

Borges the Poet

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Borges' Milongas: The Chords of Argentine
Verbal Art¹

Jorge Luis Borges has claimed that "the milonga is one of the great conversational forms of Buenos Aires,"² and in his book of milongas, entitled *Para las seis cuerdas*, his poetry turns to such "talk." In the prologue, he invites the reader to participate and to collaborate in the dialogue. He writes: "All reading implies a collaboration and almost a complicity" (EE1).³ Yet since the publication of *Para las seis cuerdas* (For the Six Guitar Strings) in 1965, almost no academic attention has been paid to this collection of poems.⁴ Not only have the milongas remained quietly ignored even by scholars who treat traditional Argentine elements in Borges' work, they are conspicuously absent from the text and indices of books dedicated to the author's comprehensive works. In contrast to the recognition and critical acclaim received otherwise by this noted Argentine writer, the lack of response to his milongas is particularly dramatic and puzzling. It poses the question: Why is it that readers have failed to respond to Borges' milonga compositions?

Perhaps a necessary familiarity with the milonga genres or mode is missing, since it is essential for an understanding of milongas to understand the historical and cultural Argentine context for this expressive form, and to develop an awareness of the social and aesthetic character of traditional milonga performances. Yet, in order to comply with the author and to fully participate in and appreciate *Para las seis cuerdas*, actual historical and ethnographic data by itself proves less important than an

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understanding of the dialogic relationship which exists between Borges' verses and those of the milonga tradition.⁵

In *Para las seis cuerdas* the author adopts an attitude, a mode, required by the milonga which inform his voice and shape his compositions. He engages in that "great conversational form" styled by *criollos* before him, both in oral and literary creations. In order to respond to and to collaborate in this work, therefore, the reader must be able to hear in Borges' understated verses not only the strings of a guitar (as the author prescribes in his prologue), but the voice of the poet alternating and merging with a polyphony of voices from the folk and erudite verbal art of generations.

Let us examine, then, the roots and character of the milonga, and briefly outline the relationship of Borges' compositions to the art of past milongueros. By thus placing the poems within a milonga tradition, we can begin to uncover a way of reading *Para las seis cuerdas*.

Of African origin, the name "milonga" comes from one of the Bantu languages. It is the plural form of *mulonga*, meaning "word" or "wordiness" and suggesting, by extension, verbal entanglement and intricacy.⁶ Such oral manifestations took various forms and tones in the Argentine context. "Milonga" was used, for example, to refer to disputes, confusion, or disorder, but also, for instance, to indicate a mischievous lie or gossip.⁷ A "milonguero" utterance might be characterized by a boastful, provocative tone, or by a light and humorous sense of verbal play. In each case, though, verbal display and flaunting highlight the speaker's mastery of words.

The milonga spirit, however, could also take non-verbal dimensions. The term is used in Argentina, for instance, to name a dance, a musical form, and to characterize rowdy, festive, or permissive behavior.⁸ A *milonguero*, furthermore, was one who singled himself out through his dancing and singing, and one who at a gathering took command of the social moment through boastful, defiant, and masterful behavior. In fact, mastery and display for the purposes of artistic and social control, and for personal recognition, mixed with playful *desafío* (challenge), lay at the heart of the milonga.

Milonga, therefore, came to signify more than simply "wordiness," as its etymology suggests. Its parameters were in no way bound to a single genre. More important to its essence was the style and tone, the stance and attitude with which not only words but dance, or song, or

behavior in general were *performed*. For a better understanding of Borges, however, let us focus here on the *verbal* dimensions of the milonga.

Traditional milonga verses varied in their meter, their themes, and their temper. Although classically octosyllabic, they could range to fit the music, and the interests of the moment. Their tone and themes could be patriotic, political, critical, jocular, provocative, philosophical, amorous, and at times even narrative. These songs "could be either the repetitions of previously memorized couplets, or its strophes were the fruits of sudden inspiration." Given its often improvised lines the milonga "was also used to *payar*" (to engage in an improvised, contrapuntal, poetic contest common among *gauchos*).⁹ In fact, to say "milonguear" in the Porteño suburb was synonymous to saying *payar* or *cantar*.¹⁰

While the *payada* was the verbal counterpoint or duel of the *gauchos*, however, the milonga belonged to the men of the outskirts. Ethnomusicologist Lauro Ayesterán explains: ". . . next to the traditional *payador*, acquiring greater stature (around the year 1870) appears the 'milonguero' who was to the suburban surrounding what the former had been to the countryside environment . . ." ¹¹ This milonguero type emerged around the time when the impact of immigration, urbanization, and industrialization pushed the Buenos Aires city limits outward toward the pampa while simultaneously drawing men from the countryside to its outskirts. In the tension of this transition the milonga flourished. "The *payador* gradually vanished into the milonguero," Vicente Rossi summarized, adding: "that is why the milonga is the citified *payada*."¹²

Borges, of course, knew all this well. He had read Vicente Rossi's book *Cosas de negros* as a young man and had written in 1928: "This yet unheard of and solitary Vicente Rossi, will be *discovered* one day with our, his contemporaries', disrepute and with the scandalous confirmation of our blindness."¹³ He had also come in contact, if only as an onlooker, or guest, with the whereabouts of the milonga. Ulises Petit de Murat, for example, tells of such incidents:

We frequented the neighborhood cafes that were the meeting places for cart drivers, *cuarteadores* (horsemen who made their living by pulling vehicles out of the mud—and who, incidentally, still operate on some Argentine byways), workingmen who would stay up all night talking, toasting friends, and listening to the music of a sad guitar. Borges still remembers, and admires, a couplet we learned from one of those men. It ends like this: 'La muerte es vida vivida, la vida es

muerte que viene (Death is life that has been lived, life is coming death). Their inventiveness has always fascinated him."¹⁴

Similarly, José Gobello notes:

In his youth—it is known—he walked the *barrios* and befriended some condescending *compadres* from Palermo, whom he later immortalized in his literature. They were *compadres* not yet Italianized, introverted and axiomatic; *compadres* of the guitar and sweet cane, capable of singing things like this: 'la vida no es otra cosa / que muerte que anda luciendo' (life is nothing more / than death sporting about). From one of those *compadres*, Nicanor Paredes, Borges learned the philosophy of the *compadre* world.¹⁵

As early as 1928 what Borges had seen, heard, and what he had learned were integrated into an essay about the milonga, included in *El idioma de los argentinos*. In it, he points out not only the milonga's suburban character, but its gaucho, countryside roots. He writes: ". . . the milonga was of the outskirts. The wooden counter and the *compadrito's* guitar generated it and it was perhaps a decantation of the *cantar por cifra* . . ." ¹⁶ In the same essay, Borges notes the milonga's defiant, challenging tone, often intended to provoke, in the spirit of a verbal duel. He explains:

That milonga, happy to defy, is the well-known one, it is the one that made itself bold and insolent in bravados about places in Buenos Aires, around the 1880's. It is the one that got along well with couplets like:

Soy del barrio e Monserrá	I'm from the barrio of Montserrat
donde relumbra el acero;	where the steel blade shines
lo que digo con el pico	what I contend with my lip
lo sostengo con el cuero.	I back up with my hide. ¹⁷

As in the *payada*, which Borges called "a kind of duel, but a duel carried out with guitars," the verbal tension of this "shove" or "thrust" (of this "*empuje*," as Borges calls it) is also present in the milonga.¹⁸ "Not only of fights; that frontier was also made of guitars," ¹⁹ he noted, and "milongas express directly what poets have tried to say with words: the conviction that fighting can be a celebration."²⁰

The physical duel, both in the pampa and in the city, was thus elevated by the guitar to poetic and musical metaphor. Milonga verses captured the spirit of a social "*enredo*" and transformed it into a verbal and literary *enredo* through a weaving of words.²¹ In the course of this process

and as a result of this artistry, an Argentine way of narrating and versifying was fashioned which made for a native, *criollo* way of speaking. Indeed, it rendered an integrally Porteño “conversational form,” as Borges explains in “La canción del barrio”:

The milonga is truly representative. Its common version is an infinite greeting, a ceremonious gestation of flattering verbiage, corroborated by the ponderous pulsation of the guitar. It sometimes narrates bloody events without hurry, duels which take their time, deaths of valiant spoken provocations; other times it pretends to simulate the themes of destiny. Its airs and arguments will vary; what does not vary is the singer's entonation, pulled along, with rushes of weariness, never loud, between conversational and sung . . . The milonga is one of Buenos Aires' great conversational forms . . .²²

It is precisely within this conversational, dialogized mode that Borges writes his own milongas. By so doing he actively engages himself in the Argentine, payadoresque tradition—a tradition which speaks to and from a historic, folkloric, musical, and literary, as well as a personal and biographical past. It is a complex, and in some sense, daring undertaking on his part, for he asserts himself as a *milonguero*, as a wielder of words, and as a descendant of the payadores and creators of *cifras*.²³

This marks a change, a leap, in Borges' writing. In *Para las seis cuerdas* he no longer writes *about* the milonga and the payada tradition, as he had done in his earlier days. He actually takes up the challenge here to *engage* in “milonguicity.” Through his milonga compositions Borges merges his voice with those of other *criollos*—both erudite singers and popular neighborhood or countryside poets. He puts himself to the test and contest of the milonga. “In my *milongas*,” Borges tells us, “I have done my respectful best to imitate the joyous courage of Hilario Ascasubi and of the old-time street ballads [*coplas*] of the different neighborhoods of Buenos Aires.”²⁴ And earlier he had said: “I would like these verses which, granted, need musical backup, to be of the liking of Hilario Ascasubi.”²⁵ Gobello, moreover, observes: “In those lyrics [of Borges' tangos and milongas] a payador-like tone is displayed. I think that the *compadritos* would have written them just like Borges, had they not been illiterate.”²⁶ The latter is a compliment indeed, for it suggests that Borges, without turning to Lunfardo (the street language of the hipster-like *compadrito*) or to a nostalgic tone, could render (as he hoped) a native, genuine milonga. “I have wanted to elude the exagger-

ated sentimentality of the inconsolable “*tango canción*” (tango song) and the systematic use of Lunfardo, which infuses the simple couplets with an artificial air,” he writes in his *Para las seis cuerdas* preface (EE1). Earlier, he had commented in “La historia del tango”:

Certain composers of today seek that valiant tone and concoct, sometimes felicitously, *milongas* of the lower Battery or of the Barrio Alto, but their works, music and lyrics studiously antiquated, are exercises in nostalgia for what was, laments for what is lost, essentially sad though happy in tone. They are to the rough and innocent *milongas* that Rossi's book contains what *Don Segundo Sombra* is to *Martín Fierro* or to *Paulino Lucero*.²⁷

Borges' milonga writings mark an important part in his search for a native, Argentine idiom.²⁸ Like Hernández' poem, they weave and superimpose a range of Argentine voices and allusions which together render a polyphonic text. As such, *Para las seis cuerdas* assumes a degree of *criollo* familiarity, and requires that, like Borges, the reader take a leap and engage in a milonga-like reading/response. This, of course, necessitates that we hear the milonga verses as part of a contrapuntal, dialogic discourse shaped and informed by Argentine folk, literary, social, and historical tradition.

“Dialogic” refers here (and earlier) to the term employed by M. M. Bakhtin, where “dialogism” is defined as “the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia.”²⁹ Such a world, in this case, is the Argentine framework in which the milonga emerges and thrives. Here, “milonga talk” defies the kind of authoritative discourse where, although ambiguity or multiple meaning may be present, the voice is rigid: speaking *at* instead of *with*. Quite the contrary, Borges' milongas and milonga renderings in general are “conversational,” dialogic. They involve a multiplicity of social voices which thrive on irony, on a tongue in cheek delivery, on a suggestive, understated, and allusive kind of speech which recalls (or implies at least) a previous utterance, a simultaneous aside, or a dialogue. In this manner, each milonga shares authority with its very tradition, and with its audience. It is composed by countless and often anonymous authors. In this type of discourse, Bakhtin suggests, “everything means, is understood, as part of a greater whole,” insuring the primacy of context over text.³⁰

The notion of “contextuality” has already been thoughtfully discussed, for example, in articles such as Emir Rodríguez Monegal's

"Borges: The Reader as Writer," where he takes up Genette's suggestion of the completion of the text by way of the reader's participation in Borges' work.³¹ But what has not been satisfactorily considered are the different conventions which govern our reading, and the different frames which define our "contexts."³² Borges tells us in the preface to *Para las seis cuerdas*, for instance, that to read *Fausto* or *Martín Fierro*, two gauchesque texts, the reader must make specific admissions (EE1). "In the modest case of my milongas," he says, "the reader must substitute the missing music with the image of a man who hums, on the threshold of his *zaguán* or *almacén*, accompanying himself with a guitar. The hand lingers on the strings and the words count less than the chords" (EE1).

The milonga author requires, in other words, that the reader respond not only to the words of a written text but that he recall a specific contextual frame—and that he do this, furthermore, in the criollo spirit in which the work was composed. The milonguero challenges the listener/reader to enter into dialogue not only with him but with the ethics and the aesthetic of the milonga world. He asks, in short, that we not be limited by that which appears linear or literal ("the words count less," Borges tells us), and that we expand our notion of "text" to include the extra-textual, the sociocultural fabric which perpetuates the milonga.³³

Although this is not a close analysis of *Para las seis cuerdas*, certain aspects of these poems may be examined and read in the spirit of the reflections expressed in this discussion.

Reminiscent of *Martín Fierro*, who calls for divine inspiration and the aid of his muse, Borges turns to the guitar to recall past histories and to bring memory to life. He writes in "Milonga de dos hermanos" (Milonga of Two Brothers):

Traiga cuentos la guitarra
De cuando el fierro brillaba,
Cuentos de truco y de taba,
De cuadreras y de copas,
Cuentos de la Costa Brava
Y el Camino de las Tropas.
Venga una historia de ayer
Que apreciarán los más lerdos;
El destino no hace acuerdos
Y nadie se lo reproche—

Let the guitar bring us tales
Of when the knives used to flash,
Tales of gambling and of dice,
Horse races and hard drinking,
Tales of the Costa Brava
And of the old Drivers' Trail.
A story of yesterday
Of appeal to all comers;
No deals can be made with fate,
So no one should reproach it—

Ya estoy viendo que esta noche
Vienen del Sur los recuerdos.

I'm aware now that tonight
Memories come from the South.³⁴

The story which follows in this milonga is one that Borges has already written in prose. It is the story of the eternal duel, always present in Argentine history and folklore. In this instance it occurs between Juan Ibera and his brother, and more generally represents the contest between North and South, the counterpoint between payadores, the rivaling versions of a same story. Implicit, one could even argue, is the poem's allusion to the duel between Fierro and el Negro, and to the consequent dialogic relationship between Hernández and Borges.³⁵

But Borges' milongas do not echo only Hernández' poetry or the literary gauchesque tradition. The author of *Para las seis cuerdas* also engages in dialogue with common, though heroic, compadres. He relates:

I was once at a meal, and the payador, a good man, dedicated verses to all those present, and I liked the strophe he addressed to me, because it began 'Y a usted, compañero Borges / lo saludo enteramente.' That idea of . . . a kind of . . . 'social greeting' seemed very nice to me and I asked him to write it down later.³⁶

Not only did the payador write it down, but Borges responded to this "social greeting" years later when he composed "Milonga de Nicanor Paredes," which opens:

Venga un rasgueo y ahora,
Con el permiso de ustedes,
Le estoy cantando, señores,
A don Nicanor Paredes. (EE20)

Give us a strum and now,
With the permission of those
present,
Gentlemen, I'm going to sing
To Don Nicanor Paredes.

This kind of greeting—this dedication or celebration—however, is also a "fórmula" which adheres to the traditional milonguero's repertoire, and which in these poems render a milonga-like discourse. Borges himself noted that his milongas were largely composed from verses sung by his predecessors, by other criollos. These depended on formulas and turns of phrases such as "con el permiso de ustedes" or "aquí me pongo a cantar."³⁷ Similarly, for example, Borges calls on traditional proverbs "En casa del jabonero / el que no cae se refala" (EE22), or on popular sayings "Más bravo que gallo inglés" (EE36). He turns to folk humor "Un balazo lo tumbó/En Thames y Triunvirato; / Se mudó a un barrio ve-

cino, / El de la Quinta del Ñato" (EE32). And he includes the mordant, ironic kind of understatement common among *paisanos* and *compadres* "Un acero entró en el pecho, / Ni se le movió la cara; / Alejo Albornoz murió / Como si no le importara" (EE46).

Yet the "social greeting" mentioned earlier serves not only to recall "milonga talk" but also to address or to identify an audience, and to establish thereby a familiar and conversational tone. Borges begins, for example:

A un compadrito le canto Que era el patrón y el ornato De las casas menos santas Del barrio de Triunvirato. (EE30)	I sing to a compadrito Who embellished and protected The least holy houses In the barrio of Triunvirato.
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and

Alta la voz y animosa Como si cantara flor, Hoy, caballeros, le canto A la gente de color. (EE34)	The voice loud and animated As if about to say "flor," Today, gentlemen, I sing To the people of color.
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and

Milonga que este porteño Dedica a los orientales, Agradeciendo memorias De tardes y de ceibales. (EE38)	Milonga which this Porteño Dedicates to the <i>Orientales</i> , Grateful for the memories of afternoons and <i>ceibales</i> .
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Often Borges' "responses" to other milongueros are not as explicitly stated as the one to Nicanor Paredes, yet we hear echoes of past popular milonga verses woven into Borges' poems. Such is the case with the words of the milonguero Arnold. Borges tells us:

I have heard in a suburb of Buenos Aires a milonga, a milonga composed by a jail-bird in Tierra del Fuego, a convict who, curiously had the same name as Matthew Arnold: Arnold's milonga. And in that long milonga, almost metaphysical like the end of *Martín Fierro*, I have found extraordinary verses like the following:

La muerte es vida vivida, la vida es muerte que viene, ya la vida no es otra cosa que muerte que anda luciendo.	Death is life lived, life is coming death, soon life is nothing more than death sporting about. ³⁸
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Borges' reference here is to Enrique Vicente Arnold whose composition "De profundis" includes other such metaphysical concerns, which defy popular expression. Arnold's milonga, for example, says:

En la humana comprensión,
con majestad grave y muda,
germina en todo la duda,
según mi interpretación.
Las cosas son y no son,
por ley de su propio ser,
nada es eterno a mi ver,
pero fin tampoco tiene:
del hoy el mañana viene
y el hoy viene del ayer.

In our human comprehension,
with grave and silent majesty,
doubt germinates in everything
given my interpretation.
Things are and they are not,
by law of their own being,
nothing is eternal to my seeing
nor does it have an end:
from today tomorrow comes
and from yesterday comes today.³⁹

We see this philosophy echoed in Borges' "Milonga de Manuel Flores" where a similar understated, deceptively simple, and apparently logical reasoning about life and death occurs:

Manuel Flores va a morir. Eso es moneda corriente; Morir es una costumbre Que sabe tener la gente. Mañana vendrá la bala Y con la bala el olvido; Lo dijo el sabio Merlín: Morir es haber nacido. (EE48)	Manuel Flores is doomed to die. That's as sure as your money. Dying is a custom well known to many. Tomorrow comes the bullet, oblivion descending. Merlin the magus said it: being born has an ending. ⁴⁰
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Again in "Milonga de Calandria," the reader/listener is drawn back to voices and personages from the past. One recognizes in Calandria, for example, that "last Argentine outlaw" carefully sketched for us and immortalized by Paul Groussac. Groussac's narrative, in turn, perpetuates the story told to him by an *estanciero* from Entre Ríos of the courageous, defiant, and playful gaucho/*peón*, Calandria, famous for his duels.⁴¹ Similarly, we are reminded by this milonga of an early tango written by Villoldo, a milonguero and author of those festive tangos which Borges likes and which scholars argue are derived from the milonga.⁴² Villoldo's version, also entitled "Calandria," sings the following boasts which, though defiant, are most endearing. It opens:

Aquí tienen a Calandria que es un mozo de renombre,	Here you have Calandria a well-known chap,
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and continues:

el que cantando milongas siempre se hace respetar. No hay compadre que me asuste,	who singing milongas knows how to get respect. No compadre frightens me,
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por más guapo y cuchillero,
porque en casos apurados
sé manejar el acero.

El miedo no lo conozco:
y jamás me sé asustar,
y el que pretenda ganarme
tiene mucho que sudar.

not even the bravest knife fighter,
because I know, when pressed,
how to handle a steel blade.

I've never known fear
and I never get scared,
and if anyone wants to top me
they've got a lot to sweat.⁴³

Borges' version, in turn, sounds like this:

Servando Cardoso el nombre
Y No Calandria el apodo;
No lo sabrán olvidar
Los años, que olvidan todo.

No era un científico de esos
Que usan arma de gatillo;
Era su gusto jugarse
En el baile del cuchillo.

Fija la vista en los ojos,
Era capaz de parar
El hachazo más artero.
¡Feliz quien lo vio pelear! (EE52)

The name is Servando Cardoso
And the nick-name *No Calandria*;
Not even oblivious time
Will be able to forget it.

He wasn't one of those scientists
Who used weapons with a trigger;
He was pleased to stake his life
In a dance with his knife.

With his eyes and sights fixed,
He was capable of stopping
The most dexterous "axe" blow.
Happy those who saw him
fighting!⁴⁴

A song about Calandria is particularly interesting here, furthermore, since the *apodo* (nickname) of the character is also the name of a native Argentine bird. Not just any bird, the calandria represents a symbol of freedom to the country people, and is known for its ability to sing in any voice. The bird is a perfect mimic, known by the folk as the poet of the countryside. Its name thus inspires popular sayings which celebrate, as does Borges, the gaucho singer's values and his verbal art. "Libre o muerto, como la calandria" or "Calandria y gaucho, dejarlos libre" are examples which underline the gaucho's resistance to authority. And "Tiene pico e calandria" or "Calandria pa el amor" indicate the seduction, cleverness, and sweetness of a "calandria's" song or words.⁴⁵

Another device used in Borges' milongas to create a dialogic tone is a series of questions which are posed to the audience. His readers are challenged to reconsider the past and to redefine the future by looking back on Argentine history and tradition. Such is the case, for example, in "¿Dónde se habrán ido?," where Borges responds to the interrogation at the end of this milonga with an insistent refrain: "No se aflija. En la

memoria." (Don't worry. In memory.) Earlier in the poem, perhaps echoing the verses of Fierro and Hernández ("Me tendrán en su memoria/ para siempre mis paisanos"), Borges declares:

—No se aflija. En la memoria
De los tiempos venideros
También nosotros seremos
Los tauras y los primeros.

—Don't worry. In the memory
Of coming days
We also will be
The foremost and the brave.

To similar questions posed previously in the poem "El tango," Borges had responded:

En la música están, en el cordaje
De la terca guitarra trabajosa
Que trama en la milonga venturosa
La fiesta y la inocencia del corage.

They are in the music, in the
strings
Of an obstinate and elaborate
guitar
Which weaves a fiesta and the
innocence
Of courage into a fortuitous
milonga.⁴⁶

Both answers, in essence, bring us back to the milonga, and to the six (guitar) strings. There, in the music of the lyrics/poems, memory (history, folklore, popular voices, etc.) is recalled by the milonguero/poet, and celebrated by the collaborative reader willing to draw up "the image of a man who hums . . . accompanied by the guitar" (EE1).

When questioned why he had "condescended to the milongas," Borges replied "I have not condescended. I have elevated myself to them! But it is not I who have written them." He added, "It is all the criollos I carry in my blood."⁴⁷ Similarly, we too must read these compositions against a backdrop of their full criollo tradition—a challenge to which this essay has only begun to respond. Indeed, much more unravelling of Borges' milongas remains to be done. The following are defiant, traditional milonga lines:

Caballeros milongueros
la milonga está formada.
El que sea más milonguero
que se atreva y la deshaga.

Milonguero gentlemen
the milonga is formed and there
let the one most milonguero
try to undo it if he dare.

Perhaps they will invite readers to "elevate" themselves (like Borges) to the challenge posed by *Para las seis cuerdas*.

NOTES

1. Some revisions have been made in the text as it was delivered at the Symposium on the Poetry of Jorge Luis Borges, Dickinson College, April 6–8, 1983. I wish to thank Linda Taranik Grimm, Güneli Gün, and Diana Grossman Kahn for their critical comments and editorial suggestions after reading a draft of this paper.
2. Jorge Luis Borges, "La canción del barrio," *Evaristo Carriego*, in *Obras completas de Jorge Luis Borges* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1970): 133. All translations of prose or poetry are mine unless otherwise noted.
3. Jorge Luis Borges, *Para las seis cuerdas*, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1970): 1. Several versions of *Para las seis cuerdas* are available. In its first edition (Emecé, 1965) the collection included "Alguien le dice al tango." For the second edition (Emecé, 1970) J. L. Borges omitted this poem, and added three new milongas written in 1970: "Milonga de Albornoz," "Milonga de Manuel Flores," and "Milonga de Calandria," (see editorial note in the Emecé, 1970 edition). The Emecé 1970 version also includes an opening poem entitled "Buenos Aires," and closes with "Los compadritos muertos," neither of which appear as part of the collection in the *Obras completas*. Henceforth, references to *Para las seis cuerdas* come from the 2nd edition. (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1970). This edition subsequently appears in the text as EE. Pagination begins with the Preface as page 1.
4. In spite of the limited treatment of *Para las seis cuerdas* by scholars, it is interesting to note that Borges' milongas have been acknowledged and recorded by popular singers. These include tango interpreters as well as singers of more traditional and rural folk music (e.g., Edmundo Rivero, Josefina, Susana Rinaldi, the Cuarteto Zupay).
5. By "dialogic" I refer here to the term as it has been employed by M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).
6. Vicente Rossi, *Cosas de negros*, ed., Jorge Horacio Becco, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: Hachette, 1958): 116–117. See especially, footnote number 4 on page 116, where Horacio Jorge Becco offers, among other references, the following: "En el trabajo de Beaurepaire-Rohán, *Diccionario de vocabulos brasileiros*, 94, hallamos sobre *milongas*: 'E vocábulo de origen bundá. Milonga é o plural de mulonga, é significa "palavra"; y que ella ha conservado su origen africano, o sea "emredo"'. . . . P. Andrés Febrés. *Diccionario araucano-español*, apéndice por Juan M. Larsen (Bs. As., 1882) anota: 'la voz *milonga* en Mogialuá, *mulonga* en Abundá y *ulonga* en Congo, significa "palabra".' Another etymological explanation given is that by Josué Teófilo Wilkes and Ismael Guerrero Cárpena in "Formas musicales rioplatenses," as quoted in Robert Selles, "La milonga," *La historia del tango*, No. 12 (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Corregidor, 1978): 2086. They believe that "milonga" is a contraction of "melos-longa," long melody, attributed to the long duration of the milonga when sung as a counterpoint.
7. Roberto Selles, "La milonga," *La historia del tango*, No. 12 (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Corregidor, 1978): 2086. See also footnote 6.
8. Rossi, *Cosas de negros*, 117–126; Horacio Ferrer, "Milonga," *El libro del tango* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1977): 568–570; José Gobello, "Milonga," *Etimologías* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Corregidor, 1978): 117–180; Félix Coluccio, "Milonga," *Diccionario Folklórico Argentino*, vol. II (Buenos Aires: Luis Lasserre y Cía. S.A., 1964): 311–312.
9. Selles, "La milonga," 2091.
10. Rossi, *Cosas de negros*, 120.
11. Lauro Ayestarán, as quoted in Ernesto Sábato, *Tango, discusión y clave*, 3rd ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1963): 41.
12. Rossi, *Cosas de negros*, 115.
13. Rossi, *Cosas de negros*, 24.
14. Ulyses Petit de Murat, "Borges as I Know Him," *Américas*, 11 (January 1959): 10.
15. José Gobello, *Conversando tangos* (Buenos Aires: A Peña Lillo Editor, 1976): 14. Note

also that in his essay "History of the Tango," *Obras completas*, 159, Borges himself reports: "I have spoken with (tango composers) José Saborido, author of "Felicia" and "La morocha," with Ernesto Poncio, author of "Don Juan," with the brothers of Vicente Greco, author of "La Tablada," with Nicolás Paredes, a *caudillo* from Palermo, and with some *payador*. I let them talk; I carefully avoided formulating questions which might suggest determined answers."

16. Jorge Luis Borges, *El idioma de los argentinos* (Buenos Aires: M. Gleizer, 1928): 135. The *cifra*, briefly, was a contrapuntal way of verbal dueling used to *pagar*, in which the singer improvised verses. For a definition, see Félix Coluccio, *Diccionario folklórico argentino*, vol. I (Buenos Aires: Luis Lasserre y Cía. S.A., 1964): 78. Roberto Selles, furthermore, writes about the milonga: "It was, and still is common, in this type of music, to apply the same melody for different lyrics. This is called 'cantar por milonga.' The same had occurred with the *cifra*, the *estilo* and, even, with other genres, like the *vals*," 2099.
17. Borges, *El idioma de los argentinos*, 136.
18. Jorge Luis Borges, "El gaucho Martín Fierro," A lecture delivered to the Department of Spanish, University of Bristol on Friday, February 22, 1963 (London, 1964): 34.
19. Jorge Luis Borges, "Palermo de Buenos Aires," *Evaristo Carriego*, in Borges, *Obras Completas de Jorge Luis Borges* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1974): 111.
20. Jorge Luis Borges, "Historia del tango," *Evaristo Carriego*, in Borges, *Obras Completas*, 161.
21. See footnote 4.
22. Borges, *Obras Completas*, 133.
23. See footnote 16.
24. Jorge Luis Borges, *In Praise of Darkness* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1974): 11.
25. J. L. Borges as quoted in *Todo Borges y . . .* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Atlantida, 1977): 130.
26. Gobello, *Conversando tangos*, 15.
27. Andrew Hurley, trans. "History of the Tango," in el. E. R. Monegal and Alastair Reid, *Borges, A Reader* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1981): 262.
28. See Jorge Luis Borges, "The Spanish Language in South America—A Literary Problem," The Tenth Canning House Annual Lecture delivered at Canning House, February 19, 1963 (London, 1964): especially pp. 10–11.
29. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981): 426–427. Also see "heteroglossia," p. 428, and the fourth essay, "Discourse in the Novel," in particular. The specific pages cited correspond to the glossary offered by editor Michael Holquist and translators Caryl Emerson and Holquist.
30. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 426–427.
31. Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "Borges: the Reader as Writer," *TriQuarterly*, 25, No. 25 (1972): 102–143.
32. I suggested undertaking an "ethnography of literature" as a step toward achieving a more holistic type of reading, in a paper entitled "Creolization in Argentina: Folk Poetry, Tango, and Literary Criticism," *American Folklore Society* (Philadelphia, 1976).
33. This, of course, has been suggested, and excellently discussed by Clifford Geertz in "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in *Myth, Symbol, and Culture*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971): 1–37. See also Karl Reisman, "Contrapuntal Conversations in an Antigua Village," *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974): 110–124.
34. Jorge Luis Borges, *Selected Poems 1923–1967*, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (New York: Delacorte Press, 1972): 225.
35. At the end of this milonga, in the lines: "Así de manera fiel / Conté la historia hasta el fin," we are reminded of Borges' need to give us "the end" of Martín Fierro's and el Negro's duel in the story "El fin." By so doing, Borges enters into contest / dialogue with José Hernández.

36. Borges, "El gaucho Martín Fierro," 34.
 37. Personal interview with Jorge Luis Borges, Oberlin, May 7, 1983.
 38. Borges, "El Gaucho Martín Fierro," 35.
 39. Selles, "La milonga," 2109.
 40. Alastair Reid, trans. *Borges, A Reader*, by Jorge Luis Borges, ed. E. R. Monegal and Alastair Reid (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1981): 294. Note that the version in Spanish varies from that in Borges' *Obras completas*.
 41. When asked for the source of inspiration for his milonga "Calandria," J. L. Borges cited Paul Groussac's narrative. (Personal interview with J.L.B., Oberlin, May 7, 1983.) See "Calandria" in *Jorge Luis Borges selecciona lo mejor de Paul Groussac* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Fraternal, 1981): 137-144.
 42. See Rossi, *Cosas de negros*, 147, for example, or José Gobello, "Tango, vocablo controvertido," *La historia del tango*, No. 1 (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Corregidor, 1976): 143. Examples of sheet music also attest to this, where compositions are labeled "milonga-tango" or "tango milongueado."
 43. Enrique Horacio Puccia, *El Buenos Aires de Angel G. Villoldo 1860 . . . 1919* (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1976): 316-317.
 44. The last word in this stanza could be "it" or "him" since the last line can refer both to the person or to his name. See also the translation by Norman Thomas di Giovanni in Borges, *In Praise of Darkness*, 8.
 45. E. F. Sánchez Zinny, *Integración del folklore argentino* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Stilcograf, 1968): 97-98.
 46. Anthony Kerrigan, trans. *A Personal Anthology*, by Jorge Luis Borges, ed. Anthony Kerrigan (New York: Grove Press, 1967): 158-160.
 47. Carlos Cortínez, "Con Borges," *Anales de la Universidad de Chile*, (enero-diciembre 1967): 142-143. It is also worth noting here that the poem Borges considers to be among his most accomplished in this interview is, "y por qué no, algunas de las milongas . . ."

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