were chosen by José Bianco and Borges for inclusion in *Otras inquisiciones* in 1952, the other being the 1946 essay “Nuestro pobre individualismo”. It is an important essay in the series of texts that Borges wrote about fascism and Nazism in the 1930s and 1940s, which famously include “Yo, judío”, “Definición del germanófilo” and “Algunos pareceres de Nietzsche”, as well as a series of book reviews (particularly of Nazi children's books and histories of German literature that excluded Jewish and Communist writers). These preoccupations were important to Borges throughout the 1930s—he was very unhappy about the military coup in Argentina in 1930 and the subsequent military governments that were increasingly close to the Axis powers, and his opposition to these kinds of governments would become the basis for his opposition to Perón during the latter's rise to power from 1943 to 1946 and during Perón's years as elected president from 1946 to 1955. His anti-fascist stance was very strong: he signed various political documents, cut off relations with Ramón Gómez de la Serna when the latter visited Franco's Spain, and of course would write “Deutsches Requiem” while the

Nuremberg Tribunals were taking place (publishing it in *Sur* in February 1946). Bécquer Seguí published a fascinating article in *Variaciones Borges* a couple of years ago showing that “Anotación” is a text that shows that Borges was reading Freud, particularly Freud’s writings on the death wish: the sentence “Hitler quiere ser derrotado”, underlined for greater emphasis, signals this (somewhat hidden) relation. There are a variety of other studies of Borges and fascism including books by Annick Louis and Antonio Gómez López-Quñones (110-12); in addition, Alejandra Salinas has published an excellent book on Borges and political theory which makes reference to this text (58), and Juan José Saer discusses it at some length in his famous essay “Borges como problema” (120-23).

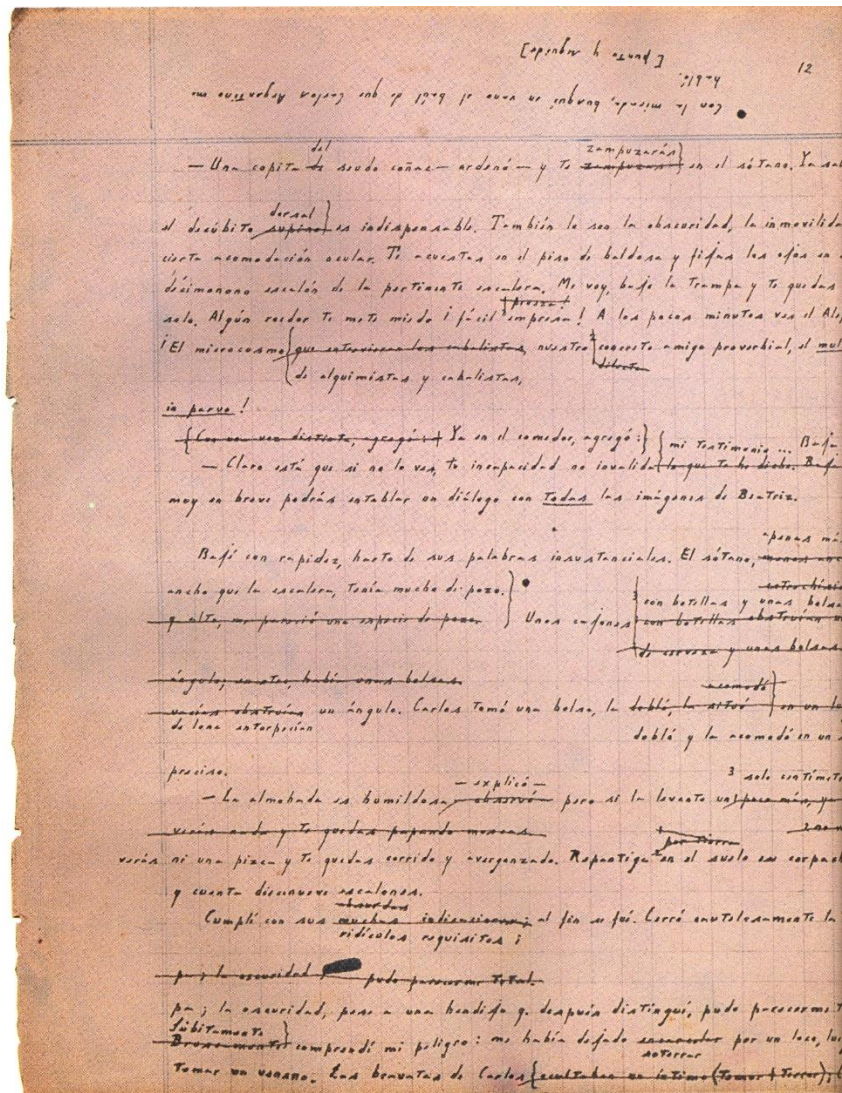
“Anotación” had as its occasion a large spontaneous demonstration in the Plaza Francia when the news of the liberation of Paris reached Buenos Aires. This was an unsanctioned demonstration that took place during a military government that was tacitly close to the Axis powers; the note was presumably written very soon after Borges participated in it, since it was published only a month and a half later, in the October 1944 issue of *Sur*. Borges emphasizes his physical sense of happiness in the first sentence of the text, and makes the startling statement that that day he had “el descubrimiento de que una emoción colectiva puede no ser innoble” (727). That this statement was preserved in *Otras inquisiciones*, published in 1952 at the height of Peronism, suggests that Borges and Bianco were interested in taking a political statement borne out of a particular historical circumstance and preserving it to distinguish between “noble” and “ignoble” collective emotions (with there being no ambiguity about how either author or editor felt in 1952 about Peronism). It is also important to note that the 1944 text, like the 1946 essay on individualism (which also expresses skepticism about collective emotions) were published in *Sur*, and that the book in which they were collected was published by Editorial Sur: Victoria Ocampo’s larger project of international cultural exchange and solidarity was consistent in its anti-fascism, and famous locally for its anti-Peronism.

Now, to approach this particular manuscript, it is first important to know what Borges manuscripts of the 1940s look like. Over the years I have worked on them I have been able to establish a clear distinction between first and second drafts, and sometimes between second drafts and fair copies. The first drafts tend to have a proliferation of possibilities, sometimes as many as fifteen options for the one chosen, sometimes at the level of the word but sometimes at the level of the whole clause; often only some of these possibilities crossed out. I have chosen a sample of three: passages from the first drafts of “El Aleph” and “La lotería en Babilonia” (and in both of those cases there are extant second drafts or near fair copies) and a radically unfinished passage in “Nuestro pobre individualismo,” the political essay from 1946 that I just mentioned (and the manuscript of which we have published in the volume *Ensayos*).<sup>2</sup> A small sample of the manuscript of “El Aleph” shows some of these practices:

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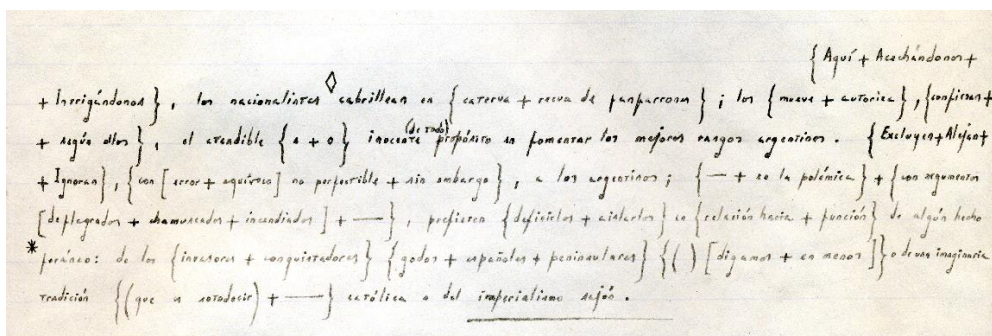
<sup>2</sup> See my essay “Revelando las falacias del nacionalismo” (2018) and Nora Benedict’s “Censorship and Political Allegory in Jorge Luis Borges’s ‘Viejo hábito argentino’” (2019) for studies of “Viejo hábito argentino”, the

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*"El Aleph" (ms. published by El Colegio de México)*

“Viejo hábito argentino”, the manuscript of the essay published as “Nuestro pobre individualismo”, shows a radical proliferation of possibilities:

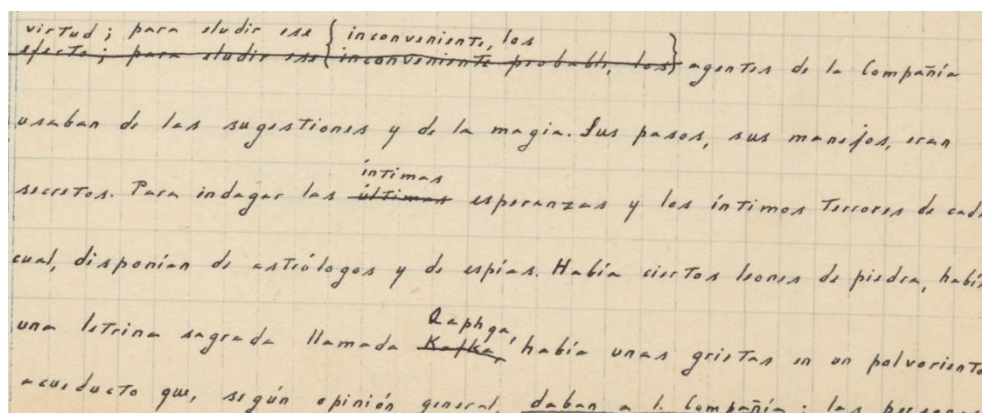


*"Viejo hábito argentino"* (ms. published in Borges and Martín, *Ensayos*, p. 23)

manuscript of “Nuestro pobre individualismo”; the manuscript itself is reproduced in *Ensayos* with extensive commentary (19-30).

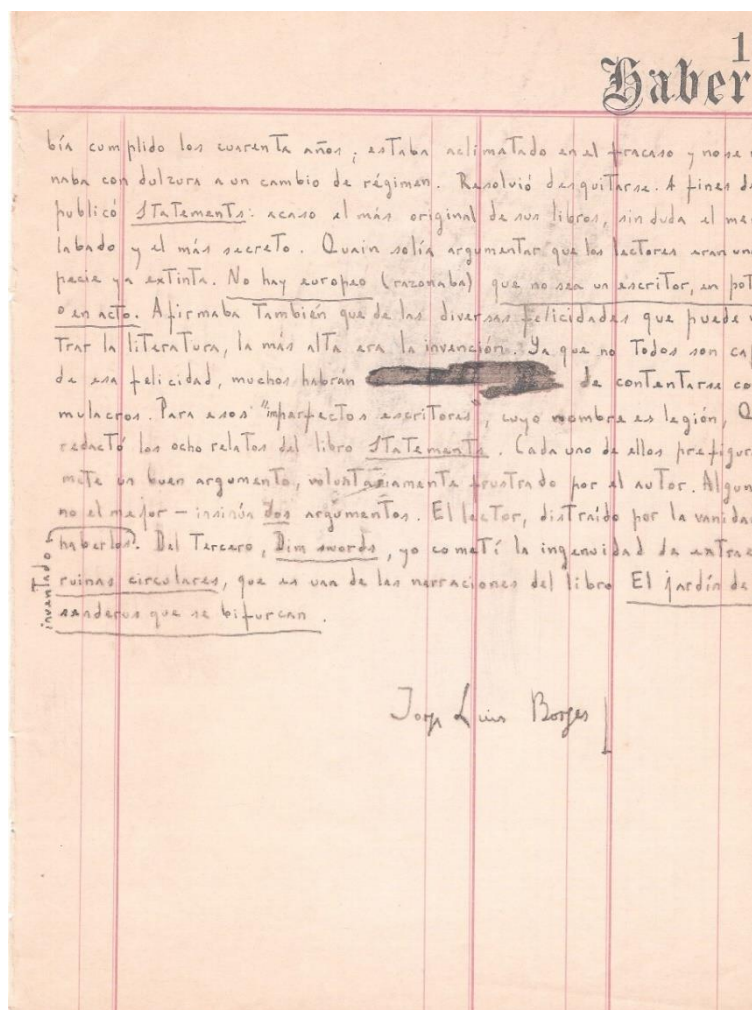
*Letras*, Dossier “Borges, sus ensayos: lógicas textuales y archivos de época”, M. Cámpora (coord.)  
2020, enero-junio, n° 81 – pp. 77 a 90 – ISSN electrónico: 2683-7897

Borges tends to use graph paper for his first drafts, and often writes on every other line to leave himself space to insert revisions which is the case with “La lotería en Babilonia”:



“La lotería en Babilonia” (published in Balderston and Martín, Cuentos, p. 26)

By contrast, second drafts tend to have far fewer insertions and strikethroughs and tend not to have the fan-like series of possibilities: I am showing you the last page of the second draft of “Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain,” signed by Borges, with one strikethrough; it was Borges’s habit from 1939 to 1941 to write the second drafts of his stories in the “Haber” pages of a Caravela accounting ledger, leaving blank the “Debe” page on the verso.



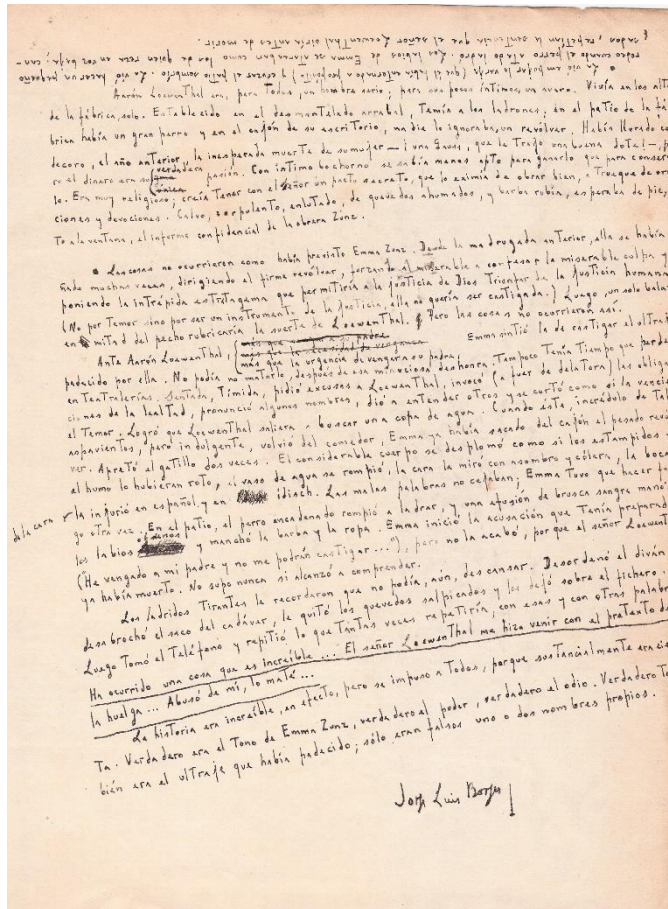
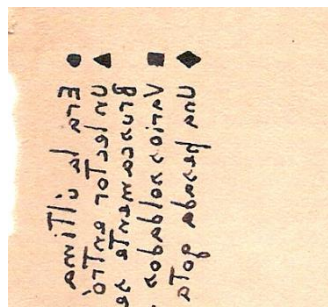
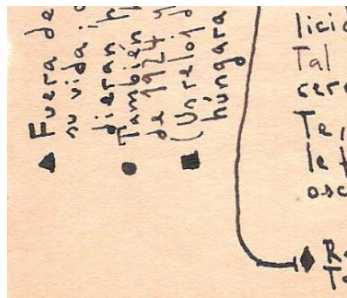
“Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain”, manuscript details

reason to surmise that “Anotación al 23 de agosto de 1944” went through two drafts, since it was seemingly conceived as a circumstantial piece on a current event; only in

retrospect did that historical event have sufficient weight, and Borges's reflections on it prove consistent with his subsequent writings on Peronism, for it to be elevated and chosen for *Otras inquisiciones*.

We should look in detail at some other second drafts from the 1940s to see what formal features some of them have. The manuscript of "El milagro secreto" that is now at the University of Virginia is on unlined irregular sheets and has a number of insertions in the left margin, coded with geometric symbols, as well as a few strikethroughs and alternatives on the main pages of the manuscript. A paragraph is circled and moved with an arrow, and there is a fair amount of underlining of important passages.

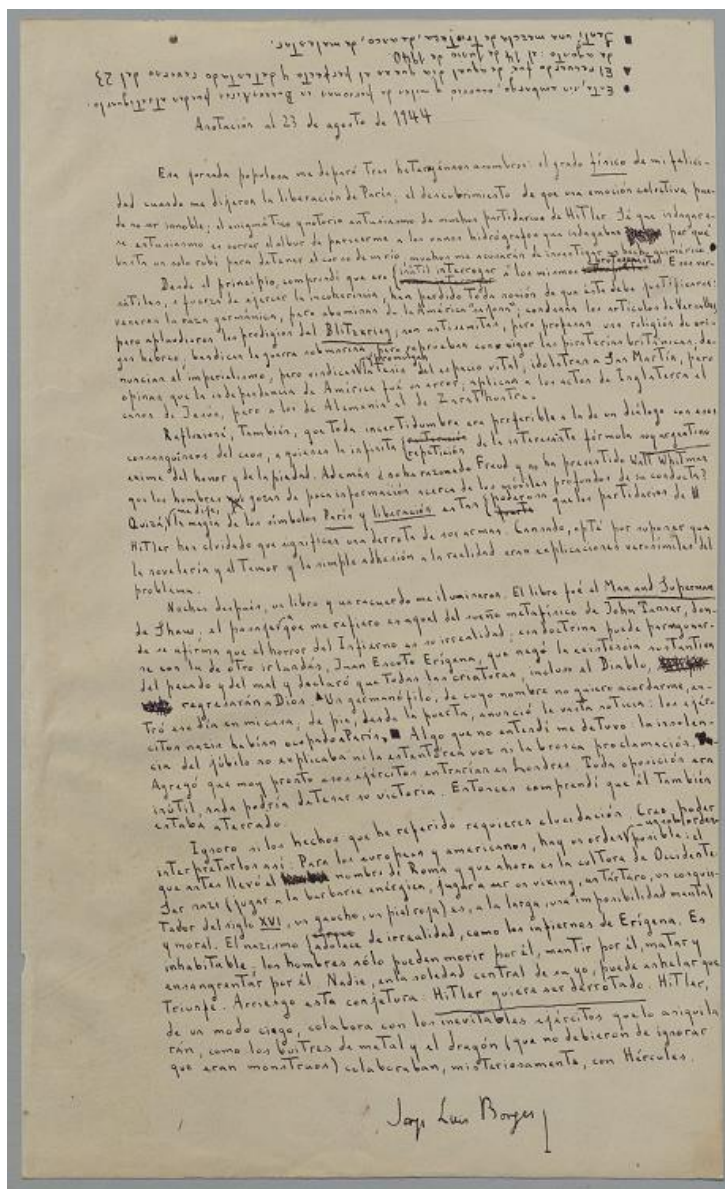
"El milagro secreto", manuscript details



The manuscript is fairly close to the published version, but it is obviously not yet a fair copy. Similarly, the second draft of "Emma Zunz" has alternatives, some strikethroughs, and an important insertion that is at the top of the page and is written upside down. Again, this is unlined paper, and Borges's handwriting is fairly irregular, with lines sloping down to the left. (On many other manuscripts they slope down to the right.) It is also signed by Borges, which is an indication that he considered it an almost final copy, worthy of being submitted to a printer or given to a friend.

"Emma Zunz", manuscript detail, see Balderston, How Borges Wrote, p. 325

The “Anotación al 23 de agosto de 1944” was bought by the University of Pittsburgh libraries in May 2019 and was opened to public access on October 11<sup>th</sup>, as shown by the finding aid. It is a single sheet, on unlined paper, with numerous strikethroughs and insertions, including two that are coded with geometric symbols that are upside down at the top of the page. The title is exactly that of the published versions. Borges has left himself a fair amount of space in the left margin, a favorite space for insertions, but in this case has not used that. The signature has a “rúbrica” that he often uses, a long upside-down T, stylized from more elaborate versions in his manuscripts of the 1920s.



The signature is in cursive but the rest of the manuscript is in block letters, both frequent features of his manuscripts of this period; the fact that he did not write in cursive seems to be a sign of his almost complete lack of formal education in Argentina, where writing in cursive was considered important.

Annotation to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August of 1944 [Anotación al 23 de Agosto de 1944] In fol -carilla- Holographic manuscript, titled and signed in black ink on the recto of a smooth leave of notebook with numerous crossed outs, corrections or alternative lexicons.

The first paragraph reads:

Esa jornada populosa me deparó tres heterogéneos asombros: el grado físico de mi felicidad cuando me dijeron la liberación de París; el descubrimiento de que una emoción colectiva puede no ser innoble; el enigmático y notorio entusiasmo de muchos

partidarios de Hitler. Sé que indagar ese entusiasmo es correr el albur de parecerme a los vanos hidrógrafos que indagaban ~~porque~~ por qué basta un solo rubí para detener el curso de un río; muchos me acusarán de investigar un hecho quimérico.

Esta jornada populosa me depuso Tres heterogéneos asombros: el grado físico de mi felicidad cuando me dejaron la liberación de París; el descubrimiento de que una emoción colectiva puede no ser innoble; el enigmático y notorio entusiasmo de muchos partidarios de Hitler. Sé que indagar ese entusiasmo es correr el albur de parecerme a los vanos hidrógrafos que indagaban ~~porque~~ por qué basta un solo rubí para detener el curso de un río; muchos me acusarán de investigar un hecho quimérico. ~~protagonistas~~ <sup>protagonistas</sup>. Esos ver-

• Esta, sin embargo, ocurrió y miles de personas en Buenos Aires pueden atestiguarlo.

The insertion with a black circle is upside down at the top of the page; it reads: “Esta, sin embargo, ocurrió y miles de personas en Buenos Aires pueden atestiguarlo.” With that addition this gives the precise wording of the published versions. What is significant is that in the remainder of the essay Borges will focus on the third of the three surprises he experienced that day: the joy expressed also by those of his compatriots who up to that moment had been enthusiastic supporters of Hitler.

The next paragraph develops this idea:

Desde el principio, comprendí que era ~~{vano-interrogar}~~ <sup>inútil</sup> ~~interrogar~~ a los mismos ~~intérpretes~~ <sup>protagonistas</sup>. Esos versátiles, a fuerza de ejercer la incoherencia, han perdido toda noción de que ésta debe justificarse: veneran la raza germánica, pero abominan de la América "sajona"; condenan los artículos de Versalles pero aplaudieron los prodigios del Blitzkrieg; son antisemitas, pero profesan una religión de origen hebreo; bendicen la guerra submarina, pero reprueban con ✕ las piraterías británicas; denuncian el imperialismo, pero vindican <sup>y promueven</sup> la tesis del espacio vital; idolatran a San Martín, pero opinan que la independencia de América fue un error; aplican a los actos de Inglaterra el canon de Jesús, pero a los de Alemania el de Zarathustra.

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Again, with the corrections that we can observe on the page –the changes from “vano” to “inútil” and from “intérpretes” to “protagonistas” and the insertion of “y promulgan” after “vindican” – this is precisely the published text. The argument here focuses on the Argentine sympathizers with Nazism, and particularly on their ideological incoherence; earlier, and later, Borges will write about German Nazis, but his focus here is on his compatriots. This is 1944, and some of the rhetoric he is attacking here will be associated with Peronism, though some of it is also that of the

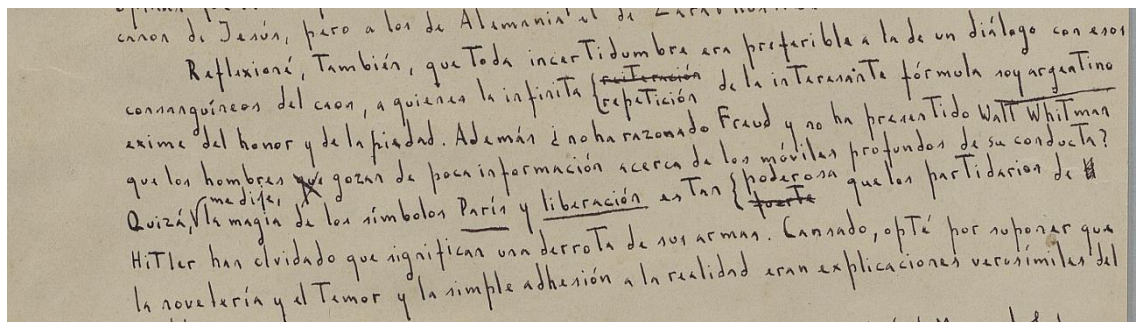
Catholic right such as his cousin Ernesto Palacio (1900-1979), the “Ernst Palast” of “La muerte y la brújula”.<sup>3</sup> Dardo Scavino comments in *El sueño de los mártires: Meditaciones sobre la guerra actual*:

Ese mismo germanófilo –su primo Ernesto Palacio, muy probablemente– le había anunciado en 1940 que las tropas del Tercer Reich habían entrado en París. Mientras le anunciaba la noticia, el personaje en cuestión exhibía un júbilo demasiado calculado porque, en el fondo, comenta Borges, estaba aterrado. El 12 de agosto de 1944, a la inversa, venía a transmitirle supuestamente una mala noticia, pero Borges intuía que se sentía aliviado. (134)<sup>4</sup>

As far as I know there is no confirmation of these conversations in published sources, but it is indeed reasonable that Palacio would be the interlocutor here: he had been a part of the Cursos de Cultura Católica or *Criterio* group in the 1930s with the Irazusta brothers and Leopoldo Marechal, and was on his way to becoming a central figure in the right wing Catholic part of the Peronist coalition, and he had been an associate of Borges’s back to the time of the *Revista Martín Fierro* (Borges often mentions him as one of the two inventors of the “Boedo y Florida” polemic).<sup>5</sup>

The third paragraph reads as follows in the manuscript:

Reflexioné, también, que toda incertidumbre era preferible a la de un diálogo con esos consanguíneos del caos, a quienes la infinita ~~reiteración~~ repetición de la interesante fórmula soy argentino exime del honor y de la piedad. Además ¿no ha razonado Freud y no he presenciado Walt Whitman que los hombres ~~que~~ gozan de poca información acerca de los móviles de su conducta? Quizá, <sup>me dije</sup>, la magia de los símbolos París y liberación es tan {poderosa ~~fuerte~~ que los partidarios de H Hitler han olvidado que significan una derrota de sus armas. Cansado, opté por suponer que la novelaría y el temor y la simple adhesión a la realidad eran explicaciones verosímiles del problema.



<sup>3</sup> [Nota de la coord.: Ver al respecto el artículo de Mariano Sverdloff en este mismo dossier.]

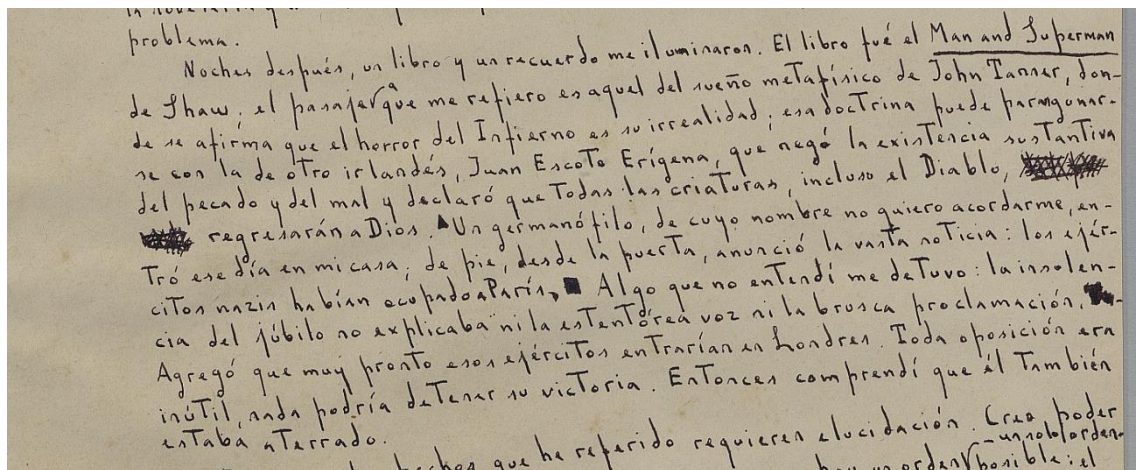
<sup>4</sup> See also Geoffrey Shullenberger's 2012 Brown dissertation: *Uncanny Influences: Freud, Argentina, and the Literary Uses of Paranoia*. Gómez López-Quiñones comments: “En uno de sus característicos giros de exacta ironía, Borges no deja pasar esta oportunidad de regocijo para acordarse de los germanófilos oportunistas que, tras la evidente y definitiva victoria aliada, lanzan las campanas al vuelo en señal de hipócrita alegría” (110).

<sup>5</sup> Mariela Blanco writes: “es sabido que Ernesto Palacio fue uno de los artífices intelectuales, junto a los hermanos Irazusta, del ideario nacionalista del treinta. Por otro lado, resulta evidente que la publicación ‘*El Mártir*’, además del guiño humorístico, refiere al periódico *La Nueva República*, publicado entre 1927 y 1931, en donde Palacio siempre ocupó un lugar protagónico, primero como jefe de redacción (1927-1930) y luego como director (1930-1931)” (97).

This is one of the few direct references to Freud in Borges's work, and as I already mentioned Bécquer Seguí has taken it as the occasion for a fascinating discussion of the death drive in the later works of Freud and its possible use by Borges in this essay.<sup>6</sup> In this reference Borges reminds his readers that Freud “ha razonado . . . que los hombres gozan de poca información acerca de los móviles de su conducta”: the focus here is on subconscious motivation, not yet on the death drive.

The fourth paragraph reads:

Noches después, un libro y un recuerdo me iluminaron. El libro fue el Man and Superman de Shaw; el pasaje <sup>a</sup> que me refiero es aquel del sueño metafísico de John Tanner, donde se afirma que el horror del Infierno es su irrealdad; esa doctrina puede paragonarse con la de otro irlandés, Juan Escoto Erígena, que negó la existencia sustantiva del pecado y del mal y declaró que todas las criaturas, incluso el Diablo, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ regresarán a Dios. Un germanófilo, de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme, entró ese día en mi casa; de pie, desde la puerta, anunció la vasta noticia: los ejércitos nazis habían Ocupado a París. Algo que no entendí me detuvo: la insolencia del júbilo no explicaba ni la estentórea voz ni la brusca proclamación. ~~XX~~ Agregó que muy pronto esos ejércitos entrarían en Londres. Toda oposición era inútil, nada podría detener su victoria. Entonces comprendí que él también estaba aterrado.



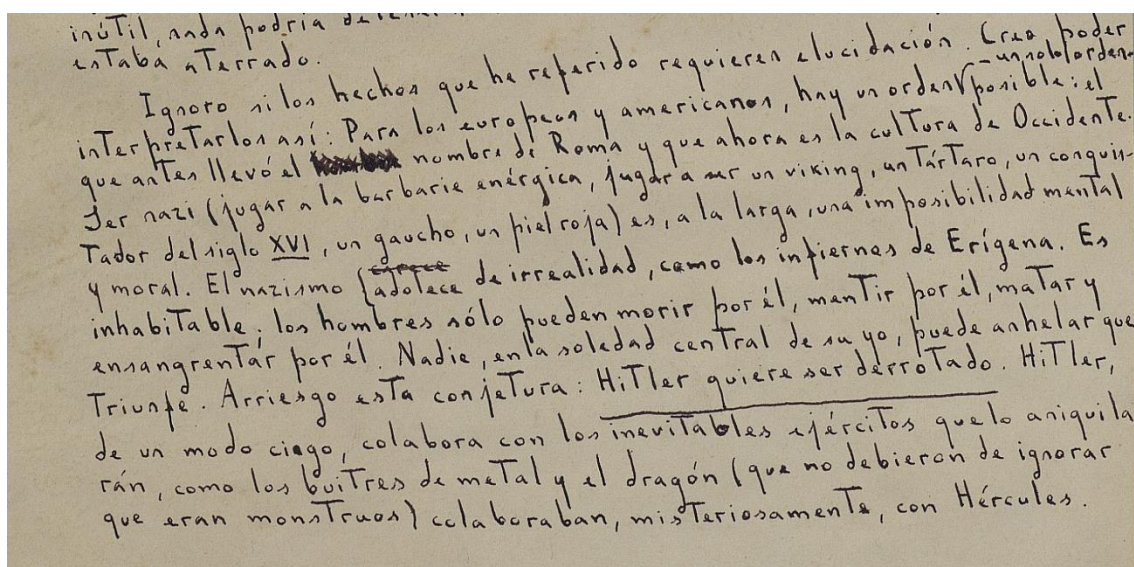
The insertion, with a black triangle, reads: “El recuerdo fué de aquel día que es el perfecto y detestado revés del 23.” In the published version he adds a slight clarification here: “reverso del 23 de agosto: el 14 de junio de 1940”. The second insertion, with a black square, reads: “Sentí una mezcla de tristeza, de asco, de malestar”. The two additions are significant in that the first clarifies the precise historical references and the second adds Borges's own feelings, in his usual tripartite way of referring to emotions: think of the end of “Las ruinas circulares”: “Con alivio, con humillación, con terror...” (455). And with these additions we have the precise published text of the paragraph.

The final paragraph reads:

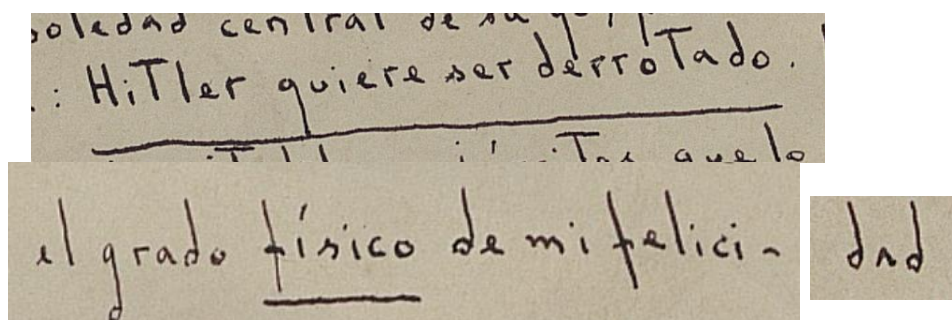
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<sup>6</sup> Saer comments: “Un detalle curioso de ese artículo es que la autoridad de Freud, que durante toda su vida fue su *bête noire*, así como la de no pocos occidentales por otra parte, viene a sustentar la tesis acerca de que ‘los hombres gozan de poca información acerca de los móviles profundos de su conducta’” (121).

Ignoro si los hechos que he referido requieren elucidación. Creo poder interpretarlos así. Para los europeos y americanos, hay un orden <sup>--un noble orden--</sup> posible: el que antes llevó el ~~XXXXX~~ nombre de Roma y que ahora es la cultura de Occidente. Ser nazi (jugar a la barbarie enérgica, jugar a ser un viking, un tártaro, un conquistador del siglo XVI, un gaucho, un piel roja) es, a la larga, una imposibilidad mental y moral. El nazismo ~~carece~~ <sup>adolesce</sup> de irrealidad, como los infiernos de Erígena. Es inhabitable; los hombres pueden morir por él, mentir por él, matar y ensangrentar por él. Nadie, en la soledad central de su yo, puede anhelar que triunfe. Arriesgo esta conjetura: Hitler quiere ser derrotado. Hitler, de un modo ciego, colabora con los inevitables ejércitos que lo aniquilarán, como los buitres de metal y el dragón (que no debieron de ignorar que eran monstruos) colaboraban, misteriosamente, con Hércules.

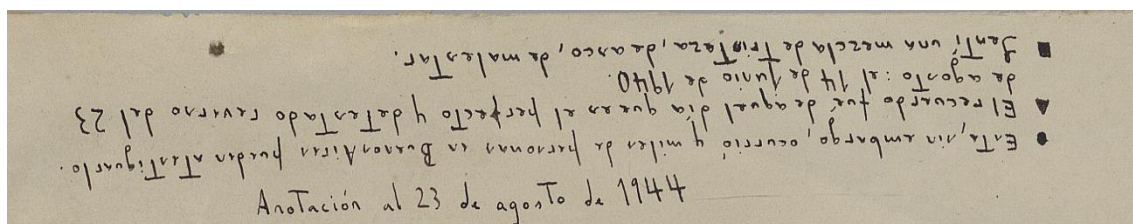


This paragraph, which Seguí comments on in depth in his article, is (once “carece” is replaced by “adolesce”) the published version. (Saer comments that these “extrañas frases compendian el pensamiento político de Borges, y anticipan sus tomas de posición venideras” – 121). I cannot make out what the word was that was crossed out so vigorously before “nombre de Roma” (it might be “nombre”: sometimes Borges eliminates a word and then writes it again just afterwards). The phrase “Hitler quiere ser derrotado” is underlined for emphasis, just as “goce físico” was underlined at the beginning of the text:



It is important to remember that this is written in August 1944, and that Hitler’s defeat and suicide won’t come until April 1945, so Borges is exercising the privileges of prescience.

The various corrections in this manuscript show Borges’s care with language. The insertion of “un noble orden” in the last paragraph, for instance, changes the rhythm of the phrase at the same time that it argues in favor of the supposed “order” of Western civilization (which must have seemed pretty dubious in 1944, and certainly does today). Of particular interest are the three insertions at the top of the page, upside down.



Because they are upside down and in order from the first to the third they must have been copied from another piece of paper; otherwise, like similar insertions in “El Aleph” manuscript, to give an example I study in *How Borges Wrote*, they could not have been written so neatly in the precise order in which they would appear.

“Anotación al 23 de agosto de 1944” is an important text in that it links Borges’s earlier writings on Nazism and fascism, most of which focus on what was happening in Europe (the exception being “Yo, judío” in 1934) with his subsequent writings on Peronism. From “Nuestro pobre individualismo” (1946) and “Déle, déle” (1946) to “La fiesta del monstruo” (written in 1947 in collaboration with Adolfo Bioy Casares but not published until 1955) to “L’Illusion comique” (1955) and “El simulacro” (1957), the focus of many of his anti-Peronist texts is on the relations between the individual and the group: many of the texts just mentioned turn on collective emotions that result in self-deception. Here, for a brief moment, he thinks that collective emotions can be noble, and argues that even Nazi sympathizers in Argentina shared in the collective joy when Paris was liberated from the Occupation. This makes it an important text both at the time and some years later when *Otras inquisiciones* was being readied for publication at the very moment of the death and mass funeral of Eva Perón: Borges wants to recall a moment when he could feel one with his compatriots in a selfless, non-nationalist stance of solidarity with the oppressed people of another country. As has often been noted, his opposition to nationalism and populism in the 1930s and 1940s was also a self-critique, since in the 1920s his celebration of *criollismo* in the essays of *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, and of local color and national culture in his poetry of the time, were not very different from the writings of the Julio and Rodolfo Irazusta, of Ernesto Palacio, of Arturo Jauretche and Scalabrini Ortiz, of Leopoldo Marechal: of the nationalist thinkers who would be his ideological antagonists during Peronism. (Of course it is fascinating that as late as 1934 he would write a preface to Jauretche’s *El Paso de los Libres*; the second edition of that book, in 1960, would replace Borges’s

preface with the more ideologically compatible name of Jorge Abelardo Ramos.<sup>7</sup>) “Anotación al 23 de agosto de 1944” is, then, significant in various ways: as one of the few texts in which Borges directly names Freud and uses psychoanalytic thought; as one of his most heartfelt, even physical, expressions of emotion, and remarkably here of a collective emotion; and as a text that connects his earlier writings on fascism and Nazism to his later writings about Peronism. The manuscript shows Borges’s care with words and ideas during the process of composition, and can be dated precisely between the day it commemorates in August 1944 and the date of publication two months later in *Sur*.

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<sup>7</sup> [Nota de la coord.: Sobre Borges y Ramos, ver el artículo de Guido Herzovich en este dossier.]

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