

Record: 7**Title:** Taylor's The Preface and *Borges's* John 1:14.**Subject(s):** TAYLOR, Edward; BORGES, Jorge Luis**Source:** Explicator, Spring93, Vol. 51 Issue 3, p151, 3p**Author(s):** Polette, Keith**Abstract:** Discusses the link between Edward Taylor, a seventeenth-century Puritan colonial minister and Jorge Luis Borges, a twentieth-century secular Argentine writer. Power of imagination to unify opposites and thus reveal the interplay between the eternal and the temporal; Poetic visions of two important acts of creation; Taylor's revision of the wonder of Genesis in his 'Preface'; Borges' interpretation of the poetry of St. John's Gospel; More.**AN:** 9309287583**ISSN:** 0014-4940**Database:** MasterFILE Premier**TAYLOR'S THE PREFACE AND *BORGES'S* JOHN 1:14**

The power of the imagination to unify opposites and thus reveal the interplay between the eternal and the temporal, or the Divine and the human, links Edward Taylor, a seventeenth-century Puritan colonial minister, to Jorge Luis Borges, a twentieth-century secular Argentine writer. Separated by time and language, Taylor and Borges become, in a sense, two human eyes in the face of God. The two writers offer poetic visions of two important acts of creation: Taylor revises the wonder of Genesis in his "Preface," and Borges sees with bright and broad eyes the poetry of St. John's Gospel. Both poets, via the imagination, reconcile and harmonize oppositional forces and ideas by discovering the sacred in the experience of the profane. They express their experience of this discovery in clear, common language and sing in simple human song of that which is more than human. It might be said that God, or the poets' conception of God, is "languaged alive" through each writer's pen.

Taylor describes a God who deliberately fashioned the world. The God he writes about is not the distant, judgmental God who presided darkly over the Puritan world, but a God who works and works hard. In the "Preface," Taylor writes,

Upon what base was fixed the Lath wherein
He turned the Globe, and rigged it so trim?
Who blew the bellows of his Furnace Vast? (lines 3-5)

Here, Taylor envisions a different kind of God, not one who waved his hand, uttered some magic words, and pulled the universe from his Godly top hat. Taylor's God is a working God surrounded by wood and iron, soot and smoke, whose determined brow is smudged with grime, whose face drips with sweat, and whose hands are rough and calloused. Such a God grunts and groans in the act of hammering out the universe on the anvil of the imagination.

Moreover, Taylor has a vision of this same rough-handed God as a God who "Laced and Filleted the earth so fine" (9), and who "made the Sea its Selvedge" (11). This God, then, is also soft, gentle, and feminine and has an eye for beauty and intricate design. For Taylor to imagine that God is both male and female, that he/she resides in all human endeavors and is to be found not only in heaven, but in the objects of nature and of human construction shows evidence of twofold consciousness. Taylor sees God through the interplay of the masculine and the feminine, the sacred and profane, the temporal and the eternal, and the conscious and the unconscious.

Jorge Luis Borges expresses the same twofold consciousness in his poem "John 1:14" by showing the cross-fertilizing of the eternal with the temporal. In his poem, Borges suggests that God, being a mystery that human beings will never fully understand, still needs language to become a reality for humanity; he writes, "I who am the Was, the Is, and the Is To Come again condescend to the written word...which is no more than an emblem" (7-10). The "word which is no more than an emblem" becomes the linguistic thread that gently yokes the Divine to the human, or the eternal to the temporal.

Once made flesh through the word, God (through Borges, or through *Borges's* persona) speaks of those human things that he "knew" and valued: "memory, hope, fear, sleep, dreams, ignorance, flesh, the blind devotion of dogs" (22-26). He continues, "My eyes saw what they had never seen-- night and its many stars" (29-30). Here the Divine describes the experience of immediate temporality in concrete language. Through such use of language, the Divine becomes known and knowable through self-reflexivity. This seems to echo the Zen notion that until enlightenment occurs the human mind is like a hand trying to grasp itself or an eye trying to see itself. Borges may be suggesting that God needs man in order to be God. Or, put another way, infinity without finity conjoined is ultimately formless and without emblematic meaning.

Borges understands what Taylor understood, that the experience of God is the experience of the imagination's power to penetrate finitude in order to discover infinitude. By such penetration followed by reflection and the creation of poetry, Taylor and Borges have granted the world its being by knowing that God can not only "turn this globe upon his lathe," but also feel "homesick" when thinking back upon "the smell of that carpenter's shop." Thus, Borges and Taylor experience the world in which a Divine presence signals that distinctions exist without divisions, that discordant opposites are reconciled, and that the unconscious and the conscious are harmonized.

WORKS CITED

Borges, Jorge Luis. *In Praise of Darkness*. New York: Dutton, 1969.

Taylor, Edward. "The Preface." *The American Tradition in Literature*. Ed. George Perkins, Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, and E. Hudson Long. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990.

~~~~~  
By KEITH POLETTE, St. Louis University

Copyright of *Explicator* is the property of Heldref Publications and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission except for the print or download capabilities of the retrieval software used for access. This content is intended solely for the use of the individual user.

Source: *Explicator*, Spring93, Vol. 51 Issue 3, p151, 3p.

Item Number: 9309287583