

Tigres Azules

Jorge Luis Borges

Una famosa pagina de Blake hace del tigre un fuego que resplandece y un arquetipo del Mal; prefiero aquella sentencia de Chesterton, que lo define como símbolo de terrible elegancia. No hay palabras, por lo demás, que puedan ser cifra del tigre, esa forma que desde hace siglos habita la imaginación de los hombres. Siempre me atrajo el tigre. Sé que me demoraba, de niño, ante cierta jaula del Zoológico: nada me importaban las otras. Juzgaba a las enciclopedias y los textos de historia natural por los grabados de los tigres. Cuando me fueron revelados los *Jungle Books* me desagradó que Shere Khan, el tigre, fuera el enemigo del héroe. A lo largo del tiempo, ese curioso amor no me abandonó. Sobrevivió a mi paradójica voluntad de ser cazador y a las comun vicisitudes humanas. Hasta hace poco — la fecha me parece lejana, pero en realidad no lo es — convivió de un modo tranquilo con mis habituales tareas en la Universidad de Lahore. Soy profesor de logica occidental y oriental y consagro mis domingos a un seminario sobre la obra de Spinoza. Debo agregar que soy escocés; acaso el amor de los tigres fue el que me trajo de Aberdeen al Punjab. El curso de mi vida ha sido común, en los sueños siempre vi tigres. (Ahora los pueblan otras formas.)

Más de una vez he referido estas cosas y ahora me parecen ajenas. Las dejo,

Blue Tigers

A famous page in Blake makes of the tiger a resplendent fire and an archetype of Evil: I prefer that sentence of Chesterton's which defines it as the symbol of terrible elegance — and there are no words besides to figure the tiger, whose shape has for centuries inhabited the imaginations of men. The tiger drew me always. I know that as a child I lingered before a particular cage in the zoo: the others mattered nothing to me. I judged whole encyclopaedias and volumes of natural history by their pictured tigers. When the *Jungle Books* were read out to me, it displeased me that Shere Khan, the tiger, should be an enemy of the hero. That curious regard did not abandon me as time went by, surviving the vicissitudes common to men, and my paradoxical intent to become a hunter. Until a little while ago — the date seems distant now, though it actually isn't — I lived calmly amid my accustomed tasks at the University of Lahore. I am a professor of logic, both Occidental and Oriental, and I devote my Sundays to a seminar on Spinoza. I should add that I am a Scot; and my childhood love of tigers, perhaps, was what brought me from Aberdeen to the Punjab. The course of my life had been common — in my dreams I always saw tigers. Now other shapes people them.

I have alluded more than once to the things I shall relate: now they seem to have befallen another. I submit them

sin embargo, ya que las exige mi confesión.

A fines de 1904, leí que en la región del delta del Ganges habían descubierto una variedad azul de la especie. La noticia fue confirmada por telegramas ulteriores, con las contradicciones y disparidades que son del caso. Mi viejo amor se reanimó. Sospeché un error, dada la imprecisión habitual de los nombres de colores. Recordé haber leído que en islandés el nombre de Etiopia era “Bláland”, Tierra Azul o Tierra de Negros. El tigre azul bien podía ser una pantera negra. Nada se dijo de las rayas y la estampa de un tigre azul con rayas de plata que divulgó la prensa de Londres; era evidentemente apócrifa. El azul de la ilustración me pareció más propio de la heráldica que de la realidad. En un sueño vi tigres de un azul que no había visto nunca y para el cual no hallé la palabra justa. Sé que era casi negro, pero esa circunstancia no basta para imaginar el matiz.

Meses después, un colega me dijo que en cierta aldea muy distante del Ganges había oído hablar de tigres azules. El dato no dejó de sorprenderme, porque sé que en esa región son raros los tigres. Nuevamente soñé con el tigre azul, que al andar proyectaba su larga sombra sobre el suelo arenoso. Aproveché las vacaciones a emprender el viaje a esa aldea, de cuyo nombre — por razones que luego aclararé — no quiero acordar me.

here, however, because they require confession.

Toward the end of 1904 I read that a blue variety of the species had been discovered in the delta of the Ganges. The news was confirmed by succeeding telegrams, with the disparities and contradictions usual in such cases. My old love revived. But I suspected some error, occasioned by the imprecisions usual to the naming of colours. I remembered hearing that among Icelanders the name of Ethiopia was “Blaland”: Blue Land or, as well, Land of Blacks. The blue tiger may well have been a black panther. Nothing had been said of the stripes, and the photogravure of an azure tiger with silver stripes emblazoning the London papers was evidently apocryphal: the colour of that apparition seemed more proper to heraldic beasts than actual animals. In a dream I once saw tigers of a blue I have never seen, and for which I have found no words. I know that they were almost black. But that circumstance does not suffice to picture the precise hue.

Months later a colleague told me that he had heard talk of blue tigers in a certain village far from the Ganges. The information surprised me greatly, for I knew that tigers were rare in that region. Again I dreamt of the blue tiger, casting his great shadow on the ground he stalked. I took advantage of the vacations to set out for that village: whose name — for reasons I shall soon make clear — I do not wish to remember.

Arribé ya terminada la estación de las lluvias. La aldea estaba agazapada al pie de un cerro, que me pareció mas ancho que alto, y la cercaba y amenazaba la jungla, que era de un color pardo. En alguna página de Kipling tiene que estar el villorrio de mi aventura ya que en ellas está toda la India, y de algún modo todo el orbe. En alguna pagina de Kipling tiene que estar el villorio de mi aventura ya que en está todo la India, y de algún modo todo el orbe. Basteme referir que una zanja con oscilantes puentes de cañas apenas defendia las chozas. Hacia el Sur había ciénagas y arrozales y una hondada con un río limoso cuyo nombre no supe nunca, y después, de nuevo, la jungla.

La población era de hindúes. El hecho, que yo había previsto, no me agradó. Siempre me he llevado mejor con los mussulmanes, aunque el Islam, lo sé, es la más pobre de las creencias que proceden del judaísmo.

Sentimos que en la India el hombre pulula; en la aldea sentí que lo que pulula es la selva, que casi penetraba en las chozas. El día era opresivo y las noches no traían frescura.

Los ancianos me dieron la bienvenida y mantuve con ellos un primer diálogo, hecho de vagas cortesías. Ya dije la pobreza del lugar, pero sé que todo hombre da por sentado que su patria encierra algo único. Ponderé las dudosas habitaciones y los no menos dudosos manjares y dije que la fama de esa región había llegado a Lahore. Los rostros de los hombres cambiaron; intuí inmediatamente que había

The rains had ended when I arrived. The village lay huddled at the foot of a hill, which seemed more wide than high, and was encircled and menaced by jungle, of a colour brownish and grey. The hamlet of my adventure must be there on some page of Kipling's, for all of India is in them, and in some way the world. To note the ditch which poorly defended the huts, and which was bridged by swaying cords of reed, should be enough. Towards the south were swamps and ricefields, and a hollow with a lime green river whose name I never came to know, and then jungle again.

The villagers were Hindus. The circumstance, which I had foreseen, did not agree with me. I have always got along better with the Mussulmans: even though Islam, I know, is the poorest among the creeds that come from Judaism.

Everyone feels that India teems with men. But it was the jungle that teemed in the village, so I felt, almost penetrating the huts. The day was oppressive and the night brought no freshness.

The elders had greeted my coming, and I maintained with them the wariness of our first exchanges, hedged with vague courtesies. I have already noted the poverty of the place. But all men take for granted that their own land is somehow unusual, and so I praised the doubtful habitations, and the no less dubious delicacies, and ventured that the fame of the country had reached Lahore. Their faces changed. I understood immediately that

cometido una torpeza y que debía arrepentirme. Los sentí poseedores de un secreto que no compartirían con un extraño. Acaso veneraban al Tigre Azul y le profesaban un culto que mis temerarias palabras habrían profanado.

Esperé a la mañana del otro día. Consumido el arroz y bebido el té, abordé mi tema. Pese a la víspera, no entendí, no pude entender, lo que sucedió. Todos me miraron con estupor y casi con espanto, pero cuando les dije que mi propósito era apresar a la fiera de la curiosa piel, me oyeron con alivio. Alguno dijo que lo había divisado en el lindero de la jungla.

En mitad de la noche me despertaron. Un muchacho me dijo que un cabra había escapado del redil y que, yendo a buscarla, había divisado el tigre azul en la otra margen del río. Pensé que la luz de la luna nueva no permitía precisar el color, pero todos confirmaron el relato y alguno, que antes había guardado silencio, dijo que también lo había visto. Salimos con los rifles y vi, o creí ver, una sombra felina que se perdía en la tiniebla de la jungla. No dieron con la cabra, pero la fiera que la había llevado bien podía no ser mi tigre azul. Me indicaron con énfasis unos rastros que, desde luego, nada probaban.

Al cabo de las noches comprendí que esas falsas alarmas constituían una rutina. Como Daniel Defoe, los hombres del lugar eran

I had committed a blunder, one which I was bound to regret. They seemed the possessors of a secret they would not share with a stranger. Perhaps they venerated the Blue Tiger: the mysteries of whose cult my reckless words may have profaned.

I waited for the morning of the next day. Having had some rice and tea, I broached the matter of the tiger. I did not comprehend, and could not have comprehended, what would happen as the evening came on. Everyone looked at me with amazement, with horror almost. But when I explained that I intended to capture the beast with the curious hide, I was heard with relief; and someone said that he had spotted it by the edge of the jungle.

I was woken in the middle of the night by a boy. A goat had got loose from its pen he said, and, going in search of it, he had seen the blue tiger on the riverbank across. I wondered if anyone could make out the colour by the light of the new moon. But the men all stood on his story, and someone who had kept silent before said that he, too, had seen the beast. We set out with rifles; and I saw, or thought I saw, a feline shadow losing itself in the darkness of the jungle. We did not find the goat. The animal that had carried it off may or may not have been my blue tiger. A face or two looked meaningly at mine: which, of course, proved nothing.

After some nights I understood that these false alarms constituted a routine. Like Daniel Defoe, the villagers were

diestros en la invención de rasgos circunstanciales.

El tigre podía ser avistado a cualquier hora, hacía los arrozales del Sur o hacía la maraña del Norte, pero no tardé en advertir que los observadores se turnaban con regularidad sospechosa. Mi llegada coincidía invariablemente con el momento exacto que el tigre acababa de huir. Siempre me indicaban la huella y algún destrozo, pero el puño del hombre puede falsificar los rastros de un tigre. Una que otra vez fui testigo de un perro muerto. Una noche de luna, pusimos una cabra de señuelo y esperamos en vano hasta la aurora. Pensé al principio que esas fábulas cotidianas obedecían al propósito de que yo demorara mi estadía, que beneficiaba a la aldea, ya que la gente me vendía alimentos y cumplía mis quehaceres domésticos. Para verificar esa conjetura, les dije que pensaba buscar el tigre en otro región, que estaba aguas abajo. Me sorprendió que todos aprobaran mi decisión. Seguí advirtiendo, sin embargo, que había un secreto y que todos recelaban de mí.

Ya dije que el cerro boscoso cuyo pie se amontonaba la aldea no era muy alto; una meseta le truncaba. Del otro lado, hacia el Oeste y el Norte, seguía la jungla. Ya que la pendiente no era áspera, les propuse una tarde escalar el cerro. Mis sencillas palabras los consternaron. Uno exclamó que la ladera era muy escarpada. El más anciano dijo con gravedad que mi propósito era de ejecución imposible. La cumbre era sagrada y estaba vedada

were dextrous in their elaborations of circumstance. The tiger might be sighted at any hour, by the ricefields to the south, or by the thickets to the north: but he was not slow to notice observers who turned up with suspicious regularity. My comings invariably coincided with that moment, exactly, when the tiger had just run off. The traces were always indicated, and some or other damage: but the ball of a fist can counterfeit the track of a tiger. Once or twice I was made witness to a dead dog. One night with a moon we put out a goat for a lure and waited, in vain, till dawn. At first I thought these daily confabulations were intended to prolong my stay — which was a boon to the villagers as they sold me eatables, and performed for a consideration some domestic chores. To try this conjecture, I told them that I meant to look for the tiger in another region, which was then flooded. To my surprise the decision was approved by all. But upon that I assured myself that there was indeed a secret, and that everyone distrusted me.

I have noted already the wooded hill at whose foot the village piled; that was not very high, and a flat truncated it. On its other side, toward the east and the north, the jungle continued. As the ascent could not have been difficult, I proposed one evening that we climb the hill. My words produced consternation. One man exclaimed that the slope was very steep. The eldest among the villagers said gravely that what I intended was impossible of execution. The summit was sacred, and kept from

a los hombres por obstáculos mágicos. Quienes la hollaban con pies mortales corrian el albur de ver la divinidad y de quedarse locos or ciegos. No insistí, pero esa noche, cuando todos dormían, me escurrí de la choza sin hacer ruido y subí la fácil pendiente. No había camino y la maleza me demoró.

La luna estaba en el horizonte. Me fijé con singular atención en todas las cosas, como si presintiera que aquel día iba a ser importante, quizá el más importante de mis días. Recuerdo aun los tonos oscuros, a veces casi negros, de la hojarasca. Clareaba y en el ámbito de las selvas no cantó un solo pájaro.

Veinte or treinta minutos de subir y pisé la meseta. Nada me costó imaginar que era más fresca que la aldea, sofocada a su pie. Comprobé que no era la cumbre, sino una suerte de terraza, no demasiado dilatada, y que la jungla se encaramaba hacia arriba, en el flanco de la montaña. Me sentí libre, como si mi permanencia en la aldea hubiera sido una prisión. No me importaba que sus habitantes hubieran querido engañarme; sentí que en algún modo eran niños.

En cuanto al tigre ... Las muchas frustraciones habían gastado mi curiosidad y me fe, pero en manera casi mecánica busqué rastros.

El suelo era agrietado y arenoso. En una de los grietas, que por cierto no eran profundas y que se ramificaban en otros, reconocí un color. Era, increíblemente, el azul

men by marvellous obstacles. Whoever trod there with mortal feet risked coming face to face with God, and going mad or blind. I did not insist. But that night, while the village slept, I slipped quietly from my hut and climbed the easy slope. But there was no path, and the undergrowth slowed me.

The moon was on the horizon. I looked with singular attention at everything: with the foreboding, as if, that the day was going to be important, perhaps the most important of my days. I remember even the dark tints, here and there almost black, of the fallen leaves. Dawn came, and within the surrounding wood not a bird sang.

Twenty or thirty minutes of climbing gained me the flat ground topping the hill. It was much fresher, I readily felt, than the village suffocating at its foot. I ascertained that my plateau was not a summit, however, but a sort of terrace, not too wide or long, which the jungle pressed upward along the flank of a mountain. I felt freed, as if my sojourn in the village had been an imprisonment. That its inhabitants had wished to deceive me did not matter. They were in some way children I felt.

As for the tiger ... the many frustrations had blunted my curiosity and eroded my confidence, but in an almost mechanical way I looked for tracks.

The ground was cracked and sandy. In one of the fissures, which cannot have been deep, and which branched into the near breaks, I recognized a colour: the very blue, incredibly,

del tigre de mi sueño. Ojalá no lo hubiera visto nunca. Me fijé bien. La grieta estaba llena de piedricitas, todos iguales, circulares, muy lisas y de pocos centímetros de diámetro. Su regularidad les prestaba algo artificial, como si fueran fichas.

Me incliné, puse la mano en la grieta y saqué unas cuantas. Sentí un levísimo temblor. Guardé el puñado en el bolsillo derecho, en el que había una tijerita y una carta de Allahabad. Estos dos objetos casuales tienen su lugar in mi historia.

Ya en la choza, me quité la chaqueta. Me tendí en la cama y volví a soñar con el tigre. En el sueño observé el color; era el del tigre ya soñado y el de las piedritas de la meseta. Me despertó el sol alto en la cara. Me levanté. La tijera y la carta me estorbaban para sacar los discos. Saqué un primer puñado y sentí que aún quedaban dos o tres. Una suerte de cosquilleo, una muy leve agitación, dio calor a mi mano. Al abrirla vi que los discos eran treinta o cuarenta. Yo hubiera jurado que no pasaban de diez. Los dejé sobre la mesa y busqué los otros. No precisé contarlos para verificar que se habían multiplicado. Los junté en un solo montón y traté de contarlos uno por uno.

La sencilla operación resultó imposible. Miraba con fijeza cualquiera de ellos, lo sacaba con el pulgar y el índice y cuando estaba solo, eran muchos. Comprobé que no tenía fiebre e hice la prueba muchas veces. El obsceno

of the tiger I had dreamt: and I wish to God I had never seen it.

I was transfixed. The fissure was filled with small stones, each the same: equal discs, very smooth and a few centimetres in diameter. Their regularity made them seem artificial, machined chips as if. Bending, I put my hand in the crack and took out a handful. I felt a slight tremor. I put the discs into my right pocket, in which there were a pair of scissors and a map of Allahabad; and these fortuitous objects, too, have their place in my story.

Back in my hut, I shed my jacket and lay down on my bedding, and dreamt again a tiger. In the dream I observed its colour: it was the blue of the tiger I had already dreamt, and of the stones of my plateau. The high sun on my face woke me. I got up, and reached for the discs. The scissors and the map hindered my hand. I took out a first handful, thinking that two or three at most remained. A sort of tickling, a very slight fluttering, warmed my palm. Opening my hand I saw that the discs were twenty or thirty now. I could have sworn that there had been no more than ten. I placed them on the table and searched for the others. I was not necessary to count them to verify that they had multiplied. But I gathered the discs into one heap and set myself to count them out one by one.

That elementary operation proved impossible. I saw with astonishment that any one of them, drawn away between thumb and forefinger by itself, was many. I felt my pulse and skin for a fever many times over. The obscene

milagro se repetía. Sentí frío en los pies y mi bajo vientre y me temblaban las rodillas. No sé cuánto tiempo pasó.

Sin mirarlos, junté los discos en un solo montón y los tiré por la ventana. Con extraño alivio sentí que había disminuido su número. Cerré la puerta con firmeza y me tendí en la cama. Busqué la posición anterior y quise persuadirme de que todo había sido un sueño. Para no pensar en los discos, para poblar in algún modo el tiempo, repetí con lenta precisión, las ocho definiciones y las siete axiomas de la Ética. No sé si me auxiliaron. En tales exorcismos estaba cuando oí un golpe. Temí instintivamente que me hubieran oído hablar solo y abrí la puerta.

Era el más anciano, Bhagwan Dass. Por un instante su presencia pareció restituirme a lo cotidiano. Salimos. Yo tenía la esperanza de que hubieran desaparecido los discos, pero ahí estaban en la tierra. Ya no sé cuántos eran.

El anciano los miró y me miró.

—Estas piedras no son de aquí. Son las de arriba —dijo en una voz que no era la suya.

—Así es —le respondí. Agregué, no sin desafío, que las había hallado en la meseta, e inmediatamente me avergoncé de darle explicaciones. Bhagwan Dass, sin hacerme caso, se quedó mirándolas

miracle repeated itself. My feet went cold, and my belly, and my knees shook. I do not know how much time went by.

Without looking at them I gathered the discs up in a heap again and flung them out of the window. I felt, with queer relief, that their number had diminished. I pulled the door in firmly and lay myself down. Turning to find the posture I had woken in, I sought to persuade myself that I had dreamt it all. So as to not think of the discs, to occupy my mind in some other way, I repeated with slow precision, loudly, the eight Definitions and the seven Axioms of the *Ethics*. I do not know if they helped. I was gone in such exorcisms when I heard a knock. Instinctively afraid that I had been heard talking to myself, I opened the door.

It was the ancient elder, Bhagwan Dass. For a moment his presence seemed to restore a daily world. We went out. I was hoping that the discs had disappeared. But there they were on the ground: and I do not know how many they now were.

The elder looked at them, and at me.

—These stones are not from here— he said in a voice that was not his —They are from above.

—So they are— I replied. I added, not without defiance, that I had found them on the top of the hill: and was immediately ashamed to have given him any explanation. Not heeding me Bhagwan Dass stood looking on,

fascinado. Le ordené que las recogiera. No se movió.

Me duele confesar que saqué el revolver y repetí la orden en voz más alta.

Bhagwan Dass balbuceó:

—Más vale una bala en el pecho que una piedra azul en la mano.

—Eres un cobarde —le dije.

Yo estaba, creo, no menos aterrado, pero cerré los ojos y recogí un puñado de piedras con la mano izquierda. Guardé el revolver y las dejé caer en la palma abierta de la otra. Su número era mucho mayor.

Sin saberlo ya había ido acostumbrándome a esas transformaciones. Me sorprendieron menos que los gritos de Bhagwan Dass.

—Son las piedras que engendran! — exclamó. Ahora son muchas, pero pueden cambiar. Tienen la forma de la luna cuando está llena y ese color azul que sólo es permitido ver en los sueños. Los padres de mi padres no mentían cuando hablaban de su poder.

La aldea entera nos rodeaba.

Me sentí el magico poseedor de esas maravillas. Ante el asombro unánime, recogía los discos, los elevaba, los dejaba caer, los desparramaba, los veía crecer y multiplicarse y disminuir extrañamente.

La gente se agolpaba, presa de estupor y horror. Los hombres obligaban a sus mujeres a mirar el prodigio. Alguna se tapaba la cara con el antebrazo, alguna apretaba los párpados. Ninguno se animó a tocar

fascinated by the discs. I ordered him to gather them up. He did not move.

It grieves me to confess that I took up my revolver and repeated the order in a very loud voice.

Bhagwan Dass babbled at me:

—Better a bullet in the breast than a blue stone in the hand.

—You are a coward —I said.

I was, I believe, no less afraid. But I closed my eyes and gathered a fistful of the stones in my left hand, and, keeping the gun on him, I let them fall into his open palm. Their number had grown.

Without knowing it I had begun to expect these transformations: and I was not very surprised at the loud alarm of Bhagwan Dass.

—The stones that breed! —he cried out. — They are many now. They may be few once more. They have the shape of the moon when full, their blue is a colour seen only in dreams. The fathers of my fathers did not lie when they spoke of their power!

Drawn by the elder's cry the villagers surrounded us.

I felt myself the magical possessor of these marvels. Before their unanimous dread I gathered the discs, I raised them up and I let them fall, I sprinkled them about, I beheld their alien swelling and multiplying and diminishing.

The village pressed together in horror and amazement. The men made their women look upon the monstrosity. Some covered their faces with their forearms, others pressed tight their eyelids. No one made bold to touch

los discos, salvo un niño feliz que jugó con ellos. En aquel momento sentí que ese desorden estaba profanando el milagro. Junté todos los discos que pude y volví a la choza.

Quizá he tratado de olvidar el resto de aquel día, que fue el primero de una serie desventurado que no ha cesado aún. Lo cierto es que no lo recuerdo. Hacia el atardecer pensé con nostalgia en la vispera, que no había sido particularmente feliz, ya que estuvo poblado, como las otras, por la obsesión del tigre. Quise ampararme en esa imagen, antes armada del poder y ahora baladí. El tigre azul me pareció no menos inocuo que el cisne negro del romano, que se descubrió después in Australia.

Releo mis notas anteriores y compruebo que he cometido un error capital. Desviado por el hábito de esa buena o mala literatura que malamente se llama psicológica, he querido recuperar, no sé por qué, la sucesiva crónica de mi hallazgo. Más me hubiera valido insistir en la monstruosa indole de los discos.

Si me dijeran que hay los unicornios en la luna yo aprobaría o rechazaría ese informe o suspendería mi juicio, pero podría imaginarlos. En cambio, si me dijeran que en la luna seis or siete unicornios pueden ser tres, yo afirmaría de antemano que el hecho era imposible. Quien ha entendido que tres y uno son cuatro no hace la prueba con monedas, con dados, con piezas de ajedrez o con lapices. Lo entiende

the discs: except a child who played happily with them. But I felt then that confusion and disorder were profaning the miracle: and gathered up all the discs I could and went back into my hut.

I may have tried to forget the rest of that day, which was the first of an unfortunate series that has not yet ended. What is certain is that I do not remember its happenings. Toward dusk I thought with regret on the day before: which had not been particularly happy, obsessed as I had been then, as on the days before, with the tiger. I wanted the protection of that image, invested with such power before. But the blue tiger seemed no less innocuous now than the black swan of the Romans, which was afterwards discovered in Australia.

Reading my notes over I see that I have committed a capital error. Drawn off into the ways of that good or bad writing miscalled psychological, I have wanted to chronicle the successions of my luck: to what end I do not know. It would have served me more to dwell upon the monstrous nature of the discs.

Were I told that there are unicorns on the moon I could accept the statement, or reject it, or suspend my judgement. But I could, all the same, imagine the circumstance. Were I on the other hand told that six or seven unicorns could on the moon be three, I would know beforehand that the thing was impossible. Whoever has understood that three and one make four does not make a proof of it with coins or dice, or chessmen, or pencils. One understands,

y basta. No puede concebir otra cifra. Hay matemáticos que afirman que tres y uno es una tautología de cuatro, una manera diferente de decir cuatro ... A mí, Alexander Craigie, me había tocado en suerte descubrir, entre todos los hombres de la tierra, los únicos objetos que contradicen esa ley esencial de la mente humana.

Al principio yo había sufrido el temor de estar loco; con el tiempo creo que hubiera preferido estar loco, ya que mi alucinación personal importaría menos que la prueba de que en el universo cabe el desorden. Si tres y uno pueden ser dos o pueden ser catorce, la razón es una locura.

En aquel tiempo contraí el hábito de soñar con las piedras. La circunstancia de que el sueño no volviera todas las noches me concedía un resquicio de esperanza, que no tardaba en convertirse en terror. El sueño era más or menos el mismo. El principio anunciaba el temido fin. Una baranda y unos escalones de hierro que bajaban en espiral y luego un sótano o un sistema de sótanos que se ahondaban en otras escaleras cortadas casi a pico, en herrerías, en cerrajerías, en calabozos y en pantanos. En el fondo, en su esperada grieta, las piedras, que eran también Behemoth o Leviathan, los animales que significan en la Escritura que el Señor es irracional. Yo me despertaba temblando y ahí estaban las piedras en el cajón, listas a transformarse.

La gente era distinta conmigo. Algo de la divinidad de los discos, que ellos

and there it is: one cannot entertain another summing. There are mathematicians who maintain that three and one are a tautology of four, another way of saying four ... and it had fallen to me, Alexander Craigie, among all men on earth, to chance fatally upon the only objects contradicting that essential law of the human mind.

In the beginning I had feared to be mad. But I would sooner have been mad, I came to believe, because my own hallucinations would matter so much less than proof that the universe allowed disorder. Were three and one able to make two here and fourteen there, reason would be madness.

It was then that I began to dream always of the stones. The circumstance that the dream did not return every night gave me a glimmer of hope first: which did not delay much in changing to terror.

The dream was more or less the same: and the beginning announced the dreaded end. A railing, and iron stairs that fell in a spiral, and then a cellar or a system of cellars that descended along steps cut to blades almost, through foundries, forges, dungeons then, toward a morass, and in that depth, in their expected fissure, the intent stones — which were Behemoth or Leviathan also, the beasts of the Book who prove our Lord mad. I would wake trembling: and there the stones were, in my drawer, readying their changes.

The villagers were different with me now. The divinity of the discs — which they had themselves named

apodaban tigres azules, me había tocado, pero asimismo me sabían culpable de haber profanado la cumbre. En cualquier instante de la noche, en cualquier instante del día, podían castigarme los dioses. No se atrevieron a atacarme o condenar mi acto, pero noté que todos eran ahora peligrosamente serviles. No volví a ver al niño que había jugado con los discos. Temí el veneno o un puñal en la espalda. Una mañana, antes del alba, me evadí de la aldea. Sentí que la población entera me espiaba y que mi fuga fue un alivio. Nadie, desde aquella primera mañana, había querido ver las piedras.

Volví a Lahore. En mi bolsillo estaba el puñado de discos. El ámbito familiar de mis libros no me trajo el alivio que yo buscaba. Sentí que en el planeta persistían la aborrecida aldea y la jungla y el declive espinoso con la meseta y en la meseta las pequeñas grietas y en las grietas las piedras. Mis sueños confundían y multiplicaban esas cosas dispares. La aldea era las piedras, la jungla era la ciénaga, y la ciénaga era la jungla.

Rehuí la compañía de mis amigos. Temí ceder a la tentación de mostrarles ese milagro atroz que socavaba la ciencia de los hombres.

Ensayé diversos experimentos. Hice una incisión en forma de la cruz en uno de los discos. Lo barajé entre los demás y lo perdí al cabo de uno o dos conversiones, aunque la cifra de los discos había aumentado. Hice una prueba análoga con un disco al que había cercenado con un lima, un

blue tigers — that had touched me. But they knew me guilty, all the same, of having profaned their mountain, and at any moment of the night, at any moment of the day, the gods might punish me. No one ventured to attack me, or condemn the deed, but I noted that everyone was now dangerously servile. I did not go again to see the child who had played with the discs. I feared poison or a dagger in the back. Early one morning, before it was light, I quit the village. I felt that everyone had been spying on me, and that my going was a relief. No one, after that first day, had wanted to see the stones.

I returned to Lahore with a handful of the discs in my pocket. The familiar ambit of my books did not bring the relief I sought. I knew that the abhorred village remained on the planet, and the jungle, and the thorny slope to the little plateau, and on the plateau the small fissures, and in the fissures the stones. My dreams confounded and multiplied those disparate things. The village became the stones, the jungle was the swamp, the swamp, jungle.

I avoided the company of my friends: I feared I would yield to temptation, and display to them the atrocious miracle that undid all the science men possess.

I attempted various experiments. Making an incision in the shape of the cross on one of them, I slid the disc in among the rest. I lost it after one or two conversions, even though the others had multiplied. I made an analogous trial with a disc I had pared, with a file, to an

arco de círculo. Éste asimismo se perdió. Con un punzón abrí un orificio en el centro de un disco y repetí la prueba. Lo perdí para siempre. Al otro día regresó de su estadia en la nada el disco de la cruz. Qué misterioso espacio era ese, que absorbía las piedras y devolvía una que otra, obedeciendo a leyes inescrutables o a un arbitrio inhumano?

El mismo anhelo de orden que en el principio creó las matemáticas hizo que yo buscara un orden en esa aberración de las matemáticas que son las insensatas piedras que engendran. En sus imprevisibles variaciones quise hallar una ley. Consagré los días y las noches a fijar una estadística de los cambios. De esa etapa conservo unos cuadernos, cargados vanamente de cifras. Mi procedimiento era éste. Contaba con los ojos las piezas y anotaba la cifra. Luego las dividía en dos puñados que arrojaba sobre la mesa. Contaba las dos cifras y anotaba, y repetía la operación. Inútil fue la búsqueda de un dibujo secreto en las rotaciones. El máximo de piezas que logré fue cuatrocientas diecinueve; el mínimo, tres. Hubo un momento que esperé, o temí, que desaparecieran. A poco de ensayar comprobé que un disco aislado de los otros no podía multiplicarse o desaparecer.

Naturalmente, las cuatro operaciones de sumar, restar, multiplicar

arc of its circle. That was lost the same way. With a punch I opened a hole in the centre of a disc and repeated the test. I lost that for good. But the next day my disc with the cross returned from its sojourn in nothingness — what mysterious space was that, which absorbed the stones and returned one rather than another, obedient to some inscrutable law or will inhumanly free?

The same longing for order that in its beginnings had possessed mathematics impelled me to seek some order in the aberrations of number these insensate and breeding stones produced. In their unforeseeable variations I wanted to find a law. I gave my days and nights over to the formulation of a statistic sufficient to their changes. I keep some copybooks from this phase, uselessly loaded with numbers.

My proceedings were thus. I counted the gathered pieces with my eyes and noted down that number; divided them straight in two handfuls that I cast apart on the table; then counted the two lots and noted down those numbers. I performed my operations over and over. The search for some formula secreted within these repetitions proved useless. The largest sum I obtained was four hundred and nineteen; the smallest, three. There was a moment when I hoped, or feared maybe, that they would disappear. But some trial disclosed that a single disc far enough away from the others could neither multiply nor disappear.

Naturally, the four operations of adding, subtracting, multiplying

o dividir eran imposibles. Las piedras se negaban a la aritmética y al cálculo de probabilidades. Cuarenta discos podían, divididos, dar nueve; los nueve divididos a su vez, podían ser trescientos. No sé cuánto pesaban. No recurrí a una balanza, pero estoy seguro de que su peso era constante y leve. El color era siempre aquel azul.

Estas operaciones me ayudaron a salvarme de la locura. Al manejar las piedras que destruyen la ciencia matemática, pensé más de una vez en aquellas piedras griego que fueron las primeras guarismos y que han legado a tantos idiomas la palabra “calculo”. Las matemáticas, me dije, tienen su origen y ahora su fin en las piedras. Si Pítagoras hubiera operado con estas ...

Al término de un mes comprendí que el caos era inextricable. Ahí estaban indómitos los discos y la perpetua tentación de tocarlos, de volver a sentir el cosquilleo, de arrojarlos, de verlos aumentar o decrecer, y de fijarme pares o impares. Llegué a temer que contaminaran las cosas y particularmente los dedos que insistían manejarlos.

Durante unos días me impuse el íntimo deber de pensar continuamente en las piedras, porque sabía que el olvido sólo podía ser momentáneo y que redescubrir mi tormento sería intolerable.

No dormí la noche del 10 de febrero. Al cabo de una caminata que me llevó hasta el alba, traspuse los portales

and dividing were impossible. The stones negated arithmetic and the calculus of probabilities. Forty discs could, divided and cast apart, amount to nine; and these nine divided in their turn could become three hundred. I do not know how much they weighed. I did not resort to a balance, but I am sure their weight was constant and light. Their colour was always that blue.

These operations helped me save myself from madness. Handling the stones which destroyed the science of mathematics I thought more than once on the stones the Greeks had made their first figures with: which have bequeathed to all languages the word ‘calculus’. Mathematics had its origin in stones, I told myself, and now ends in them. Had Pythagoras operated with these ...

By the end of a month I understood that the chaos was irremediable. There lay the indomitable discs — and the temptation perpetual, even so, to touch them, to feel again their tremor, to cast them apart, to witness their surcrease or diminution, to discern parities or imbalances. I came to fear a general contamination, particularly of the fingers that insisted on trying the discs.

For some days the intimate compulsion to think continually upon the stones imposed itself on me. I knew that forgetting was bound to be momentary, only, and to discover my torment again would be intolerable.

I did not sleep the night of the 10th of February; and, pacing it through, toward dawn I came through the gates

de la mezquita de Wazil Khan. Era la hora en que la luz no ha revelado aún los colores. No había un alma en el patio. Sin saber por qué, hundí las manos en el agua de la cisterna. Ya en el recinto, pensé que Dios y Alá son dos nombres de un solo Ser inconcebible y le pedí en voz alta que me librara de mi carga. Inmóvil, aguardé una contestación.

No oí los pasos, pero una voz cercana me dijo:

—He venido.

A mi lado estaba un mendigo. Descifré en el crepúsculo el turbante, los ojos apagados, la piel cetrina y la barba gris. No era muy alto.

Me tendió la mano y me dijo, siempre en voz baja:

—Una limosna, Protector de los Pobres.

Busqué, y le respondí:

—No tengo una sola moneda.

—Tienes muchas — fue la contestación.

En mi bolsillo derecho estaban las piedras. Saqué una y la dejé caer en la mano hueca. No se oyó el menor ruido.

—Tienes que darme todos — me dijo—. El que no ha dado todos no ha dado nada.

Comprendí, y le dije:

—Quiero que sepas que mi limosna puede ser espantosa.

Me contestó:

—Acaso esa limosna es la única que puedo recibir. He pecado.

Dejé caer todas las piedras en la cóncava mano. Cayeron como en el fondo del mar, sin el rumor más leve.

of the mosque of Wazil Khan. It was the hour in which the light has not yet revealed any colours. There wasn't a soul in the courtyard. Without knowing why I sank my hands in the water of the cistern. Within his precincts already, I acknowledged that God and Allah were two names for one inconceivable Being, and asked in a loud voice that I should be delivered of my burden. Not moving, I awaited some reply.

I heard no steps, but a near voice sounded:

—I have come.

A beggar was at my side. I made out in the low light the turban, the dead eyes, the yellowed skin, and the grey beard. He was not very tall.

He put out his hand and said, in a voice always low:

—Alms, Protector of the Poor.

I searched, and answered:

—I haven't a single coin.

—You have much — came the reply. In my right pocket were the stones. I drew one and let it fall into his empty hand. Its faint noise went unheard.

—You must give me all — he said.

—He who has not given everything has given nothing.

I understood, and said to him:

—I want that you should know: my charity could be a horror.

He replied:

—Perhaps this kindness is the only one I may receive. I have sinned.

I let fall all the stones into the hollow of his hand. They fell as if into the depths of the sea, without the least sound.

Después me dijo:
—No sé aún cuál es tu limosna, pero la mía es espantosa. Te quedas con los días y las noches, con la cordura, con los hábitos, con el mundo.
No oí los pasos del mendigo ciego ni lo vi perderse en el alba.

He said to me then:
—I do not know yet how great your charity is. But mine is a horror. You will linger with the days and the nights, with the world, understanding neither less nor more, doing as you ever do.
I did not hear the steps of the blind beggar, nor see him lose himself in the dawn.

afterword

Borges has his professor of Logic wake from nightmare trembling and certain that his “insensate and breeding stones” are *tambien Behemoth o Leviathan, los animales que significan en la Escritura que el Señor es irracional*: and the reader who tests my englishing of his direly dreamed going, against the deliberate Spanish of the *ficcion*, may well conclude that I have taken needless liberties — which may have seemed lamentably *gongoriste* licence, even, to an author who wished his words to sound *the bronze of Quevedo*. But I found myself unable, as I sought to keep my words within some register properly oneiric, to recover either the measured recounting of the descent, or the professorial diction in the pit: and ‘Behemoth or Leviathan or both, the beasts of The Book who prove our Lord mad’ is the best I have been able to do — eliding punctuation and auxiliary so as to prolong into its crisis my headlong fall into the nightmare of the tale.

The man who recalls the book of Job will remember, now, the supernal *ratio* of Jahweh’s final reply to the remonstrances of his faithful creature: and saying ‘el Señor es irracional’ out to themselves may bring back to Borges’ natural auditors, even now, God’s reason lowering upon men’s reasonings there, the darkness visible to chastened Job. But the *koine* that English has now become, in the McWorld we go within, that tongue needs no theodicy; and in the functional “globish” the language is everywhere becoming, superintended by commerce and science, the word ‘irracional’ would do for Borges’ *ficcion* no more, I feared, than the anodyne ‘not rational’ could. One could tell the tale over so that its fatal recognition is better relayed by literal transcription — ‘Behemoth or Leviathan also, the animals that in the Bible signify that the Lord is irrational’ — and doing so would keep its protagonist more composed, certainly, than I have left him at its end; more professorial maybe; and a translator whose first loyalty is to “character” may chide me for the traces of hysteria I have now and again had Alexander Craigie betray.

I cannot tell how much I have compromised the fiction thereby — the remainder of the transcription is as literal as possible — but I hope I have been able, all the same, to show how the *ficcion* carries off the extra-ordinary concetto of its title: as one will surely think when its blue tigers show themselves for what they are. That Borges should have succeeded in figuring a metaphysical or ontological horror just so — the words do not

name some chimæra of mind only, I trust — that the fiction should have succeeded even so, or instructively failed in the attempt, else, that is surely what makes *Tigres Azules* a work of literary art: and I must hazard trying to say how the work figures its singular horror; as I think it successfully does, in fact. But that figuring does not consist, I shall note already, in the reader coming to feel anything like horror, at all, by any sort of empathy.

I do not know how loudly the ghost of Spinoza should be brought on, now, and I cannot say how present that spectre would have been to the story's contemporaries: the continental revival of Spinoza's philosophical fortunes, toward the close of the last century, had not quite begun when it appeared. One risks a great deal, of course, by lowering a philosopher *ex machina* upon the doings of fiction; in any variant of English, surely: the technical manner of anglophone philosophizing could only repel those sensitive souls, so one supposes, whose nurture has been the particular concern of the "programs in creative writing" that the universities of McWorld administer; whose principals have so much saynow in the publishing of literary work; and the practicings upon words of whose "products" will soon come, one thinks, to be definitive of literary norm.

Just how a reader averse to philosophy might have heard our protagonist repeat, with *slow precision, loudly, the eight Definitions and the seven Axioms of the Ethics*, that might better be passed over in silence than. The circumstance may bear very little thinking on actually, all said — just as little thinking upon as Bertram's gladly leaving Spinoza to Jeeves, say, in the marvellous entertainments of Wodehouse — and a reader who merely notes the detail may well be taking in the story as its author would have wanted. I certainly did not open up my copy of the *Ethica more Geometrico* just then; and I cannot say that my rendering of the story would have gone otherwise had I in fact done so. Neither did I ask myself, as I went about the business of translating, just what makes *Tigres Azules* a work of art: the question would have addled my head just then. But taken whole 'the figuring of ontological horror' seems a formula that does describe, and properly, the distinctive doing-with-words of the *fiction*. One may wonder if ontological horror can be figured at all, of course; and if so, how. Spinoza would very likely have thought that impossible — disdaining poetry as he did — even had he granted that metaphysical understanding could end in horror: a concession altogether unlikely, of course, when one considers that the aim and end of such understanding is *the bliss of knowing the union that obtains between mind and nature*, as his tract *On the Emendation of the Intellect* asserts.

I have supposed otherwise however; and must insist perforce that the monstrosity needs no sign besides — just as truth needs none for Spinoza — because *the mode in which we perceive an actual reality is certainty*, no less, so he avers in *On the Emendation of the Intellect*. But I must record that the figuration of ontological horror I assert would not be imaginal at all, finally, sensuous else or no: could not be so: even if any such figuring could happen only within some coronal darkness — some eclipse of mind, as it must seem to persevering readers of the *Ethics*, surely — within and through which we will fall away from such apprehending as we may have risen toward, haply, of the singular and single substance that the *Deus sive Natura* of the *Ethica more Geometrico* is: *which is in itself* and which is *conceived through itself*: which One Substance would disclose itself

entire to perfected understanding only, to understanding perfected by knowing *as bliss* the union that obtains between mind and nature; and would disclose itself entire and entirely, thereupon, through each of those *infinite attributes* that *the intellect perceives as constituting its essence*.

I have just run together those initial Definitions of the *Ethics* that are numbered 3, 4 and 6; having conceded already the crowning proposition that *besides God no substance may be granted or conceived*; and the notorious and reprobated conflation of God with Nature, *Deus sive Natura*. I do not know how licit it is to clear the ground for *figura* thus: by construing Definitions 3 and 4 counterfactually. But the caveats that *On the Emendation of the Intellect* advances surely warrant the move: so, for instance, I take 4 to assert that an infinite attribute is what we *would* perceive truly, as something constituting the essence of substance, *were* our intellects perfected.

Votaries of Spinoza are agreed that understanding the *Ethics* whole would depend on construing aright the kinds and characters of the divine attributes: the cardinal and contraposed attributes of Thought and Extension not least. That is not easily done: so I shall hazard, now, that *Tigres Azules* figures metaphysical horror by narrating just as it does just how its protagonist succumbs to the inconceivable infinity of Extension manifested as such in “the stones that negate arithmetic and the calculus of probabilities.” To a mind that can take the *Ethics* in whole, and keep with it so, the infinitude of the attributes would be mystery no more. But our finite minds do not come equipped for supernal clarities; and Definition 6 of the *Ethics* posits God as *a substance consisting in infinite attributes, each of which expresses infinite essentiality*.

To take the mensural aberrations the discs display for manifestations of the inconceivably infinite character of Extension, as I have just done, that does seem proper here — because the random summings to which they reduce our professor of logic are not limited in any way by our usual summations of number. To see why, though, one must submit one’s understanding of the term ‘limit’ to the Definitions of the *Ethics*. Counting out any given number of the stones would be an operation of a kind with our summings of numbers themselves; or contrive to suppose so, at least; and consider now that Definition 2 makes anything *finite after its kind* only if it may be limited by another of its own nature. The infinity of the natural numbers is conceivable; is adequately conceived with the axioms of Peano, so I shall suppose: but the articulation of axiom proceeds upon secure possession within mind — and “had Pythagoras operated” with such stones as ours the natural numbers may never have become a secure possession of the human mind, so one must take our tale to imply. It is against the achieved order-in-mind of the natural numbers, then, that the wilful mensuration of the discs would become an inconceivable infinity: closed within which defeat “reason would be madness.”

It seems proper, as well, to assert that the “irremediable chaos” of the wilfully multiplying stones discloses the inconceivable infinity of Extension, of that attribute particularly, more than a like and weird infinity of its complement Thought. The dedicated reader of Spinoza would demur, of course, persuaded or not by our tale. But I shall not attempt to defend that epistemological proposition, as it might seem; and shall only insist, again, that the figuring of horror in *Tigres Azules* consists in the narrating of a particular movement of mind, of mind succumbing to an inconceivable infinity of Extension.

I need not remark — but shall, nonetheless — that the postulated horror does not consist in the reader picturing anyhow and starting up at “the obscene miracle” of “the insensate and breeding” discs: even if our professor had wanted, upon that, the “protection” of the image of the blue tiger he had first dreamed, which had been “invested with such power” before; and neither does the fiction’s figuring of horror consist, to say it again, in bringing readers to feel any sort of empathetic horror. The ordinary use of the word ‘figuring’ may be properly extended in this way, I trust; and were I asked in what, precisely, such figuring does consist, I could only point, just now, to the way in which the successive namings of the discs as stones and vice-versa comes to *pace* disclosure, to clock its protagonist’s succumbing to the wild infinitude they manifest.

That the tale should end as it does seems almost ordained now. To “linger with the world, understanding neither less nor more” than one merely happens to ... to a disciple of Spinoza that would be a horror obverse, exactly, to the bliss that the union of mind with nature would be: durant awareness endless and mockingly the moving image of sentient Eternity ... or so a votary of Plato might say.

I cannot venture much more regarding the distinctive doing-with-words that, as I think, does indeed make *Tigres Azules* a work of literary art; and must leave these speculations to the reader’s judgment as summarily as they have been advanced.

It remains to note that the fiction may well be received otherwise, as the fatal misadventure of the distinctive person Alexander Craigie seems to be: even if, and perhaps precisely because, he himself laments that “it would have served me more to dwell upon the monstrous nature of the discs rather than to chronicle, to what end I do not know, the successions of my luck.” One might imagine some apostate sectary of Calvin now — a logician and a prodigal-of-reason, so to cast him, straying in mind from Covenanted forebears sternly simple in their faith — a man who, tempted to impiety by the seeming clarity and sufficiency of the *Ethica more Geometrico*, made mistakenly wise, is brought low before the Lord of his staunch fathers, and doomed to linger, in the world and of it perforce, by the “inconceivable being” their God has proved: a god straitly his Lord again.

Readers who take in the story could amuse themselves with Spinoza: by tagging passages here and there with formulae from the *Ethics* and noting stray suggestions of doctrine. The seeming happenstance that “a single disc far enough away from the others could neither multiply nor disappear” for instance: that might show nicely contrapuntal, now, to the proposition in the *Ethics* which asserts the indivisibility of substance — and that “the scissors and the map of Allahabad” come to “have their place” in Craigie’s tale by having hindered his hand, only, and to no effect, as he reached for the discs, before they showed themselves for what they were: that may be some genuflection toward the entirely determined course of *Natura naturata*. So I must argue, and shall, that such suggestion only prepares the later diminution of *Deus sive Natura* into the “will inhumanly free” within the stones that confound Number — what the Universe itself was, once, to votaries of Pythagoras — but the man who likes his fiction plain will not want such saucing.

Exercises of this sort would serve to fill out the professorial character and circumstances of Alexander Craigie — that the tale is set in an India conjured out of Kipling may matter much; he is a white man among natives, of course; but that he should come to grief by taking the villagers for children, and end just as he does, that is formally apt now — and, importantly, we may read *Blue Tigers* as Craigie's story without having to try our minds upon the postulates of the *Ethica more Geometrico*: while the reading I propose would require just such trial. That the making or taking-in of literature should be burdened with philosophical labour, at all, will seem egregious to the majority of writers and readers; and rightly so, perhaps, for literary art might only be obscured thus ... Socrates may have discerned something divine in poetry: but poets and their readers tangle with philosophers at their own risk maybe.

It might be well then, all told, to receive *Tigres Azules* as Alexander Craigie's misadventure, and to relay with a logician's sobriety what befell him — seeking just so the *recta noticia* that the librarian of Babel had sought — and I must make apology, now, for having delayed to no purpose those prudent readers who had heard the tale out even so.