

From  
*A Personal Anthology*  
By Jorge Luis Borges  
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## THE WITNESS

In a stable lying almost in the shadow of the new stone church, a man with gray eyes and a gray beard, stretched on the ground amidst the animal odors, meekly seeks death like someone seeking sleep. The day, faithful to vast secret laws, continuously displaces and confounds the shadows in the wretched stable. Outside stretch the tilled fields, a deep ditch filled up with dead leaves, and the tracks of a wolf in the black mud where the woods begin. The man sleeps and dreams, forgotten. The bells calling to prayer awake him. In the kingdoms of England, the sound of the bells is already one of the customs of the afternoon, but the man, while still a boy, had seen the face of Woden, had seen holy dread and exultation, had seen the rude wooden idol weighed down with Roman coins and heavy vestments, seen the sacrifice of horses, dogs, and prisoners. Before dawn he would be dead and with him would die, never to return, the last firsthand images of the pagan rites. The world would be poorer when this Saxon was no more.

We may well be astonished by space-filling acts which come to an end when someone dies, and yet something, or an infinite number of things, die in each death—unless there is a universal memory, as the theosophists have conjectured. There was a day in time when the last eyes to see Christ were closed forever. The battle of Junín and the love of Helen died with the death of some one man. What will die with me when I die? What pathetic or frail form will the world lose? Perhaps the voice of Macedonio Fernandez, the image of a horse in the vacant space at Serrano and Charcas, a bar of sulfur in the drawer of a mahogany desk?

—Translated by ANTHONY KERRIGAN