

Isaac Amoah

65 Lines consist of an INFINITE number of points; planes an infinite number of lines; volumes an infinite number of planes, hypervolumes an infinite number of volumes... No, this, this more geometric, is definitely not the best way to begin my tale. ²Affirming a fantastic tale's truth is now a story-telling convention; mine, though, is true.

"I live alone, in a fourth-floor apartment on Belgrano Street. One evening a few months ago, I heard a knock on the door. I opened it and in walked someone I had never met before. He was a tall man, of indistinct features. My myopia perhaps made me see him that way. Everything about him seemed to me of an honest poverty. He was dressed in grey and carried a grey valise. I sensed immediately that he was a foreigner. 'At first I thought him an old man; later I noticed that what misled me was his sparse hair, almost white, and his face, like a Scandinavian's.' Over the course of our conversation, which would last no longer than an hour, I learnt that he hailed from the Orkneys. I showed him his seat. The man paused a moment before speaking. 'He exuded a melancholy air, as do I now.'

"In this house there are several English Bibles, including John Wyclif's, the first of all. I also have Cypriano de Valera's, Luther's — which, as a piece of literature, is the worst of the lot — and a copy of the Vulgate in Latin. As you can see, it's not Bibles I have a need for."

³⁰He opened his valise and placed the book on the table. It was a clothbound octavo volume which had undoubtedly

passed through many hands. I examined the book; its unexpected heft surprised me. ¹⁰On the spine was printed Holy Writ and below that Bombay.

¹² "From the nineteenth century I'd hazard," I observed.

¹¹ I opened it at random. The characters were unfamiliar. The pages, which appeared to me worn and of poor typographic quality, were printed in two columns like a Bible. The text was cramped and arranged in versicles. In the upper corner of each page were Arabic numerals. ¹² It caught my attention that the even-numbered page bore, let's say, the number 40,514 and the odd-numbered page that followed 999. I turned the page; the overleaf bore an eight-digit number. ¹³ Also printed was a small illustration, like those in dictionaries: an anchor drawn in pen and ink, as though by a child's unskilled hand.

¹⁷It was then that the stranger told me:
"Study the page well. You will never see it again."

¹⁹There was a threat in what he said, but not in his voice. I took note of the page and shut the volume. I reopened it immediately.

²⁰In vain I searched for the figure of the anchor, page after page. To hide my discomfort, I said to him:

²⁰"No," he replied.

²⁹Then he lowered his voice as if entrusting me with a

*I acquired the book in a small town on the plains for a few rupees and a Bible. Its owner didn't know how to read. I suspect that he saw the Book of Books as an amulet.

Jorge Luis Borges, 1975

²⁸ "A black-letter Wyclif!" he murmured.

²⁰ I went to my bedroom and I brought back the money and book. He turned the pages and studied the binding with the fervour of a bibliophile.

"It's a deal," he said.

"I was astonished that he did not haggle. Only afterwards did I realise that he had entered my house with the intention of selling the book. He didn't count the bills; he put them

⁴³We chatted about India, the Orkneys and the Norwegian girls who had governed there. ⁴⁴Night had fallen by the time he had left. ⁴⁵I never saw him again, nor do I know his name. ⁴⁶I thought of keeping the Book of Sand in the space left behind by the Wyclif Bible's absence. ⁴⁷In the end I opted to hide it behind several misshapen volumes of Thousand and One Nights.

"I went to bed and could not sleep." At around three of four in the morning I turned on the light. I searched for the impossible book and turned its pages. In one of them I saw printed a mark. In the corner the page bore a number. I don't remember which anyone - that was raised to the ninth power. I showed my treasure to no one. Against the joy of possessing the book grew the fear that it would be stolen, and later the suspicion that it was not truly infinite. Both these worries aggravated my already long-standing

"I had few friends still alive. I stopped seeing them. Precious of the Book, I almost never left the house. I examined the worn spine and cover with a magnifying glass, and I discounted the possibility of some kind of artifice. I found that the small illustrations were spaced two thousand pages apart from one to the other. I noted them down in a small alphabetised notebook, which did not take long to fill. They never repeated. At night, in the scarce intervals insomnia withdrew its hold over, I dreamed of the book.

"Summer was coming to an end and I realised that the book was monstrous. There was no consolation in the thought that ~~it~~ ^{the} less monstrous was I, who perceived the book with eyes and touched it with ten nailed fingers. I felt the book to be a nightmarish object, something obscene that slanders and compromises reality. I thought of fire, but I feared that the burning of an infinite book would be just as infinite and suffocate the planet with smoke.

"I remember having read that the best place to hide a leaf is in a forest. Before retiring, I worked in the National Library, which housed nine hundred thousand books; I know that to the right of the lobby a curved staircase descends to the basement, where the newspapers and maps are stored."

¹I took advantage of the librarians' inattentiveness for a moment to lose the Book of Sand in one of the buried shelves. I tried not to notice how high or how far from the door.

~~the road~~ now, but I do avoid even passing by
Mexico Street.

I feel somewhat relieved