

*Arts & Letters***THE GOLD OF THE TIGERS: Selected Later Poems**

by Jorge Luis Borges
Dutton, 1977, 95 pp.
\$3.95 paper, \$8.95 cloth
L of C 77-7479
ISBN 0-525-11458-0
ISBN 0-525-03465-X pbk

THE BOOK OF SAND

by Jorge Luis Borges
Dutton, 1977, 125 pp. \$7.95
L of C 77-8418
ISBN 0-525-06992-5

Alastair Reid (translator of the poems) has written that "it does a great disservice to Borges to isolate any one branch of his writing from any other, for they are all parts of a vertiginous whole." Thus the two volumes here, along with the great Argentine writer's previous works, should best be read as companions. The poems serve almost as notes for the stories, and the stories (translated by Norman Thomas Di Giovanni) amplify the poems. Borges's familiar themes recur: Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon literature play a part in "Ulrike" in *The Book of Sand*—a story about a meeting between a mythical Norwegian girl and a literary Colombian bachelor in England. Whitman-like "list" poems in *The Gold of the Tigers* call up Bede, Shakespeare, Berkeley's God. Borges, now in his 70s and blind, moves easily from form to form, always inhabiting the same poetic world, whose center is the paradox of language. It is a world where all things exist at once, on occasionally converging planes, as in the Japanese-sounding "It Is Raining" (one of "Fifteen Coins"): *In what yesterday, in what patios of Carthage/does this rain also fall?*

CAUGHT IN THE WEB OF WORDS: James A. H. Murray and the Oxford English Dictionary

by K. M. Elisabeth Murray
Yale, 1977, 386 pp. \$15
L of C 77-76309
ISBN 0-300-02131-3

At age two, in 1838, James Murray took a primer into the nursery "to show little brudder [a new baby in the family] round O and crooked S." The roundness and crookedness of the English tongue was to occupy the maker of the great *Oxford English Dictionary* almost all his days. An extraordinarily eclectic Scotsman (he taught the young Alexander Graham Bell about electricity), Murray took on the dictionary task in 1879. He started with a mildewed, rat-gnawed mass of haphazard notes dating back to 1857. Practically without funds, depending on erratic but dedicated volunteers (including many Americans), fighting the criticism of Oxford scholars who scorned his lack of formal academic training, Murray doggedly set the pattern for the *OED* and pursued it against all

odds. He had almost finished (literally crossing the final T's) before his death in 1915. His granddaughter's biography gives us the whole eminently Victorian story.

**A DICTIONARY OF
CATCH PHRASES: British
and American, from the Six-
teenth Century to the Pres-
ent Day**

by Eric Partridge
Stein & Day, 1977
278 pp. \$17.95
L of C 77-8750
ISBN 0-8128-2321-4

"Man is a creature who lives not by bread alone but principally by catchwords," wrote Robert Louis Stevenson. A catchword may be like a catch phrase, but lexicographer Partridge, who has compiled many collections of slang and clichés, along with more scholarly works, prefers to define it by example rather than precept. From "all chiefs and no Indians" (Australia, surprisingly, 1940) to "demure as a whore at a christening" (Britain, 1726), he ranges through the quaint, the colorful, and the unseemly. His book is *just what the doctor ordered* (a generalized 20th-century catch phrase "of unqualified approval, applied to anything . . . exceptionally good or unexpectedly agreeable").

**HEARTS AND MINDS: The
Common Journey of Simone
de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul
Sartre**

by Axel Madsen
Morrow, 1977
320 pp. \$10.95
L of C 77-2896
ISBN 0-688-03206-0

Jean-Paul Sartre met Simone de Beauvoir in the spring of 1929. He was 23, she 21, he a city boy, she a country girl. Both were in their last year at the Sorbonne, she in philosophy, he in literature. They quickly became intellectual companions and lovers and have remained so without marriage for nearly 50 years (until Sartre became blind in 1973, they did not live together for any length of time). In researching this dual biography, Axel Madsen (also the biographer of André Malraux) interviewed existentialist Sartre, feminist Beauvoir, and their friends and read all of the couple's separate works—a total of 9 novels, 10 plays, and some 30 major works of nonfiction, including autobiography. Madsen traces their remarkable common journey in the mainstream of European philosophy, journalism, theater, literature, and left-wing politics. In her first published novel (*L'Invitée*), Beauvoir summed up her feelings about Sartre: "You and I are simply one . . . neither of us can be explained without the other." Of Beauvoir, Sartre has said, "In a way I owe everything to her."