Borges cites innumerable authors in the pages making up his life's work, and innumerable authors have cited and continue to cite him. More than a figure, then, the quotation is an integral part of the fabric of his writing, a fabric made anew by each reading and each re-citation it undergoes, in the never-ending throes of a work-in-progress. Block de Behar makes of this reading a plea for the very art of communication; a practice that takes community not in the totalized and totalizable soil of pre-established definitions or essences, but on the ineluctable repetitions that constitute language as such, and that guarantee the expansiveness—through etymological coincidences of meaning, through historical contagions, through translinguistic sharings of particular experiences—of a certain index of universality. This edition includes a new introduction by the author and three entirely new chapters, as well as updated images and corrections to the original translation.

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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

When speaking of Borges, neither does passion fade nor are quotes diminished, and an ambivalent affection both animates and afflicts readers as they, excited by a laborious fervor, are drawn toward the same pages already run over a thousand and one times before. Incited, they attempt to turn their readings into writing, as he does. Given the excess of references that multiply his quotations throughout all domains and the devout amazement that consecrates his poetry or that pillages it through imitation, it has seemed necessary to me that this work lay fallow for some time, in accordance with the millenarian biblical exhortation that the fecundity of the land be preserved so that it may be cultivated anew after a prudent period of repose.

Nevertheless, that very same vibrant validity is enough to justify a new edition, a revision of what has already been published along with the incorporation of recent approaches. Moreover, the conviction that the enthusiasm has been maintained, as inexhaustible as the surprises held by his texts, as inalterable as the written letter despite the constant and multiple changes of a present that makes a moveable age out of those changes. More than in previous eras, these changes have no time for time itself and, in supporting them, the work remains, as if this perseverance were its mission. Its permanence initiates a posterity confirmed by interminable quotes that, like an unending string, continue and circulate, spinning around the work, simulating the movement of the Wheel that provides the narrator with the good fortune of “understanding it all, without end.”

Introductions, and particularly the “Author’s Introduction,” neither can nor ought to escape those transformations. Even more if, as in this case, the introduction intends to present a second edition, one determined by events since the publication of the first edition and, in some way, bound up with them. Because of this I limit myself to alluding to the books of a French theoretician that speaks of foreseen forgeries, of commentaries on books never read, of the future that is already written in the pages of the literary past, of paradoxes irresolvable to logic or digressions that, while accessories in the first instance, come to be fundamental. Although sometimes Borges will be rigorously mentioned, other times he won’t enter in; the omission is natural since his traces and traits are to be seen when held up to the light, like a watermark that appears on each of the pages.
The scope of his work is boundless, in such a way that it was foreseeable that within it, among its most emblematic characters, the hero of one of the most quoted stories (and here precisely the event of the quote is crucial for that narration) might reappear as the protagonist of a novel and, through eponymy, vindicate his prestigious and many times literary origin. The epigonic experience is legitimate and its antecedents are ancestral and abundant, even if the transformations in recent works, for reasons both many and clear, are rather sporadic. Nevertheless, the variations not only radiate out from the archetypes imposed by antiquity—epic poetry and its versions, tragedies and their versions—but rather explain the cultural event in general. Among more venerable models, it might be said that the emblematic ghost of Hamlet, of more than one Hamlet, haunts his work, convoking other ghosts, propitiating future avatars that cross through epochs, regions, dramas, or parodies, and, in part, its fortune lies in this spectral condition.

It's curious. In a few decades the work of Borges has extended throughout the world and, as if this expansion weren't sufficient, there is no lack of those who come along to amplify it through different kinds of intrusions. Additionally, as a guarantee of such proceedings, that literary and artistic inflation faithfully accompanies the aesthetics of an actuality that, as in previous decades, illuminates the theories in vogue, justified by various practices (intertextual, transtextual, polyphonic, heteroglossic, carnivalesque, anthropophagic or palimpsestic, rewritings generated by a proliferating imagination but one considered second rate or secondhand). Frequently, they lean upon Borges's own reflections, the sage predictions of his fantasy that grow with the excesses of an always impatient future.

It is certain then that, in instances of an infinite reality or in the fugues of fiction, it might already not be necessary to name him. It is well known that he is in both and, as has been said of beauty, his proper name is common, perhaps because the good already belongs to no one but language and tradition. These are his words. It might also be necessary to remember that the prophetic style permits the employment of neither quotation marks nor the erudite exposition of books and authors... the saying is known to be its own, and it need not be announced as a Borges quote. Being themselves obvious, notes overflow (when they do not vex) and typographical signs, scarce and weak, might be insufficient.

Books, articles, speeches, interviews, films, whether they dispense with the name or not, evoke his poetics between the lines. A director of cinema alternates the ingenuity of his character, another American in Paris, with the consecrated idols of the Lost Generation, with the habitual and ambivalent intellectual hospitality of Gertrude Stein. Among other anachronisms, lapses, and the usual visits to museums, the picture-postcard stereotypes of a touristic itinerary abound. Machines that facilitate voyages in space “make place” for trips through time, and machines of fantasy wander the whole of la place du temps. As in the great novel that, upon consecrating recovered time in space, suspends it, in the film are heard, ringing out from some antiquated steeple close at hand, the “chimes at midnight,” so that literary and artistic wonders might occupy the screen, and dreams, and readings realized by its intercession.

And Borges? Is it Borges, or Henry James, or James as read by Borges, who develops a fantastic Sense of the Past in the protagonist? The surname of the film's young American is a paronom of the surname of the young character from James's novel, and similarly, both names begin with a symbolically named pen (Ralph Pendle in James's novel, Gil Pender in Woody Allen's film), because it is writers that are at issue in both fictions. The characters, artists and writers, interchange speeches that quote their own works intercalated with incidental dialogues. Games of coincidence abolish time, while literary illusions, being more durable, displace elusive reality. Which of Borges's fictions or reflections are welcomed into the twists of that spiral? A sort of vortex where differences between epochs don't count, revoked as they are through a familiarity with the most admired works belonging to the “imaginary museum,” intimate and shared, that legitimizes a contemporaneity capable of making a mockery of history and drawing from memory a vivid actuality richer, more worthy than quotidian adventures. To which story, poem, or essay ought one to allude? To which ought one not?

Just as his texts are reproduced on sites throughout the internet, versions of a video that present memorable quotes also exist; without detracting from the work, the textual snippets come together to make a trivial puzzle. In addition to passion, and in spite of intentions of fidelity, it is one of the risks one runs with quotes, similar to those brilliant (and well-named) "hits" that splinter off from a greater work, reunited through accumulation, through displacement, dazzling as they collide, rendering themselves opaque and losing the intensity that the quoted author knew how to administer in his own way. Beyond the autonomy of the famous sayings, the sincere solemnity of the snippet, of the fragments and juxtaposition of the wisdom meant to be exalted, the epigrammatic concision, the transformation of the work into aphorisms, repetition wears away even as it consolidates. On the other hand, too many quotes, maybe the least repeated ones, perhaps the happiest ones, are lacking.

Everything is quotable in Borges, no matter the theme; associations naturally arise in their pertinence. Why avoid them then? Moreover, how to avoid them? Is it fair to abandon rereading and rewriting his texts? Is it possible to study other authors without passing through the ones that he quotes, when there are so many? Is there any room for a strategy to avoid it? When dealing with annotations that analyze and interpret his stories,
poems, lectures, and dialogues, the question becomes: How to write at the margins of Borges? Even if they are annotations of other themes, they can't dissimulate their markings, such that, in one margin as much as another, every text inscribes itself at the margins of Borges. Having been passed over until recently, even the importance acquired by those lateral spaces in theories from the last decades of the twentieth century might be attributed to a hierarchy that his writings promote and bring into relief. Titles, prologues, epilogues, footnotes (in stories in which their presence is unusual), postponed postdata, and other marginal texts grow more relevant as they are seen in the half-light of their thresholds, there, where the twilight penumbra scarcely manages to bring light to the blind.

It already seems impossible to steal oneself away from Borges's universe, from the bibliognostic contact and habit of a much- and well-read author (in Spanish the word leído [read] refers to both one who is well read and one who is much read by others), from the force of a universal poetic attraction. His motives are movements, they are emotions, words—mots in French—that are repetition and silence, they speak and remain mute. His discourse has become planetary and, at the same time, his irony challenges the gravity of law and legend [ley y leyenda] as conjecture ridicules the greatest of certainties: mistrusting absolute truths, he vacillates or feigns vacillation in the face of differences confusing them before fusing them in one single thing.

In this sort of verbal magic that doesn't occult its resources, thought crisscrosses with imagination, as do ideas with words and their histories, as do theories that, being ephemeral, are plotted like fiction.

There is no dearth of expositions of paintings inspired by stories, or films that seek to vindicate them. His name, like that of the city (burgus, burg, bourg, borough) from which it is derived, like an oft-cited hamlet, extends itself thanks to the networks that cover space in all directions. Like the uncontrollable reversibility of the Aleph, the mystical object that is at once an aspiration, a letter, a word, a title, a story, a book, everything . . . the world is in the work and the work is in the world. Although the opposition of contraries need not always be so, that chiasmus is banal and excessive, but it insinuates the poet's intuition and announces the fatality of the Creation that it brings to a close, as in a judgment or a poem, as in a sentence. The quoted city, or in French la cité citée, is in search of sonorous solidarities that found its vision through the proper name and the quote.

A few years ago a documentary circulated that claimed to be harto de Borges [fed up with Borges]. Capital letters and all, between Spanish and English, it bore the title Harto The Borges and was nonetheless a quote, one serving as a meeting with Borges and his quote, a quote that, as he says, he repeated throughout the film. But his flesh (Fr. la chair) did not appear sad, nor did he lament or brag of having read so many books, although he didn't cover up a certain annoyance that was strange for one skilled at lavishing others with humor as well as poetry. Unlike the quote, cita, which in Spanish also signifies a sentimental, amorous, or friendly encounter, this quote serves as a distanciation. It repeats "Borges and I," a conjunction that monumentalizes modesty, if such a thing were possible, articulating an offstage voice, remaining off, hors sujet, "subject or theme" as Emmanuel Levinas might say, in one and the same vocation, simultaneous and anonymous.

More than once Borges affirmed that proper names, like circumstances, are frauds of the word. Moreover, the copula and and the pronoun I (like Pascal's moi haïssable [detestable]) are detestable to him, and for the same reasons he abhors the mirror and the secret copula because they multiply the number of men. In spite of the eventualities of etymological investigations, proper names usually lack significance just as much as the copulative conjunction. It is a particle that tries to obey a merely grammatical function. Although it presumably unifies, in this case it is a particle or letter that distinguishes and tears asunder. By connecting his own proper name with the pronoun I, the semantic absence is enlarged, a hole (another) that only designates the one that speaks or his double, anticipating innumerable possible speakers that use or usurp the function, and in doing so manage to detain it, though only for a moment. Another vain particle makes room for the vanity of all, of all of those that pronounce it, the plurality of names that quote him and that he quotes in turn.

It isn't the first time that a semantic vacuum, multiple and in series, has availed itself of words either in order to identify, which is to distinguish as much as one conceals, or so that someone other than oneself might feel himself alluded to through signification's pronominal hole. If the one being quoted in this strange binomial may well be suspected, there is also room to doubt the one quoting the pronoun in each case. Since it is Borges speaking, I don't rule out the possibility that this is a blind date (which is also a meeting, foreseen by a blind seer, one that, as a prophetic response, forever postponed, forms part of the suspense).

The texts included in the first edition have been revised for this edition, and have been expanded to include "Borges and García Márquez: On How to Put Life into Words, and How to Recount Them," "Repetitions Are No Surprise," and "Fiction between Fraud and Farce: Parodies and Properties of the Name"; I am grateful to Christopher Ray Alexander for his translations of these new essays and this very introduction.

I would like to demonstrate my profound thanks to William Egginton, and not just for the valiant labor of having translated writings into English that, I recognize, present difficulties deriving from the necessity of simultaneously utilizing the various significations that a word, that each and every word,
accumulates in Spanish (although this is not a property exclusive to our language). Scarcely translatable from one language to another, the relevance assigned to the verbal sounds of each word and the involuntary or inevitable resonances in phrases also interpose obstacles. But above all else I emphasize my gratitude for his academic interest and amicable perseverance in carrying forward, with the most convinced dedication, a labor of many years so that a second edition of the book could count on the renewed editorial hospitality of State University of New York Press.

Once more I express my gratefulness for the attentive readings realized by my colleague of many years, Arturo Rodríguez Peixoto, a reader who, in addition to the erudition of his knowledge, brings along curiosity for the universe of Borges, the histories of his sayings, the ups and downs of the animated polemics in which Borges participated with other writers of the period and those of his compatriot contemporaries, and the celebration of humor that abounds in his literary versions and diversions.

I am grateful to the team at SUNY Press, Michael Campochiaro, Dana Foote, Laurie Searl, Beth Bouloukos, and Rafael Chaiken, for the kind attention they have shown in each and every phase of the realization of this book, especially for their engagement in the complex process of editing it.

Every meeting with Borges is a meeting with Isaac. The happiness of shared memories, from the bedazzlement of a first reading to the streets of Maipú, the welcoming elegance of Borges's gestures, commentaries quotidian and timeless, unexpected and vigorous curiosity, memories of Montevideo, names from a Uruguayan past, anecdotes—that were never published—the laziness of a cat also appearing in the photos. Sometimes, without hurrying, the walks repeat a belabored routine, the strolls through the sidewalks of Buenos Aires, no further than the Plaza San Martín. Familiar, the itinerary affirms the steps before doors lustrous and worn from the uncesing shuffle, permits acknowledgment of the ironworks, not all being equal in their beauty, discovering some thresholds, the brief corridor, the marble stair, glass with beveled figures and mosaics off to the side. It becomes easy to quote a few verses or to allude to memorable writings of other times. In the city center, without perceiving the advance of the hours beginning another day, dialogues prolong the raucous afternoons of the conversant diners in the Cantina China, confusing matters of the moment with interminable literary incidences in a happiness one and the same.

William Egginton

Barthes once wrote that the only way to read a work of passion is with another work of passion. What was true for Barthes is equally true for Lisa Block de Behar, whose four or more decades of scholarly activity have produced an imposing body of scholarship on the work of Jorge Luis Borges, but more importantly and more urgently have resulted in the invention of a new way of thinking about the activity of reading and the nature of meaning itself. If I may recur to a historical analogy, and one that is not without heuristic value for the case at hand, Block de Behar's relation to the texts of Borges is redolent of that of Heidegger to the poetry of Hölderlin. Having practiced fundamental ontology from the perspective of and in the language of philosophical discourse, albeit in a way that overturned the most basic presuppositions of that discourse, the Heidegger of the late thirties began to produce a kind of writing that refused to speak about Being, from the outside—as if one could have a vantage from which to see and speak that was itself not already in and of Being. Such a writing—one that would take seriously Heidegger's discovery that language does not report on beings but is rather the house of Being—is exemplified not by philosophers and the history of their craft, but by the poets, and it was in the words of Hölderlin that Heidegger believed he could best listen to Being as it uttered the meanings of our most basic words.

By beginning with this analogy, I do not want to suggest that Block de Behar is a Heideggerian, or that she applies the thoughts of Heidegger to the works of Borges, in the now classic and utterly bankrupt application-paradigm of literary studies, in which the would-be critic sprinkles a dry literary text with a healthy dash of some spicy theory in order to serve it up fresh and with newfound panache. Indeed, to say of her work that it applies a paradigm to the text of Borges is to miss one of the most fundamental of her insights, namely, that in his writing Borges anticipates the theoretical and philosophical currents of the late twentieth century, not merely in the
sion entailing an activation of the primordial meanings of Borges's words, sense of announcing their arrival avant la lettre, but more importantly by creating the very archetypes of thought that define our times. First comes poetry, then comes thought.

No, Block de Behar does not apply anything to Borges, but rather, like Heidegger did to Hölderlin, she listens to the poet and hears in his writing the meanings of our most basic words. Rejecting the focus common to the scholarship around Borges—her work does not dwell on the plethora of metaphors associated with Borges’s work, such as tigers or labyrinths or mirrors—what Block de Behar explores is the originality of Borges’s imagination, one that finds its personal discourse in the propriety of words, in the fire of their minting. This, in fact, is the argument—if one can call it an argument, for Block de Behar seldom argues, choosing rather to read, to combine, to explore—of her 1994 book, Una palabra propiamente dicha (A Word Properly Said), which proposes a reading style appropriate to the specificity of Borges’s literary style. This would be a practice of comprehension entailing an activation of the primordial meanings of Borges’s words, a peeling off the patina of everyday use and semantic localization, and a reaching for a transversal and plurilingual semantics that constitutes the core of Borges’s originality but also of his universality.

Primordiality, originality, universality—all of these concepts ring strangely out of tune in a zeitgeist dedicated to simulacra, difference, contemporaneity, to the belatedness of all attempts to establish a claim to originality. But Block de Behar does not read Borges as either a critique or a confirmation of this zeitgeist, but rather as having articulated the very conditions of its possibility. Originality as a key notion for understanding Borges—and this is the theme of her 1998 book, Borges ou les gestes d’un voyant aveugle (Borges or the Gestures of a Blind Seer)—is neither a signifier of extravagance nor a designator of primitivity but denotes rather the poetic property and propriety of the revelation of that which disperses or disappears behind and among appearances, representations. And this thing, in the end, is not the thing in itself, a world stripped bare of the illusions of representation, but is rather the very intimacy of language and things that can never be dispersed but only hidden by the certainties of positivism or the desperation of idealism. And is not this intimacy resonant with the linguistic horizons that make up the house of Being?

Much as her explorations of Borges’s writing problematize the notion of a representational space separating words and things, Block de Behar’s analysis of the reading practices suggested by Borges’s work—and much of her contribution must be seen as a stylistics of reading, a poetics of the very production of meaning—deflate the categorical boundaries between production and reception. The theme of her first book on the subject of Borges—Una retórica del silencio (A Rhetoric of Silence)1—constituted a meditation on the figure of the reader and the reader’s practice in the writings of Borges and not merely as represented in those writings but, moreover, as presupposed by them. Pursuing this figure throughout Borges’s oeuvre and especially in his “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote,” Block de Behar unearths a narrative whose protagonist is the inexistential author of a silent work, a narrative in which the hallowed boundaries between author and reader are blurred into nondistinction, merged into one and the same silence. But silence is not wordlessness. It is the suspension of the voice as a tacit verbal object, the guarantor of author’s presence and hence authority and thereby the jailer of unauthorized meaning. In the space of this suspension, then, a reader is constituted and reconstituted through the endless recombination of the written word. While this liberation of writing from the tyranny of voice is certainly the critical legacy of Derrida, we owe its poetic legacy in part to Borges, and to the careful reading of Block de Behar.

It is against the background of these and other rhetorical visions that Lisa Block de Behar has, in this book, turned her “readerly” attentions to the figure of the quote. In many ways, it is in this figure that all of the themes that have characterized her work of reading to date are crystallized in their paradoxical plenitude, for it is not in the quote that the issue of originality reaches its ultimate limit? As countless texts from Borges intimate, the search for originality must come up against the quote as the figure of its own impossibility, and yet it is quoting itself—an act that merges reading and writing, in short, sense-making—that constitutes a break, a moment of cratio ex nihilo where something comes to be—a difference in pure repetition—where something was not before. Borges cites innumerable authors in the pages making up his life’s work, and innumerable authors have cited and continue to cite him. More than a figure, then, the quotation is an integral part of the fabric of his writing, a fabric made anew by each reading and each re-citation it undergoes, in the never-ending throes of a work-in-progress.

Block de Behar makes of this reading a plea for the very art of communication, a practice that stakes community not in the totalized and totalizable soil of preestablished definitions or essences but on the ineluctable repetitions that constitute language as such, and that guarantee the expansive-ness—through etymological coincidences of meaning, through historical contagions, through translings of particular experiences—of a certain index of universality. Divergent times, places, spaces, scenes are brought suddenly and irreparably together in the ever-expanding library of Borges’s words. “Words, words, words,” Hamlet responds when Polonius asks him what he reads. Pressed on what the “matter” of those words might be, Hamlet replies, “Between who?” capturing in the inappropriateness of his answer that is also a question the interminable flight of the very meaning, or matter, Polonius seeks.2 For is not that matter sought in words the very
matter that disappears between two authors, two characters of Borges: Pierre Menard writes the very words written by Cervantes so many years ago, and in the immaterial difference between those same words a world of difference intervenes. Words, words, words, when will they ever end? They will not; and it is this, and nothing else, that is the meaning of eternity.

In Of Grammatology Derrida writes, about the "tradition's" attitude toward writing:

Writing is the dissimulation of the natural, primary, and immediate presence of sense to the soul within the logos. Its violence befalls the soul as unconsciousness. Deconstructing this tradition will therefore not consist of reversing it, of making writing innocent. Rather of showing why the violence of writing does not befall an innocent language. There is an originary violence of writing because language is first, in a sense I shall gradually reveal, writing. "Usurpation" has always already begun. The sense of the right side appears in a mythical effect of return. Of course, if language per se, language proper, is, properly speaking, not innocent of the violence attributed to writing—its secondary nature, its perversion of intention, its homophonic, anagrammatic failures, etc.—then the question is begged of who or what is innocent, is innocence (is proper, per se, as such . . .). And lacking the primordiality of the innocent, the notion of violence itself seems curiously out of place. Indeed, for Block de Behar the engagement of writing and reading, as interlaced, mutually supporting and ultimately similar procedures, is an association that has lost the aggressivity of the initial assault on metaphysical presence. Hers is a poetics of creation that is at the same time a poetics of disappearance; a poetics of production that is equally a poetics of nothingness; a poetics of interpretation that is one with a poetics of preterition.

Preterition: the OED’s third definition, from rhetoric, runs thus: "A figure by which summary mention is made of a thing, in professing to omit it"; yet for Block de Behar, this figure becomes the paradoxical foundation of the production of meaning, and of interpretation itself. To negate a thing while at the same time affirming it; to affirm something while negating it. Preterition captures, for Block de Behar, the paradoxical core of how language works to produce meaning. The word names, and in naming takes away. It supplies an absence, which it has created, with a presence that leads to an absence, to the positive creation of another lack, which in turn produces a positivity. It will not be possible to categorize Block de Behar along with those Deleuze and Guattari christened as the priests of lack. Her writing refuses to grant even negativity its privative power, since in the very instant of privation, in the very move itself, creation occurs, meaning is restored, albeit differently, anew. This movement is the very movement of human being itself: interpretation. In Block de Behar’s world, Homo ludens becomes homo interpretans.

Thus interpretation would seem to be the bastard child waiting to be born of these concepts, a construction not lacking a creative drive that occurs, once again, a mutual origin, albeit one that defies etymological verification. The pret that is the root in common, the prefix and suffix, could claim a basic meaning in the Latin present pretere is, to pass, to go by; the leaving behind while mentioning that presents us with the operative paradox of preterition; the passing through or, originally, translating—moving from one side to another—that the interpretative activity signifies. But interpretation’s root is the Sanskrit prath, signifying the action of spreading out, hence a spreading out between two or more in other places, in other circumstances, a spreading that would entail a passing through, and perhaps a passing by, a mentioning and invoking while negating and leaving behind, hence an interpretation.

In its interpretational, and one might add original, manifestation, then, interpretation no longer connotes a search for an established or preexisting meaning but rather a communicative (also in the sense of contagious) act of passage between—states, entities, times, spaces—and creation of—the same, which is at the same time the different. The root—and hence rational—pret of passing and spreading, passes and spreads between a prefix of liminality, lability, and a suffix of fixity, two fixes that mark the extremes of the movement of fixation, a movement that is itself that of interpretation, the movement from the labile to the fixed, and back again.

The rhetoric of preterition is thus also at work in the word fix, from the Latin fixare, originally meaning to fasten, to rivet one’s eyes or attention upon something, connoting the stopping of a movement or a tight place from which one needs to escape. Simultaneously, in current (North) American usage, it has come to denote the dosage of illicit drugs one needs and hence is lacking, to regain a sense of fixity, stability, the homeostasis that Freud defined as the negation of pain. Think of the psyche and the soma as interrelated, analogously comparable organic networks, living, changing networks of interconnected elements. The introduction of a narcotic like heroine into such a system produces an imbalance, a lability, that moves the organism to rewire itself and incorporate the new element into a newly established fixity. The disappearance of the narcosis provokes another change in the new fixity, a sensation of pain requiring the return of the lost element, the fix, in order to reestablish the new, albeit ultimately unstable, temporal, fixity. If the soma has a primal, primordial (perhaps imaginary) balance, the fix unfixes that balance, provokes a permanent flux between.
pleasure and pain. The psyche, because it is stratified, organized, is at a remove from the balanced soma (the plane of consistency, a body without organs, Deleuze and Guattari would call it), is always in flux; the psyche is a body on drugs. Its fix, however, is interpretive, a momentary fixation that, if we were to free ourselves from the self-imposed limits of etymological orthodoxy—the addition or subtraction of a letter, an n, almost a nothing, marks the difference between figere and fingere, to make believe—comes to us most often in the form of a fiction, one of those infinite possible worlds we hunger for in the delirium of our withdrawal from meaning.

We have mentioned Freud. Is not the “talking cure” in some sense the ultimate interpretive fix? The interpretation, especially in Lacanian practice, need not be an explanation, a putting into words of a symptom so as to make the symptom go away, as in the traditional, more hermetically inclined understanding of the practice. A Lacanian analyst enters into a theatrical relation with the analysand; roles are played, a fantasy formation is assumed; the analysand plays out in the transference, a verbal bridge between two subjects, the spectacle of his or her daily life, complete with deeply held convictions, emotions that graft to the skin of the ego. A hack, a cough, an interjection on the part of the analyst, and something breaks into the carefully constructed world of the transference: an interpretation, a moment of breakdown and reorganization, what Lacan calls presence. The network is liminal again and searches for a new fixity. The fix is experienced as meaning, as revelation, as truth, but this truth did not precede the event; it was generated by the fix.

Another book that explores the interpretive fix through a sort of experiment in code building is Christian Reder's (and in the spirit of Block de Behar we should remain attentive to the resonance of names, Reder, the one who speaks . . . ) Words and Numbers, the Alphabet as Code, a simple and plainly arbitrary—that is, unmotivated, as Saussure famously described the relation between words and their referents—encoding matrix is established: each letter in the Latin alphabet is assigned a number from one to twenty-six. The resulting schema becomes a sort of table of elements for the production of meaning, a meaning that is no less meaningful for the contrivance of its origins. What this artificial (künstlich) combinatorial underscores is that the naturalness or artificiality of results tends to ride on the plausibility of correspondences between interpretation-formations and result-formations rather than on the correspondence to a preestablished truth, or reality, an implicit understanding of thought that joins with the pragmatic philosophy of a Gilles Deleuze, a Richard Rorty (both of whom are referred to in Reder's introduction), but also a Jacques Derrida and a Lisa Block de Behar, in their insistence on the primacy of creative activity over representative mirroring. As Deleuze and Guattari put it: "Concepts are not waiting for us ready-made, like heavenly bodies. There is no heaven for concepts. They must be invented, fabricated, or rather created and would be nothing without their creator's signature."

What strikes us as unusual in our hyper-skeptical, hyper-ironic present is the turn that this recentering of the interpretive activity makes toward unification, universalization, the resurrection of seemingly esoteric discourses, like that of Kabbalah, and the seriousness of the attention paid to mere coincidence. Borges, Biyo Casares, Benjamin, and Blanqui are combined, truths are to be sought for in their combination because . . . because their names all begin with the letter b? Is this astrology masquerading as criticism? There is a revival of astrology going around under the name the Human Design System. Practitioners consult with their clients and offer them readings on the basis of a map constructed out of key temporal and spatial coordinates in their life. This interpretation refuses to be unmotivated in its self-presentation because its motivation, like astrology, is to be found in the influence of time and space, of astronomical events, on our genetic and emotional makeup. The functioning is similar to a psychic “reading,” where in this case the “chance” of the cards is replaced or occulted by the influence of spirits or perhaps even to a psychoanalytic reading, where the chance of a combinatory of words is occulted by the truth of the unconscious, the “it speaks.” The occultation, of course, is part of the combinatory; just as in psychoanalysis there can be no transference without a subject supposed to know, in every other interpretive fix, the act of interpretation requires a moment of occultation, and a moment of revelation. But in the open interpretive play of interpretation, what lies beneath is not a fixity but another act of interpretation, beneath each reading lies another reading, beneath each book another book, beneath each word another word.

We spoke of the anagrammatic strategy that consists of a rereading, a re- vision, a sub-version that is realized underneath the words (a paragram or hypogram in the terms of Saussure, or les mots sous les mots, for Jean Starobinski), a transposition of the graphic unities of the word that responds to the procedures of selection and combination, a combinatory of decisions of that lector-elector-selector who reciprocates in each reading (lecture) the freedom of an option that revises and defines it.

Reading practices, which are also writing practices, are, like the other interpretive fixes we have discussed, exercises in self-discovery that is at the same time a self-creation. The resolution of coordinates involved in each such act, a reading, is pulled together out of another form, like the word out of chaos. But chaos is not primordial, as Block de Behar also points out; the operations of chance that seem to lie at the origin of all these reading practices are themselves the result of a demonic “falling through” out of the divine and into the human form, a form defined by its separation from the
divine, just as the divine is resolved through the expulsion of the human and the demonic. This falling produces the purity of chance, and its legacy is recorded in our languages.\textsuperscript{15}

Borges's text is, for Block de Behar, the palimpsest reservoir of this resolving act, of the precipitation of meaning out of a primordial soup of chance, which is likewise and retroactively born of that same movement. The games, the ruminations, the thoughts, the verses, the narratives, in short the interpreteritations, are innumerable, and so they must be. For the interpretive fix is not merely explained with examples, it cannot be thus put to rest; we do not read of such a process from the fixity of the language of criticism but rather participate in it, repeatedly, inescapably, as that language changes us and changes itself through us as well.

Even at the risk of falling into redundancies from the start, one would have to recognize, once again, the gravitation of quotations in Borges's universe, where, unbeknown to time, though without eluding the facts of their origin, quotations allow for the repetition of several discourses at once. On more than one occasion, Borges affirmed the literary fatefulness of his destiny and, assuming that task, recognized the precedence of a writing that cannot avoid the quotation. Literary repetition reiterates and demands the affinities of a shared place, more than a shared place, a common place, which—beyond distances and circumstantial differences, and on the basis of verbal coincidences—is conducive to signs of universality.

A balance of unsuspected reciprocities impels us to appreciate and recognize this repetition as a proper practice: if Borges quotes innumerable authors in his works, it should not surprise us that innumerable authors continue to quote Borges. Recourse and recurrence, from one author to the other: literary passion manages to order itself around quotations that animate an inconclusive textual game.

Borges's library multiplies, in parts, the books of others in his books and his in those of others, accumulating the potential of a partial, endless literary play. Reading Borges, one makes out the parts of disparate works, and that shared discovery—a discovery parcelled between author and reader—lends itself to more than one meaning. Someone glimpses the revelation of a distant fragment and comes to be glimpsed in turn. Fragments come and go as if transported by an endless band in which oppositions are knotted and cancelled, reconciled by the same passion for quoting.

This back and forth of the quotation replicates the literary ritual, or rituals, of the circulating. It is a curious tendency of quotations that they are quoted, as if each one, once invoked, reserved the imminence of a potential quoting, which is mentioned for its energy, for its efficacy, or simply because it can occur. Its simple occurrence refers it to a previous instance, like to
a past time but pointed toward a text or time to come. It returns to the
beginning, only to circle back again.

Despite the secret to which Borges ambiguously refers in his story, the
narrator belonging to "The Sect of the Phoenix" knows that this textual
reproduction seals literary continuity via the quotation; literal, in silence,
the species is not extinguished. In the same way that the sense of this story
is doubled, so should we understand the ambivalence of the quotation's
meaning.

These are dualities that Spanish, in its good fortune, does not dissimu­
late: "cita" [quote, citation/rendezvous] designates a meeting—more than a
meeting—of the text or of the heart, and, as a result of the complicity of
this meeting, other passions rush forth. The words of a text mingle and
cohabit in another text and thus do they survive. If it is true that a
book does not choose its lectors, it is the "e-election" that the latter realize
that affords the book an unforeseen permanence, beyond the disposition of
a presumable authority. Therefore, it is not surprising that one of the cen­
tury's most quoted authors should be an unknown author—one who doesn't
exist—of a well-known book—which already existed; the quote legitimates
the ambivalences of its open statute. Borges's character, Pierre Menard,"a
consecrated reader and author, writes not another Quixote but the Quixote
of another: letter by letter, word for word, its identical paragraphs authorize
a meaning that modifies, according to different versions, a truth in terms.
This eventual alteration of the truth is found precisely in a text that deals
with truth conditioned by history; the references to the discipline make of
the theme and of the discourse that articulates it one and the same
hermeneutic question.

This is not an objection, on the contrary; nevertheless, one may
observe that, for a long time now, Borges has been quoted too much. It
is true that his lines are repeated in other pages and that passages, verses,
words to which Borges restored original meaning appear in contexts that
reveal, or not, the origin that the poet demands: "Every word was once a
poem" and, in the same way that only the word remembers, its reiterated
use attenuates the origin.

Repetition is a phenomenon that lacks novelty, as is known; in any
case—and this has also been said—novelty is rooted only in the return,
which suggests that the recognition of the quotation is especially appro­
priate—in Borges's text, with Borges—for the celebration of a centennial.4
In its repetition it calls for suspension in a timeless time, a return to a
placeless space that, as the ceremony punctually authorizes, rescinds the
circumstances.

If, for Borges, quotations reveal that authors are readers who rewrite
what has already been written, those turnings that found and shape his poet­
TWO VARIATIONS ON A LETTER AVANT-LA-LETTRE

Seul le chapitre des bifurcations reste ouvert à l’espérance. N’oublions pas que tout ce qu’on aurait pu être ici-bas, on l’est quelque part ailleurs.

(Only the chapter of bifurcations remains open to hope. Let us not forget that all that we could have been down here, we are somewhere else.)

—Louis-Auguste Blanqui

1

If the aesthetic, theoretical, and hermeneutic present is debated in the face of the indeterminacy of works that slip between the expansive spaces of a disputable disciplinary topography; if epistemological definitions question its limits and its doctrinal and methodological foundations; if questions of taxonomy challenge the rigidity of inventories that fail to encompass the inventions they seek to classify; nor oppositions justify series because they interlace them, accelerating their differences; if other uncertainties are not exclusive of the scientific present; perhaps it is not necessary to remind ourselves that, since more than a half a century ago, numerous thinkers, philosophers, and writers have been reading Borges. They hesitated at first, interpreting as metaphors the aporias of his rhetoric of indecision, as allegories the paradoxical variations of a poetics of preterit that grasps the imagination of possibilities and their opposites, convinced, like some of the characters of his fiction, that historical times interlace their differences, multiplying uncertainties, planting suspicions, filtered through an unpredictable network that intercepts them as much as it lets them pass through.
Just as after Borges1 it is no longer disputed that each author creates his or her own precursors,2 it is even less disputed that Borges creates other authors who follow him, read him, who write and therefore exist. So many poets and narrators, so many theoreticians and critics are occupied with the imagination of Borges, that the imagination of Borges has occupied the world. Understandably, a long time after Emir Rodríguez Monegal3 wrote down the illustrious terms of that “greatest common denominator” that is his name, a North American critic proposed to nominate Borges as the emblem of this era.4 There is no question about it: In such a case, I would carve in that emblematic image the inscription ante litteram.

It is not unusual to approach the variations of his literature’s reasoned aesthetics, the diverse modulations of his intellectual poetry, which anticipated and concentrated the thought, knowledge, and imagination of the century, attending to the reticencies contained in the coming and suppression, both down the illusory terms of aesthetics, the diverse modulations of his intellectual poetry, which has been alluded to more than once but whose excesses would recuperate the original meaning of “to transgress”: to pass to the other side, traverse margins, cross borders, go beyond—also in capitals, transitions that cede way to the transcendence that is, properly speaking, an ascension to universal terms, by which it overcomes categories, oppositions, the eventuality of differences. A contradictory transgression overcomes limits or suspends them through a bringing into relief (relevamiento) that, like the well-known Aufhebung—that Hegelian form of “to bring into relief” (revelar)—is overcoming and suppression, both actions at once. It is important to bring into relief that first meaning of to transgress, among other reasons, because that is how to understand, in a contradictory way, that his writings “read with a previous fervor and a mysterious loyalty”; those conditions of reading that define, according to Borges,5 the classical writers. An in-fraction restitutes the fracture, reunites the fragments, and animates the vigor and validity of his writings. It is precisely in that essay, “On the Classics,” where he concludes by formulating an assertion that I would introduce here as an exhortation, with the purpose of contesting a permanence that neither endorses nor invalidates transgression:

The emotions that literature evokes are perhaps eternal, but the means must constantly change, even if only in the slightest way, in order not to lose their virtue. They expend themselves as they are recognized by the reader. Thus the danger of affirming that there exist classical works and that they will be so for ever.6

II

Beyond the functions of reader and critic, of author and critic, or of author and reader, Borges’s writing mingles attributions that are presumed to be exterior to the textual universe, interlacing them in a threshold that extends and disappears. Neither inside nor outside, neither before nor after. A diegesis in crisis alters the spaces and times of a textuality that does not distinguish between them. Beyond oppositions between language and metalanguage, between both, it is possible to imagine variations of a semiosis that, (a) posited in the abyss, confuses references, impeding the discerning of another way out through an exit facing inward, facing backward, at the same time or timeless. Beyond disciplinary conventions, his writing slips between literary and philosophical borders, superimposing theory and poetry, history and fiction, representation and reference, lucidity that is not only wakefulness. Without imposing, without being excessive, a spectral entity—a specter in fact—oscillates between narrator and characters, victims and heroes, hangmen and traitors, between times that do not differ, return, or coincide in the simultaneity of an instant, an Augenblick that, deprived of time, is not distinguished from eternity: fleeing that threshold a man is discerned on the way to a universe where space does not count, nor time, who persists in creating a passage where extension and ephemeralism are confused in a reality au-delà, à outrance, an ultrareality,7 an ideal reality, perfect, eternal, exaggerated, extreme.

Beyond limits, the writing of Borges e-liminates them; beyond oppositions, it requires an interpretation, succinct, in the key of O; different or the same, either the letter or the cipher, or both, it obliterates the disjunction making of alterity another identity. His imagination does not resolve the antagonism of superimpositions, suppositions, conjectures; invents or discovers the literary space that makes place for an origin, the beginning (principio) of a thought that adjusts to the principles (principios) of a logic—if not proper, adverse, illogical—a logic that reveals the mechanisms of a reasoning secured according to rules that, albeit imposed, seem natural, or it seems natural that they be so.

What is missing are limits to this transliminal aesthetic, where definition coincides with the indefinite, the finished with the infinite, acceding to a perfection that, unexpected, does not end. In “Of Rigor in Science,”8 the brief text (which could serve as epigraph to these reflections) endorses the cartographic practices of geographers who expose the perfection of their maps to the inclinations of time and weather (tiempos), chronological or temporal, meteorological or the more intertempest storms of rain and wind that intensify beyond the times (tiempos) that neither grammar nor history can periodize. Another text, almost symmetrical, “The Parable of the Palace,”9 reveals that that perverse perfection is not an exclusivity of rigorous sciences and ends by risking poetry as well; the word of the poet that destroys the poem, the palace: “It was enough (they tell us) that the poet pronounce the poem for the palace to disappear, abolished and struck down by the last syllable.”10 The word (palabra) is the parable,11 a “comparison,” a story, an
such is the fantastic polysemy of the preposition /por: Borges for Menard, scarcely known, discovers unknown authors, gives birth to others who, like J.overnight Spanish preposition figures as cause, as substitution, and as multiplication, one author for another who does not exist; as if he multiplied by (por) zero, the number (cifra) that reunits all numbers, he exceeds him and exhausts him, he animates and annuls him at once.

The vanishing of the author in such functions long predates the overnight "mort de l'auteur" (death of the author)—the sentence is from Barthes who, like another death foretold, pronounces it on the basis of the accepted theories of writing.16 A little later, on the basis of a related notion of écriture—although he extends it in certain ways—Michel Foucault pronounces a similar sentence by referring to "the disappearance of the author."17 It was a great disappearance—it was not the first—but like the decree of an earlier, greater death, it precipitated the announcement of a chain of disappearances: the disappearance of poetry, a disappearance consecutive to other flagrant disgraces; the presumed and oft-proclaimed disappearance of history; or, in the best of cases, the claim of writing, which confers on it a status of fiction that neither the historians nor the writers would oppose. The disappearance of systematic difference, more rigid than rigorous, the disappearance of the difference in a writing that belittled even the voice,18 which cannot even be heard amid the bells tolling in mourning over the disappearance of absolute knowledge,19 brought into relief by a pensiero debole,20 disappearance of the referent as one more illusion. One had spoken of an hors texte like an hors la loi; it is not surprising that an aesthetics of disappearance that razes geographic and generic borders would have in the work of Borges its fabulous antecedent. In his texts, a cell in Prague borders on an entrance way in Tacuarembó, a hovel in Cairo, Illinois, a slum of Buenos Aires or a suburb of Dublin, it is all the same whether "in Oklahoma or Texas or in the region that the literati call the pampa."21 If the latest edition of the Encyclopædia Universalis defines the current concept of globalization on the basis of a quote from P. Valéry: "Le temps du monde fini commence,"22 (The time of the completed world begins), any one of the numerous references imagined by Borges from his earliest to his most recent writings would have been more pertinent:

But let us not speak of facts. Facts are no longer of any concern to anyone. They are mere starting points for invention and reasoning. In the schools they teach us doubt and the art of forgetting. Foremost the forgetting of what is personal and local. We live in time, which is successive, but we try to live sub specie aeternitatis. From the past we retain a few names, which language tends to forget. We pass over the useless details. There is neither chronology nor history. There are no statistics either.23

In that utopia of the story, although "English, French, and mere Spanish" had already disappeared from the planet, language is not the conjectural Ursprache of Tlön, because "the earth had returned to Latin." The anonymous character encountered by the narrator warns him that: "There are those who fear that it will once again degenerate into French, Languedocian, or Papianento, but the risk is not imminent."24
For diverse reasons—critical and hermeneutic, philological or mystical—no one is surprised that the vastness of Borges's oeuvre could be identified, emblematically, with the aleph. More than the letter, more than the title, the story, the book, his whole oeuvre constitutes a sort of aleph, the first letter touching on an immense universe, the disproportionate aleph that is found, in places, in all places, before the beginning, before the creation, on whose account the beginning does not appear because something had already started before: a letter avant-la-lettre? Ante litteram. In Hebrew aleph represents, more than the letter, the inspiration prior to the production of sound, it points to the movement of the soul, a wish previous to its articulation; the Kabbalists always considered "the aleph the spiritual root of all letters, capable of containing in its essence the entire alphabet and, hence, all human language. 'Entendre l'Aleph, c'est proprement ne rien entendre'" [to hear/understand the Aleph is not to hear/understand anything], and I turn to the French translation in order to take advantage of the verbal polysemy of a verb that, in that language, alludes to a form of gasping at once sensory and intellectual.26

Nevertheless, and to confirm the beginning/principle (principio) of that initial silence, it would not be surprising that the inquiries into the genesis of his text indicate that a space, the mihrab,7 had preceded the literal, graphic, and Kabbalistic inscription of that letter. Because of that literal and figurative vision, a character of Borges, he who does not see—just as one says of Socrates, he who does not write, or of Plato, he who does not speak—sees all the earth and the whole earth sees him. The whole orb in the orbits, orbi et orbi. Which is the center and which the periphery in that excessive topography that suppresses the dimensions and distances that are its material? In a miniaturized domestication of the universe, the shaded enclosure, at home, in a point of the basement like the corner of the miserable hut of Funes, an enigmatic but square black hole, perhaps another black hole8 where the stars of a "collapsing universe" are pulled apart, on the edge of the void, there where the world contracts, exposes itself to the horror of a blind window, of a screen like a blank page, which risks it, reveals it, hides it. A hole like an empty orbit, it becomes the basis (reductio) of vision, the reduction of the visible, a résumé of the world or a receptacle where the world is concentrated into a fenced-in camp, a metaphor of the pre-electronic prison, of a prisonhouse,9 the prisonhouse of language where reality is held hostage by its vision. I wonder if someday someone will dare to say: "Once upon a time, there was reality . . ." as in a fairy tale, the narrator will create suspense and, condescendingly, will refer to reality like to the sleeping beauty, in a box with a crystal cover, beneath a transparent screen. Face to face, the aleph of Gran Street, "where the entire universe was reflected"10 threatened by demolition on the verge of disappearing; similar to the aleph on the forehead of the Golem, in which Judí Leon inscribed and, repentant, erased the first letter of the "Simulacrum"11 that he had made: "Made of consonants and vowels [. . .] in exact letters and syllables," the suppression of the first letter, like the suppression of a page in an encyclopedia, turns the truth (emet) into death (met), a country, a region, a continent, suppressed by a perfect version, exact (cabal), complete (acabada)—Kabbalah plays with the homophony of these letters, between them—or because it is missing a page: the aleph, the letter the Golem (Hebrew for an embryo, a larva, a being short of being; a mask in German13), the letter missing at the beginning (bereshit—Genesis—begins with beth), the title that announces that the world had begun before, before the beginning and its version. If the world was created by the letter, by the same cause, literally, it can disappear.

In 1980 Paul Virilio began to speak of an aesthetics of disappearance.13 More than forty years earlier, the year in which Walter Benjamin committed suicide, Borges, in the story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Terrítorius," and Bosco Casares, in The Invention of More114—"a perfect novel"15 that crosses paths with that story—anticipated in a literary way that aesthetics of disappearance. A multiplied disappearance that the universe of the concentration camp would cast into the abyss, the endless precipice, that fall. "Impossible to write and think like before," says Giorgio Agamben;16 or as Jean-François Lyotard says in the Différend,17 the dilemma that has been faced by thought since the furthest reaches of time and remains detained in the disgrace, the dividing (einteilen) of a world that does not communicate (miteilen), variants that do not believe the negation of Theodor Adorno,18 to whom it perhaps did not seem necessary to negate history as well, because according to Hegel it had already come to an end in October of 1806.19

III

From his first books, Borges had shown his preoccupation with the relation between space and signification. But in place of the maximal minimal aleph, in The Size of My Hope68—that book that replicates in its title The Size of Space, the small volume that Leopoldo Lugones had written some years earlier on mathematical questions69—Borges had desired to accede, by way of the appropriation of the common tongue, to the singularity of each place (in space), of each time (in waiting, in hope), to a different idiomatic property, a language of his own, particular, which, as was already said, is the original meaning of idiom.20

At one time I had intended to analyze linguistically the impossible language (idioma) of Ireneo Funes; I wanted to formulate a semantics on the basis of words that, precisely because they were particular, like proper names,
do not signify. Today it would be interesting to sketch out a different analysis of Borges's language, of a multilingual "Borgese" to which the transversality of his revelations is conducive. In the same way one says "the language of Cervantes" but in reverse, I would disfigure the etymology such that in place of making reference to the language of all Spanish speakers, I could restrict it to a particular language, his, since it is that original particularity that we are talking about. The language of Borges both is and is not the language of Cervantes and, according to this contradictory ambivalence, Borges would be trying to approach a primordial language, at times via etymologies, at times dispensing with them:

There are few disciplines as interesting as etymology; this is due to the unpredictable transformations of the primitive meaning of words across time. Given such transformations, which can border on the paradoxical, the origin of word will help little or not at all in the clarification of a concept.43

One would have to pause to consider the poetic reason of a signification that brings him close to the theories of Walter Benjamin, to the mysticism of his speculations, which lays the foundations of, among others, one of his greatest essays: "The Task of the Translator,"44 "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" (utterance and demonstration of a task at once possible and impossible, since Aufgabe in German means both work and giving up). It is a question of one of the semantic dilemmas that preoccupied Borges and that distinguish his words with a universal poetic density. The comprehension of antebabelian language, Edenic/Adamic45 because of his foreseeable blindness, the ironic association of this fates with access to a paradoxical Paradise, a species of library; the appropriation of his ancestors' iron language, which his blindness throws down into a crossroads of tongues: "the iron language"46 similar to the "hard iron, the intimate knife at my throat"47 ("Conjectural Poem"48), un lenguaje blindado ("blinded" and "armoured").49 The translinguistic crossroads is prolonged in a series of names, proper or not, which reciprocally "untranslate" themselves: the red Adam, Red Scharlach, Escoto Erigena or the Irish Irishman, and so many others.

If all thought is conjectural50—the thought and the declaration are Borges's—one of the conjectures I could formulate, apropos thought and knowledge, would be as much a double conjecture as a double thought: in a certain sense, Borges knew how to reveal "the grace of thought" or "the grace of knowledge," the grace so needed by this twentieth century that fell into disgrace, because of the catastrophe that more than fifty years ago provoked the differend from which there is no exit. Perhaps it is pertinent to evoke, from the place of my double ignorance of Hebrew and Kabbalah, a procedure that the Kabbalists apply to the interpretations of texts. I refer to "tikkun,"51 that restitution that demands prayer, in the middle of the night, implores the restoration of the ruined temples, the urns broken like crystals in the night. More than a prayer, "tikkun" is the procedure that the lay lecture, lega,52 cannot elude. All reading supposes an operation of fragmentation and the contrary operation, a reunion of fragments, the search for unity, the means to a restitution of a meaning that implies not a unique meaning but rather the union of meaning, one where the series commences and encompasses it, in unity, less secular, less fortuitous than other unities more celebrated in the last years.

From these perspectives, it was necessary that the restitution pass through German, through its idiom and, as Adorno said, when he pointed to the absurd lexical obstinacies of German that designates philosophy as thought, thus making a profit out of a deficiency.53 To aspire, among so much disgrace, to return grace, to a restitution that language just like recent history still obliges and of which language is conducive. "La grace, par hypothèse, n'a pas de prix, peut-elle même s'obtenir?" (Grace, by hypothesis, has no price, can it even be obtained?).54 Without avoiding the academic, epistemological exigencies of thought and knowing (saber), one would have to undertake to recuperate in thought the grace of thought since, in their origin, it was impossible to distinguish them: danken und denken (to thank and to think) are terms that originate in the same voice: in Old High German, danken. In the same way, one would have to recuperate in knowing the grace of knowing, since something similar occurs there, Wissen being not so different from Witz, the joke. In the end, in both cases, to claim to restore the grace of knowledge (conocimiento), or better yet, cognizance (or recognition), which was one of the forms of gratia, configuring a gesture or gratitude that passes through knowledge and duplicates it, fragmenting it along a semantic cleavage that tends not to be remembered.

They are more than coincidences, convergences of meaning in the biography of a word or the incidences of simultaneity in a single voice. In a word, I allude again, one more time, to the recuperation of an original meaning that accumulates, without attenuating the variations of other meanings, discovering a semantic synthesis that the fragmentation of use had disarticulated. Borges writes in Spanish, which is his language, although his quête or quest,55 his search and questioning of universality orients his verbal imagination toward other languages and myths: he uses words in Spanish, but they can be understood in English, at times in other languages—in Hebrew, for example—a fate of translilingual, poetic growth, because of which the same words sound, re-sound at the same time in different languages. It is one of the paths I could find in a Garden beyond or before, through which it is possible to transgress borders and which erases them or bifurcates them:
une biffure, as Levinas said of thought: “La pensée est originalement biffure” [thought is originally erase], the trace that crosses—erasers—and symbolizes, at the same time, parts of a fractured piece that, when they coincide, incite a return to the illusion of the beginning.

**THREE**

**PARADOXA ORTODOXA**

Coincidences are inevitable since we are reading Derrida and Plato on the basis of Borges.

—Emir Rodriguez Monégol

It is said that the pelican so loves her young that she puts them to death with her claws.

—Honorius de Autun

Let us adore without understanding, said the priest.

So be it, said Bouvard.

—Gustave Flaubert

In “Vindication of Bouvard and Pécuchet”! Borges considered Flaubert’s work to be a “deceptively simple story”; we could apply a similar consideration to his story “The Gospel According to Mark.” But the coincidences between Flaubert’s work—an aberration, according to some, “the greatest work of French literature and perhaps of all literature,” according to others—and Borges’s story are recognizable as something more than an appearance of shared simplicity. According to Borges, Flaubert makes his characters read a library “so that they don’t understand it,” they (cornu)copy it; also in “The Gospel According to Mark,” Borges imagines the problems of a reading that is too loyal and, for this reason, here too the risks of incomprehension should not be discarded.

The story begins by describing the primary narrative circumstances of every introduction (“The deed occurred in the hacienda Los Alamos, in the district of Junín, toward the south, in the last days of the month of March of 1928”), but this observation of conventional “beginnings” constitutes
a realist option in two ways: a beginning that adjusts itself to the most conservative realism, which according to Roman Jakobson is the one on which he models his observations concerning the old canons, and a minute and chronologically punctual geographic orientation. As far as Borges is concerned, the exaggeration of realist precision can only be a cause for suspicion. Perhaps it is more prudent to define this narration as realist à outrance, of an outre realism, better yet, an ultrarealism. (We will return to this definition.)

The character, Baltazar Espinosa, a student from Buenos Aires, is found summering at his cousin's hacienda when the storm crashes down, and the estuaries of an unforeseeable river-swell oblige him to remain in the heart of the hacienda, to share it with the foreman and his family—the Gutres—and to turn to the reading of the Gospel in order to attenuate the hostility of a forced conviviality, sidestepping by way of the (re)cited word as much the dubious proximity of dialogue as the discomforts of an inevitable circumspection.

Basically, the narrative situation ends up being quite similar to that of another story: "The Shape of the Sword." In this piece as well the story occurs in a farm, La Colorada, as it was called, although as we may read in the previous quote from the edition of the complete works, the hacienda from "The Gospel According to Mark" is called "Los Álamos," in the first version it appears as "La Colorada"; the coincidence of the proper name cannot be ignored. But other, less striking similarities may be registered as well: the city/country opposition; inundation and isolation; involuntary closeness; the precarious Spanish of those living in the hacienda; the resistance to dialogue; the change and accumulation of narrative functions brought about by the participation of a character who takes on another narration and introduces in this way a second, distant—biblical or historical—diesis. That introduction is crucial in that it unleashes an exchange of fundamental narrative functions: narrator for narratee; reader for characters, slippages that stratify the narration in chiasma, weaving it into two crossed planes: in superposition and opposition, because the structure of "the circular ruins" is not only the fundamental literary articulation of the imaginative archeology of Borges but also the putting into evidencing—by its narrative, by its poetics—of the referential fracture, the inevitability of breakdown through the phenomenon of signification.

Representation as the point where the abyss opens: the sign is the origin of other signs, said Peirce, recognizing the il-limitation of semiosis as the path that, by way of the breakdown, precipitates the infinite:

One—which?—looked at the other
Like he who dreams he is dreaming.9

More than the common place of the Borgesian imaginary, these interlaced slippages reveal duality as a necessary condition of any literary text that, according to Derrida, prefigures its own deconstruction: presence for absence, absence for presence, truth for fiction: "any truth would be an illusion of which one forgets that it is an illusion," said Nietzsche, and there is no need to be surprised; "such truths do exist."10

The word installs a strategy of initiation; it is the origin, according to John, where all begins, but it would also be that revelation that begins the Apocalypse; from the beginning, the first word, apocalypse, evokes the end: the revelation/destruction, origin and catastrophe, origin of the catastrophe, the word apocalypse initiating the Apocalypse recuperates the ambiguity that the mere mention convokes. "Je parle, donc je ne suis pas" (I speak, therefore I am not), Maurice Blanchot could have said.11 If Peirce said "to know a sign is always to know something else," it would not be abusive to understand from this that to know a sign is always to know something different, something opposite. This is what Umberto Eco reiterates: "Starting from the sign, one goes through the whole semiotic process and arrives at the point where the sign becomes capable of contradicting itself (otherwise, those textual mechanisms called 'literature' would not be possible)."12

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF WRITING

Littré dealt them the coup de grace affirming that there had never been a positive orthography and that there couldn't be one either. For this reason they arrived at the conclusion that syntax is a fantasy and grammar an illusion.

—Gustave Flaubert

In "Plato's Pharmacy," Jacques Derrida questions the contradictions that from antiquity to structuralism without interruption have denigrated the function of writing. He starts from Socrates, "he who does not write," who in Phaedrus traces the doubts as to the benefits of writing back to a remote Egyptian past. His contradictory ambivalence makes suspect Plato's claims about this invention of Theuth, and—even though his suspicion remains written—he does not hesitate to suspect a remedy that, created for the benefit of memory, damages it as much as it assists it; a pharmakon, at once remedy and poison, fixes and destroys it at the same time. "Because writing has neither an essence nor a value of its own, whether positive or negative. It acts in its simulacrum and mimes in its type, memory, knowledge, truth."13 It is not truth because it imitates it; it is not knowledge but appearance; it is not memory but its fixation; nor the word because it silences it. Derrida deconstructs that logocentric obsession that tries to ignore the relevance.
of writing: its reserve. Nevertheless, it is that discretion and accumulation, disposition and prudence, that makes of its virtuosity a virtue. Against time, writing fixes itself; it spatializes discourse, initiating controversy, giving way to an infinite textual openness: in this abyssal, space-time does not count. Reading departs from there, it withdraws (se aparta): “Reading has to begin in this unstable commixture of literalism and suspicion” and, when it is valid, it deconstructs it: “Reading [. . .] if strong is always a misreading.”

Harold Bloom contradicts himself, and this contradiction legitimizes the potency of interpretation, its power to be; its possibility: the multiplication of a truth to the “nth” version. Neither literal nor notarial, concerning meaning there is no property but rather appropriation and confrontation; “the will of the contrary,” which could be attributed to Nietzsche, is the condition and passion of the text. “Je suis le sinistre miroir // où la mègare se regarde” (I am the sinister mirror // in which the harpy looks at herself), as if spoken by writing about itself, demanding a first person who is—“Thanks to voracious irony”—subject and object of interminable contradictions. “I will speak of a letter”; thus Derrida declares the initiation of différence (these are the first words with which “Différence” begins), imposing in this way the introduction of the Derridean order: the letter as primordial referent, the letter that precedes speech: Derrida speaks of the letter.

From its origin—it was Theuth who invented it, either Theuth or Hermes or Mercury or Wotan or the great magician Odin, inventor of runes, god of war and god of poets; through writing the text debates; it is a debate, or it is not a text. Writing is fixed in a dual space, on the bias, between an inside and an outside, between imagination and reflection, between silence and silence, a space beyond, of transparency and tergiversation, where it (ex)poses itself in curious evidence, impugning “the fundamental epistemological metaphor: understanding as seeing,” the flight of meaning, the fault through which it slips out, the failure that is neither error nor lack but rather an obstinate will to know and to be the truth.

TO HEAR ONESELF OR TEAR ONESELF AWAY: WHERE TO?

What did “the abyss that broke” and “the waterfalls from heaven” mean in Genesis? Because an abyss does not break and heaven has no waterfalls! [. . .] You must remember, said Bouvard, that Moses exaggerated demonically.

—Gustave Flaubert

Oral discourse takes place in time, with time, like time, and these coincidences dissipate in fluidity the abysmal breakdowns of meaning, reduce interpretive possibilities, limit them, eliminating disconcert by a sort of certainty: I understand because I hear, an epistemological metaphor always more disputable albeit accepted. The suspicious Francophone plausibility of entendre confounds comprehension with audition, sense with the sensed, truth with presence, presence with the voice: “And all the people are seeing the voices,” the scriptures say, and John, for his part, transcribed the revelation of that strange vision: “Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me,” as if the voice were sufficient: seeing in order to hear, hearing in order to believe, are what counts as evidence. “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God …” But neither does ignorance guarantee that knowledge, as Pécuchet could have reasoned, Pécuchet who, excited by his recent erudition, had begun a record of the Bible’s contradictions, even though he would not have proposed to deconstruct them.

The Gutes of Borges’s story were illiterate, they barely knew how to speak; Roberto Paoli speaks of their “almost zoological regression.” The readings of La Chacra, of the veterinarian manual, of The History of the Shorthorns in Argentina, of Don Segundo Sombra, that Baltasar Espinosa tried to present them did not interest them. The triviality of the stories was not distinguishable from those they lived every day: on the contrary, when dealing with the country, they preferred their own adventures as cattlemen. In reality there was no difference. Nevertheless, when he began to read the Gospel according to Mark, “perhaps to see if they understood anything [. . .], he was surprised that they listened to it with attention and then with hushed interest. [. . .] It reminded him of the elocution classes he had received in Ramos Mejía and he stood up to preach the parables.” Espinosa proceeds like Mark: he does not limit his version to referring to deeds but rather preaches while dramatizing them: to be precise, his discourse converts the tale into action.

The naive attention of his listeners was foreseeable. They are listening for the first time to a tale; that tale refers to the story of Jesus Christ; the initiation could not be better. Furthermore, the circumstances of this reading reinforce credulity: they hear, they not read. More still than the philosophical arguments of Plato, of Rousseau, or of Saussure, objected to by Derrida, mentioned so often by the deconstructionists, the live reading of revealed truth concentrates in logos its privileged polysemic. The eloquent conviction of Borges’s character sums up the differences in his voice is everything: reason-thought-knowledge-word-sacred word—the word of God. For these listeners—who are also unaware of the works of deconstruction—the logocentric priority is verified once again as the coincidence of voice and presence: truth in person. Logos as origin and foundation of being converts the Gutes, converts their credulity into credence. In “The Gospel According to Mark,” Borges presents a sacred parody of conversion via the word:
the revealed logos reveals, mediating between man and things, erasing the differences between nature/culture, country/city, barbarity/civilization. Perhaps Borges would have shared the fantasy that Walter Benjamin creates on the basis of Angelus Novus—a painting made by Paul Klee that belonged to him—as to the determining force of names that, in addition to representing the secret personal identity of the individual, conditions his or her biography and work.

Barthes does not exaggerate when he understands the disposition to write (à mise en writing we could say) to begin when Proust finds or invents proper nouns: “Once this system was found, the work wrote itself immediately.” It is not only for Proust that the class of proper nouns—the Name—presents “the greatest constitutive power.” Cratylus was already suspicious of a kind of onomastic Platonism that might as well be est signification. In this way, from an a-semantic extreme, and authorized of entire oeuvre emerged from a few names, we can risk the attribution of of meaning comes to refuse the linguistic status of the proper name and, onomastic motivation that the author attributes

As literary interpretation aims with a double edge, becomes more proper and more universal than ever. As literary interpretation aims to discover or invent meanings, this practice takes advantage of the semantic void in order to fill it with the greatest signification. In this way, from an a-semantic extreme, and authorized by textualization—by the operations that appropriate and are appropriated by the text—proper nouns slip easily toward a meaningful plenum. The onomastic motivation that the author attributes to his characters extends beyond the text and contaminates with meaning the proper name of the author too, who does not belong to the text itself, although he configures its constitutive frame. Everything comes to signify, as much the textual center as its borders. From the same zone, marginal and anterior to the work, Leopoldo Lugones inserts between the prologue and his poems the epigraph of El lunario sentimental, illustrating by way of the title the “nobility” of a procedure that, within the literary species, categorizes the proper noun above both the common and the proper:

In the old days
The Lugones were called Lunones
Because these men came
From Great Castle, and wore
The moon on their heralds.
[-Tirso de Avilés]

When the literary condition is recognized the verbal movement is interesting, and it is double. For the poetic word, the author or interpreter claims two attributions: he or she makes proper the common noun and common the proper noun. Also inspired by “French reflections,” Geoffrey Hartman formulates the hypothesis that the literary work constitutes the elaboration of a specular name, the proper. Borges—Georgie to his friends—celebrates in his work a name that recalls both the agricultural labors of the Georgics, and the boroughs, or towns, and their echoes, reuniting the extremes. When one mentions to him such a determination, he is also delighted by the specular coincidences of his name and its literary consequences.

Different from other “read readers” (subject and object of reading, who read and are read), the characters of “The Gospel According to Mark” are not properly readers because, assigning all privilege to the voice, they do not observe the silent condition of reading. Double error: neither voice of presence nor silence of reading. A case not foreseen by Plato but which Borges encounters, records, invents. Borges and his own inventory, “Borges, the apothecary.”

This privilege of the phoné is not fortuitous. In De la grammaticologie, Derrida attributes it to a “s’entendre parler” (hear oneself speaking, understand oneself) where the immediacy of discourse, the evanescence of the oral word, the intangible properties of the phonic substance have brought about the confounding of the oppositions concerning the signifier as nonexternal, nonmaterial, nonempirical, noncontingent, capable of direct access to thought, to truth, an immediacy that neutralizes differences between outside/inside, visible/intelligible, universal/nonuniversal, transcendent/empirical.
A LITERAL DIFFERENCE

How to transmit to others the infinite Aleph that my fearful memory barely grasps?

—Jorge Luis Borges

One letter alone can contain the book, the universe.

—Edmond Jabès

In an earlier piece, apropos some narrative contrasts between "The Aleph" and "The Zahir," I tried to observe the extremes of an alphabetic order capable of reducing the initial totality of the orb to the wastes of a final fixity. I quoted Gershom Scholem, who defines the aleph "as the spiritual root of all letters and of that from which derive all the elements of human language," an aspiration that anticipates the articulation of sound, but implicated by the Borgesian imaginary. That "aspiration" of the aleph exceeds its literal rootedness. Without negating its nature (phonetic or physiological), aspiration extends to another form of realization, is understood as a wish, the breath of a desire, the profound aspiration, the "inspiration" that animates. The aleph is, at least, a double aspiration: a respiratory movement, a movement of the soul. Generator of energy, anterior and initial, the aleph identifies two instances of one and the same principle, instances which cipher the double key of the origin, the place where the text begins: the key of aperture and a key that— as in the score— registers the interpretation, because in interpretation are found the aperture and the key. Wish and aspiration, principle and key, soul and life; I am not loath to read in the aleph a form of totality. Edmond Jabès did not refer to the aleph but to the a, and although he does not express it, perhaps he had already speculated about these transcendent coincidences of the aleph when he defines the difference that Derrida notes, or takes note of. Without naming it, he warns: "So is it that in the word difference (différence), a letter, the seventh, was exchanged for the first letter of the alphabet, in secret, silently. Sufficient for the text to be another, or for the text to be.

In the same way as Derrida, Edmond Jabès does not formulate simply a claim for writing, but rather, recognizing its emergence, he deconstructs the illusion that impedes our distinguishing among logos-truth-presence. In French, the substitution is neither heard nor said; it is hardly even written: différence/différence, and in that operation—substitution without suppression—is verified its relevance. The a for the e. More than substitute, the preposition multiplies: a x e, a substitution that multiplies the meaning of the word. It produces a dissemination of meaning that, because of it, shimmers and shatters, dispersing univocal interpretation, disarticulating definitively whatever definition. There is no origin, nor center, nor end; whatever solution, whatever exit is illusory, or pure theory.

In difference deconstruction is concretized, without distinction (a form of differing), without displacement and postponement (another form of differing), the writing is a dead letter or a letter that kills, as the Gospel says.

PROPHECY OR PROVOCATION?

Who can tell the dancer from the dance?

—W. B. Yeats

Some time ago, when I proposed a hypothesis concerning the silence required by a text, I noted the paradoxical condition of literary reading, a contradictory activity that repeats and is silent.

In Borges's story, a reader, the reader of the Gospel—and his lectories—transgress that silent condition of reading, and, by reading out loud, suspend the difference, thereby provoking logocentric fascination: the word, the logos, the divine word, are identified in presence.

Borges's theological exercises weave another atrocious version of literary passion: high fidelity puts reading at risk. Because of faith, because of identification, the fidelity manifested by his characters is at least doubled; the risk as well.

In a certain way, the Borgesian material conforms to the cycle of evangelical narration: just as Mark recounted what Peter had recounted, so does Espinosa recount what Mark recounted.

By way of the out-loud reading of the Gospel, Baltasar Espinosa, "whose theology was uncertain," Borges says, consummates a precarious consubstantiation. To his eyes, to those of his readers, that voice is no longer to be distinguished from that of Christ nor from his presence. Because of that same precarious union, neither are the Gutes to be distinguished from his executioners. One cannot be surprised, by the end of the work, by another crucifixion. "Espinosa understood what awaited him on the other side of the door."

The characters do not speak; they do not speak to one another. "The genuine logos is always a dia-logos." But the discourse of Espinosa, his presence, the conviction of his voice, revokes the hiatus of representation, constitutes an efficient effet de réel: none of the characters conceives of the difference. The reading of the Gospel is a mirror in which the characters fix themselves in order to identify themselves. Specular, or spectacular, identification is, once again, a frustrated interpretation.
Borges had already said enough. In “The Gospel According to Mark,” as in “Of Rigor in Science,” the more faithful the representation the more it sabotages the reference; fidelity perpetuates another “perfect crime” and, only because it is perfect, it does not know itself; if there existed a perfect reading it would mean the end of literature. The Gutres do not know the duality of the word; the presence of Espinosa, his voice, dissimulates his absence, suspends the inevitable duality that representation encloses. The reading they realize is the most innocent, the guiltiest.

The word brings along its contrary: a message of civilization/barbarity, of life/death, of goodness/cruelty, of truth/lie.

What law orders this “contradiction,” this internal opposition of the spoken against writing, a spoken that is spoken against itself from the moment that one writes, writes his identity in himself and extracts his identity against this depth of writing? This “contradiction,” which is nothing but the relation of diction opposing itself to inscription, is not contingent,

but neither is his warning new.

Given that contrariness, interpretation cannot fail to be ironic:

Most things are not the ones one reads, one no longer understands bread for bread, but for earth: nor wine for wine, but for water, since even the elements are ciphered in elements. What could men be? Where you think there to be substance, all is circumstance, and that which seems to be the most solid is a hole, and all holes are empty: only women seem what they are and are what they seem. How can that be, replied Andrenio, if they are all, from head to toe, nothing but one lying sycophancy? I will tell you; because most of them seem bad, and really are: such that it is necessary that one be a very good reader in order not to read everything backward.

“This was and was not.” Roman Jakobson tells us that this was the usual exhortation with which the Mallorcan storytellers introduce their narratives, “WALK DON’T WALK.” I transcribe the sign of the traffic light that, both illuminated, detain or hurry along the walking of the characters in George Segal’s sculpture, the group of plaster, wood, metal, and electric light that is to be found in the Whitney Museum in New York. It makes no sense. The work, like the world, has only various senses or contradictory meanings, or else it has none.

“The allegory of reading narrates the impossibility of reading,” says Paul de Man apropos of the allegorical requirements urged by Proust’s narrator. From which we may derive that comprehension, as an aesthetic response, is either produced through difference or is not produced at all. “Plus tard j’ai compris” (later I understood), Marcel repeatedly confesses; comprehension implies a postponement that the simultaneity (or instantaneous) of presence suspends.

THE ULTRAREALISM OF BORGES

Coleridge observes that all men are born Aristotelians or Platonists. The latter feel that classes, orders, and genres are realities; the former, they are generalizations; for these, language is nothing other than an approximate play of symbols; for those, it is the map of the universe.

—Jorge Luis Borges

Borges does not deny the initiatory property of logos. His story deconstructs it: nothing remains safe from the contradictions. Neither salvation nor order, as we already know. The Word orders chaos; it concludes or institutes it. The confusion is rooted in the nature of the word itself, which is the origin of the troubled compatibility of presence/absence, identity/difference, universal/particular. Narration exacerbates it all the more when it has narration as its theme. Confused from the beginning—there begins Apocalypse—it is already impossible to distinguish the initiation—the beginning—from the end; the revelation does not finish with the catastrophe; in the telling it convokes it.

Displacing a dialogue that the characters could not establish, the words of the Gospel constitute a strange quote, they penetrate the situation, they superimpose themselves on that reality but do not discard another contradiction: without failing to be an act (they configure a quite debatable “speech act”), they would also be its model. From which we may conclude that, as Borges comments apropos of Bouvard et Pécuchet, “the action does not occur in time but rather in eternity,” a reflection that would also correspond to his story.

Within the literary frame installed by Borges’s narrative statute, the reading of the Gospel reconciles at once model and realization: “The individual is in some way the species, and Keats’s nightingale is also Ruth’s nightingale,” Borges says in Otras Inquisiciones, and it is that coincidence that justifies the reflection that I transcribe as an epigraph.

Even without intending it, every reading approaches an appropriation of the text. As for the author, so too for the reader—although in a less troublesome form—the page is the target of the one who writes his own meaning/a proper meaning. But, in the same way as occurs to the characters of “The Gospel According to Mark,” in the propriety of the reading is
confounded the rigor of literalness (and I do not avoid here the associations of cruelty and hardness) and the search for a truth as meaning, a second propriety that consists of being the owner of meaning, usurping it.

In Borges's story, literalness is a literary fiction: interpretive abstinence—a search for pure or primary meaning. It is the first interpretive abuse, an impossible refinement that makes room for two aspects of one and the same austerity; without interpretation (only a matter of a naïve conjecture), loyalty and fidelity, which try to appear as the manifestation of faith, the observation of literal truth, give way to an authoritarian rigidity where once again "The letter kills and...". And once again propriety is more arbitrariness than exactitude.

This contradictory ambivalence of the word and its properties constitutes the very statute of the word, the duality of a nature far from simple. Each mention refers at least two times, since while referring to a particular individual it never ceases referring to an archetype, a universal. One could explain this ambivalence by considering the old neo-Platonic contribution of the distinction later established by Peirce when he opposed type and token. He indicated for each word the possibility of recalling a type (the legisign of the luxuriant Peircian nomenclature) and a particular object (the sign, in this case), such that each word registers two memories, remembers two registers. But not only this. The word token is particularly felicitous because, apart from the sixteen substantive forms the Oxford English Dictionary defines for it, on the basis of its relation with type, it weaves a semantic network that gathers up the folds of its signification. The token is, among other things, a password, a mot de passe, a safe conduct that trespasses through planes and, in that passage, allows the token to be seen in the type and vice versa. Different from Saussure's sign, the token is a sign that, without discarding the meaning of evidence, of something that is there, expresses, at the same time, the sign as footprint, the sign of something that existed and, as well, the sign insofar as it is a presage of a prodigy to come; the sign in all times, something that presents itself as a "memory," a present—a gift—offered especially to someone about to leave. Because of it the tenses appear superimposed.

Borges's is not the Gospel according to Mark but "The Gospel According to Mark," and the precise mention of the article, from the title, initiates the process of actualization. The reading actualizes the text: from ideal to real, from possibility to action, from archetype to particular type, from a past to a present, on the basis of an original, the copy; but in this case, the copy is also an origin.

Referred to by the narrator-character, the biblical recitation appears "en-abyme." Model of action, it reflects itself in the story as in a mirror, faithful and inverted, and in this way the paradoxes begin to appear. Part of the text, the characters do not imitate a historical reality but rather another textual reality. The realist illusion of the tale does not attain to an imitation of the real but to a system of transtextual verisimilitude. Neither the mirror that hung along the way and of which Stendhal spoke, nor the life that imitates art, as Oscar Wilde preferred. If the story turns out to be verisimilar, this impression is produced because the interpretation occurs between texts. This between is the hole through which another form of reading falls. The anxiety of influence—a title from Harold Bloom—appears as the necessity of formulating at least a transtextual legitimization. Writing—sacred, in this case—guarantees a narrative event that, without the prestige of such a precedent, would lack not a little credibility.

One diegesis generates another diegesis: the metaleptic slippage does not appear to occur outside the boundaries. Because of its literary nature it is natural for the character-reader to find inscribed, in the book he or she reads, his or her archetype, "like a shadow of the things to come," as Paul says apropos of the affirmations that, in the Old Testament, announce the events of the New. That is the depth of reality, a reality that is beyond, an ultrareality that—also for this reason—adds itself to the realist exaggerations of the outset.

Here as well literal reading is a risk; a fixation of writing is produced, an obsession contains a strange metamorphosis. As in Cortazar's story, in "The Gospel According to Mark" the reader turns into a larva, an exolot that identifies with itself, problematically, because it no longer distinguishes between who watches and is watched.

The book read in the book repeats itself as in a mirror (in a similar book) and en-abîme (in a different space). Like Don Quixote, like Emma Bovary, like Bouvard and Pécuchet, it is the fidelity of reading, literal, without difference (writing without writing: a coincidence), which determines its own mishaps, those proper to literary readers. Everything occurs between equals. It is Virgil who leads Dante in his Inferno. If, as Derrida says, there is no "hors-texte," there must necessarily without hors-texte be an inside-text. Like Lancelot du Lac, the "Galeotto" that facilitated the love between Paolo and Francesca, the Gospel is origin and model, the archetype of a fatal relation between characters.

**EITHER THE LETTER OR THE CIPHER**

Among books there is no exit. If the characters try to extract themselves from the calamities of their situation by means of reading, that extraction is a plot and a trap: as if, by duplicating itself, the fiction were to negate itself. The text within the text establishes a curious transtextuality; by way of a play of mirrors it creates a flight toward profundity but also an edge, a
The story begins before beginning since here as well, in the beginning is the Word, not chaos. The title, gospel, announces what has occurred and what will occur. The recourse does not appear to be exceptional. Another story from the same book, “The Intruder,” indicates, from the same para textual zone, from the aperture of those marginal texts where the story is inscribed, all the biblical, bibliographical references necessary for the quote but excessive for the epigraph: “2 Kings, 1:26,” nothing more.

Like in “The Gospel According to Mark,” Borges specifies the references but abstains from quoting. These retrospective anticipations that simultaneously announce and suspend the reference imitate the archetypical nature of the aleph insofar as the present and past, present and absent model is both within each realization and beyond it. It was in this way that God proceeded, who—according to the Midrash Rabbah—in order to create the world had first to consult the Bible, previous and present, cause and effect of creation.

Interior and anterior, that transtextual ingestion is its regress: the exit leads inside and back. As Derrida says, all writing is anterior; which is why with it begins history: “The worlds that propose April March are not regressive; what is regressive is the manner of writing their history,” says Borges in “The Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain,” clarifying that “the weak calemen of the title does not signify The March of April but rather, literally, April March.”

In the “The Gospel According to Mark” the Gospel is interior and anterior. Because of this the crucifixion of Espinosa is prescribed: written, anterior and obligatory. The transtextual mention does not distinguish whether the anteriority is only anticipation or cause. In prescription, the anteriority of writing is confused with causality. Its priority, because of its importance, its precedence, brings to light the opposition between the temporal and successive progression that defines the condition of the signifier, of the non-written sign according to Saussure, and writing as inversion—reverse and returns—that is a form of salvation by literature. “Time recovered,” reaching safety in writing, insinuates a glimpse of eternity, its resplendence as much as its conjecture.

The invention of writing by Hermes-Mercury and the reconciliation of opposites by means of the cross is a recurrent idea in the texts of the alchemists, always ready to resolve conflict by means of paradoxes. Perhaps, as Jung says in Mysterium Conjunctionis, the unifying agent is the spirit of Mercury and, thus, its singular spirit makes the author confess to being a member of the Ecclesia Spiritualis, for the spirit of God. This religious antecedent appears in the selection of the term Pelican for the circular process, since the bird is a recognized allegory of Christ.

As occurs in Proust’s novel, reading remits a thing to its beginning and what Paul understood as a mirror—as enigma and reversed—typology as announcement, is not so different from what Origen understood for apocatastasis: restoration et reintegration and the operations of allegorical reading; neither the one nor the other deny the “reversal and reinscription” that seems to be the foundation of deconstruction. The book is memory and divination and, speaking of interpretations, be it in Antioch or in Alexandria, repetition does not cease to be a transformation. In the same way that no book could communicate the ultimate knowledge, neither can its interpretation be definitive: “to want to limit the knowledge of the text would be as prudent as leaving a knife in the hands of a child.”

The interpretation of the text reiterates, revises, in each reader the (theological) problem of comprehension, of a knowledge that may be as well explicated by taenology as by paradox. For Thomas Browne, ordinary events only require the credulity of common sense; mystery is the only possible proof of divinity: “I am what I am” enables the foundation of that mystery and the endeavors of a negative theology that, like Docta Ignorantia, affirms by negating. The sacred definition affirms nondefinition, it runs through the discourse without interruption, turning around above itself. The end returns to the beginning, giving root to a paradox of knowledge capable of reconciling as much the reverse as repetition.

Analyzing the complexity of paradoxes, Rosalie L. Colie understands, on the basis of the Sophist, of the Theaetetus, and of the Parmenides, that the problems derived from the ineludibility of contradictions emerge from the proper nature of logos and the consecutive existence of two realms apparently opposed to one another, such that what is real in the one could not be so in the other: “. . . that paradox necessarily attends upon those men brave enough to travel to the limits of discourse.”

In the same way as paradoxes, deconstructive operations question the mechanisms of comprehension and, above all, the certainties that comprehension establishes: “Certum est quia impossibile est.” But neither paradoxes nor deconstruction have an end. The paradox negates itself, and in negating itself the failure of definition constitutes a kind of definition. This contradiction holds as well for deconstruction, which deliberately avoids defining itself, plays with the temptation of deconstructing itself. As Oscar Wilde says, “paradoxes are very dangerous,” hardly are they invoked when it becomes impossible to elude their occurring. The paradox negates definition, it negates itself, attempting, by that auto-deconstruction, to undermine the closure of disciplinary formulas, of academic norms, of the systems that
are the most rigorous means of limitation—or the means of the most rigorous limitation.

"My end is my beginning," the phrase attributed by Borges to Schiller, is inscribed in the ring of the Queen of Scotland to confirm her Christian faith and challenge in this way execution and death. The necessity of a circular route, the return to the beginning, contradiction as a specular vision, the organization on the cross as a reconciliation of opposites, impossible literalness, the impossibility of paraphrasing paradox, the inscription in the ring could also be the enigma and motto of textual comprehension. Perhaps the greatest fidelity verifies the greatest paradox.

FIVE

ON "ULTRAREALISM"

Borges and Biory Casares
(The Interlacing of the Imagination and Memory on the Thresholds of Other Worlds)

For Christian Metz

Those who sleep are in separate worlds, those who are awake are in the same world.

—Heraclitus

Given the circumstances, it would perhaps have been more suggestive, and certainly more appropriate, to propose a title derived from Un drame bien parisien, the novella by Alphonse Allais presented for the first time in Le Chat Noir in 1890, a quite disconcerting piece of the gaité française, which Allais had nourished with a "poetic imagination situated somewhere between Zeno of Elea and that of children." As is known, André Breton includes this curious text in his Anthologie de l’humour noir. The doubtful chromatic affiliation of the humor of this piece would be justified less by the macabre laughter than by a certain affinity with The Black Square on White Background of Kasimir Malevitch, because of its mystic, suprematist suppressions that unite the profusion of forms into an elemental geometrical figure and that reduce the variety of colors to black, which is not a color. Too regular, "square où tout est correct" (square where everything is cor-
rect), the square paradoxically insinuates a worrying forecast of those not-so-mysterious black holes in which crumbles “the microcosm of a collapsing universe,” empty plenums of collapsed stars “on the edge of nothing they give us nothing on guarantee (nantissement),” that strange guarantee with which Breton sustains humor at the margin of these cosmic considerations.

In a certain way, the prevision of a square hole, which recalls the attempts to trace the quadrature of a circle, is close to the perplexity of the denouement of Allais’s novellas—without another similarity than the rules of its own discursivity. The stupefied in the face of its disarticulated logic drew attention to itself once again, more recently, in a different, less spectacular, literary and disciplinary circle, off-stage, starting from a series of conferences, colloquia, and seminars where Umberto Eco has converted it into the recurrent reference of his formulations concerning “Possible Worlds.” Published repeatedly in articles, re-elaborated in *Lector in fabula,* it constitutes a notion about which he continues to speculate in his more recent books.

The expression possible worlds was originally formulated by Leibniz, who introduced it into philosophy as the divine act of giving existence to a real world, one which God chooses among the numerous possible worlds created by His providential mind, and God felt himself free not to create the best of all possible worlds; it was only He who preferred this one to all others. As Christian Metz says, “What delimits a discourse with regard to the rest of the world, and for this very reason opposes it to the ‘real’ world, is that a discourse must necessarily be pronounced by someone [. . .] it is one of the characteristics of the world that it is not prerogated by anyone.”

Actual or possible, preferred or proffered, the limits of my world are the limits of my language, and because it is known that the chiasmus is true: only if there is language will there be a world, whether of truth or of fiction. Its properties may or may not coincide with the real facts, but nevertheless it is possible to narrate them or describe them verbally—graphically, photo-, or cinematographically—construct them. Defined by the discursive conditions that give form and figure to objects, they are like Lichtenberg’s knife without a blade that lacks a handle: they are not to be found anywhere but could come to exist some day in some place or, simply, can be described. Their discursive reality is certain; however, the real presence of an anterior posterior, or exterior reference beyond the text, with which it does not necessarily coincide, is merely possible. Each fictional character can be the onomastic origin of generations of people who carry its name without altering the archetypal docility of its aesthetic condition. A chimera is a mythological monster, a vain dream or a gargoyle sculpted on the edge of a gothic cornice. If, because of an excess of municipal zeal, Illiers comes to call itself Illiers-Combray, the toponymic literalness of the interpretation gives neither more nor less credence to the fiction that is held in suspense. Despite the closure of the story, literary entities have a tendency to exist and, even dispensing with the fatal traps of success (éxito), they procure an exit both dangerous and redundant, given that to exist is already to “be outside,” but outside of what?

Alluding to the enigmatic mystifications of Allais’s humor, Eco does not hesitate to assimilate it to Escher’s engravings or, as he says, “to a pastiche à la Borges,” whom he himself has pastiched as few others. He also might have alluded to the slippages of planes that, overflowing their borders, obliterating them, jump out (asoman), provoke awe (asombran), in the paintings of Magritte, stratifying vision to the point of placing it at the edge of the abyss, by means of an optical and logical dis-illusion that trompe l’œil and twists the mouth—“beau comme”: the fixed eye between the lips without a face of Maldoror is fixed on the spectator of Jean-Christophe Averty, closing the breach that separates the voice and silence, making the disjunction between the word and the gaze vanish into smoke, both, eye and mouth, surprised at the same time. The pipe is nothing but a representation of one or two pipes; without fumes, with humor (in Spanish they are closer, humo/humor), an iconic figure and a verbal figure, both in sight, are confounded in one of those jokes specific to fumismo, “L’Hydrope” designated A. Allais as the ‘head of the fumist school.’

More than dallying in the alternatives of a drama in which one bets against the stereotypes of the genre and against the conjectures to which conforms a thought controlled by the automatism of opinion, those disciplines that occupy themselves with possible worlds are interested to observe the unexpected moves played with by an eccentric logic that coexists with the regularity of mechanisms fastening by reason or habit; moves of narrative prestidigitation that divert by surprise. Unforeseeability brings to light the rules that establish the normal situation, and merely revealing them in one stroke is enough to impugn them. Breton said of Allais:

Not only does he never miss an occasion to take a pot shot at the lamentable, patriotic, and religious ideal exasperated among his colleagues by the defeat of 1871, but he stands out in making trouble for the satisfied individual, blinded by truisms and sure of himself, whom he finds at his side in the street every day. His friend Sapek and he reign, in effect, over a kind of activity until then almost unheard of: mystification. One could say that with them it is raised to the level of an art: it is a question of nothing less than experimenting with a terroristic activity of the spirit, which puts in evidence the average conformism of the people.

A semiotics of narrative texts delves into the existence of possible and impossible worlds originated by the actions of a reader who can only suppose his hypothesis in silence, limited by more or less vicious hermeneutic
circles. But “the observer always interferes with the phenomenon under observation,”14 such that each of his or her possible worlds brings together the comprehension of his readings into a comprension that suspends momentarily the other worlds. If in the instant of its birth, the work explodes like an event of rupture, the reader’s interpretation observes this fracture and restituces the statutes in which are founded thought, imagination, language, or the figures that represent them.

It is in the incertitudes of interpretation that is initiated the quête—which is both a search and a question, a double program, doubly problematic—of old and new worlds, of so many other worlds, without a determined time or space, the diverse universes of dreams that vigil concentrates and reduces into one sole, real world, partial and shared. In other words, Heraclitus’s worlds precede and cipher thus interpretation.

Owmost, intimate, individual, the many “piccoli mondini”15 like those presented by Eco, are small worlds, the exact title of David Lodge’s16 academic satire or the “microcosms” that Leibniz had understood “monads” to be, which is to say, those formulas that are the expression of the world and a world unto themselves, a term that was adopted by German aesthetics of the between-wars period (Benjamin, Adorno, for example) to designate the singular work of art, cloistered, without windows. It is in one of those petits mondes of interpretation, one of the many possible worlds of those nomadic monads in which I will try to concentrate the combinatory of conjectures of a reader of fiction and theory, a private zone wherein, like in a hole in the sky, is produced the hardly coincidental meeting of Borges and Bloy with other authors, an interpretation in the key of B (en clave de B), an enclave in Paris, the dramatic localization of which Borges never stopped making fun:

We men of the various Americas remain so unconnected that we hardly even recognize ourselves as a reference, told by Europe. In such cases, Europe tends to be a synecdoche for Paris. In Paris one is less interested in art than in the politics of art: look at the gang-like tradition of its literature and painting, always directed by committees and their political dialectics: a parliament that speaks of lefts and rights; another military, speaking of vanguards and retroguards.17

It is not superfluous to recognize the auspices of the genies of place—geni loci that turn into, in this case, our loci comuni. Appealing to the favors of both, I would convoke genies, arguments, and coincidences in this place, from one of those small possible worlds enabled by the theoretical drift of fiction. When dreams make out the reverse side of reality, a world lurking behind this world reveals the avatars of its hybrid statute dissipated by the frequent control of a daily and diurnal vigil. It is Walter Benjamin who discovers in Paris or in dreams the somber thresholds of those crossed worlds, passages of transit and transition that time does not repeat. A space of time, Zeitraum, or dream of time, Zeitraum, are not to be distinguished or, as with Derrida’s différence, only one letter differs in order to, paradoxically, mark time in space. Passagen-Werk18 are “works of passages” or passages under work, undecided passageways between outside and inside, or rather, Passagen-Werk, literary passages that remit to the reader, from one author to another. They are interstices of the city in which Benjamin reveals, in part, the ambivalent, indecisive nature, without an outside, of these constructions that nineteenth-century urbanization introduced between the buildings: “such a passage is a city, a world in miniature.”19 Like paths covered by a passage, like a place of localization and permanence, galleries confront dialectically before and now. Curious itineraries of spatial or spectral intermediation oscillate between house and street, a Zwischenwelt that compromises, erratically, or eludes, the adventures of the exterior where the multitudes grow, with the private misadventures of the interior where melancholy grows.

From the liberty bestowed on him by a poetics of dreams, Benjamin is swept away by the rebellions of the surrealist insurrection. But beyond that circumstantial impression,20 he is perturbed by a more profound illumination revealed by the utopian phantasmagorias of L’éternité par les astres (1872) by Louis-Auguste Blanqui,21 “an apparition” who will be obsessively present in his thought and in his texts. In the same way as he discovers the ambiguities of a contradictory world running up and down the Paris arcades, Benjamin buries himself in the mysteries reserved by the worlds that Blanqui’s cosmogony speculation ceaselessly conceives. “Marx imputes to the Bourgeoisie the invention of the name Blanqui”;22 Geffroy denounces those who turned him into a monster, a specter, he says; Derrids does not mention him in Spectres de Marx.23 A specter among specters, betrayed, locked up, interred in his prison-tomb, not only Blanqui disappears in the shadows of his messianic desperation. It is the men of the nineteenth century who, like Benjamin, run up and down a tunnel of phantoms in the Paris arcades.

There they meet, by way of the coincidences that reading propitiates, as if they had made a “date” (cita/quote); Benjamin and Blanqui meet like that, by droit de “citer,” a right of the city, as if the city itself had given them a date, a sentimental date among other dates, one for the two of them. “Thanks to wandering through the libraries with that collector’s nose, where one comes upon those meetings that so please the surrealists, by way of the luck of objective chance.”24 Benjamin begins to admire the stellar vision or visions of Blanqui, from the moment he reads L’enfermé (The enclosed),
the denomination and title given by Blanqui's biographer. Benjamin will no longer distance himself from the political, poetic, ethical imagination, seduced as he is by the strength of a heroic figure:

emblematic of the permanent revolution. . . . The enigma of Blanqui: for him, the idea of revolution is mysteriously associated with an infernal vision of repetition—it is the stars who pronounce the accusation—and it is there that he enters the realm of theology.12

More than the rebellions of the conspirator, of the terrorist of the barri
cades, of the audacities of an anarchist who subverts without truce—even at the cost of his own sacrifice—French society of the nineteenth century, what impresses is the contumacy of this “New Hero.” Despite the oppression and prison, Blanqui puts down neither arms nor convictions, imagining at the same time the infinite plurality of different worlds. He conjectures their astronomical collapse and the coincidences of eternal return: “The world dominated by his phantasmagorias is [. . .] modernity. The vision of Blanqui brings the entire universe into modernity.”

I am not aware of whether Borges read Benjamin or Benjamin Borges. Nevertheless, it would have been most possible that Borges would have had news of his writings, his thought, his interests, not only through Gershom Scholem, his friend Gerhardt, whom he visits more than once in Jerusalem and with whom he discusses at length the knowledge of Kabbalah, decisive for all three. In 1933, Luis Juan Guerrero includes in the schedule of the department of aesthetics at the University of La Plata “Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik” and, although he does not cite Benjamin explicitly, his references to the aesthetic consequences of mechanical repetition and the “loss of aura,” which are easily to be found disseminated among his texts, give us sufficient indication to presume that Borges would have known of him by that time.13 It would not surprise me if Borges and Biy Casares, without more references about Benjamin, would have felt the echoes of his reflection on film, for example, in that decade that ended so tragically. In 1967 the press Sur published Héctor A. Murenza's Spanish translation of selected writings (Gesammelte Schriften) of Walter Benjamin for the collection “Estudios Alemanes.”

But the conjecture does not go beyond suspicion. On the contrary, I ought to pause longer to consider the image and imagination of Blanqui, his figure as well as his philosophy, transtextualized in the works of Borges and Biy Casares, beginning nonchronologically with the texts in collaboration attributed to Honorio Bustos Domecq: Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi (1942). This character ponders, much as Blanqui does, from the interior of a cell, the enigmas and conflicts, both police and political, which are brewing outside of the prison. Like the inhabitants of Tlön, Blanqui continues to be a sworn conspirator who does not cease to found, from within his imprisonment, secret societies to threaten established power. In an age of violence, he weaves plans of evasion and a revolution that surprises by turning and returning, a return to the beginning, an apocatastasis which when it returns, inaugurates by restituting. Published in 1940, both the story “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” and the novel The Invention of Morel coincide with the suicide of Walter Benjamin, precipitating a story and an aesthetic of disappearance that, paradoxically, has its origin in the multiplication of copies, in copious technical reproduction. Both narratives present various aspects in common but coincide, above all, in that they play, one and the other, with a poetics of representation. They are submitted to the paradoxical turning of talents into tatters, to the excellence of technological mechanisms of repetition so perfect as to bring about numerous parallel worlds, copied, dualities that end by introducing themselves into the folds of a real world, confusing themselves with it, reducing it to one sole entity in which what represents and what is represented are no longer distinguished.

The aesthetic itinerary is similar and closely follows the progress of technology: reproduction, the reiterative pluralization of things and persons en masse, repeated more and better, risk losing their existence in exchange for perfection. The encyclopedia, the mirror, the invention of Morel captures and registers figures in movement for eternity; the characters, preserved forever, become sick and dying. Like writing in Plato’s Phaedrus and “Plato’s Pharmac,” by Derrida, the instrumental solution enhances and kills. The apparatuses that capture and register life, fix it, multiply and confound individuals, reproduce and suppress them. First the aura disappears—the loss of the separation that distinguishes, of the singularity that confers to unity the character of uniqueness. Then, that disappearance initiates another: the loss of reference, the collapse of the necessary duality that the referent needs to signify, a collapse that the last war showed on television, like a news item or a novely. Metz said that “the perception of the tale as such [. . .] realizes the told thing.” Was it not Burges who feared that the fixation of codes would “make resurgenc . . . a phantom, the phantom of the referent”? Not only codification risks the referent. Representation, to the same extent as it requires it, preys on it; representation and predation are reciprocal and necessary: what happens, happens through representation. According to the narrator of “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” the Anglo American Encyclopaedia—literal reprint of the Encyclopedia Britannica of 1902—is indispensable for the existence of Uqbar; the opposite would seem to be the case but is not. It is significant that the Encyclopedia Britannica that I have at home (1973) has entries for Europe, Africa, Asia, and Oceania but no entry for “America” or even for “Americas,” as it is so often pluralized.
For the authors of this Encyclopedia, could America still be a utopia, a "no place," an imaginary continent, without end, like Kafka's America, a continent still to be made? Could it be that it still makes sense to believe that one can "make America," like those who now believe in making Europe? In any case and in some way it worries us that the encyclopedias—be it in fiction or even outside of it—do not get any answer right.

The contradictory achievements of the instrument turn discovery into repetition and drawn invention in inventory, a list that conserves and abolishes it at the same time. As Borges says: "In the poem the palace was complete. It was enough (they tell us) that the poet pronounce the poem for the palace to disappear, abolished and struck down by the last syllable." In one shot, palace, poem, and poet vanish by virtue of a rivalry that the emperor comprehends but does not tolerate. In another text, the cartographers of his empire describes it so perfectly that the description is confused with the empire and is exposed to its weather/time (tiempo) and storms (tempestades).

The reflections of Benjamin, the imagination of Borges and Bioy anticipate forms of disappearance or desperation that the atrocious events of the decade, the forties, would confirm thousands, millions of times over, in the destruction of war and in the camps of annihilation: "a desperation doubtlessly somewhat mixed with that irony of which Blanqui found himself to be so sadly and completely deprived, or with a humor blacker than that of the surrealists." Was it Benjamin who compared Blanqui's lack of irony to the strange humor of the surrealists?

Like another Esthétique de la disparition, science and technology appear to be tied to another world. The series induces us to think of other worlds, "parallel worlds, interstitial, bifurcating, even to that black hole that would only be an excess of speed of this type of voyage, a pure phenomenon of velocity." The theoretical speculations of Paul Virilio allude to a new order of illusion in which the unidirectionality of speed causes pilots, vehicles, troops, cities, and continents to disappear, threatened by the utopias of a technology that is dedicated to accelerating and miniaturizing its machinery to the point of unnoticeability. The elusions of acceleration constitute a different phenomenon but are fundamentally related to the same collapse.

In "The Celestial Plot," Bioy Casares's narrator (re)counts (on) the inexplicable disappearance of persons and places or their equally inexplicable reappearance; an equally strange fluctuation of possible worlds is recounted by the story of captain Ireneo Morris; a name of happy recollection, like Ireneo Funés, his Ireneo is, and with a famous last name: Morel, Moreau, or more. Another Morris (William?) may be seen in filigree, mentioned in the famous prologue to The Invention of Morel, where Borges recalls Louis-Auguste Blanqui quoting Dante Gabriel Rossetti: "I have been here before, / But when or how I cannot tell." The cosmological enigmas of Blanqui haunt the shared imaginary of Borges and Bioy, who interlace prologues, dedications, characters, and other elusive quotes that appear and disappear without leaving a trace, like the worlds of Blanqui.

"The Celestial Plot" begins with an introduction in which it is told that on a 20th of December, on board an airplane, Ireneo Morris and Carlos Alberto Servian disappear in Buenos Aires. A narrator describes the commission that he received those very same days: "the complete works of the communist Louis Augusto Blanqui," a manuscript and objects of scarce value. Like the narrative archetype of the Quixote, to which the narrator alludes, the story transcribes a manuscript that, although different, nevertheless forms part of the diegesis of the story that contains it. The referential turns of the mise en abîme make possible worlds that duplicate them thematically and textually, pushing them to the edge of the precipice, precipitating them into the abyss at a vertiginous velocity that the irony of displacement multiplies or explodes. The narrator of "The Celestial Plot" speaks of secret societies, of ritual visits to the cinematographer, of Celtic legends and subject matters. Just like the other Ireneo, the character of this story lost consciousness. The loss was not due to the fall from a horse but from an airplane. Surviving or swooning, the accident makes him doubly suspicious: either foreigner and spy, sentences with exile, or Argentine and traitor, to be shot without further ado. In the face of these alternatives, he prefers to confess himself Uruguayan. "I consoled myself thinking that for me an Uruguayan is not a foreigner." The plot is complicated by the disappearance of a letter and some grammatical and orthographic irregularities that the narrator neither grounds nor claims; I did not doubt Morris's good faith; but I had not sent him books; I had not written him this letter; I did not know the works of Blanqui. The circular paths of the story, the repetition of situations that disconcert by their similarity (then repetition is possible) and their differences (then repetition is not possible), almost equal worlds, the slippage of one world into another, the encyclopedia that distinguishes characters, life ordered like in a library: "one epoch was occupied with philosophy, another with French literature, another with the natural sciences, another with ancient Celtic literature," and thus it goes until arriving to the works of Blanqui, which I would include in the series of occult sciences, politics, and sociology. According to his strategies of reading, it is not surprising that the narrator should transcribe literally a poem in prose—that is how he defines it—of L'éternité par les astres, painstakingly annotating the bibliographical references of his edition, since in this poem or essay he claims to have found the explanation of the adventure of Morris. The text that Bioy transcribes is one of the quotes of Blanqui preferred by Benjamin and by his critics. I begin with Bioy's quote: "There could be infinite identical
worlds, infinite worlds slightly differentiated, infinite different worlds."55 I continue with that of Blanqui: "What I am writing at this moment in a dungeon of the fort of Taureau, I wrote and will write throughout eternity, at a table, with a pen, beneath these garments, in similar circumstances. Just so, all of them."56 I continue with the transcription from Biyo: "In infinite worlds my situation will be the same, but perhaps there will be variations in the reason for my interment or in the eloquence or tone of my pages."57

Like the recurrent worlds of Blanqui, The Invention of Morel and "The Celestial Plot" are two among other examples from Biyo that interface with numerous stories of Borges. In "Tiôn, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," the narrator wonders: "Who are those who invented Tiôn? The plural is inevitable, because the hypothesis of a single inventor—of an infinite Leibniz working in the darkness and in modesty—has been unanimously discarded. It is conjectured that this brave new world is the work of a secret society of astronomers, of biologists, of engineers, of metaphysicians, of poets, of chemists, of algebraists, of moralists, of painters, of geometers . . . led by an obscure man of genius."58 In "The Garden of Forking Paths,"59 Stephen Albert says, "time bifurcates perpetually toward innumerable futures. In one of those I am your enemy."60 In "Death and the Compass,"61 the story ends in dialogue: "For the next time I kill you [. . .] I promise you that labyrinth that consists in only one straight line, which is invisible, and endless."62 And also in "The Other Death,"63 and in "The South,"64 and in "The Theologians."65 Similar to the worlds of Blanqui, "which repeat themselves and blunder in the same place,"66 that turn and return to turn, making the very future a repetition of the past, the universes of Biyo and Borges interlace in a passageway where the simulacra—it is Borges who highlights the term—are confounded.67

If I highlight the "ultrarealism" of Borges and Biyo in the title, it is not merely a question of leaving behind the "outrism"68 (ultrásimo) and extravagance of their ephemeral discourses by way of a more proximal reality but rather of better observing the cleavage of realisms that proliferate on the basis of a notion of realism that does not mean the real but rather only one of the possible interpretations of this specious reality. From realism to the realisms classified by Roman Jakobson,69 the profusion of different, parallel realities, which nevertheless coincide with this reality, is astonishing. It is known that realism is not reality but a possible world; should it be surprising that, thanks to reading, they should all coincide within one, "chosen" world: Borges, Biyo, Benjamin, and Blanqui, reasonably imagining the lurking of worlds haunted by the impulses of technologies of representation, of reproduction, of recording. The regions, the empires, the events, the figures, multiplied to the point of an alarming or indifferent exile? A collapse into the doubtful reality of a monotonous world.60 Indifferent, copied, reproduced to the point of exaggeration, it turned into a terminal reality, a term between quotes, period.

Several years ago I had worked on "The Ultrarealism of Borges or the Miracle of the Roses,"71 because I felt in its recurrences the attraction of a different repetition. By way of a verbal reiterated gesture the word designated its referent, but at the same time it replicated or put it into relief. By way of this putting into relief, the reader of Borges came to approach, face to face, the archetype, the universal idea, an ideal reality, in capitals: Beyond, exaggerated, in extreme, an ultrareality.

But that was years ago. Now, even repetition has changed in the profusion of replicas reproduced by "the machines of vision,"72 which fit the roundness of a world into a square, a square in black and white or in colors. A Beyond squared by screens dominates, domesticates the excess of a reality that is turning "sage comme une image" (wise as an image), calm as a statue, correct and loyal, installed in all media by any means necessary. Everywhere and absent, partial and whole, repeated to extremes, images cause a strange universe to conform; particular as they are, images become simply universal; they suppress the referent or they arrogate themselves as such.

Irrelevant, irreverent, that universe becomes a double, insofar as it represents (does not represent), more than ever, a violated reality. Prayed upon, reality disappears for the gaze, or hides itself, covered by the screen that exposes it. Trapped by the black hole and the colors of the television, the viewfinder puts reality in its sights, makes of reality its objective and shoots, twice, several times, as in the most televisual drama. As Blanqui says and Benjamin repeats: "At bottom, it is melancholy, this eternity of man through the stars."73
FIVE

BORGES AND GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

On How to Put Life into Words,
and How to Recount Them

Dispersed in disperse capitals,
Solitary and many,
We placed at being the first Adam,
Who gave things their names.

—Jorge Luis Borges

"Then," he said, "the first thing a writer must write are his memories,
when he is still able to remember everything."

—Gabriel García Márquez

In part they are contemporaries; they share the same continent, the same
language, the fervor of readers beyond number and an uncommon glory.
Passionate readers themselves, these writers frequent similar readings in an
equally prized library featuring the same authors: Cervantes and Faulkner,
Quevedo and Conan Doyle, Alfonso Reyes, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, good old ancestral dictionaries.
They knew how to lavish military grandfathers with familiar references and
epic affects, how to regale marveling mythic grandmothers with memories,
with heroic episodes and quotidian anecdotes, all with a childlike eagerness
for adventures both supernatural and domestic. A beauty inscribed
in countless pages spares none of its wonders, translated into almost all
populous languages, evoking intimate histories, regal houses and fabulous
cities where imagination dwells and swells thanks to myths that multiply.
illusion. It would be unfortunate, however, to advance greater civil affinities between them or to persevere in an obstinate comparison where a reader's prudence might determine that this should be avoided, a comparison in which the investigator, perhaps, has already engaged or still persists with ponderous care.

For the sake of approaching the work of the narrator, essayist, and poet that is Borges, one might define it in accordance with a negative generic consideration: he didn't write novels, although he continued to read them to the last page and provided commentary on them on more than one occasion: "In the course of a life dedicated to literature, I have read very few novels; and in the majority of the cases I have only arrived at the last page out of a sense of duty." Novelist of colossal accomplishments, journalist or reporter by trade, García Márquez dedicated to the newspaper the sort of attention appropriate to a profession that didn't interfere with the enchantment and mystery that literature cultivates, and this even though sometimes the specious truth of the chronicle—with or without the capitalization—would give name for years to a weekly paper or go on to coin and quantify the title of his celebrated novel. Among his memories he had already exalted that happy coincidence of functions that, in so many other cases, would serve to perturb:

Carried away by the game of literary enigmas, I began to drink without moderation the cane rum with lemon that the others were drinking in slow sips. The conclusion of all three was that the talent and handling of information by Dumas in that novel, and perhaps in all his work, was more a reporter's than a novelist's. 5

Both are authors of well-known autobiographies and they also put before themselves the difficult task of passing from things to words, "from roses to letters," or from words to words. Borges managed to concentrate the extremes of his literary life in a succinct, collaboratively dictated "essay." García Márquez chose to prolong it through a copious book, many hundreds of pages long, wherein the event of being, of doing and of saying it, are confused in one and the same discourse.

Among his sayings and the facts that they register, an insinuated or torrential humor leaks out; with distinct grace, sparks of verbal intelligence ignite a "reality" that, questioned and elusive, remains in quotes, as if it could only exist in writing, saved by a typography that, within a frame, marks the vacillations of a particular sense, questioning and abrogating it. For Borges the real tiger, more than a symbol or a poetic license that lies in wait among stripes and traces, more than "a series of literary tropes," is the one that reveals the other tiger, neither more nor less true than the one that is in the verse. With García Márquez the severity of reporting is not forgotten, resolving a problematic relation that remains problematic in spite of its enunciation: "Even reality is mistaken when the literature is bad," he said, weak with laughter. 9

Both authors survive thanks to the passion of saying or recounting, of prolonging their life in stories that similarly fail to end with the dawning of a new day, as if recasting a vertiginous poetics or pulling over the course of a hundred years, or as if emulating the legendary rituals of the Thousand and One Nights, the title and cipher of which anticipates from the symmetry of its numbering a narrative circularity that, even in its final moment, continues to announce its beginning. With masks interposed or taken away, they recount in order to live—a common aspiration of those who perform "the craft of turning our lives into the words we write," or of "living to tell the tale," so that the elaboration of personal testimonies and literary chimeras comes to justify other reasons that are not separate from memory, but reasons with which memory neither wants nor is accustomed to conforming in order to make room for the flights [fugas] of the novel's characters.

Venerable measure, strict and free, following a precise metrical back-and-forth, is not removed from a poet that, like Borges, has assumed the brief sententiousness of the ellipsis and, moreover, it legitimates the desertion of omission by way of paradoxical variations on a mutation that refers the word to the wisdom of its original silence, thereby restoring, through a rhetoric of contradiction, a measure that in no way reduces a monumental work. In the generous dimensions of García Márquez, art is excessive, giving way to a state of affairs that would have alarmed Heraclitus: "Es necesario atenuar la desmesura más que un incendio." More than a blaze, excess must be tempered. 6 Between fragments and aphorisms, the philosopher—or posterity through a sort of chance and forgetfulness—has carved out the fissures and holes of a silence at the edge of the abyss, and the task of the narrator is the conversion into pure word [pura palabra] of that abyss. But, with sufficient frequency, some brief novel, in contrast with more voluminous ones, or the usual circumspection of their laconic characters who are alternated and counterposed with the eloquence of the character that speaks—that ought to narrate—shows that the prudence of that hieraticism is not forgotten: concise phrases, cutting like verses, slice through the excesses of the one recounting and contrast with the display of an uncontrollable eloquence. In narrative counterpoint, it lays out the chords of the instrument in one and the same movement, impressing them with their own vital tone, a chromatic and resonant energy, as if once, just once, it could contain the
risks of certain excesses, or the greater risks of doubt. Through “a terminal sentence,” the figure of a close relative or a literary character interrupts the overflowing of discourse.

“How many words does it have?” I asked.
“All of them,” said my grandfather.1c

Sentences are incrustations, lapidary, like a hail of stones thrown against a discourse that refuses to be broken down: García Márquez said “wring the neck of the swan,”11 just as Verlaine said of rhetoric, replying to Hugo and anticipating Jules Laforgue and a whole saga of irreverent poets, who likewise did not allow themselves to be tempted by the seduction of showy sentences or of sentences that had been prefashioned—by others. The difference that could bring both writers into opposition are so well known and foreseeable that it seems just as useless to ignore them as it does to exhaust them. So then, beyond an annotation of shared circumstances and beyond the evident differences that might be dissimulated by broader analogies, I would tease out those differences by reviewing the coincidences that arise between a well-traveled story from Ficciones, “Funes el memorioso,” and a no less familiar passage from Cien años de soledad. It might be necessary to be made of time in order to observe,12 to conceive a comedy of the common place that, on the basis of disparate discursive universes, enables an argumentation apt for reasoning through the principles of an epistemology-fiction, a writing in which literary visions that are unexpectedly more alike than adversarial may meet. Borges and García Márquez make their respective characters face up to the vicissitudes occasioned by an unfortunate episode, namely, two breaks that, though different in kind, have similar consequences. Having fallen from the stallion he was riding on, Ireneo Funes “loses consciousness” [“pierde el conocimiento”]. The fall leaves him forever crippled in a humble shanty in Fray Bentos and disrupts his senses, but although that disruption alters his life and changes his world, he doesn’t complain. To the contrary, Ireneo glories in the alterations that he undergoes. The transformations that precipitate the calamity are no less significant: from roaming the open country to prostration in a back room; from landscapes of mountain ranges that cut through the horizon to erudite tomes; from the chronometric acuity of perception to the most miniscule details or the learning of Latin, English, French, and Portuguese, pushed forward by a memory that renders the globe “intolerably exact.”13 After the accident, like Adam in a prelapsarian Genesis, the necessity of giving names to things is the most significant of the pressing matters at hand. For his part, threatened by the insomnia that hovers over the city of Macondo like a plague, José Arcadio Buendía, who recalls the damage of this lethal ailment, fears the loss of the notion of everything and, before sinking “into a kind of idiocy that had no past,” he hurries to identify each thing; all things, restoring to them, just in case, their proper names, repeating the gesture—Edenic task or primordial gestation—with which Adam gives them names.

Without trying to move into issues proper to theologians of the Fall, it is necessary to note that both authors put forward a major philosophical problem that they humorously resolve by way of solutions that are only apparently contradictory. Both authors transform the vicissitudes of the problem in accordance with a literary logic that, while being equally entertaining and plausible, might not have been as lacking in verisimilitude, although it is true that the happenings of the narrative are hardly realistic.

“The limits of my language are the limits of my world,”15 declared one of the most conclusive and fortunate affirmations of the twentieth century, quoted by those who have continued occupying themselves with the problem of knowledge and the existence of a subject that, more than pertaining to the world, determines it. “I am my world”;16 this could have been said by the first man and repeated by those who followed his traces in, beyond, or on this side of Paradise.

Without pretending to move the discussion to metaphysical or theological planes, it is advisable to remember that this approach is not estranged from the risk, run by José Arcadio and his compatriots, of losing the name and notion of all things to a “cruel and irrevocable [forgetfulness] [. . .] because it was the forgetfulness of death,”17 or from those risks that, through the exactitudes of memory, reduce Funes to obscurity and to the immobility and vicissitudes of his desired confinement. However, there is no harm in supposing that the ardent conflict of naming that those characters experience—and the ironic philosophical solutions that dissolve it—allude to a mythical and sacred regime, as if referring back to the initial moments of Genesis, both secular and poetical, and reckoning with the most prestigious literary forebears. If the world began with a Book, if at most a poet can end up the same way, that hazardous job of giving in which these writers revel and their characters debate among themselves should be no surprise. The fatality of writing, at the beginning and at the end, may be inherent to their first or second natures. Albeit skeptically, it may still be said that “there are two natures within us” [“Il y a deux natures en nous”], and neither of the two writers would have objected to such ambivalences.

Although the variety and richness of the quotes that Borges bestows in this sense are enormous, here it is tempting to include those that proceed from an environment that is doubly native. Allusions to the River Plate campaign are frequent, dispersed in his work and drastically categorical in
his autobiographical essay: "When I found out that the peasants were gauchos, like Eduardo Gutiérrez's characters, they acquired for me a certain enchantment. I always arrived at things after having encountered them in books."

The sincerity of an analogous confession is convincing and different in García Márquez's work, and likewise plays a decisive role in his autobiographical options: "In church I had been surprised by the size of the missal, but the dictionary was thicker. It was like looking out at the entire world for the first time." Wittgenstein would not have contested Funes's solipsism, a position that illustrates one of the keys to the problem. If the philosopher understands that "We cannot think what we cannot think," confirming that "so what we cannot think we cannot say either," then the linguistic tribulations and verbal inventiveness of the eastern gaucho would have appeared neither absurd nor eccentric.

Nevertheless, given the precarioussness of the available universal notions that Ireno renounces so as not to betray the precise determinations of his extreme perception or because he cannot conceive of them, it is curious that the urgency of saying either remains inseparable from its environs or scarcely manages to set itself apart somewhat: more like the stems and clusters of the grape than wine poured into vessels: the forms of clouds between nearby hills at the break of a specific day at a specific time, the lines of foam lifted by the oar from the Río Negro on the eve of a date that the narrator remembers with the same exactitude, just as happens with his dreams and daydreams.

It is certain that, in the story, the perfect perspicuity of his vision, the heights of his memory are what keep Ireno from thinking: "To think is to forget a difference, to generalize, to abstract." Although funese, that impossible language that Ireno could have invented—and one whose grammar would be of interest—dispenses with the conceptual property of common names, it should nonetheless be no surprise that Funes still makes use of proper names—those that identify without signifying—in order to designate the intensity of the personal experiences that are uniquely his: Máximo Pérez—whom national history presents as an Uruguayan caudillo, perhaps the last of those types proper to the "old country"; El Negro Timoteo, a publication from the period that might have been "the greatest exponent of Uruguayan satirical journalism"; Luis Melían Lafinur, the Montevidean uncle to whom Borges alluded more than once.

Although he renounced the stereotypes of conventional language, his imagination never departed from a history that is encyclopedic for today's reader and a vital part of the immediate world for Ireno, just as it is for the author and perhaps for many of his good readers. Students of the new rhetoric would have approved of Ireno's ambitious linguistic project since his terms establish the resemblances of metaphor on the cultural proximities—generally spatial—of metonymic contiguity.

Could Ireno have aspired to the construction of a perfect language? Could that "system" of verbal substitutions have originated in an atavistic nostalgia for an Elenic, Adamic language that has come to preoccupy men since the penalty inflicted on them, first, for their wish to know—or to be—like the gods, and later as the yearning for the ancestral tower and the punishments of the diaspora? Isn't it contradictory that the ambition of renaming—of naming again—an ambition shared by Funes, could have been stimulated—as the narrator says—by the very denomination of the Treinta y Tres Orientales, protagonists of a punctually venerated and laudable historic event, one emblematic and patriotic in Uruguay, Funes's country. According to Ireno it was absurd that the designation of the national heroes that carried out the heroic national deed should have required "two symbols and three words, rather than a single word and a single symbol." For this reason, beyond honoroble patriotic symbols, beyond the programmed glories celebrated by history and consecrated by official art and legends in the vernacular, the number as name—the Spanish word for "name" [nombre] being the same as the word for "number" in French—had already been an object of ridicule for Borges in the thirties, as it was for Juan Carlos Onetti a few years later. Numbers participate in that "inaugural enigma," that revelation that convokes poet and mathematician in the joint effort of reaching out to an archaic reality without it disintegrating.

In full fiction, Funes's metaphors substitute a number for a name, one Word for another, particularizing a universal by way of another universal that itself is appropriated through a proper name or a figurative use, like those that Funes prefers, a linguistic eccentricity that nevertheless exhales the aroma of more traditional rhetoric. Like Funes, who "marveled that such things should be considered marvelous," at this point it would seem strange to find any strangeness in his language. Metaphors are no stranger to literature or everyday language, and as Borges says in the prologue, his story, in reality, is a long metaphor for insomnia.

The sickness of insomnia is propagated throughout all of Macondo and, faced with the impossibility of avoiding it, in the same way as Ireno, José Arcadio resigns himself: "If we never sleep again, so much the better," and moreover, knowing that there is much to be done in a world in formation, one gives in, thinking that, 'that way we can get more out of life.' Ursula's painstaking, sleepless nights proved useless, her usually efficacious herbal cures were of no avail this time; no one managed to sleep, and they "spent the whole day dreaming on their feet." Reflecting on the transgressions that Surrealism vindicates as its own, although it would have been necessary to recognize them as inherent to the workings of the imagination, Walter Benjamin said, "life only seemed worth living where the threshold between waking and sleeping was worn away [. . . ] where no interstice between image and language remains."
Wandering between insomnia and dream, Borges's narrator recalls that Funes's memory was infallible. In similar fashion, the narrator in Cien años de soledad recounts that Aureliano, expert insomniac, reads José Arcadio against forgetfulness. In order to protect the inhabitants of Macondo he instructs him in a literal practice that, having been applied in his own house, then goes on to spread throughout the whole of the village: "With an inked brush he marked everything with its name: table, chair, door, wall, bed, pan. He went to the corral and marked the animals and plants." Taking no notice of biblical precepts or Platonic apprehensions, he thought it necessary to place an announcement at the entrance of the town so that no one would forget that "God exists," fearing, nonetheless and despite the eternity that that belief implies, that the inscription would only secure faith in the short run since the permanence of the letter was unable to prevent the forgetfulness of its uses and meanings.

The immediate and literal means taken by José Arcadio were not the most practical, but neither were they new. Preceded by the "Literary Engine" and the recommendations that the sages of Balnibarbi favored in their academic debates, a similar procedure took advantage of the literary favor of successive and distinct generations of readers of Gulliver's adventures. Worried by the arbitrariness of verbal communication, those sages had formulated projects that began to propitiate the reduction of all words to monosyllables; then, the reduction of all grammatical categories to the noun, in order to arrive at the total abolition of words, and this was urged as a great advantage in point of health, as well as brevity. In this way, that progressive disappearance engrosses the lush expedient of a universal language and its background of silence.

But this is not only a deviation of enlightened academics or a series of the sort of hilarious circumstances, always under suspicion, proper to Jonathan Swift. Caricatured in more than one sense by the narrator of Gulliver's Travels, the sages and their scientific nonsense anticipate the meditations that philosophy has dedicated not only to the limits of language but also to the mystical origin of the silences that those limits impose: "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical,"

Wittgenstein himself said, he who continuously advised that it was better "to say nothing except what can be said." Elsewhere, Waler Benjamin conjectured the existence of a primordial language, capable of configuring the landscape of original truth, the origin where "ideas" refer to those primary "names" constitutive of the Adamic language. For Benjamin as well, the linguistic essence of man is rooted in the naming of things, a simulacrum of the return to Eden or a desperation that converts felicity into catastrophe.

Between mystical and comical, the Buendías' amnesia allows them, with the help of the fixation of words and the literalness of their denomi-
native proceedings, to apply a strategy figuratively opposed to Funes's metaphorical displacements, which remain "memorious" but immobilized. Chased through the ruins of forgetting, instead of responding to the vague exigencies of the past, they classify and label objects and actions, defining a universal idea that neglects the particularity of each circumstance. The inhabitants of Macondo might not remember, of course, but, availing themselves of the eternity of archetypes, at least they would be able to think. Between the lucidity of insomnia and hallucinatory dreams, the truth of those Ideas can be glimpsed, and it provides "the images of their own dreams [...] [and] the images dreamt by others." In any case, they are not strange dreams. The cinematographer's oneiric explorations engage again and again with the possibility of accessing, through machines that become less and less unlikely, the interiority of cerebral images, imagining a second degree of machination, one also not unknown to science.

It follows that, even though it's true that the transgressions popularized by the culture of Macondo have been attributed to the tropical imagination, it would be right to remember that the transgressions that took place in the River Plate were no less important. In this austral or austere region that more closely approached the sobriety of Europe than the presumable excesses of the South American continent, it was Funes, within the frame of his plural fiction, who tried to surpass, by way of his transgressive poetic logic, the conceptual deficiencies of a realism that only clings to the validity of already-established ideal categories. In this way, poetry is not the enemy of thought; neither is Funes's neologistic genius entirely different from the Buendías' gestures, nor is the ingenious machinery constructed by José Arcadio in order to preserve memory at a great remove from The Invention of Morel:

The artifact was based on the possibility of reviewing every morning, from beginning to end, the totality of knowledge acquired during one's life. He conceived of it as a spinning dictionary that a person placed on the axis could operate by means of a lever, so that in a very few hours there would pass before his eyes the notions most necessary for life.

Rescued from oblivion, without regard for the posters pinned to the walls and thanks to the redemption of the written word, with Melquíades's complicity and the stupfaction produced by the new invention, José Arcadio settles into the daguerreotype laboratory, thinking, as if he had read Biow Casares's novel, "that people were slowly wearing away while his image would endure on metallic plates."

The rhetorical itinerary branches out, dispersing different versions of the truth; the reader, however, reunites them in the convergence of those
pathways, replacing that universal principle of a cosmic or comic intuition, ironically substituting those sonorous harmonies for others turned into poetic causality by phonetic contingency. In the fashion of an epitaph, the author engraves another of those terminal phrases, indicating, more than once, that fiction is a confabulation in progress, and that that shared fable is the truth of its history: "Everything is known," even that which doesn't figure in encyclopedias and dictionaries. Despite their ideological nonconformity, and despite the vision or division of their opinions and the ease with which they are opposed, it is important not to pass over those literary points that emerge between their narrations and the discovery of the cosmic beauty that fashions out of wonder an aesthetic of the normal. The dualities of an equally opportune misfortune, the fall from the stallion and the plague of insomnia, they all provoke a disorder that, as regularly happens with disturbances of regularity, makes manifest the nature of a normal operation. Ireneo's privileged suffering reveals the stupor of one who, obliged to express the singularity of his poetic condition through common language, paralyzed by the universal concepts that define the properties common to all objects, searches for an alibi in figurative diction. A rhetorical movement, a trope, comes to rescue him from his invalidity by animating conceptual thinking or inert discourse through metaphors that displace. The poetic process returns language to its original instance, the instantaneous fulguration of a union between word and thing once fractured by the use of language. The operation carried out by José Arcadio parodies that original union and, although the joke ridicules the longing for eternity, it doesn't annul the solidary and solitary juxtaposition of archetypical ideas, the same "adhesion" to the things or causes [cosas o causas]—for in their origin they are the same thing—that they name.

Toward the end of the novel, to the extent that the sense of irreality is progressively lost, in that space where names return to their place and where contrasts fade, the curses of the old bookseller resound, he for whom it was necessary to pin on "tickets and immigration documents to his pockets with safety pins" so that his forgetful memory wouldn't cause him to lose the identity that depends on those documents. He warns that neither the past, nor love, nor books are exempt from the fugacity that is the only time of men, and scarcely confides in writing as the only possible way out for one who recounts or invents their memories.
the same letters. Casual cases? Such coincidences might be sufficient to indicate the accord between these two cases, without even including, in the "cas" series, the beginning of Bioy Casares's second last name. The exclusion has the purpose of not giving into simplistic temptations of an onomatosephic fetishism more partial than elemental. Nevertheless, why not accede to interpreting these "cases" as fortuitous signs, above all those which are manifested in the literal/literary region that, "almost unexplored," legitimates the "discoveries attributed to objective chance," or simply to pure chance.

One is surprised by the appearances or disappearances within the celestial plot that this narration by Bioy Casares weaves; they come to intrigue us even more due to clues that make us suppose the existence of parallel worlds, or other worlds in which other cities, other streets, persons or their doubles, their works, entities, identities or alterities overcome or succumb for no other reason than their simple mention or omission. Like in an atlas or encyclopedia—where a nominal omission could imply the suppression of a continent—these discontinuities put in danger a reality that only the word could save. It is difficult to overcome the stupor, better yet, the fear provoked by the compromises that close in on the word, on writing, responsibilities that do not differ from others that tend to preoccupy the Kabbslists, who know that even the mere omission of a letter could upset the order of the entire universe; by the mere omission of just one word.

On the occasion of the colloquium at the CAS I already evoked an aspect to which I will now only allude. I anticipated then a reality, a *ultrazona*—an ultrareality—repeated and accelerated by the pluralization of worlds in a culture of satellites where "the excesses of velocity" contribute to annulling or rescinding the oppositions between here and there, proximity and distance, present and past, both of these and the future, real and unreal. A mixture of histories and hallucinatory utopias of the technologies of communication favor unexpected crossings, coincidences between originals, copies, and facsimiles, that profusion of "lookalikes" that find in plurispheric localization a multiple exit to escape the limits of a narrow space, too temporal, too human.

More than the vicissitudes of a pilot adventuring across strange worlds, more than the errancies of Bioy Casares's narrator, who flies over a variety of narrative situations, we try to follow the profound tracks of Louis-Auguste Blanqui² in the literary fictions of Bioy Casares. In this strange intertextual universe, the books of Blanqui—author of the most fearsome insurrections, terrorist of the Paris Comunes, the anarchist who subverts without truce, even at the cost of his own sacrifice, the French society of the nineteenth century—are required, registered, transcribed, lost, negated. Biyo's tale founds the "accidents" of the narrator's flight with the comings and goings of a group of Blanqui's books that appear and disappear from the scene in the same way as their characters or cities are introduced or vanish. It confounds the stellar mysteries with the facts of captivity, as much the oppressions of the cell as the imaginary "escapes" from that prison. The quotes excerpted from *Eternity through the Stars: An Astronomic Hypothesis* count as a safe conduct that gives passage to the most unheard of references, passageways to other worlds, as enigmatic as they are unexpected.

It is not necessary to take inventory of the texts in which this eccentric book of Blanqui, the fascination of his spectral phantasmatogories, the rare tone of an insufficiently sarcastic irony, modulate the fantastic exercises of Bioy Casares, in accordance with the celebrated poetics of Borges from the end of the thirties. His later stories prolong this same ironic approach where the traps of mediatonic irruption—which had already begun to make their disastrous effects felt—the folds and duplications of parallel worlds, occult and reveal, re-veil two times over, reality and its variations. More numerous are the narrations in which Borges and Bioy Casares insist on the convergence of different entities that cross paths because of "a kind of double life"—a double path—in a time that returns, claiming an eternity imitated or limited by the duration of an epoch that is repeating. "All the crossroads of heaven are crowded with our doubles!" exclaims Blanqui. Those doubles abound; their limits, diffuse, are confounded; the repetitions do not differ but at the same time they are never the same. The copies gesture toward a melancholy immortality; and eternity in the light of the stars, or in the key of moon, reclaims from Blanqui's Eternity a precedent that had not been sufficiently noticed: Thus, thanks to his planet, each man possesses, in extension, an infinite number of doubles that live..."²⁶

Constant, "the Blanqui effect" is verified as much in the works of Biyo Casares as in those of Borges, producing, on the basis of the plurality of worlds, of the interlacing encounters precipitated by voyages, of the slippages of some into others, their suspense and their substance. *The Invention of Morel,*³⁶ * Plans for an Escape to Carmelo,*⁶³ *Venetian Masks,*⁶⁶ *Unleashed History,*⁹ *The Room without Windows.*³⁵ So many texts in which chance encounters would explain coincidence in the narratives of Biyo Casares: "Well, the idea of a collision seems extraordinary... He who seeks himself finds himself."³¹

Constant as well in the imaginary of Borges: *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,*³¹ *The South,*³¹ *The Theologians,*³⁴ *The Other Death,*³⁵ *The Library of Babel,*³⁶ *The Garden of Forking Paths,*³⁷ *Death and the Compass,*³⁸ and so many more, the duplications and dualities could only be explained partially if not for the vision of alternative worlds enabled by and inhabited by the fabulous cosmogony of Blanqui.
In several of Borges's texts, at the beginning of "The Library of Babel" just as at the beginning of *Eternity through the Stars*, Borges and Blanqui transnaturalize the same sentence from Pascal: "The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite and, perhaps, infinite number of hexagonal galleries... The Library is a sphere whose reasonable center is wherever hexagon, whose circumference is inaccessible," says Borges's narrator.\(^{19}\) Blanqui, for his part, recalls: "The universe is a circle, whose center is found everywhere and circumference nowhere."\(^{20}\) Also, like Borges, Blanqui returns to the celebrated affirmation, adding, in his way, further on, a few lines: "Let us say (according to Pascal), and with more precision, that 'the universe is a sphere whose center is found everywhere and surface nowhere.'"\(^{21}\) Similarly to Blanqui, prisoner in the endless succession of his cells, "a librarian of genius" discovered, in Borges's story, the fundamental law of the Library. The coincidences between both authors are too numerous to be able to record them only in the reductions of an inventory. Nor should the following observation of Borges be passed over: "This thinker observed that all the books, as diverse as they might be, are made of the same elements: space, the period, the comma, the twenty-two letters of the alphabet."\(^{22}\)

Meanwhile, in his *Astronomic Hypothesis*, Blanqui affirms that: "The prodigious quantities of different combinations... of diverse arrangements... It is too much work for such scarce tools."\(^{23}\) If it were not a question of the universe instead of the Library, one would say it was Borges himself who proceeds reflecting in the terminology of Blanqui: "It may be that I find myself disoriented by age and fear, but it is not illogical to think that the world is infinite."\(^{24}\)

On, discussing the opposite, in a dialogue held by two of Bioy Casares's characters:

---I am a writer, I answered.

---Me, I'm a cosmographer.

---What you say brings to mind my first intellectual preoccupation. It's strange. It wasn't connected with literature but with cosmography.

---What was your first preoccupation?

---Perhaps the perplexity of a boy shouldn't be called that. I wondered how it could be the limit of the universe. It had to have some form, some aspect. Because the limit of the universe, as far as it was, exists.\(^{25}\) Blanqui had begun by warning us: "Here we enter into the full obscurity of language" and adds immediately, "One should not try to handle the infinite with language."\(^{26}\) Nor is it difficult to be surprised by this tone of transcendent familiarity, of skeptical triviality a la Jules Laforgue, of lucid fatalism, against-the-grain tone that Blanqui adopted and that has definitively marked the writing of our Latin American and Río Platense writers, even though Walter Benjamin had judged the writing of Blanqui to be deprived of any irony. Nevertheless, the unforeseeable alternatives and the recognition of their frequent repetitions insinuate a discursive reversal that deconstructs whatever risk of solemnity in his sentences, in the same way as he impatiently admonishes: "Either the resurrection of the stars or universal death... It is the third time I repeat this."\(^{27}\)

In the same way as Blanqui, the imagination of Adolfo Bioy Casares approaches the complexity of infinite space with the naturalness of one who steps out for a walk across the sky, with the same indolence of one who strolls down domestic walks—or passes over them, no less indifferent to their mysteries than to those of the streets of Paris, Buenos Aires, or Montevideo. These authors testify to the monotony of a time that only passes in order to pass again. Frequently Borges, Bioy Casares, have Blanqui appear in their reflections and in their texts. What is Blanqui doing in these lands? An apparition, an unexpected phantom, brought to life by letters.

Nevertheless, it should not be so surprising if, despite this presence, the reader of Bioy Casares or of Borges noted both the gravitation of Blanqui as well as his omission by the critics. This is not a question of insinuating a conspiracy of silence but rather of orbits that describe paths without ever crossing in the same reader. If words are the reverse face of the world, this reversibility resists it; its iterability multiplies the interlacings and the encounters become more frequent. Between recission and multiplication, silence is installed in several of the author's voices. E-lector, he already knows it is not possible to read everything. Each reading is an option among those small worlds where the statutes of reality/fiction, of truth/version, and fugacity/permanence coincide: "Poetry constitutes that which is most real, that which is only completely real in another world."\(^{28}\) It was Baudelaire who debated more than once and in more than one language: "It doesn't matter where! It doesn't matter where! As long as it is outside of this world!"\(^{29}\)

We know that for these writers as for Nietzsche, Blanchot, Levinas, or Derrida, literature is not only a different discourse but the discourse of the desire to be different, the desire to say as well as the desire of the self and to leave the self, to be elsewhere. Recently Harold Bloom, in the preface to *The Western Canon*—as he had already adopted it from Borges in a prior book—interpreted this desire again as an "anxiety of influence," a notion that in this astronomical context I can only comprehend as that
flux that is the search for influence in the stars but also the search for the influence of others: the poets who came before, like the first gesture, like an initial gestation.

Search for an anteriority or an authority, another reality, an exalted reality, where alterity and exaltation are confounded in another world, above this one. It could be the possible world, the chosen world of which Leibniz spoke, chosen, read (elegido, leído). Books upon books upon books that create—above that bit of reality that once existed—a superreality close to the stars (estrellas), close to the symbols, before bursting (estrellarse) and fracturing into parts. In the prison where he remained for most of his life, Blanqui contemplates a superior reality, a strange space that becomes ordinary, among the stars, the ether, eternity.

The possibility of an unfolding of simultaneous and successive worlds nourishes these writers, worried by the enigmatic nature of systems insufficiently understood, weighed down by the inheritance of a century, hobbled by boredom, by spleen, as well as by positivisms or astronomic theories and cosmogonic hypotheses. They speculated about solar systems, about infinite space, about other planets, about their origin, about their end, about an eternity in flight, which remains as time-without-time, in the place privileged by the symbolic imagination. Later Proust recuperates time and the aesthetic principles he formulated by way of cosmogonic speculations that are assimilated:

"...In the prison where he remained for most of his life, Blanqui becomes a decisive reference in the thought of the Jewish German philosopher who, like Bouvard and Pécuchet, the Borgesian characters of Flaubert, or like whichever of the doubles of Blanqui, does not cease copying and copying entire pages from that strange book that is Eternity through the Stars in his. On the other hand, Walter Benjamin, in Paris, learns of the existence of Blanqui, of his phantasmatogoria, of the reach of his revolutionary commitment, of his accusations and invectives against the different forms of oppression that dominated the society of the time. Blanqui becomes a decisive reference in the thought of the Jewish German philosopher who, like Bouvard and Pécuchet, the Borgesian characters of Flaubert, or like whichever of the doubles of Blanqui, does not cease copying and copying entire pages from that strange book that is Eternity through the Stars. So much so that one can no longer avoid the impression that the lookalikes that pullulate among those pages, that the multiplied doubles that haunt them, seduce and confuse the reader to such a point that he cannot extract himself from the duplications and turns himself into a lookalike, in order to copy, to imitate, to become, in his turn, one of those “new individualities,” “of other ourselves.” Those identities conceived by the imagination of Blanqui by means of which he tried to flee from the enclosures of his prison or from the temporal miseries of all, but which did not succeed in bridling the vehemence of his revolutionary passion.

In different texts, several times Borges makes reference to the communist Blanqui. For his part, Bioy includes long quotes from Eternity through the Stars in his. In the one room (whose floor is of earth
and which has the shape of a circle) there is a table of wood and a bench. In that circular cell, a man who looks like me writes in characters that I do not understand a long poem about a man in another circular cell who writes a poem about a man who in another circular cell... The process has no end and no one will be able to read what the prisoners write.

In only a few lines, Borges sketches the outline of a poetics in images that he shares with Blanqui, rounding out an anonymous vignette that biographically ciphers the image and fantasies of the prisoner, of the "enclosed one" as he was called, in several dungeons. Nevertheless, and beyond the reiterated allusions to text and figure, to development and structure, in other passages Borges quotes and ponders explicitly the integral name of Blanqui—here as well it has been repeated and will be repeated:

In that chapter of his Logic that deals with the law of causality, John Stuart Mill reasons that the state of the universe at any moment is a consequence of its state at the previous instant and that for an infinite intelligence the knowledge of one instant alone would be enough to know the history of the universe, past and future. (He also reasons—Oh Louis-Auguste Blanqui, oh Nietzsche, oh Pylthagoras!—that the repetition of any one state would bring about the repetition of all the others and would make of universal history a cyclical series.) In this moderated version of a certain fantasy of Laplace—he had imagined that the present state of the universe is, in theory, reducible to a formula, from which Someone could deduce all of the future and all of the past. Mill does not exclude the possibility of a future exterior intervention that will break the series.

Borges makes numerous allusions to Blanqui and, precisely, on more than one occasion, in relation to one of the themes that matters the most to them. For example, when he enumerates three doctrines apropos of the Eternal Return: the first, astrological, is from Le Bon; the second makes reference to Nietzsche; the third, which is grounded in the enumeration of simple bodies, is the one formulated "by the communist Blanqui."

Of the three doctrines that I have enumerated, the best reasoned and most complex is that of Blanqui. He, like Democritus (Cicero, Cuestiones académicas, second book, 40), crowds with facsimilars worlds and with dissimilar worlds not only time but also interminable space. His book is beautifully titled Eternity through the Stars.
I bid farewell to Morris. I promised him I would return the following week. The matter interested me and left me perplexed. I did not doubt Morris's good faith; but I had not written him that letter; I had never sent him books; I did not know the works of Blanqui...

My ignorance of the works of Blanqui is due, perhaps, to the reading plan. Ever since I was young I have understood that, in order not to be dragged along by the inconsiderate production of books and in order to attain, even if only in appearance, an encyclopedic education, I had to read according to an immutable plan...

The "mystery" of the letter incited me to read the works of Blanqui. I quickly realized that he was included in the encyclopedia and that he had written on political themes. That assuaged me; in my plan, immediately after the occult sciences come politics and sociology.

One early morning, on Corrientes Street, in a bookstore run by a blurry old man, I found a dusty bundle of books bound in brown leather, with golden titles and fillets: the complete works of Blanqui. I bought them for fifteen pesos.

On page 281 of my edition there is no poetry. Although I have not read the work entirely, I believe that the writing alludes to L'éternité par les astres, a poem in prose. In my edition it begins on page 307 of the second volume. In that poem or essay I found the explication of Morris's adventure.99

The editorial and bibliographical data is false; they belong solely to Biyo's fiction. Nevertheless, and with a literal minuteness that the narrative does not frequent, the narrator, a lookalike of Bouvard, of Pécuchet, of Pierre Menard, pauses and launches into a quote from Eternity through the Stars. Lookalike of Blanqui and of Biyo Casares he himself, the reader, although he is writing, cannot do less than transcribe both:

There could be infinite identical worlds, infinite worlds slightly differentiated, infinite different worlds. What I am writing at this moment in this fortress of Toro, I wrote and will write throughout eternity, at a table, on a piece of paper, in a dungeon, entirely similar. In infinite worlds my situation will be the same, but perhaps there will be variations in the reason for my interment or in the eloquence or tone of my pages.10

Individuals, doubles, multiples, wholes, and fragmentary copies. Hypothesis of Blanqui or inventions of Morel, of Morris, or of Biyo: the universe put into pages or screens, exhibiting the world, hiding it; ambushing and lying in wait. It is there and is not, like the worlds, peoples, and cities, trapped in the celestial plot (trama) or trap (trampa). At the end, Blanqui comes forward:

At this hour, the entire life of our planet, from birth to death, is detailed, day by day, in the myriad of astro-siblings, with all their crimes and disgraces. What we call progress is enclosed in each earth within four walls, and vanishes with it. Always and everywhere, on the terrestrial place, the same drama, the same decor, on the same narrow stage, a noisy humanity, infatuated with its grandeur, believing in the universe and living in its prison as if in an immensity, in order soon to sink with the globe that it had carried, with the most profound disdain, the burden of its pride. The same monotony, the same immobility in strange stars. The universe repeats without end and marches in place. Eternity interprets, imperturbably, in the infinite, the same representations.
THEORETICAL INVENTION IN FICTION

Marvels, Miracles, and the Gazes of Miranda

The cause is posterior to the effect, the reason for the voyage is one of the consequences of the voyage.

—Jorge Luis Borges

For some time now theory is spoken of as if of a voyage, a veering, or rather, if one takes into account, within the same semantic field or sea, the twists of an interpretation adrift or oriented by a jetty, a quebramar in Portuguese, the jeté with which Jacques Derrida designates it in French, that maritime or speculative construction that channels the sea, directing the sense of the course in the water, or of the discourse. This essay deals with the “quebramar,” with the voyages of discovery or invention—which in the origin are not distinguished, with the current that does not distinguish either, that comes and goes “like the air in the sky and the sea in the sea,” like the texts that throw themselves, without greater warning, into other texts like theory into fiction, forms of knowing, of seeing, of an American imagination where “writing about writing is the future of writing,” the double, multiple forecast with which Haroldo de Campos sees and writes, says and foresees.

Perhaps it would have been appropriate to place the title under an interrogative, to pose the question more than once of which could be the attributes of a Latin American critical discourse. To wonder if the century's end, in which so many ends coincide, would be the appropriate cultural instance to claim, again, the particularity of a writing that, like other contemporary phenomena, is evermore unaware of specific arcs, continental, regional, national, rational boundaries, and to discuss the creative
ambiguities of the critical nature. Nevertheless, it is perhaps opportune to examine yet again a question that has become an urgency, as much due to the pressures connected with its production as to the relief that makes them stand out.

Different from the sermons of so many terminal discourses, about poetry, philosophy, absolute knowledge, history, reality, reference, the drum rolls of critical discourse seem to resonate everywhere “before our eyes.”

Finally, almost at the end of the studies of literary communication, criticism emerges as a privileged object of study. From an attention focused on the author, then on the text, or from the attention dedicated to the reader by a new historicism, the relevant interest for the critique was foreseeable. From the author to the work, from the work to the reader, from the reader to the critic, critical appreciation, like communication itself, describes a path that ends by not ending, because by including in the last phase all the anterior ones, its own dynamic returns it to the beginning. It is not necessary to say that the category of author is present in the critical text, doubly present, because the critic pauses to consider it or because he himself is an author, because that duality is extended to the work that is the object of examination and, at the same time, is confounded in one and the same writing with the work of the critic. Because the critic is, above all, a reader who is in turn read; for the sake of being read he is in turn an author and thus the recursivity of the circuit is neither truncated nor closed.

It would not be a matter of claiming, then, the property of a geographical jurisdiction, that for being continental would not for that reason be any less provincial, nor of marking territorial boundaries where policing or disciplinary customs would authorize or not the universal circulation of these works. More than insisting against doctrinal dependence—which exists—or thematic dependence—which also exists—against the absence of a strong American thought, when that absence is a planetary lack, against the imitation of a philosophy resisted from afar, it is proposed, moving beyond those studies that date back to a nineteenth-century criticism certain of its positivistic researches, which continued for a large part of the past century, that we observe the interactive integration between similar writing, the aesthetic and theoretical coincidences of knowledge and creation that, in the last years, are assimilating different genres into a single textual entity.

A PARTICULAR HISTORY

It is known that since the first periods of colonization, decrees from the Inquisition had prohibited the importation or printing of fictional novels. Nevertheless, there arrived to the Americas in the bodegas of the galleys of the Spanish merchant fleet: books of science, physics, and math, of Greek and Latin, and of religious and philosophical themes. Legally, the “books of romances and false stories” were intercepted by the frequent Royal Decrees. On April 4, 1531, the House of Contracts directed a Royal Decree to impede the arrival to the Indies of “books of romances, of vain stories, and of profanities such as that of Amadis and others . . . because it is a bad practice for the Indians to learn reading putting aside the books of sound and good doctrine and, reading those of deceitful history, to learn in those bad habits and vices.” The severity of the exclusions, as is known, came to be justified by certain commentators, who recognized that, on the one hand, “the Spaniards were opening wide the doors of European culture to the Indians,” such that if these ordinances prohibited “books of Romance of profane subjects and fables.” They did so “with the purpose of protecting the Indians, who, because they were ignorant of Spanish customs, when faced with novels in the form of printed books, could have lost faith in the printed word and, as a result, in the Scriptures.” In 1536, the Queen complained that “in the execution of this [policy, W. E.] there was not the care that there should have been.” At times the severities of the Spanish Crown's censorship were even brushed aside by pointing out that “the mania of persecuting books was universal at that time,” such that it was not exclusive either of the Spanish Indies or of that epoch. For example,

Father Labat, having returned from a brief stay on the island of Saint Thomas, already advanced for the eighteenth century, bought there a shipment of books brought over by the Dutch. “I took those books”—he writes—“not so much in order to read them as to impede that they read them, and that the books make an impression on spirits weak and already sufficiently lost. I went leaving them during the trip and threw them into the sea as I read them.”

Given these precedents, it would have perhaps been impossible to foresee that over the years it would be precisely fiction that would attain its greatest expression in these territories. On the other hand, over time there was manifested a progressive nonchalance for generic and regional categorizations, making the provenance and location indifferent in favor of a common “literary world.”

As a parable of this situation, we will only recall, among many examples, the appearance in the 1920s in Rio de la Plata of Borges’s Inquisitions (1925), the essays that were intended to relieve the term of “sambenitos and the smoke of bonfires.” Nevertheless, as far as Borges is concerned, the risks of literariness do not cease to be ironic, to the point that his own inquisi-
tions were handed over to the censorship of those who wanted, by way of his book, to liberate the term.

It was he himself who tried to impede the circulation of the book, first, later excluding it from his Complete Works. Without being ignorant of the incontinences of mechanical reproducibility, he did everything possible to avoid the conservation of the book, from the destruction of the copies to which he had access, to making the contradictory gesture of acquiring them in antiquarian bookstores, ordering them, confiscating them, in order to do the same. Or he accomplished the same task but reversed, writing other books in order to counterbalance them by way of an alterity that he administered in his own way. Later would appear Other Inquisitions, which differs in an ambivalent way from the actions imposed by the ecclesiastic tribunal. This second book displaces the first inquisitions by means of new investigations, eluding the doctrines that his writings had tried to disarticulate or had succeeded without trying, contributing to the extinction of “the terrible flame of absolute knowledge.”

The reasoned imagination of his writing gave place to a literary form that recuperates interpretation without discarding spectacle in speculation, or the reflection of thought in that of a mirror, or imagination in theory. He would not speak of the invention of a sole genre because, engaged between the image and the idea, he is not interested in distinguishing between genres or canons or codes, those conventions that Christian Metz denominates the formal machines of historical and social content: “To name, to classify: here begins our problem, that of cultural taxonomies.”

In the paradoxical “Warnings” that Borges includes at the end of Inquisitions, its author proposes to have recourse to “a rhetoric that would start not from the adjustment of the current literary happenings to the already fixed forms of classical doctrine, but rather from their direct contemplation . . .”

**BETWEEN TWO MEANS**

After the copious data compiled by Emir Rodríguez Monegal in Borges par lui-même, it would be redundant to note that Maurice Blanchot, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gérard Genette, as well as Jean Baudrillard, Hans Robert Jauss, Emmanuel Levinas, John Barth, Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, Gianni Vattimo, Jean-François Lyotard, Umberto Eco, Paul Virilio, J. Bessière, Douglas R. Hofstadter, and so many other thinkers, writers, and doers of the second half of the twentieth century start from the considerations and fictions of Borges. Everything passes through Borges, he is the obligatory passage, the transit and initial cause. So many poets, so many theorists and critics occupy themselves with the imagination of Borges that the imagination of Borges has occupied the world. It is not in vain that a North American critic proposed “to nominate Borges” as the emblem of this age.

I have proposed to add to this emblem the inscription *ante litteram*, but that is another story, which has already been alluded to.

For this reason, more than in the theoretic discussion, in the validity or caducity of systems, in “the explicit breakdown of the subject, putting in parentheses the enunciative mechanism,” in the advances of an “epistemological anarchy,” we would have to delve into the alternatives of a certain cultural history that favors this critical primacy. We would have to wonder at the same time about a second-grade attempt at “invention” on the part of critical discourse in Latin America, which is not limited to the existence of a recognized textual category—more than a genre because it overflows it, is more and less than two, because it overlaps them—and confirm the “grace/humor” (gracia) of Borges’s imagination, in which are contracted (the term is less felicitious than the action it denotes), thought and knowledge as forms of a poetic writing.

Without risking, at the start, that “metonymic practice of history” guaranteed by one singular work and one sole proper name, the intellectual imagination of Borges anticipates and condenses the fiction and knowledge of at least a half a century. In as much as the narrative, poetic, essayistic masterpiece eludes the facility of historicizations and categorizations of genres that his genius surpasses, criticism does not elude its time. Nor is it a question of denigrating theory, as Stefan Collini does, attributing to it, in his introduction to Eco’s *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, the individual success in American (North American) academic life where (cultural diversity and the principles of the market) “Have contributed to making of this second order mass of reflection designated by the word ‘theory’ the central intellectual arena where reputations surge and where battles for status and power are played out.”

Nevertheless, one of the principle attributes that distinguishes Borges’s writing is neither the theoretical questioning nor the entry of different philosophical doctrines, nor a critique of the thought or judgment that resolves—or not—the narrative intricues or the truth of his poetry.

Perhaps the poetic invention of Borges is his Latin American and universal aspiration, the search for a transgressive writing, a transgression that means—it is its first meaning—“to pass to the other side,” through frames, margins, boundaries. A form of “passing beyond,” a transcendence that, at the same time as it reveals the limits—which are the requisite of definitions—makes them disappear:

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—beyond traditional literary genres, that writing supersedes or suspends definitions, interlacing categories.

—beyond the attributions of reader and critic or of author and critic, or of *author and reader*, his writing superimposes functions.
presumptuously considered exterior to the textual universe, introducing them, crossing them with the properly textual functions of narrators and characters, confounding them.

—beyond the possibilities of distinguishing thought from imagination in areas, his writing slips between disciplinary boundaries: literary, philosophical, or between theory and poetry, or between history and fiction, interlacing them, or between reality and its representation (two forms of interpretation), or between vigil and sleep, or between times that do not differ, return, or coincide, disappearing into an instant that, in its lack of time, does not differ from eternity. Borges's writing annuls the differences between names and numbers, making the other from the same, making of alterity an identity, both doubtful.

In this aesthetic “without limits” of Borges, even words or things are confounded, rescinding an opposition that should be ironic. A lack of limits is produced that attains perfection and on the basis of this is demonstrated the coincidence of the indefinite with definition, confounding, contradictorily, the finished with the infinite.

The excesses of a canon like that of Borges revise and resist the impositions of the canon. Without excluding the masters, Borges throws light on authors barely known or unknown, brings to the light (gives birth to) others who, like J. Hádik, a playwright in jail in Prague, like Pierre Menard, critic and novelist in Nîmes, make of their literary existence a parody of universal literature that counts among its glories the statute of an author who does not exist celebrated for a work that also does not exist, or that is not his. They are signs of a negative poetics that, like negative theology, configure the theoretical and critical imaginary of this epoch.

Borges has brought together in one sole figure all the literary functions. Like he himself, Menard is a reader, a critic, author, translator according to some, a character in all cases. He exists for/because of/by (por) Borges, and the preposition functions as cause, as substitution and as multiplication: Borges por Menard, one author por another who does not exist; as if multiplied by zero, the number that reunites all numbers, it exhausts him, suppresses him.

This vanishing of an author in functions that are similar is quite prior to the already noted “death of the author” (1968). The sentence is that of Roland Barthes, who pronounces it on the basis of well-known theories of writing. A little later (1969), on the basis of the same notion of écriture—although in a certain way he impugns it—Michel Foucault pronounces a similar condemnation when he refers to “the disappearance of the author.” These were neither the first deaths to be announced nor the most lapidary.

The disappearance of the oppositions that defined the systematic differences of doctrines more rigid than rigorous, the disappearance or postponement of difference in a writing that claimed to denigrate the voice, bells of mourning for the disappearance of definitive knowledge, sublated knowledge, that is to say, for a pensiero debole defined—interpreted—by Gianni Vattimo. Disappeared the referent, or the referential illusion vanished, neither does thought venture to impose. It is not surprising that an aesthetic of disappearance that razes boundaries has its fabulous antecedent in Borges's work. In his texts, a cell in Prague borders on a foyer in Tacuarembó, a city in Africa on a district in North America, or a slum in Buenos Aires blends into another in Dublin. Historiography is the same as cartography, reading or writing associates and condenses, obliterates, literally, distances. If the Encyclopedia Universalis defines the passing concept of globalization, so recent and often cited, on the basis of a quote: “Le temps du monde fini commence” (The time of the completed world begins), the oxymoron is from Paul Valéry, and he justifies it. It would have been more pertinent to illustrate this by way of any one of the numerous a-geographical references that Borges imagines from his earliest to his most recent writings: “You might say that a passport does not change the character of a man.”

THEORETICAL DISENCHANTMENTS: SECULARIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION

The complicities that have defined the critical statute are complicated in the present day by other dualities that confirm as much the hybrid nature of the critic as the excesses of his or her irregularly reticent condition.

Today a preeminence of criticism would be explained by the disappearance of “les phares” (the enlightened ones), to allude in the terms of Baudelaire's visual rhetoric to the absence of new writers and thinkers of greatness; too simple, a mechanics of compensations would explain away a reason as debatable as it is transitory.

The preeminence of criticism before the theoretical legitimization of intertextuality does not rival, in general terms, with those excellences of the writer, such that even when his irradiation orients the cultural movements of a period, the antagonism between creation and criticism, original and derivative writing, work of the imagination and intellectual work, is not maintained.

Comparing Barthes's anxiety at the idea of writing a novel, or the substitutive search in the pleasure of the text, with the efforts of Eco, who yearns to write more than one novel in which he introduces, “as certain as science,” the recourses of a theoretical foundation that he himself or his colleagues elaborated. The revelations of writing of Jacques Derrida, which
impugn disciplinary categories and stereotypes, speculating on the texts of writers such as Mallarmé, Artaud, Genet, Ponge, Celan, reconcile philosophy and literature in a double reflection that does not deny either of the two. Just as for Kant,21 "all the capacities of the soul can be reduced to three: the 'faculty of knowledge,' the sensation or feeling of pain or pleasure, and the faculty of desire," the crisis of criticism is a change that comprehends those capacities comprehended in different forms."

Other factors would be the buttressing of doctrines, the rigor of systems, neo-positivist optimism—the ingenuous and erudite confidence in methodological solutions and in ideological models that exalted the critical function until the seventies—have declined. Nevertheless, this decline, suggestively, entailed a reduction in the preeminence of criticism.

We could not discard, as a consequence, other historical circumstances in addition to these epistemological conjunctions and locate in less disciplinary reasons the relevance of a phenomenon that has been attributed to the flourishing of human sciences in one of their greatest apogees.

Despite the fact that in this field definitions have become elusive, that the resistance to theory22 is an inherent condition of the nature of theory itself, it would be necessary to recognize that critical discourse starts from literary discourse and, consequent to the ambivalences of that indefinable, or at least "endless," nature, participates in the logical fallacy of a de-fm-ition without finality—because it does not end—without end, because it is not of use. Part of the "ineffability" of beauty is its "undecidability," the rejection of a concept conceived in the short term, the urgencies of a thought that makes use of concepts for which the objects "criticism" and "literature" are not always circumscribable.

If art has been defined as those productions that a community understands as art, if the definition of literature does not promise much more, the criticism practiced by the art of judgment could be adjusted to that vagueness, that errancy of meaning that depends historically, socially, on other definitions that do not manage to be formulated, and as such maintain themselves in this radiant precariousness.

The critical necessity that literary institutionalization requires does not undermine its diffuse statute, on whose oscillations the canon depends, at the same time as it is the canon that depends on the critical activity. This reciprocity of circular dependence does not discard the ups and downs of the market since, if indeed the validity of a mediatic literature is irregularly recognized, what is not in debate is the fact that the mediatic space is recognized as the most "natural" for criticism. Its functions of mediation, between work and reader, between author and reader, find in today's globalization of techno-scientific communication stability and authority that the tradition did not assign it. The media consecrate these attributions of mediation with jurisdictions of universality that are their own. Criticism finds itself in its element in the media, between two media/means, and it is that between-two wherein is consolidated mediatic or mediatic settlements, that extends over all that is mediatic and over what is not, in order to assimilate it.

THE LIMITS OF CRITICISM

In this way the theme that has existed for more than twenty years has acquired, in this tele-techno-scientific culture,23 dimensions of an exaggeration that was not foreseeable. Properly speaking, the competence of today's critic is not so different from that of the original critics. Reconsidered the problems of the constitution of the canon, reconsidering the "quest of the author" as "a critical question": who is critical in a literary arena that has extended its critical arrogance to the point of not knowing its limits? Who is not?

It is no longer a question of the practicing critic of whom T. S. Eliot spoke but rather of a literary practice that since Borges—without overlooking passages of the Quixote, of Baudelaire, of Mallarmé, of Proust—does not lend itself to exclusions of authority or genre. From its beginnings the critical task implied historically the consideration of themes that until the present have not ceased to be "the themes" of a labor determined by the orientations of literary theory and its problems: the question of the author, truth and fiction, identity and alterity in writing, the plurality of voices in the text, its reception, the rigidity or flexibility of the canon, among others.

The relations into which the writing of creation enters with critical writing have become close to the same degree that critical writing has been assimilated to theoretical writing. Inscribed in the limits, its liminal function is constituted as an epistemological question: "The word criticism signifies more an investigation of the limits of knowledge, that is to say, of that which cannot be formulated or is ungraspable."24 Its position as tiers arbre, or third in discord, who has to resolve a plain between two orders, would fit if it were a third, an arbiter, except that it does not involve a plain between two others, but rather it is the critic who participates in the condition in which both parties find themselves. His thirdness is, without doubt, his natural statute and the recognition of his semiotic condition, the third term, the figuration of an orbes tertius that criticism carries to planetary dimensions.

Without claiming to carry out an inventory—since such a proposal alludes to invention—nor to recur to the dangers of taxonomic procedures,
but rather to deconstruct on the basis of the critical function whatever taxonomy that tries to register and describe in a restricted way the critical function, it behooves us to recall the arbitrariness that results from the dualities among which we debate.

The critic installs himself between the author and the reader but, without eluding the network of implications of his work, participates in the attributions and requisites of both and, in a certain way, neutralizes the opposition by way of a third position that involves them both.

The critical text is found between the text of creation, without ceasing to be itself a creation, and the theoretical text, without ceasing to be theoretical. A convergence organized by forms of knowledge that pass through the imagination or through reason producing a third form of reasoned imagination that defines the predominant characteristic of contemporary literature.

One could attribute to the vigor of the imagination the weakness of a thought that recognizes hermeneutics as the manifestation of contemporary knowing: “The contemporaneity of hermeneutics, which is thought of for good reason as the philosophy of modernity,” a knowing that distances itself from philosophy in order to come closer to history, to the accidental variability of circumstances, in order to disembody the textual truth. Vattimo attributes to the discoveries of interpretation the mission of a transcendent nature: “The history of salvation and the history of interpretation are far more tightly bound than the Catholic orthodoxy would like to admit.”

In effect, he attributes to hermeneutic intermediation an eternal safe passage: “salvation occurs through interpretation,” navigates between different times. The critical gaze makes the past resurface in the present of reading, an ephemeral time that is prolonged or not according to how the critical examination manages to consolidate it. In this sense all criticism is responsible for continuity, is posterior to the literary texts it deals with, a posterity that is consecutive time and suspension of time: heaven. It is, in this sense, that the present of critical interpretation keeps vigil over the text, suspending the difference between times that have passed or, equally, times that will pass.

Although it is known to be ephemeral, critical writing scrutinizes a knowledge and, at the moment of finding it, it finds it but without going beyond conjecture, beyond an imminent revelation that remains under suspicion, or a supposition that, in the terms of Charles Sanders Peirce, would be an abduction. Neither deduction nor induction, the hypothesis is a sequestering of reason, a supposition that is valid for only a short time, a certainty that is not prolonged for much more than the clarity produced by a lightning bolt. Like the horizon always in flight, one hypothesis is displaced by another hypothesis that is left behind only to be in turn superseded by a new hypothesis, and so on successively: each epoch, each critic, each reader supposes.

Critical supposition may be an abduction, or it may prolong the work thanks to an infinite interpretation, like unlimited semiosis, the successive comprehension of which Peirce spoke. For this reason, despite the apparent tautological construction, it would not be merely redundant to propose the hypothesis that interpretation is a hypothesis, a conjecture, a supposition that turns back on itself, a logical figure but also a game of the imagination, “a play of musement.” I have already said that in this age, when positions becomes less and less drastic, when oppositions are defended with indifference, it would be possible to find in supposition the personal procedure valid for approaching that scarce reality of reality that is ours, the truth that is ever less convincing, conditioned ever more by a plurality that puts in evidence the dangerous limits of a unique truth.

A hypothesis, a supposition, in both expressions is revealed—from the (in)formation of the word—an operation that lies beneath the text. To suppose means to interpret; to interpret, a way of understanding (entender). I do not believe that “understand” in English is associated with this hypothetical position (localization), but, without a doubt, comprehension is bound to a perspective that is opened from within this plane, which is not of inferiority (under) but rather of profundity. From the profound depths, the foundation to which one accedes only with difficulty.

We spoke of the anagrammatic strategy that consists of a rereading, a re-visualisation, a sub-version that is realized underneath the words (a paragraph or a hypogram in the terms of Saussure, or les mots sous les mots, for Jean Strobinski). A transposition of the graphic unities of the word responds to the procedures of selection and combination, a combinatory of decisions of that lector-elector-selector who recuperates in each reading (lecture) the freedom of an option that revises and defines it.

Between the cloister and the century, between the university and the media, there remains no cultural space in which the management of criticism does not mediate or inflate itself. If their differences are recognized, they are becoming ever less noticed in this century that has consecrated, paradoxically, secularization as its basic condition, raising the regimes of cloisters in a progressive secularization that leaves no ground for the sacred, for separation, for the discernment that is the key of the critical exercise. Discernment is the separation, the distinction, the pondering that our age has put aside. That is why I cited Eco as a paradigmatic example of this secular explosion. His literary ambition that extends in voluminous novels the information of his readings, the deeds of not-so-ordinary bibliophilism: the collector of old books chooses little known facts, the least known of an extravagant library rescued from dereliction or deluge. Among the novels
of technical prowess whose novelties no longer astonish, one is also not too astonished by the results of relics found by an encyclopedic archeology that brings together equally mirrors with mirages in a deep swell, that mare magnum where the “reader-navigator” confronts the tempest, various tempests.

America is configured from the remains of the shipwreck, with the pieces of an embarkation and a library. Those cherished books that, close to the New World, Prospero rescues from a storm that can be seen as a sign from Providence—which is how Columbus interpreted them in his Diary, the logbooks of another voyage he claims as his own. From within his own perplexity, Emir Rodríguez Monegal, the greatest Uruguayan critic and greatest critic of Borges, confessed a few years ago:

> It has taken on so many twists and turns since my birth in the border town of Melo that at times I think of myself as a bizarre combination of spectator and actor looking at a play in which I am simultaneously a performer and a critic.29

A rare combination in which the terms are inverted. It is true: Manuel Puig, Severo Sarduy, and others say—write—that they have been invented by Emir. I transcribe here the fragment of a letter of Manuel Puig who, playing with the ruins and voices of Babel, joins with Sarduy in the explicit recognition of that common authority who overflows the critical function:

> Well, the Puig Bulletin ends with the announcement of his next novel, of a crime novel stripe, currently shooting on location in perversed Buenos Aires, it's a sort of thriller.30 Do you remember MGM's slogan for the premiere of "I'll Cry Tomorrow" with Susan Hayward? It went like this: "A Film shot on location: inside a woman's soul." Well, the same could be said of my crime novel. Ok, Emir, this time answer me please. In Paris Severo and I were in agreement that we are both your inventions. It wouldn't occur to you to disinvent me for some mysterious reason?31

Although they do not say so in the same words, both are aware that “it is the other who makes you a writer,” and in this case “the other” has a name. It is not so frequent that recognition be that explicit.

Playing a plurality of roles, the considerations and realizations of Emir were an advance on the cinematographic excellencies of Peter Greenaway, a film director who makes of the image his world or of the world an image, on the basis of the books that he saves from the Tempest and the shipwreck; he saves them and shows them. Prospero—John Gielgud—gives his voice to the other characters, evoking the search for a unity that the idiomatization of language revokes. Like the critic in the literary space that was his own, Prospero interprets all the functions, speaks for all the characters. In the film, the voice of Prospero is that of all, the books of mirrors (The Book of Mirrors),32 the gaze (mirada) is that of Miranda.

This is also so of the poetics of blindness that Derrida outlines: the blind man becomes “the great blind man.” In the gests of Latin American thought it is the woman who sees or the woman who looks, or both: “volonté de savoir comme volonté de voir” (the will to know like the will to see), as Derrida said.33 Before shining forth in the film, Prospero was the image from which derived the great symbols of Latin American ideology,34 that since the end of the last century the continent has adopted as its own: the saga of Ariel, of Prospero, Caliban, and, last but not least,35 it is now time to start Miranda’s clock. The admired and admirable gaze (mirada) of Miranda, which brings together, in a single aesthetic dazzling display, imagination and knowledge, the stupor prior to study, the miracle of the gaze (mirada), amazed by the magic of Prospero, by the conversion of the scattered parts of the shipwreck into the images of a world to be made.36 Between Europe and America, between Ariel and Caliban, between fiction and theory, between his memories of a past world and the foundation of a new time, Miranda dreams, idea and figure, all of humanity:

> O wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
That has such people in't.36

Bessière, apropos of “the formal play of Alejandra, by Ernesto Sabato,” spoke of “the fable of blindness,”39 referring to those characters with whom he is concerned in “the paradox of the tale.” Dealing with that between-two that is the ambivalent space of Miranda, one could speak of “la fábula du regard” (the fable of the gaze) as fábula and habla (fable and speech), a parable (parábola) of his lucid vision (in Spanish the three terms recall the same origin, which associates fiction with the word—palabra). It is those tensions and oppositions that orient the critical activity, the presence of the critic, a meditation that makes of its condition an eternity hard to define, a concept hard to determine, which feeds the air of this age—"those airy nothings"40—the debilitation of a theory that brings with it a theory of debilitation, the decline of strong structures, the resistance to doctrines, to the radicalisms that vanish into reconciliations more apparent than real and that even the fainting of anterior adherences fails to scandalize.

If it was indeed Heidegger—and no wonder—who insisted on the etymology of the word Occidente—the land of sunset, of the fall—and despite
the fact that it occurred to Oswald Spengler to sketch out a biological theory of history, of its progressive decline in *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, nevertheless the philological coincidence does not go beyond a felicitously infelicitously etymological analogy that the current stage of the century's intellectual history confirms. Though coincidental, its pertinence does not cease to be real.

It is language proper, it is proper to language to favor these circular effects, these voices in echo. Apropos of the hermeneutic circle, Hans Georg Gadamer said:

> The hermeneutic rule according to which the whole must be understood on the basis of the particular, and the particular on the basis off the whole, comes from ancient rhetoric. It is the hermeneutics of modern times that has transposed the art of the rhetorical onto the art of understanding. In both cases it is a question of a circular relation.¹⁰

The critic must be attentive to the recourses of the hermeneutic task, the discovery of a past that, unknown, surprises with its strangeness the evidences of a present, the search for meaning, the conjectures and conjunctions of comprehension. The invention of critical discourse takes into account that hermeneutic requisite, a hybrid condition in which participates nature as crossed, a chiasmus that opposes extremes and reconciles them in a different species only because it has the property of assimilating the others, in the same way as it assimilates into its hybridity hubris. Cross and excess, a double condition that philology does not confirm but that propitiates the secularization of an interpretation that cannot be understood merely as "a logic of individual discourse,"¹¹ but in the double sense with which it has played since the beginning, rescuing classical dualities that contemporary thought recuperates.

All of which is to say that the scholar, researcher, professor, critic interprets but so too does the actor, pianist, author who—through the mediation of transtextualities, carnivalizations, parodies, quotes—does not cease to be an intermediator of the tradition that he or she confirms or refutes, which is the same action with a different opposite:

> The eyes speak,
> words look,
> looks think

says Octavio Paz in "To say: To do,"¹² recalling, in another part, that the best that we Hispanic Americans have done we have not done in the domain of politics and economics but rather in that of literature and the arts.¹³

In that crossroads of the senses (of various synesthesias or homonyms) is rehabilitated, as Abdelwahab Meddeb¹⁴ recalls, the priority of the imagination as a form of knowledge, postponed by the privileges of intellectual procedures and the seduction of their reasons, always partial. The duality of interpretation is found in the foundations of knowledge, that double vision, reasoned, and aesthetic, that is part of the imagination, of culture, where reflection can be a meditation but also the image reflected in the crystal, a mirage or a duplication in water, speculation as abstraction of reason, a strategy in finance or a figure between mirrors. As *theoria* was in the beginning: contemplation close to spectacle, to theater, before ever being contracted into a disciplined discourse of knowledge. These are forms of "escrever," of writing and seeing, that approach each other and coincide, that separate and adjust themselves, an expectation, in more than one language.
THE IRONY OF A BLIND SEE

What will the indecipherable future dream? It will dream that Alonso Quijano can be Don Quixote without leaving his town and his books. It will dream that a vespers of Ulysses can be more prodigal than the poem that narrates his travails. It will dream human generations who will not recognize the name of Ulysses. It will dream dreams more precise than today's vigil. It will dream that we will be able to do miracles and that we will not do them, because it will be more real to imagine them. It will dream worlds so intense that the voice of just one of its birds could kill you. It will dream that forgetting and memory can be voluntary acts, not aggressions or gifts of chance. It will dream that we can see with our whole body, as Milton wished from the shade of those tender orbs, his eyes. It will dream a world without machines and without that painful machine, the body. Life is not a dream, but it can become a dream, Novalis writes.

—Jorge Luis Borges

OF MERE TITLES

When dealing with more than one vision, with a divided vision, or with a diffuse blindness, it would not be difficult to allude, despite the passage of several decades since its publication, to a binary that, in its English title, enables as much the acuities of insight as the limitations of blindness. Verified by the facts and the reflections that analyze them, the foresights of Borges, those surprising anticipations of his intellectual imagination, his provocations or prophecies that as much the theories as the histories of his century continue to confirm, ever closer to his poetics, we would not have to think of Paul de Man nor in the foundations of Blindness and Insight, and yet they surge, by way of reductive, almost mechanical associations, from a rereading that neither directs them nor puts them aside.
It follows from this that, reviewing the variations of a literary perspicacity that impede dialectically aesthetic forms articulated by unforeseeable contradictions, paradoxes that resolve into coincidences, I would not avoid getting even with a theoretical position whose controversial critical elaborations continue to mark the well-trodden mystery of conjunctions that do not attenuate opposition but, on the contrary, enter into it in order to treat as finished a game that, in reality—or in its allegories—does not end.

Nevertheless, in the first place we would have to resolve a question of terms or, rather, “of mere titles,” as Borges says in “The Blind Man.” In the same way as one of the first books that Borges wrote was titled Inquisiciones, a mention that he inscribed as a kind of threshold in order to make way for a new literary space not conditioned by the deviations of history, where he declared from the beginning his intention of unburdening the concept of the violence of conversions, of exiles, and of bonfires, it would be more simple to unburden blindness and insight, as much as its adverse combination, of semantic “occupation” (Besetzung, the Germans would say, as if referring to the occupation of a city by an enemy army or by themselves) that reduces them to the simplifications of one sole authority or one sole author.

In the second place, it would be necessary to make way for a hypothesis. Despite the fact that he does not say it or usually indicate it, it is certain that Paul de Man was well acquainted with Borges’s work. It may even be supposed that he came to know him personally when Borges was invited to Harvard as the Charles Eliot Norton Professor in 1967, a university where de Man was himself professor between 1950 and 1960 and from which he does seem to have distanced himself too much afterward. Furthermore, at Yale University, more than a colleague, de Man had been one of Emir Rodríguez Monegal’s friends (1969–1985). Rodríguez Monegal has been the most fanatical Borgesologist, Borgesian, Borgesist, even in the early days when Borges was only appreciated by a limited group of connoisseurs. So much so that not only was Emir the scholar most knowledgeable concerning the life and work of Borges, as Umberto Eco recognized while Borges was still alive, but also someone who, for many reasons, biographical and literary, slipped that third person—the proper noun constant in his dialogue—toward the first, a slippage legitimated by recurrent quotes in a discourse that identified the two men beyond mere grammar. At times his interlocutor would be perturbed by the impression of a personal, almost pronominal alternation, the gradual metamorphosis of one person into another. In those conversations, Emir was slowly transformed into the prized dummy of a distant ventriloquist: quotes of Borges, anecdotes, but above all the humorous tone that conformed to an unexpected physiognomy, the gestures adequate to another’s facial features, of a voice that is duplicated, like another face, before one’s eyes.

There is no doubt that for years de Man had known of the existence of Borges’s work. In 1964, in The New York Review of Books, de Man had published a brief review on the appearance of Labyrinths and Dreamtigers, titled “A Modern Master: Jorge Luis Borges,” which begins with a quote from William Butler Yeats:

Empty eyeballs knew
That Knowledge increases unreality . . .

If indeed it figures as an epigraph to his article, it is only when closing that de Man make a lateral allusion to Borges’s blindness, a mention that does not justify the strength of that epigraph, attenuated by the reference to a suffering from which the critic wrests importance. He mentions the blindness as a natural lack owing to the years of the Argentine writer who, nevertheless, were not so many and, indeed, he would live for many more.

Rereading the article, one finds strange the thematic unbalance in favor of the epigraph and, returning to peruse de Man’s other essays, included in the mentioned book, it is also strange not to find there even one sole reference to Borges or to his blindness. More suggestive still is that in the posthumous publication, The Resistance to Theory, Borges figures only two times in the index of authors, both of which lacks corresponding merely to mentions, not strictly textual, of their author. One is from Wlad Godzich, who announces from the prologue that de Man had planned to write a book of essays about classic authors like Montaigne or as modern as Borges. The second mention appears in an interview with Stefano Rosso, translated from the Italian and included at the end of the book. When de Man tells him that “I feel perfectly at ease writing on eighteenth- or seventeenth-century authors and don’t feel at all compelled to write on contemporaries,” Rosso reminds him that nevertheless, many years before he had written an article on Borges, de Man replies: “Well, it was suggested to me. . . . Certainly I would be at any time ready to write on Borges, certainly on the fiction of Blanchot, but if you ask me on what contemporary French authors. . . . I could possibly think of myself writing on Calvino . . . ."

It is the only mention, in his entire oeuvre, of an author demanded by his interlocutor and included in an eventual list, as if his interest for Borges had been only accidental, isolated, and distant. He takes his distance: “It has been suggested to me,” and, bothered, lets go of the name as of a red hot coal, passing quickly to other authors to whom he had attributed similar possibilities, engaging a barely contingent future.

Anecdote, the omission or postponement should not pass unnoticed. Above all if one keeps in mind that in the 1964 review, de Man, when
trying to define the stories of Borges, considers that it is not possible to compare them to other stories or moralizing fables because, he says, "their world is the representation, not of an actual experience, but of an intellectual proposition." He formulates a quite similar consideration apropos of the nature of representation, starting point for the ambivalences of the aesthetic process.

In that review of 1964, de Man, among a few stories, commented on "The Garden of Forking Paths," a story in which Borges has the narrator say:

I know that of all the problems, none of them worried and worked him like the abysmal problem of time. Indeed, that is the only problem that does not figure in the pages of the Garden. He does not even use the word that means time. How do you explain that voluntary omission?

I proposed several solutions; all insufficient. We discussed them; in the end, Stephen Albert said to me:

—In a riddle whose theme is chess, what is the only word that is prohibited? I reflected for a moment, and responded:

—The word chess.

—Precisely, said Albert. The Garden of Forking Paths is an enormous riddle, or parable, whose theme is time; that recondite cause prohibits it from mentioning its name. To always omit a word, to recur to inept metaphors and obvious paraphrases, is perhaps the most emphatic way of indicating it. It is the torturous way preferred, in each of the meanderings of his indefatigable novel, by the oblique Ts'ui Pên. I have confronted hundreds of manuscripts, corrected the errors introduced by the negligence of copyists, I have thought to reestablish the primordial order, I have translated the entire work: it is apparent to me that he does not once use the word time.

And the narrator of the story continues hypothesizing on the meaningful omissions of words, of deeds, of times, in the narration of a story that, retrospectively, seems to coincide with other events that were reproduced in those same years, variants of the adverse perception of the purloined letters, letters, of the alphabet or missives, as evident to the eyes as they are unnoticed.

Nevertheless, it is not only the omissions of the critic that are so suspicious, but also his repetitions:

In Lukács's story the villain—time—appears as the hero. . . . The reader is given the elements to decipher the real plot hidden behind the pseudo-plot, but the author himself remains deluded.

As much in Blindness and Insight as in his review of Borges, the same de Man said that the artist has to put on the mask of the villain in order to create a style: time or mask, the villain is present in his texts even though the author dissimulates (himself). However, it does not seem to me necessary to make a minute comparison between overly faithful coincidences that, in this case, do not require the attention of an investigation or inventory. More than the coincidence of a single critical sleight of hand, the prolonged and careful attention he dedicates to the story "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero"—one of the most well known and least commented on of Borges's stories in those years—shows that de Man could not avoid interpreting that the omissions, which are not only decisive for Borges's aesthetic, were also frequent and revelatory for his characters as much as they would be for de Man or for the reader who was capable of deciphering the real plot hidden behind a false plot.

In the first place, Borges's story, which is from 1944, also begins, like the review of '64, with an epigraph from Yeats. In the story, because of one of those narrative strategies of universality, Borges's narrator prefers not to define the circumstances:

Details, rectifications, adjustments are missing; there are zones of history that had still not been revealed to me; today, January 3, 1944, I make it out like that. [. . .] Let us say (for the sake of narrative comfort) Ireland; let us say 1824. The narrator is called Ryan, he is the great grandson of the young, the heroic, the beautiful, the murdered Fergus Kilpatrick.

One tolerates in the intrigues of the story that a narrator is not differentiated from a historian. In "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero," that character, also ambiguous, who is his descendant, proposes to investigate the tragic attack that ended the life of an exemplary revolutionary. Nevertheless, he discovers that his ancestor was not the admirable conspirator that the fatherland venerated but rather a traitor discovered in compromising circumstances, who also was not murdered, victim of a terrorist attack, but rather was judged in secret, accused, found guilty and executed with the same discretion. After long hesitations, the narrator decides to cover up the embarrassment of a past of betrayals and instead of declaring the truth: "He publishes a book dedicated to the glory of the hero; even that, perhaps, was foreseen."

Between veracity and its versions, he discovers the theatricalized execution of his ancestors, glimpsing among the different circumstances the dramatic model of Julius Caesar, the tragedy perpetuated by the "English enemy," William Shakespeare, but he preferred to remain silent about the discovery. In contrast, faced with a similar situation, Ortwin de Graef, a
student of literature of the University of Leuven, Belgian like his countryman Paul de Man, did not succumb to the temptation of the complicity of the model and, opposing it, preferred not to remain silent about the revelations of his investigation.

One cannot fail to notice that among Irish writers, paradoxes abound, and it is insinuated that Life imitates Art much more than Art imitates life. Borges's narrator does not hesitate to imitate one of the most illustrious of the Irish. Carnivalizing that affirmation, the narrator says: "That history would have copied history was already sufficiently astonishing; that history copies literature is inconceivable." Nevertheless, it would not be surprising if theory copied literature; moreover, it is predictable that fiction be ahead of it. It is only a question of verifying, then, that the coincidences between the fiction of Borges and the theoretical contributions of de Man are numerous and notorious.

It seems disconcerting, on the other hand, that one should omit mentioning Borges as bluntly as one who comes to cover up the guilt of a past in collaboration with the enemy. Perhaps this as well Borges foresaw: he anticipated the history of his reticent chronicler, some of the directions of his thought and the ethical fluctuations of an intrigue. Like the historian obliterating carnalizations, de Man kept secret the violation of his past of collaboration with the enemy, his debts to Belgium and Borges. Faced with this silence, his colleagues, his friends (who loved him, who believed him worthy of greater feelings), conjectured, without confirmation, that de Man's secresies could be due to the discretion observed by one who might have suffered the tribulations of resistance. The ambiguous relations between history and literature, the turbid options that are proposed in "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero," are multiplied in the biography and reflections of the infamous Belgian critic. When he speaks in general of the blindness of the critic, who "in his blindness, turns the weapon of his language upon himself . . .," perhaps he intended to say that also silence—which is language—can produce that reversal, a low blow that language gives the one who uses it without noticing the uncontrollable derivation of the duplicities it implies.

It is well known that in an epoch in which various transtextualities, carnivalizations, and polyphonies legitimated palimpsest writings, the displacement of themes and texts are all still of importance, and the interest in fragments of writing is a common metaphor. It is not a question then of demanding rights of textual exclusivity or of anachronistic registers, less so now, when the electronic perfection of the media of communication is obliterating the referent, accumulating copies and reducing the complexities of representation to images that, on the screen, present one reality for another, as immediate, as unmediated.

In The Anxiety of Influence, Harold Bloom begins his book by recalling quite summarily that Borges had said that poets create their precursors. I do not know if Bloom knew that this is one of the most often-quoted sentences of Borges, and if he only mentions Borges in passing in order to make this frequency appear obvious. It is possible that de Man does not mention him for reasons of the same appearance of obviousness, or because he experiences as much the fear as the desire of that anxiety. It is rather significant that de Man and Bloom suppress their reference to Borges. In those same years, Michel Foucault began Les mots et les choses affirming that "this book was born from a text of Borges's," and continues elaborating his thought on the basis of "The analytical idiom of John Wilkins." Several years ago, Jean Bessière made of "Borges and the Fable of the Sphinx: From the Enigma to the Enigmatic" the title and beginning of the preface to his book on The Enigmaticity of Literature. Douglas R. Hofstadter and Daniel Dennett, in 1981, not so far from here, Bloomington, began The Mind's I by transcribing the entirety of "Borges and I." That pronoun that, in English, juxtaposes at the same time Borges with an author, with himself, and with an eye—The Blind's Eye—adding to the pronominal ambiguity one more semantic twist, necessary to return to blindness and the ambiguity of its visions.

BLINDNESS: A POINT OF VIEW

Despite dealing with Borges, with the predictably uncontrollable derivations of whichever of his themes, I tried to concentrate this reflection in depth on one precise point and nothing else. One of the properties presented by his work, however, one condition that determines the validity of its emerging currency, is precisely that, in its depths, the elements that seem independent cross one another, subjacent, comprehending the universe. One begins to study his blindness and ends with the entire world, or does not end, like the world, another globalization that he did not mention but that, in part, his perspicacity or perspective, a point of view—or two—of his blindness, already foresaw.

Nevertheless, in the same way as one knows that his imagination does not tend to elude the attraction of contraries, the contrariness of his blindness contracts according to its own specious, lucid mechanics. It begins by being a sequestering of logic, a species of abduction—from the Aristotelian to the Peircian—and ends by being intelligibly revelatory. The confrontation would not surprise so much but for the intermediation of a third term, which is not mentioned but which implies both, the contraries both are and are not opposed.

This three-point contrariness is the one that substantially determines a thought and a poetic that, in his work, are terms that are also not opposed.
If indeed they are aspects of an intimate conviction, its causes are, more than interior, anterior. They proceed from before and, above all, would seem to proceed from outside. In the first place, the contradiction that his name, his proper name, formulates, would have been the beginning of his writing:

Who can tell me if in the secret archive of God are found the letters of my name? 27

In the same way that his blindness is not only a genetic and biological condition, personal, particular, his own, proper, name (a property both proper/own and distant) orders his universe according to an onomastically significant key. His name constitutes the formula of the oxymoron that ciphers the entirety of an oeuvre that adopts and articulates it specially. In the form of an analogy to the contradictory property of the name, his blindness was an adoption or an inheritance (another property both proper and alien) that Borges rehabilitated as a proper condition of his vision: "Blindness is a cloistering, but it is also a liberation, a solitude propitious for inventions, a key and an algebra." 28

In the contradictory articulation of his proper name, Jorge, there is a reference to the countryside. The insistence on being called by his nickname, Jorge, not only claims the familiarity of his English origins, but also, in English, is affiliated to Latin. The paradox of the allusion is double: it alludes by way of English—and not Spanish—and by way of a familiar, informal invocation—and not erudite or classical—to Virgil's oeuvre. In the other nominal extreme, in Borges it is the city that is alluded to (Borges, Burgos, Bürger). In History of Night 29 the poems is titled "G. A. Bürger," ". . . [(both of his dates are in the encyclopedia)]," says one of Borges's verses in parenthesis; and it is easy to verify: (1747–1794). Curiously, a lapsus calami of Willis Barnstone 30 inscribes as his title, in the place of G. A., abbreviation for Gottfried August, the initials G. L., and the same occurs in the French edition, 31 as if both authors and languages were confused. The Italian edition, 32 in contrast, appears as it does in Spanish, "G. A." The city and country cross one another, ciphered onomastically in his proper name; an inheritance that demands, a required/loved (requerido) atavism, with its greatest affects, filial and etymological. They initiate the play of opposites that are conjugated throughout his oeuvre, uniting two extremes in a third entity, the unity that extends them to the point of comprehending everything, country and city, the common place, the plot that gives it its place.

The opposition starts out from a personal combination but then distances itself from it, in the same way as, in his blindness, Borges does not recognize a particular biographic circumstance but the presence of his elders, times of other times that make themselves present. He actualizes the past and realizes a vision. The urban space and the rural concentrated in the oxymoron of his name, and all of time, the entire universe, in the eyes and their orbits. Urbi et orbi.

They are personal circumstances with which he conceives or pulls together a universality that overflows the particularity of his space and time. The blindness catches (greffe) on a genetic memory and both at the same time, blindness and memory, make of the past the present. I quote two poems—en pendent though the years: "A Reader," 33 where he says: "forgetting" is one of the forms of memory, its vague basement, the other secret side of the coin," and the other poem, "The Blind Man," 34 says: "Memory, that form of forgetting." It is the same for the reader or the blind man, forgetting and memory, blindness and vision, letters written or read. His writing contracts common oppositions in a double bind, a double blind, a vision and an insight, 35 two visions however, at the same time a vision and a privation, an interior vision, private, more profound, more perfect. A vision that, deprived of the sensitivity of vision, both is and is not an interior vision: insight, vision and lucidity, lack of vision or blindness.

They are opposite and correlative terms, that is to say, they exist in function of a greater or lesser reciprocal dependence, contradictions that are resolved by an ironic mediation, the indispensable third term between two opposites, because the imagination of Borges realizes what Thomas A. Sebeok analyzes on the basis of one of the best-known premises of Charles Sanders Peirce:

Peirce adapted the designation "semiosis" (in a variant transcription) from Philodemus's fragmentary Herculanean papyrus On signs, where the Greek equivalent occurs at least thirty times . . . , to represent a type of reasoning or inference from signs. He endowed the term with a definition of his own as an action or influence, "which is, or involves, a cooperation of three subjects, such as sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in anyway resolvable into actions between pairs." 36

From his vanguardist writings, in the times of the Spanish and Latin American idraism, Borges passed from perplexity to fascination when observing that words not only could have several meanings but also that this plurality could comprise contrary meanings. A fascination that, those years past, disclaiming violently his first books, did not diminish. On the contrary, it is one of the few obsessions other than semantic ones that continued to
be among his most lasting. In The Report of Brodie, the eponymous story of one of his last books of stories, Brodie assimilates the peculiarity of the language of the tribes to that of our language; the text is in Spanish, but nevertheless the report says: "Let us not marvel excessively; in our language the verb to cleave means both to rend and to adhere." More than fifty years earlier, his stupefaction when faced with the same phenomenon was no different:

The fact that they exist is enough to test the provisional and tentative character of our language faced with reality. . . . In algebra, the sign more and the sign less exclude each other; in literature, contraries become siblings and impose on consciousness a mixed sensation; but not less true than the others.

The hallucinations of his blindness that extend those of dreaming to the wakefulness of his vainly open eyes; the will or valor of anticipating it, first, and the resignation facing the fatality afterward; the certainty of the lucidity in darkness; the memory of the shadow of forgetting; its elegy; the reading not distinguished from writing; are topics run through by an ironic network that multiplies constant references and preferences in poems, books, essays. Like the ambivalences of his memory, the ambivalences of his blindness are so frequent as to discourage, as useless, the catalogue.

When Borges formulates the Elegy of the Shadow or records the History of Night, it is not merely a question of affirming that resignation but of exalting the proud belonging to a courageous kin: his literal ancestors (Saxons or Gauchos, both warriors), or his literary ancestors converge in the myth of the blind poet.

It is with difficulty that the coincidence of fatalities must be attributed only to chance, a license of reasoning in which Borges does not believe. He attributes his blindness to God—in whom he also does not believe—to diminish the arrogance or enjoy a chosen liberty. For this reason he oscillates between a God (indefinite but in upper case) or the god (definite but in lower case) who, like in Plato's dialogue, chooses the poet to whom to bequeath the blindness that Borges recognizes as the perfect instrument of another poet. In "The Other," a poem from The Other, the Same, "the other" itself is the title of the poem or of the title that he bequeaths as much to Milton as to another blind poet, model of poetry and blindness, who was the first, Homer, or the other who is he himself:

The pitiless god who is not named gives:
To Milton the walls of shadow,
To Cervantes exile and forgetting.

In his lecture "Blindness," Borges does not say that Oscar Wilde said it—because he did not say it—but rather that "it was said": "The Greeks maintained that Homer was blind in order to mean that poetry should not be visual, that its duty is to be auditory." It is Borges who has Wilde say that it is not important if Homer existed or not, but rather that the Greeks preferred to imagine that he was blind in order to insist on the fact that poetry is above all musical and that the visual in a poet can exist or not.

The series of enthusiasms, stubborn or blinded (he includes, in passing, Tiresias, who, prophesying, provoked the blindness of Oedipus), is extended to other Argentine writers:

My blindness had been coming on gradually since childhood. It was a slow, summer twilight. There was nothing pathetic or dramatic about it. Beginning in 1927, I had undergone eight eye operations, but since the late 1950's, when I wrote my "Poem of the Gifts," for reading and writing purposes I have been blind. Blindness ran in my family; a description of the operation performed on the eyes of my great-grandfather Edward Young Haslam appeared in the pages of the London medical journal the Lancet. Blindness also seems to run among the directors of the National Library. Two of my eminent forerunners, José Mármol and Paul Groussac, suffered the same fate.

Blindness, a limitation inherited from his elders, made him slide, from the standpoint of that noble and double genealogy: arms into letters, the country into the city, prose into verse, free verse into classic meter; and by way of that adverse itinerary he intended to return to the language of his elders. He says so in an autobiographical essay in which he connects blindness with the mnemonic virtues of verse—other "mémoires d'aveugle," Derrida would say—and the tendency to return through poetry to the story, where a narrative thread, an argument, could lead it like a sonorous thread, a leitmotiv between spaces and walls that do not see, quotidian environments that he passes through without recognizing, converting known objects into enigmas, no less threatening for being familiar, only more frequent. A blindness that textualizes its surroundings as "the exercise of commentary illuminates the text by adding it to the text and, in a certain way, hiding it."

In poems, in talks, in dialogues and interviews, Borges attributes to blindness the necessity of having replaced the visible world with the auditory world of the Anglo-Saxon language, of having given himself over to the study of the tongue of his elders, poetry, classic verse, narration, but above all "the Germanic studies of England and Iceland." Already in In Praise of Shadow he had attributed—and with gratitude—to his blindness the dedication to study "the language of iron," Anglo-Saxon,
Ironies

92

As a condition with the earth.

Dimension for the name, for the man, for the relation of his substantive

English-speaking reader, jectural one language, which is formed on the basis of Kabbalistic clues in those circumstances, fail to be associated with blindado (armored).

Even if it is a legitimate play, it is not merely a question of playing with words or letters: In "A Vindication of the Kabbalah," a text published at the beginning of the thirties, Borges wrote: "... it occurs in the verses, whose ordinary law is the subjection of meaning to euphonic necessities (or superstitions). The coincidental in them is not the sound, it is what they signify."

When he names Adam, Borges—who confesses with sorrow to not knowing Hebrew—does not lose the idiomatic opportunity to qualify him as "Red Adam," or to recognize that "the stroke/ was the blood of Adam, a first day," or to remember the earth, the dust of which he is made. In Hebrew, earth is Adam, red is Adom, and blood is Dam, one more semantic dimension for the name, for the man, for the relation of his substantive condition with the earth.

It is interesting to observe that Borges, being one of the authors who most often and best elaborated the figures of contradiction (synechysis, oxymoron, chiasmus, antithesis, attenuation, paradoxes), also engaged himself in dissimilar forms of a tricky, transversal repetition, through more than one language. Pierre Menard could be the paradigm of the procedure but without attaining those archetypal levels; for example, in "From Someone to No One," Borges says: Johannes Eriugena or Scotus, that is to say John the Irish, whose name in history is Esco Eriugena, or rather Irish Irish."

The same model of "different repetition," could be distinguished in the name of Red Scharlach, one of his most famous characters, the protagonist of "Death and the Compass." After Red (rojo), Scharlach means "scarlet" in German. Rojo Rojo is a good forename and last name for the presumed assassin of a political story blazoned across four letters, the trigrammaton, which is formed on the basis of Kabbalistic clues apt for discovering the ritual deaths of rabbis, Hassidic wise men, specialists in the Sefer Yetzirah and other books of Jewish mysticism. Although Adam, the man, also tolerates that strange synonym and promotes others: "In Latin, humus was related to homo, although not directly derived, and the form in which both proceed from an ancestor of humus, 'earth,' is one of the obscure questions of Indo-European linguistics."

Icelandic, the epic of his ancestors. But speaking of that language it is also necessary to recognize that it constitutes an iron language, the language of iron similar to "the hard iron that slices my chest, the intimate knife at my throat," according to the translation of the "Poema conjuntural" ["Conjectural Poem"]). The translation is quite close but, for the eye ear of an English-speaking reader, iron (hierno) cannot fail to be an allusion to the ironies from which Borges does not distance himself. Neither could blinded, in those circumstances, fail to be associated with blindado (armored).

On one occasion I preferred to catalogue that rhetorical procedure as an "intraduction," the figure that hinders languages and differences, a figure that, if one had to assign it an origin, would be originally rooted in Rio de la Plata. It does not cease to be coherently contradictory for it to be just a "figure," the strategy of literariness of which meaning makes use in order to rescue a common truth from among different words. Interidomatic, it denominates the impossibility of translating a sign that, without abandoning its language, remains in between, a term comprehended between two languages, two languages that cross each other like two swords of iron, words like swords, two-edged words. The irony of an interior translation, or anterior, that remits to an Edenic or Adamic language, where "My viper of letter," forked and seductive, will tempt the poet who procures, beyond idiomatic limits, to recuperate the comprehension of a prebabilic language.

Joyce is another blind writer who searches through invented words an identity that supersedes the jurisdictions of a conventional linguistics:

He learned something of all languages and wrote in a language he invented, a language that is difficult to understand but that is distinguished by a strange music. Joyce brought a new music to English. And he said valorously (and mendaciously) that "of all the things that have occurred to me, I think that the least important is that I became blind."

Borges, Biy, like other Rioplatense writers who preceded them—Jules Laforgue, Lautréamont, Supervielle—recur with suggestive frequency to a figure that, despite having been adopted by advertising and continuing to be stalked by the weariness of its insistence, maintains its ironic strangeness. As if it were natural for the word to dissipulate its history and reserve for poetry the revelation of its truth, its past, its origin: "He who discovers with pleasure an etymology," goes a verse of "The Just Ones," and it is not the first time that Borges alludes to the happiness of that class of discovery where the word turns historical or vice versa.

BLIND GAZES

It is likely that Borges managed to say it in Indiana, when he was here in 1976, a visit from which there remain recorded dialogues. He said in one of those conversations that "I have never looked for a subject. I allow subjects to look for me, and then, walking down the streets, going from one room to another of my house, the small house of a blind man, I feel that something is about to happen, and that something may be a line or it may be some kind of shape."
In the same way that he neither searches for nor rejects the themes that present themselves, he posed no resistance to his blindness coming to meet him and, from that point on, Borges elaborated a poetics of blindness, a *different vision*, as if his whole life, since his birth, he had been awaiting it, like one who awaits a reimbursement: blindness and irony in a single gift.

Despite the fact that his blindness progresses from the moment of his birth, from before, he prefers to give it a date; he dates it to 1955 and from then on he celebrates both. In that “Poem of the Gifts” he said:

Let no one diminish by tear or reproach

This declaration of the mastery

Of God, who with magnificent irony

Gave me, at the same time, books and the night.65

Irony is of God, but God, like the maker in lower case of the title, who is confused with the author, fuses his irony with the irony inherent to irony, as if it were a metal in an alloy of similar elements. According to Borges, the relation with divinity is no different from the relation that Ion, the gifted interpreter of Homer, describes in the Ion. In that dialogue, Plato describes enthusiasm, the overflowing of a god in the expansions of a muse who inspires the poet, who inspires the interpreter and inspires the listener. With the same magnetic force of the Heraclean stone, interpretation propagates itself, like a breath. The chain of the enthused of which Ion spoke is like Borges's chain, a chain of iron, a chain of ironic works that neither Socrates nor Plato would have de-authorized.

“A reader” (In *Praise of Shadow*)66 is not the only work he dedicates to one who is, like Don Quixote—another reader—his literary hero par excellence, remembered in his autobiographical essay, in his talk on blindness, in so many poems. He understands that to inherit blindness permits him to recuperate another inheritance: the forgotten language of his ancestors.

I gave myself over to the study of the language of iron

used by my elders, to sing

swords and solitudes.57

Because forgetting is, for Borges

one of the forms of memory, its vague basement,

the other secret face of the coin.58

Iron is displaced from memory, which is ambivalent, to the language, which is as well, of “The music of the Saxon iron” (as he says in the prologue to *The Iron Coin, 1976*).69 The coin, a metal with two faces, is a metaphor of memory and forgetting: blindness, which is double, is a metaphor of foresight and its visions. In the language that is his and is other, the words, like swords—written in English they are distinctly distinguished—like the “double axis of iron,” mark the entrance or exit of the labyrinth (Gr. *labyros*), the dualities of language that irony mediates, as if this duality had its emblematic figure in blindness.

“A great poet of the eye” or a great poet of the gaze is what Derrida could have said of Borges, insofar as a philosopher, such as Derrida himself, would be a great thinker of the eye: “Idem, edos, idea: the whole history, the whole semantics of the European idea in its Greek genealogy, we know it, we see it, assigns seeing to knowing.”70

Words combine (hacen juego), twice over. Borges had envisioned, like the Kabbalists, an absolute writing in which every word counts. Blindness enables that interior vision, more than a mystical ascension it gives him access to a *pardes*. In Hebrew, it is the acronym formed by the initials that name the four readings necessary for enabling the comprehension of the sacred text; *pardes* is the same word that designates Paradise, a garden in the form of a library, the Eden that assures perfect comprehension; by way of the writing that does not see, one approaches the truth that is also not possible to see, although he makes it out as archetypes, and it is with them that Borges began the first stanza of his poem “The Golem.”71

In that poem, that stanza, which is the only one of his entire work that he would like to have remain, he names Scholem twice. With Gerhardt—as he preferred calling Gershom Scholem—he had conversed twice in Jerusalem, and had read attentively his book *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*.72 Attentive to the knowledge of the Kabbalah and to the imagination of the Golem, however, Borges says he names Scholem because he had not found another name that rhymes with Golem. This cannot be understood as a trivial commentary and, as transcendent, it would be inevitable to associate it with a rhyme that stands out in the *Divine Comedy*. Hatzfeld1 recalls that Dante only names Christ three times and, although rhymes with Christ are frequent and easy in Italian, in the *Commedia* Christ only rhymes with Christ. It is not absurd to think that the relation between Golem and Scholem is also the discovery of an identification in rhyme that has for Borges, an erudite poet, scholar of the *Divina Commedia*, all possible mystical resonances. *Golem*, the word in Hebrew, appears in Psalm 139, 5:16 of the Book of Psalms of the Old Testament, and has been the object of different or disputable translations: “substance,” “inchoate mass,” “imperfect,” “embryo,” among others.

“Tes yeux voyaient mon Golem” goes the French translation,73
In the short text "A Dream," the vertiginous unlimitedness of that infinite circularity is condensed by Borges in a few lines:

In a deserted part of Iran there is a not-so-tall tower of stone, without doors or windows. In the one room (whose floor is of earth and which has the shape of a circle) there is a table of wood and a bench. In that circular cell, a man who looks like me writes in characters that I do not understand a long poem about a man in another circular cell that writes a poem about a man in another circular cell... The process has no end and no one will be able to read what the prisoners write.  

Lector and interlocutor of Scholem, always studying the Kabbalah, Borges could not fail to know that every word counts, that names and things exist in virtue of a literal combinatorial both wise and mystical. But, most of all, he is fascinated like his character by the aleph, the letter with which all begins, even before the beginning, the sign that represents in Hebrew the first movement of the larynx (like the "sweet spirit" of Greek) that precedes a vowel at the beginning of the word but that, because it is the spiritual root of all letters, contains in its essence the whole alphabet, that is to say, all the elements of human language. In this way the whole world depends on a letter. And Borges imagines this verbal dependency visually, in a story, "The Aleph," that designates as much a world as a book, as much a title as a story. The Aleph, in which the poet—author, narrator, and character—is at the root of an orb: "I saw in the Aleph the earth, and in the earth once again the Aleph, and in the Aleph the earth," one of the points in space that contains all points, a point of view that the letter fixes. That is why aleph is the letter that the rabbi inscribes in the forehead of the Golem, initiating a combination emet that means "truth." When he wants to destroy it, he erases the first letter, and in this way what remains is the word that means "death," and the Golem crumbles, like man, made of dust, into dust.

Through absolute writing, a perfect machine, the Golem was created (the first, in Writing). Its death, one not true, puts in evidence the simulacrum of writing that, for Borges, is a simulacrum of memory. With the death of the Golem life is interrupted, semiosis comes to a halt. In A Sign Is Just a Sign, Sebok asks:

If objects are signs, indefinite regression to a suppositious logos, and if interpreters are signs marching in progression toward the ultimate disintegration of mind, what is there left that is not a sign? ... In a celebrated article he published in 1869, Peirce anticipated and answered this question, contending "that the word or sign which
man uses is the man himself," which is to claim that "the man and the external sign are identical, in the same sense in which the words homo and man are identical. Thus my language is the sum total of myself, for the man is the thought."

Despite his magical wisdom, the rabbi did not concede the word to the Golem, nor did he concede language or thought:

Despite such high witchery
Man's apprentice did not learn to speak.\(^99\)

For this reason, deprived of the sign, in the Scriptures, the Golem is an in-form-ed entity, a larva, another of the words that accumulate several different and opposed meanings. The Romance languages inherited from Latin the meaning "phantasm, specter, spirit of the dead who haunt the living, embryonic form, particularly of insects, mask." The Golem is anterior or posterior, man remains in the middle; between both extremes, his life. The Golem will exist on the basis of the word, and will cease to exist on the basis of it. It will be or it will cease to be, a chrysalis or the spirit of the dead.

It is that double gift—poison in German, like Phaedrus's pharmakon—a poison and a remedy, a simulacrum that resolves simultaneously, ironically, memory and forgetting. A simultaneity in an instant, the Augenblick that is the coup d'œil, a blink of the eye, the furtive gaze that permits him to apprehend and install eternity in an instant. To know in an instant his essence that I will only recall that in

My lot is what is normally called intellectual poetry. The word is almost an oxymoron; the intellect (vigil) thinks by means of abstraction, poetry (dreaming), by means of images, of myths, or of fables. Intellectual poetry must knit together those two processes. [. . .] Thus does Plato in his dialogues. [. . .] The master of the genre is, in my opinion, Emerson . . .\(^30\)

Blindness has attenuated the world of appearances, approximating it to another interior world, private, doubly deprived by circumstances and peripatetic circumstances, by timelessness and future, as he says in his talk: "I said to myself: as I have lost the dear world of appearances, I have to create something else: I have to create the future, what happens to the visible world that, in fact, I have lost."\(^90\) Beyond time, beyond its happenings and successions, a species of revelation of truth arises in the Idea:

At the end of the years I am surrounded by an obstinate, luminous mist that reduces things to one thing without form or color. Almost an idea.\(^92\)

Permanent like the idea, free of fugacity and contingency, writing shares with the coin and with arms both iron and ambivalences. We mentioned his veneration for myths, Germanic languages and literatures, where Odin, god of war, inventor of runes, crosses—like Borges, like Cervantes, like Lope—arms with letters.

So many are the personal, biographic, conjectural, and poetic references that I will only recall that in "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," the famous author is only the author of chapter XXXVIII of the Quixote, precisely in the one in which Cervantes "deals with the curious discourse that Don Quixote gave on arms and letters," and a fragment of two others (IX and XXII).\(^93\) His Pierre Menard is, without doubt, one of the most quoted authors of the century, perhaps the most important of contemporary literary history. An author who did not exist and who not only wrote some fragments of a work that already existed, but also did not write it.

It is true that, for Borges as for the tradition that precedes him, in the same way that God created man, man is capable of creating other beings in his image and semblance, submitted, in the same way as

Gradually was seen (how we)
imprisoned in this sonorous net
of Before, After, Yesterday, Meanwhile, Now.\(^94\)

In "Signs,"\(^95\) one of his least-cited poems, Borges brings together signs, ciphers, syllables, metals, secret names. "Signs" ends with a verse, "I can be all. Leave me in the shade."\(^96\)

"The Golem," as he says, the poem that meant the most to him, begins with a reference to Craytulus and to the literal image of a rose, quite different from the roses of Ronsard, of Laforgue, and from all the roses that poetry multiplies like another "miracle of the roses" that, like the Golem, reproduce
themselves, grow, and succumb. Borges's rose is, like "The Profound Rose" of Milton, "The Unending Rose," an interminable rose, archetypal, "that the Lord will show to my dead eyes," like the one that flowers in the quote of Angelus Silesius.

In the same way that the blindness of his lifeless eyes anticipates the foresight of his timeless life, it returns to him paradoxically the language of his ancestors, a language of iron melted across languages and their particular differences by the irony that multiplies meanings to the point of filling to the rim a single sign, wherein begins the infinite of signification.

In the prologue to The Other, the Same, Borges recalls his encounter at Lubbock, on the edge of the desert, with a tall girl who asked him if, when writing "The Golem," "had he not intended a version of 'The Circular Ruins'; I responded to her that I had to cross the entire continent to receive that revelation, which was true." Both compositions recall the vertiginous character of the dream in the abyss of a dreamer who is dreamed to the same extent that a reader is read, or in the gaze of the rabbi who contemplates his Golem, suspecting that, in the same way that he looks, he is also looked at by God. The reader, miraculously, making the gaze his or her own, returns it or puts it away again.

Borges (off camera) dictates a text on friendship for the homage to Emir Rodríguez Monegal in his apartment on Maipú St 994, sixth floor, Buenos Aires, October 1985. (Photo by Isaac Behar)

Lisa Block de Behar speaking with Borges in his apartment on Maipú St 994, sixth floor, Buenos Aires, 1985

Borges, Gérard Genette in his apartment on Maipú St 994, sixth floor, Buenos Aires, March 1985. (Photo by Isaac Behar)


Borges, Jacques Derrida; Borges speaking with Jacques Derrida in his apartment on Maipú St 994, sixth floor, Buenos Aires, October 1985. (Photo by Isaac Behar)
NINE
SYMBOLS AND THE SEARCH FOR UNITY

... for all the things [that is, the Sefirot], and all the attributes, which
seem as if they are separate, are not separate [at all] since all of them
are one, as the[ir] beginning is, which unites everything “in one word.”

—Commentaries of the Sefer Yetzirah

To fix our ideas suppose players playing with dice . . .

—Charles Sanders Peirce

Don Alejandro once aspired to be a deputy, but the political bosses
closed the doors of the Uruguayan Congress to him. The man got
irritated and resolved to found another Congress of much more vast
reach. . . . Don Alejandro conceived the idea of organizing a Congress
of the world that would represent all people of all nations.

—Jorge Luis Borges

For some years now it has seemed of interest to me to invoke the genies of
place. Close to Hollywood, Los Angeles,1 it would have been opportune to
speak of the angels to whom today’s reflection2 and imagination3 have dedi-
cated so much recurrent attention. I do not know if it was satellite networks
or the ubiquitous messages of an explosive mediatic communication or the
readings of Walter Benjamin or the angelic proliferation of Paul Klee, or if
it was, above all, cinema that gave birth to this new advent of angels, but
I would dare to conjecture that any one of these reasons, tightly related to
one another, is not alien to it.

It is hard not to notice the bibliographical, cinematographic frequency,
the notable works in which angels abound and, if perhaps few today would
wonder if “. . . ten thousand of them could dance on a needle’s point” or
“why are they not more interesting than the bewildering varieties of insects
which naturalists study, what is of interest is their status of intermediation between two worlds, the transmission of messages in silence that is attributed to them, their movement between the visible and the invisible, the announcement that bears witness to other realms, their constant fugacity that is also permanence. The ambivalences of the angelicological condition turn out to be generally valid for attending to certain aspects of cinematographic language and the properties of the word in the electronic image. Said or written, mute or in movement, the word is seen. Silence and voice, word and thought, coincide in a single vision, a disquieting move that erases the frontiers between seeing and dreaming, saying and thinking, saying and desiring, showing and telling; all at once.

The word put into an image synthesizes differences, crosses limits: the eye that sees, hears; the image in movement contracts voices and figures; in film, showing and saying do not require each other like opposite or rival actions. The animation of film that is emotion and movement, motivates the word (le mot, in French, says it all). Everything is in view. The image shows and says, shows what it says, concurs to realize the miracle of the gaze (mirada), an elegy of the gaze, ad miration. One sees, one hears, one reads, one looks, everything is seen and there is nothing behind or outside of this vision. What would Bishop Berkeley have argued faced with that impression of the senses? For him these too would be "truths so clear that to see them it is enough to open our eyes." In an Augenblick the correspondences that angels establish also allow us to glimpse an instant of eternity. Film breathes this neo-angelic air that brings to light another vaste clairé, as if the stars of a seventh heaven vaguely illuminated the seventh art that, in the meantime, turns the image into time.

Beyond the figures animated by light and movement, film diffused new hybrids of verbal and visual images, promoted different aesthetic tensions enabling vision, registering, as of not so long ago, the metamorphoses of the written words that transformed into things that represent, magisterial images demonstrating the magic of a movement, a prestidigitation that the nature of language did not know. Suddenly the image is no longer the illustration of diction but rather goes on to be the impossible vision of its idea. It is in film where the apparition of the "invisible man" was not unusual, nor ghosts unheard of.

Similar to the evangelic announcement of gestation, a new gesture of deixis announces another language of angels. A communication by way of messengers who also engage themselves in a rite of passage, require passwords to slip around borders, between outside and inside, on the limit of fiction, on the edge of the beyond, between heaven and earth. Suspended, they suspend the schematic dualisms that reduce to opposition biological, grammatical, literary genre; they discurs in an interior language that film makes visible.

In film, angels also pass in silence, mediating, midway between god and human, mediating between spaces and species, they cross them. Some legends had it that angels were so numerous that they distanced themselves from God, were separated from the divinity, and fell, converted into demons. These falls from a divine space to a human space multiplied legends, theories, and doctrines that agree in recognizing one and the same fracture: either it was the separation that provoked the fall or it was the fall that provoked the separation. In both cases the catastrophe is consecutive: separation gives origin to the diabolical (Gr. Diabolos: "that which disunites, separates") and the re-union reestablishes the symbolic. From this comes the union between different universes that the symbol recalls. For Peirce that is precisely the objective of the semiotic universe, the Third Universe that "comprises everything whose being consists in active power to establish connections between different objects, especially between objects in different Universes." His Third Universe could be the orbis tertius inscribed in the ancient cartography or in Borges's story, where the "aerial nothings" are crossed with Brute Actuality.

In this epoch of synthesis—or sansthesis—perhaps the convocation of the Fifth Congress is of interest as a topic, which is a theme and a commonplace, adequate for observing the diversities of a present that, without being ignorant of them, tends to throw them together. Although it sounds tautological, we meet in a reunion that is at the same time a re-union, the agglomeration wherein is observed as much the diversity of elements as the movement of turning back, the return to a unity. A species of secular, institutionalized apocatastasis remits us to an initial and anterior instance, since "all the things [that is, the Sefiroth], and all the attributes, which seem as if they are separate, are not separate [at all] since all [of them] are one, as the[ir] beginning is, which unites everything 'in one word.'"

Word and thing all at once, the commonplace attenuates differences, assimilates them into one and the same affinitas: neighbor, similar because next. Shared, the same limits reduce differences between word and image, between the object referred to and the object that refers, between performative and constative discourses, between language and metalanguage, between theory and fiction. It is not to be verified only in one language: a process of synthesis vanishes the limits between different languages by way of a semantic cross-fertilization dissimulated between words that are syntactically close. It is not a recent process but it anticipates—poetically—the excessive suppressions at the end of a millennium, at the end of a century, that did not skimp on them. Among so many reiteratedly foreseen ends—of oppressions, of referents, of poetry, of theory, of history, of wars—a reality disappears, overwhelmed by the specters of its representation. Daily the technological image confounds reality with nothing. Since this confounding
is not noticed, the disappearance is double and rekindles. In other terms, two ancient quarrels (the images, the universals) in one sole question. Does the globalization of images universalize the failure of representation? Everything appears or disappears in that square black hole\(^\text{11}\) of screens that allow one to see, that they do not allow one to see, where "the microcosm of a collapsing universe"\(^\text{12}\) crumbles, "vacuums full of collapsed stars," on the edge of the nothing that offers nothing as a guarantee,\(^\text{13}\) the strange guarantee with which Breton sustains black humor on the margin of the abyss.

It is fair for semioticians to broach this work of reunion and synthesis of diversities in a congress\(^\text{14}\), because no one will forget that since its origin, congressus designated in Latin, as it does today, the "action of meeting," even when it has been adopted later, in our languages, with more scabrous meanings that will not be invoked here. Only when it loses that erotic meaning of an initial union gone bad, congress goes on to designate, more austerity, a reunion of specialists who, in this case, were convoked to study the synthesis that comprehends diversity, a logical or anthropological operation of long history and remote myths that confirm the antagonistic character of the world as revelation of the symbolic vocation. Here congress alludes to a fact, a story, a name, and a thing; like the I think of Peirce, denotes "the unity of thought," underlining that "the unity of thought is nothing but the unity of symbolization-consistency, in a word (the implication of being) and belongs to every word whatever."\(^\text{15}\)

As much as Sebeok may have said that "symbol" is the most abused term and "in consequence, it has either tended to be grotesquely overburdened . . . or, to the contrary, reduced . . . even to absurd nullity,"\(^\text{16}\) it is known that the oscillation between "replenishment and exhaustion,"\(^\text{17}\) in addition to being the prevalent aesthetic diffusion, is our disquieting quotidian practice. It is not necessary to remark that we are discarding any intention to add to symbol new meanings. Still more, toward the end of suspending the excesses of its semantic profusion, we try to rescue here one of the meanings that symbolon had in its origins, and that the numerous and varied contexts, interpretations, and theories, gradually mitigated.

Neither similarity nor contingency, for Peirce the symbol is a sign that refers to the object and denotes by virtue of a law. There is another important corollary that may be drawn from the law of symbols: "This infinite Symbol being necessary denotes not the contingent facts of the universe but the absolute law in all its detail and unity to which the universe is subjected."\(^\text{18}\) It is in this legal, conventional aspect that Peirce points to, that the symbol would be opposed to the notion that "chance is indeterminacy, is freedom. But the action of freedom issues in the strictest rule of law."\(^\text{19}\)

"Chance changes everything & chance will change that" says Peirce in the same essay. From this comes the thesis that chance\(^\text{20}\) is really operative in the Universe. That phenomenon that Peirce denominates tychism is a form of falling, a fall that other languages still conserve (Fr. chœur, Itat. cader, Sp. caída). It is luck, a hazard, a fall, a part of its evolutionary cosmology, but that fall is also the fatality of the symbol. In several senses it is its luck: a "chance" and a fall, another syllipsis that reunites in one word contradictory meanings that, in this context, cannot be avoided, nor do they surprise. Just as Borges's "Ingenious One" confessed to be amazed that:

There is not in the orb one
Thing that is not another, or contrary, or nothing.\(^\text{21}\)

David Brodie repressed his amazement before the possibility that there could coincide in a name meanings both different and at the same time opposed. One need not be surprised, however, that "the verb to cleave stands for both to rend and to adhere."\(^\text{22}\) One and the same verb means "to separate" and "to unite," an example of several edges because, like congress, it designates and illustrates at once segmentation and union. Borges underscores that single word in a series of examples in which he speaks of a congress and of carnal union, without saying that in Latin a single designation did not distinguish them.\(^\text{23}\)

The consequences of these falls still affect us, and although the versions of the loss of innocence are among the most dramatic and repeated, one need only recall that for the Greeks this chance-fall referred initially to the game of kabbos, the throw of dice, later it was a password,\(^\text{24}\) a sign of recognition or of hospitality in a shared community, before giving birth to symbols. Knucklebone, in English, osselets, in French, and taba, in Spanish. They are the names of a game of little bones that, also found in prehistoric caverns, remit to an ancient and universal rite, and it is this ancestral game that we are wagering in this essay alludes to symbols, to falls, fragments, fractures, breaking of the vessels, or crumbling of towers, a provocation of linguistic differences, of dispersions and carnal or spiritual reunions, of congresses, a ludic and theoretical series that, according to Peirce, runs through stages of tychism (fall), synecchism (continuity), terminating in agapism, "the thesis that love, or sympathy, has real influence in the world and, in fact, is 'the great evolutionary agency of the universe.'"\(^\text{25}\)

The myths coincide in imagining similar falls: angels who plummet to earth, expelled inhabitants of paradise, the punished androgynous hybrids of Plato, the vessels are broken and the towers crumble down and, in all cases, a cause explains the event by reasons of the pride and rivalry of human knowledge with a superior one.

Like in archaic times, universal communication, without limits, of the present, would be verified in the heavens; today, without going Beyond—in
... the form of each human being as a whole was round, with back and sides forming a circle, but it had four arms and an equal number of legs, and two faces exactly alike on cylindrical neck; there was a single head for both faces, which faced in opposite directions, and four ears and two sets of pudenda, and one can imagine all the rest from this. It also traveled upright just as now, in whatever direction it wished; and whenever they took off in a swift run, they brought their legs around straight and somersaulted as tumblers do, and then, with eight limbs to support them, they rolled in a swift circle.16

It was in such a way that Zeus decided to "cut each of them in two" so that they would be "weaker and at the same time more useful to us [...] by having increased in number, and they'll walk upright on two legs." Sacrifice of unity or thirdness, the loss consists of a division into two. It is for this reason that "Each of us then is but the token of a human being, sliced like a flat fish, two from one; each then ever seeks his matching token."28 Perhaps for that reason as well, Peirce, "An American Plato,"29 without further clarification affirmed that "the general answer to the question What is man? is that he is a symbol."30

As I have already said on a number of occasions, the Greek word for tesseraw for token, is symbolon: the reunion of the parts corresponding to a knucklebone, an earthen pot, or whatever other object broken in two; each one of these parts fits with another, such that it becomes proof of the anterior sentimental affinity, amicable or amorous, of those who possess it.

"Words are symbols that postulate a shared memory," says Borges in "The Congress," one of the stories from The Book of Sand: "The mystics invoke a rose, a kiss, a bird that is all birds, a sun that is all the stars and the sun, a pitcher of wine, a garden, or the sexual act."31 The words of the narrator announce the end of "The Congress," a story that takes place in Montevideo, in Uruguay, a small country, and, secretly, comprises the universe. The fidelity of the quote reveals the dualities that the word in Spanish combines. Cita (quote/rendez-vous) is the sentimental and intellectual meeting, transsexual or transtextual, biblical sin or Greek banquet, text or sex, the secret of "The Sect of the Phoenix,"32 or of "the pleasure of the text."33 Who would wonder if angels speak? Sex and word reconciled from the beginning as diversity and unity in one and the same knowledge immediately after the fall, when yada in Hebrew means both "to know" and "to lie down" with the beloved one.

"Type or token," type or part, the universe broken into pieces by knowledge, the separation of fields and disciplines. The ambition of the androgynes, like the divine emanations that make boats or vessels explode (breaking of the vessels),18 like the tempest that shipwrecked utopia, the ship, and the books of Prospero, blowing up "a brave vessel/ Who have no doubt some noble creatures in her/ Dash'd all to pieces, ..."34 There are no gods who will withstand the challenge of (pre)potency, and symbols shatter in order, perhaps, to one day be reunited. Faithful to his Muse, Aristophanes, between jokes and interludes, before ceding the word to Socrates and Agathon, repeats that the lover wishes

... to join and be fused with his beloved, to become one from two. The cause is that this was our ancient nature, and we were wholes. Eros then is a name for the desire and pursuit of wholeness. And as I say, before we were one, but now we have been dispersed by the god due to our injustice as the Arcadians were dispersed by the Spartans. So there is fear that if we should not be well ordered toward the gods, we shall be split in two again and go around like the people molded in profile on tombstones, sawed in half through the nose, born like split dice.35

Dice and symbolon at the same time. The French translation is curious: it translates anthropon symbolon as it figures in the text with tессере d’homme. The footnote of this French translation clarifies:

The translation is not literal. The Greek word is symbol but its proper meaning is lost in French, whereas for us the Latin tessera evokes a more concrete image. Essentially it is question of a tablet, a cube, a knucklebone, of which two patrons each kept the half, transmitted thereafter to their descendants; when one of these two complementary fractions of the whole one would approach the other (this is the etymology), there would be established the existence of anterior bonds of hospitality.36
If the relation between the symbol and the trinity appears recurrently, it is not solely due to "compulsive drive" to return "to the excitation of excessive triplicities" of which Umberto Eco and Thomas Sebeok speak in their preface to The Sign of Three, nor is it due to having suffered a "triadomania," that infirmity against which Peirce warns when he confesses that "I have no marked predilection for trichotomies in general," although he admits that "there is a not uncommon craze for trichotomies." Nevertheless, nobody will suppose that I wish to claim any originality in reckoning the triad important in philosophy. Since Hegel, almost every fanciful thinker has done the same. Originality is the last of recommendations for fundamental conceptions. On the contrary, the fact that the minds of men have ever been inclined to threefold divisions is one of the considerations in favour of them.

If I pause yet again over this trinitary economy of Peirce’s thought, it is not only on account of their having renounced or overcome the paradigmatic binarism of the Saussurean structural articulations, but rather because it is a question of returning to unity from thirdiness by way of hybrids and divisions, of recognizing “intermediary tertias,” of the intermediation that the present day propitiates with an unusual extension and frequency. “A centaur is a mixture of a man and a horse. Philadelphia lies between New York and Washington. Such thirds may be called Intermediate thirds or Thirds of comparison,” says Peirce in the same text, and it is that mention of hybrids as a tiers arbitre or third in discord, one distant to the dilemma, the foreigner—a status sheltered by “the figures of alterity” or of geographic illusion, the place that gives a place to fiction, which is of interest to highlight here.

It could have been foreseen that, having overcome the rigorous limitations and systematic abstractions imposed by emphatic theoretical formulations, the research in course, of and about the present day, would articulate disciplines, would contextualize knowledge, reconciling a current cultural search that is not verified in an isolated medium but among different media. For this reason, in addition to distinguishing each medium in particular, what is of interest is a new medium, another medium: the one that is intermediate. A hole is opened, that is formed and is a figure between two: between natural and cultural, between outside and inside, between secular and sacred, between showing and telling, between visual and verbal, between oral and written, between journalistic and literary, between scientific and poetic, between doctrines and fictions, an intermediate space, mediated and mediatic, where historical, theoretic, and aesthetic imagination comes together endeavoring to combine those fragments, restore fractures, resolve fractions and cracks. The massification of the media is understood in another sense: media are in everything and everything is in media. Two cracks: two media between two media, two divided by two between two divided by two; simplifying, one divided by one equals one, that is to say, three times one. In all cases it is a question of dividing, of middle points, of mi-leaf, a place between two, in “the brief vertigo of the in between,” as Octavio Paz said.

Despite the necessity of knowing, of analyzing, that is separating, of applying doctrines and disciplines, contemporary realizations tend to look for that unity—more than unique, initial—that claims to recuperate, on the basis of the diversity of knowledges and languages, some coincidences that the epistemological and aesthetic conditions of the contemporary condition legitimate. Current reflection is debating among diverse media, is throwing itself in the middle, in the crossroads, the place of crossing and intersection where differences are confounded out of proximity, where it is no surprise that coincidence, which is one form of co-incidence, would be routine.

With all reason, Eco, with the famous image of a Babel crumbling on the cover of his book In Search of the Perfect Language, upon beginning the introduction warns:

The utopia of a perfect language has not only obsessed European culture. The theme of the confusion of languages, and the attempt to remedy it thanks to the refining or invention of a language common to the whole human race, runs through the history of all cultures.

They are the first words of the book; perhaps without intending to, they extend into a necessary volume, the search that Borges summarizes in some lines of “The Congress”:

I stayed in a modest pension behind the British Museum, to whose library I would run morning and afternoon, in search of a language that would be worthy of the Congress of the World. I did not overlook universal languages; I looked into Esperanto—which the Lunario sentimental qualifies as “equitable, simple, and economic”— and Volapük, which wants to explore all linguistic possibilities, declining verbs and conjugating nouns. I considered the arguments in favor of and against resuscitating Latin, whose nostalgia has not ceased to perdure at the end of the centuries. I lingered as well in the examination of the analytic idioms of John Wilkins, where the
definition of each word lies in the letters that form it. It was under
the high cupola of the hall that I met Beatrice.46

Ten years ago, quite close to the Research Center for Language and Semiotic
Studies that Thomas A. Sebeok created, it occurred to Douglas Hofstadter
to dedicate a voluminous book to Bloomington and to propose formulas of a
“Magic Cubology”—there continue to be implied more cubes, flagstones,
and rubrics—recuperating in his metamagical way the polysemic possibili-
ties of a firm or fragile tessera or symbol.

He gives an account46 of an alphabet in which the letters that have a
distinctive graphic function would cease to differentiate, would represent
as much one phenomenon as another, “A Total Unification of All Type-
faces,”47 “the trick is to achieve completeness: to fill the space.”48 Hofstadter
and Kim spent years drawing what a friend called “ambiguous.” One more
aggravator that Saussure did not foresee in his denigrations of writing. For
that reason, that unification is not totally distant from the “differences” of
Derrida, although their authors are not aware of them. Nor is it distant from
the “spirit,” maker of all writings, from that literal aspiration required by
the articulation of the aleph and that gives birth to all letters, or from the
aleph of Borges, synthesis in diversity to the letter. “The ‘A’ spirit”49 that
Hofstadter describes demands a singular “Platonic essence” that recognizes
that “the Platonic essence reveals something new about the spirit without
ever exhausting it.” Hofstadter further recognizes that “the shape of a let-
terform is a surface manifestation of deep mental abstractions.”50 With the
arrival of computers, “to have an ‘A’ making machine with infinite variety
of potential output is not in itself difficult,”51 and it is no longer impossible
to think of approaching “the vision of a unification of all typefaces.”52

In May of 1994 a congress of academies in the Real Academia Española
imposed on us, against our will, the elimination of letters belonging to
our alphabet.53 It was argued that there existed an urgency to accede to
a universal Latin alphabet but, different from a lingua perfetta toward which humani-
ty continues to direct its worries, universality in this case is of interest
in order to facilitate the connections between computers and databases.
Eco wonders: “But would it be possible for a supernational entity (like the
UN or the European parliament) to impose an International Auxiliary Lan-
guage as lingua franca [...]. There are no historical precedents.”54 One has
the impression that “Every few centuries we have to burn the Library of
Alexandria,” as one of the characters of “The Congress” says.55 Sometimes
the fire begins with the letter.

In the Phaedrus, Thamus, the Egyptian king, was right to doubt the
invention of Thoth or Hermes. Writing, the first technology dedicated to
registering and conserving fugacity, was intended to represent, to make pres-
ent what is absent. Effective, secret, suspect. As a remedy, it brings together
the dangerous ambiguity of the pharmakon; as an instrument, the dangerous
ambivalences of the servant. The Golem is animated by the letter and with the
obliteration of the letter it crumbles; made of earth, of dust, it falls to
earth, like the dirt that forms it.

As the century passes, we believe ever more that we believe ever
less. Nevertheless, this increasing discredit that disparages representation,
from rhetorical discourses to the images that dissipate them, reinforces
perhaps a belief in the circumstances. Immediate circumstances, indispu-
tably immediate, which, present, without need of representation, are there,
without claiming to be able to foresee the uncertainties of a Beyond more
or less sure, without claiming to accede to the prolonged wishes of utopias
more or less isolated or fantastic. It is these circumstances that, adverse
to mere speculations of political fantasies, contemplate the radiation in a
place, celebrating the arguments of commonplaces, in the present—like a
present—the place in which we are: “The Congress of the World began with
the first instant of the world and will continue when we are dust. There is
no place in which it is not.”56

It is not a question of bringing to life the favore etimologico nor of
consecrating a perfect language in which names, as Cratylius wanted, would
be in a natural or necessary correspondence with things, nor of giving oneself
over to “an unbridled hunting of etymologies.”57 as Eco warns against, in
order to demonstrate remote relations or philological coincidences of roots
with which the nineteenth century more than sufficiently nourished its his-
torical, philological, and biological investigations. It is interesting to trace,
evertheless, some common lines in contemporary thought, to propose a
synthesis of diversities that would attain a unity beyond theological consecra-
tions, overcoming the facileness of binary oppositions or the limitation of a
numeration that, triadic, only adds a term to the series. We do not speak of
unity in order to reduce three to two or two to one but rather in order to
re recuperate “one,” more as a beginning, as the commencement of an open
series, than as quantitative limit to a monothestic unity: “I will not extend
this speculation much more since it could be offensive to the prejudices
of some who find themselves here,” I might say, paraphrasing Peirce.58

One, a commencement, an origin of creation, a ludic beginning, of
re-creation, after the ending where words match, combine, and wager those
combinations, as if one played anew in order to engage symbols with poetry,
with knucklebones, or with dice. “A toss of the dice will never abolish
chance,”59 summarizes in a verse a world, or two, their destruction, their
sudden fragmentation, and their restitution by transidiotic means, re-
veiling by way of some randomly tossed cubes the profound coincidence of
meaning that lies beyond the differential surface of languages.
The symbol is found plentifully in the intersection of two spheres of existence, combining exterior, interior, the physical and spiritual world, the visible and the invisible. Perhaps it alludes to the androgynes, to the fall and luck of symbols, to the suspicious law of chance, to the toss of dice, of two dice or of one and the same die duplicated by different languages in one and the same verse, and the possibility of restitution (a key word) by poetic introduction. That is the figure with which I designate on the one hand the impossibility of translating and on the other the most profound translation beyond the meanings that the names segment or simplify. In this task, it is the difference of languages that is in play.

Far from the deplored positivist yearning for finding an Ursprache that would explain genealogically a common origin, introduction stands in Borges, in great poetry, as an example of synthesis in diversity. It is a search—poetic, theoretical—for the remaining traces of a unique, initial, anterior, interior, indivisible language. The presumption of a prebabic nominal unity that appears recurrently in his essays constitutes a starting point for his fiction.

Borges discovers the magnificent irony of God on the basis of a language of iron, of his armored (blindado) language, which is that of a blind man, speaks of red Adam,60 of many other reds juxtaposed in his own names: Red Scharlach. Those crossed words stake claim to an Edenic or Adamic language, where My viper of a letter,61 forked and seductress, a split tongue, of “departure” and “arrival,” a safe conduct that fools customs by way of a symbolic key, will tempt the poet who procures, beyond linguistic limits, to recuperate the com-prehension of a language if not unique, at least united or universal. By way of an extravagant onomastico-semasiological dispositive, the poet or the philosopher challenges borders, impugns the rigor of a history, parodies basic linguistic properties (arbitrariness, linearity). He does not transgress, but neither does he observe, the syntactic norms in favor of an almost perverse semantics, extending consecutiveness not as an effect and not in time but rather in a place (place, not space, Ger. Ort, not Raum).

There it is possible to return to these circumstances, to highlight the place that enables the relation between material elements; the continent62 that makes the meeting possible, orienting ourselves first to the West, the point from which points are defined, secondly, to the West of America, near Los Angeles. For this reason I have said for some time now I have not rejected the temptation to venerate the genii loci and I invoke them, quoting Walt Whitman, thanks to an epigraph from Sebeck:63

Solitary, singing in the West,
I strike up for a New World.

From this nearby far-West, two times west, two times occidental, west on west, double the double u, a u-turn returns us to the beginning when we spoke of the dualities of that chance-fall. It is inevitable to recall that the Latin occidens is the present participle of occidere, a verb composed of ob- and cadere, the “fall” to which we have been referring since the beginning, a fall that, without ignoring the others, refers to the setting of the stars, of the sun especially, whose setting place is the occident. Nevertheless, this time it is not a question either of a decadence of the occident, although that fall is double too.
THE PARADOXES OF PARADOXES

Now we do not define each deed that incites our sing; we cipher it in one sole word that is the Word.

—Jorge Luis Borges

In this case it would be valid to modify the formula of the Hebrew superlative, since it is not only a question of distinguishing a level of superiority that exalts a king of kings for being the greatest, or a song of songs that was the best and is his. Despite these grammaticized excellences, it is necessary to point out that the superlative used here is not applied in order to exalt in the same way. Similarly, Borges announces in his book Prologues the presentation of a “prologue of prologues.” I would be interested in anticipating by way of this double plural the apex of paradoxes that Borges’s oeuvre and its author multiply, those of a Borges, who writes, and the other, who also does.

I would not want to attribute solely to the Balkan hospitality of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, to his convocation to reflect, in Dubrovnik, in 1989, on “Collapses, paradoxes, cognitive dissonances,” the necessity to recur thematically to Borges’s paradoxical imagination with such naturalness. Above all because, attending to themes of this nature, naturalness could be alarming. It is true that if unforeseeability constitutes one of the conditions of the paradox, then dealing with paradoxes one need not speak of Borges nor, dealing with Borges, would it be necessary to speak of paradoxes: “in the Koran there are no camels; this absence of camels would be enough to prove that it is not Arabic.”

For this reason, these reflections are initiated in the key of preterition, a figure that seems to me more paradoxical than paradoxes themselves, although, as it is limited to accessory metadiscursive rhetorical recourses, one does not always remember that in saying that one does not say what one says, the rhetorical figure reveals one of the complicated dualities that
are a condition of the word. Between paradoxes and prerentions would be the sententious occurrence of the first and the perverse redundancy of the second, two of the scarce differences between figures that have in common an ambivalent auto-referential remit: without interrupting the consecutiveness of discourse, they are terms that remit it to itself, formulating a verbal auto-referentiality at the same time as they suspend it. The suspended reference, remains and does not, goes and comes, as much what one says as what one does not say is said, is negated and is maintained.1

Paradoxical literature has always existed, but there are works and moments in which this frequency explodes, and it is already difficult to pass them by, their lights and blinding flashes. Borges is a paradoxical event of such a kind that his analysis would overflow the specifics of whatever description, or the limits of inventory. Because of the logical vastness and variety of this recourse, one of the first problems would be to pose again the question, "where to begin?" But the beginning, in the same way as the end, once mentioned, moves away. There is always a discourse or witness that refers the phrase, the judgment, the solution, the catastrophe, like the messengers who recount the calamities of Job to Job and believe, or say, that they exist only to recount to him his misfortunes. Through the word, even the greatest disasters, verbalized, are normalized. From the moment that someone recounts it, once it is named, the ending becomes a deferred end, postponed; through the phrase, mentioned, the beginning also becomes posterior. Because of something "at the beginning," at the beginning of Genesis, as "Beresheit" was translated, does not begin with aleph but with the next letter. In the indicative ambiguities that deixis claims to avoid, the uttered beginning refers to itself from the beginning, two times: "In the beginning was the Word." In the same way, in the oft-discussed "Ceci n'est pas une pipe," the initial auto-referentiality formulated as deixis (eci: this) is part of an indication of circularity that problematizes the formulation. Perhaps more than the Beginning, it was in the End that there was the Word: "début" is a beginning that in French would seem to negate the end from the beginning. Hegel had always observed this complex circularity: "The result is the same thing as the beginning because the beginning is the end (parce que le commencement est le but/veil der Anfang Zweck ist)."6 Similar to the designation "the perfect crime,"7 one does not take into account that once it is said, it ceases to be perfect, although it does not cease to be a crime. Its perfection, perfection itself, would not tolerate the commentary; because of the mention, not only would it be known, but the perfection is destroyed and it is only a matter of a crime; without the mention it would not be known and would not even be a crime.

It is in the recognition of this naturalness or paradoxical nature that is rooted one of the obstacles that impede the comprehension of Borges's vision because, precisely, his paradoxical imagination is as natural as his blindness, because, as well, his vision is paradoxical. That precariousness of his biographical, genetic, hereditary condition has been so often alluded to that it would seem obvious at this point to speak of Borges's blindness, above all when he himself accepts that contradictory gift "from God, who with magnificent irony/ Gave me at the same time books and the night."8 He says he accepts it without thinking, without sorrow, like the days and the darkness. It is not a question of resignation; hesitating among shadows, Borges praises them, like Oedipus, he makes out in this way another light. Borges, who never boasted about the pages he had written but rather about those he had read,9 has no compunction about demanding the virtues of his defect. "Escrive é uma forma de ver" for Haroldo de Campos,10 although neither for him, creator of concrete poetry, does seeing manage to evidence the truth. For some time now the theoretical and methodological statements that insist on the question of the observer have been numerous. It is possible, as a consequence, to consider Borges as a paradigmatic observer: perspicacious, clever, lucid, and blind, the paradoxical observer par excellence.

When Borges presumes that Oscar Wilde "realized that his poetry was too visual and intended to cure himself of that defect," he was not referring only to Wilde. Mostly he is also speaking of himself when he recalls that Wilde had said to himself:

The Greeks maintained that Homer was blind in order to signify that poetry should not be visual, that it should be auditory. [...] We may think that Homer did not exist but that the Greeks liked to imagine him blind in order to insist on the fact that poetry is before all music, that poetry is above all the lyre, and that the visual can exist or not exist in a poet. I know of great visual poets and I know of great poets who are not visual: intellectual poets, mental, there is no reason to mention names.8

The irony of his verses, like the discretion of confidence, does not diminish a stubbornness that is no more paradoxical than it is literal, because poetry brings together those contradictions of the written word. In the first of his last poems, Octavio Paz said:

Poetry
is said and is heard:
is real.
And hardly do I say
is real,
it dissipates.
Is it more real that way?70
From the beginning Borges was determined by contradictions. Like few others, his is an adventure properly verbal, nominal: “His adventure is having been named.” In this case it is Geoffrey Hartman who, inspired by “French reflections,” quotes J. P. Sartre and validates his hypothesis on the notion that the literary work constitutes the elaboration of a specular name, the proper name proper. Nor did Roland Barthes exaggerate when having been 118 G. B. Piranesi or dissimulated with spatial humor by M. C. Escher in fixed corridors and useless staircases. It is difficult to cut blaze a path so well marked, discover the discovered, invent outside of the inventory. As if what were required were the genie loci that Borges appeared to avoid, the poor protector genies of my land, the scarce intellectual ascendancy of Indians who were confused from the beginning, men or Indians, Indians or beasts, Indians with soul or without, Indians without h or with h, as Francis Drake registers them; 14 so many ab-originl confusions appear determined by the paradoxes of an occidental discovery by accident, of a dis-orientation to the letter. America continues to be utopia, an id-entity always in flight.

As for Borges, the greatest paradox is precisely that the paradoxes and the topos koinoi are not distinguished. In the past, in more recent times, criticism has not ceased to indicate the paradoxical frequencies of a dubious eccentricity. A little while ago, the Magazine Litteraire, 15 which dedicated once again a special issue to Borges, brought together an abundant series of articles in which I believe that nobody failed to observe the variants of his paradoxical imagination.

It is not strange that the author of a character-author who is the author-reader of a character-reader should be the great author of this age, author of the author of a Don Quixote identical to that of Cervantes, although superior. It is strange, on the other hand, that Pierre Menard, one of the authors most analyzed in recent times, is no more than a fictional character; even more strange is the fact that his partial and unknown oeuvre—no one read or even managed to see the draft that he himself destroyed—should provoke so many commentaries and so much praise. It would not surprise us if it turned out to be a matter of emblematicizing as well the perplexities of a critical exercise that does not hesitate to make pronounce on texts that it does not know—or that do not exist—in the same way that it simulates not knowing texts that it does in fact know.

It is not an exaggeration to affirm that Borges’s entire imagination is articulated paradoxically, and it would even be paradoxical to do away with this articulation. How to avoid then the common sense that paradox avoids? How to observe, in that “alliance of words, the artifice of language through which ideas and words, which ordinarily oppose and contradict themselves, come to approach each other and combine with one another in such a way that they surprise the intellect,” if novelty, surprise, is rooted in the fact that here are confounded common place and genies of place, doxa and paradox? Once again the paradox is paradoxical and tends to accredit itself ambivalently; yes and no, one diction against the other, they oppose and support each other in a reciprocal way. Indeed, paradoxes are most dangerous; hardly are they invoked and it becomes impossible to interrupt their occurrence, whenever it occurs. Once again, what is said is said against itself, like Plato, “accusing” writing in writing,” a less well-known version of the liar’s paradox who does not cease to be belied because it is not merely coincidental that mention and mendacious are hardly to be distinguished: Who is L’homme qui ment? Literature accuses itself of tempting him, and the accusation is as much a burden as a justification, since not only in Latin does accusing recall the cause, and all of Borges is a cause for contradictions.

I do not know if Borges, in the same way as the metaphysicians of Tlön—who “do not search for truth or even for verisimilitude: they search for amazement”—only searched for amazement because amazement is all too natural for Borges, so much so that it surprises him that amazement can...
still surprise. When referring to the admirable perfection of a poem, the
narrator hits on the idea of commenting on “the true, the incredible . . .”20
The consecutive incompatibility of the oxymoron is neither suspicious nor
noteworthy in an author who is so well read (in both Spanish and English,
one who reads much is not to be idiomatically distinguished from one who
is much read). Among so many inexhaustibly bookish references in his lit-
erature, among libraries, books, poems, stories, letters, where everything is
quoted, it is not unusual that the contrarieties of a topsy-turvy world should
abound. Nevertheless, the inadvertence of the oxymoron goes beyond the
recurrences of a narrator well planted in the literary universe. “Incredible” is
also the most frequent commentary even for the normal events registered by
the certitudes of everyday information. As much about the news that appears
in the press as among the informalities of spontaneous communication, it
is said of everything that everything “is incredible.” Not only in fiction
is “truth stranger than fiction,” it is in media less literary—journalistic or
historical—that truth seems even stranger.

Other oppositions form part of known and established structures: His-
tory of Eternity22 or The Other, The Same 23 are titles that are adjusted to
the well-known rhetorical reconciliations of titles to which, like so many
other authors, Borges tends to accede. As if from the title itself an author
would cipher, as mot-de-passe, the “No pasarán” [They will not pass].24 A
contradiction that defines ambivalently the condition of literature, of art in
general, that converts into equivalents the terms of the tragic alternative
and, without discarding them, maintains it. Before Socrates and after Ham-
let, in the strongest moments as much of philosophy as of poetry, to know
and not to know, to be and not to be, although they oppose one another,
do not exclude one another.

Attention to the inevitable contradictions of an antonymic semantics,
Borges deconstructs, from his first writings, the conflictive accumulations of
an undecidable language: “Let us not marvel excessively; in our language
the word to cleave means both to rend and to adhere,” he translates thus,
between two languages, the observation of an Anglophone character, a frac-
ture similar to the indiscernible irreducibility of the properties confronted by
the oxymoron: “the public and secret representation.”25 It is an “inversion
in narrative structures, where a narrator uses the correction of grammatical
rules to occult under a third person the folds of his own betrayal, using the
double edge of the word-sword, the word as thought in English: (s)word(s)
word(sword(s)).

Starting out from the title of the story “The Form of the Sword,”26
the segmentation becomes less abusive. It is a question of a story that has
as a protagonist an Irishman whose name is hidden until the end but whom

...
is not interested in religious differences either, as far as taking one theologian for another. [. . .] for the unfathomable divinity, he [Aurellano de Aquiles] and Juan de Panonia (the orthodox and the heretic, the abhorrer and the abhorred, the accuser and the victim) were one and the same person.12

According to Harold Bloom, if the misreading fits the reading (“Reading, if strong . . . is always a misreading”),13 its deconstructive operations of reversal and reinscription could also be applied to writing. It is a recurrent recognition that the twentieth century has multiplied on the basis of diverse notions and doctrines. Nevertheless, several decades before, the erudite offenses of Lautréamont and “the viper Letter” in which Jules Laforgue wrote, spatializing a poetry that inscribed itself ambiguously between different texts.

When Charles Sanders Peirce said that “A sign is something by knowing which we know something more,”14 he understood it, doubtlessly, that by knowing something more one would know something different, such that the knowledge of that difference necessarily implies the variations of an inevitable opposition. In part, this is what Umberto Eco reiterates when he considers that, “Starting from the sign, one goes through the whole semiotic process and arrives at the point where the sign becomes capable of contradicting itself (otherwise, those textual mechanisms called ‘literature’ would not be possible).”15

Like the imaginary regions of Tlön, where a book that did not include its own dictionary would be considered incomplete, in the universe ordered by Borges, or in his ordered universe, everything occurs or is explained by mechanisms of contradiction. Beyond the interiority of the text, a story is limited by another story to which it is opposed (“The Aleph”/“The Zahir”). A letter (aleph) is unfolded into two signs (yod) that confront each other; a book against another book: Other Inquisitions (1952) against Inquisitions (1926). There remains in specter the disquiet of a prohibited book, submitted to the censorship of its own inquisition. The book that is object of the most severe contradiction, that of its author, despite his intention of writing it only to relieve the concept of “sambenitos and the smoke of bonfires,” separating it, “purely by coincidence,” from those other, more famous, more atrocious inquisitions. Although historical, they do not cease thereby to be the same. Is it a question of words, of rhetorical figures, of books, of religious abuses, of absurd criminal abuses?

Paradoxes exist to reject such divisions as those between “thought” and “language,” between “thought” and “feeling,” between “logic” and “rhetoric,” between “logic,” “rhetoric,” and “poetics,” and between all of these and “experience.” In paradox, form and content, subject and object are collapsed into one, in an ultimate insistence upon the unity of being.36

In this way Borges discovers in the semasiological reserve of one and the same word conceptual divisions, internal oppositions, and although lexical propriety registers and authorizes them, adverse coincidence recalls incompatibilities of meaning that the pragmatic reductions of context tend to attenuate or discard. Usage avoids those semantic collisions that the dictionary guarantees but that the speaker prefers to forget. Beyond those objections, Borges’s language has its foundation in simultaneous usage, at the same time, of different, contrary meanings. That simultaneity discovers in the instant an instance of eternity. It is “The Secret Miracle,”37 a story in which Borges makes of the “temporality” of time a secondary condition of permanence. It is the moment in which the fugacity of maintenent, of “now,” is detained, se maintenent, maintaining itself. The diegesis of the story initiates it at dawn, when “the armored vanguards of the Third Reich entered Prague.”38 The story was written in 1943.

Elsewhere but by similar mechanisms, his textual strategies manage to disseminate in one and the same unity philosophical, religious, political, historical, personal, circumstantial antagonisms. Of him as well it could be said that he considered human beliefs to be like children’s toys,39 since for him as for Coleridge all men are born either Aristotelians or Platonists. The latter believe classes, orders, and genres to be realities; the former, that they are generalizations; for these language is no more than an approximate game of symbols; for those it is the map of the universe.40

One of the most suggestive uses of that paradoxical reserve is constituted by the production of opposed and simultaneous meanings, which is one form of the principle property of the term but which manages to disarticulate it in a literary use that reaches the apex of meaning (Literature of Replenishment) at the same time as its refutation and questioning (Literature of Exhaustion).41 One meaning against another: do they impugn or support one another? One meaning for another: do they multiply or exclude one another? “This text, then, begins from/because of (por) the word from/by because of (por),” reminds Derrida.42 The fable, “Fable,” by Francis Ponge, two times fable, is a poem of (the) truth. Nevertheless, not only in the complexities of a poem is it possible to verify the singular cross of irony and allegory with which Derrida celebrates Paul de Man. Whatever word, the mere voice, evokes and revokes at the same time. “The action takes place in an oppressed and tenacious country: Poland, Ireland, the Republic of
Venice, some South American or Balkan state... that the ambiguity of the conjunction convokes. A *mysterium conjunctionis* is to be verified in this conjunction (*conjunctionis oppositionem* par excellence), a word almost not articulated, a vocal cry that the letter imitates in the original and primary emblematic circularity of its elliptical trace: multiplication of meanings that attract and reject each other in opposite directions, the oval nucleus from which proceed all contradictions.

Perhaps in the word *cipher* is rooted one of the keys of the word, its gematrical or geometric virtuality, the representative aptitude of a word that names the number, the secret writing of a figure that is number and secret, quantity and silence, each one of the numbers and its set, that one with which the enumeration begins, part and whole, the void in Arabic (ṣifr), nothing and the circle that encircles all of the plenum, the apex, the zero: 0 the letter 0 the cipher/numeral.

His preoccupation for these different tensions into which opposite meanings enter, that ironic bidirectionality that is the power of meaning, or potential meanings, is hindered with the paradoxes of identity and difference that, although they are among the oldest formulations, are not for that reason the least disquieting: "They do not know how the discordant accords with itself, agreement of inverse tensions, like in the arc and the lyre." It is precisely in the mouth of a foreigner that Plato affirms being to both one and several, both hate and friendship make its cohesion. In "Funes the Memorable," the protagonist of one of Borges's master showpieces of epistemology-fiction suffers, like "A Reader," the passion of language. The suffering is as strong as the attraction. Funes is a gaucho from my country who "since that afternoon when the blue-black horse threw him [...] he lost consciousness [...] Now his perception and his memory are infallible." And for that reason, precisely, he is incapable of thinking what it is to forget and forget. He lies prostrate in an obscure corner of the ranch because he cannot tolerate, he cannot conceive that "the dog of three fourteen (seen in profile) would have the same name as the dog of quarter after three (seen from head on)." For Funes, "the generic symbol dog is an archetypal exaggeration." The question is as old as the word. Although Parmenides does not, in the alternatives of his dialogue, manifest it in such a perturbing way, I am not sure that Plato any more than Parmenides had not foreseen the occurrence of this native rustic passion.

The problem is posed poetically when Borges recognizes that the individual is in some way the species, a duality that is disseminated under the same name: "Keats's nightingale is also Ruth's nightingale." By virtue of one sole word all times coincide, eternity and an instant; all space, the universe in a point; in one word, a word that is also a letter: the aleph. There begins the conflict.

It is worth recognizing in the homonymic lability of the word one of the decisive reasons for the paradoxical constancy. It is in the tendentious and inevitable confrontation that is produced in the interior of the word, of the word with itself, that is rooted the origin of so much contradiction:

Language says the opposite of what we try to say. We attempt the singular, and it says the universal. But it does not maintain only an opinion against ours; because it says the universal, what it says is true; it refutes our opinion. Hegel, in the decisive conclusion of his analysis of sensible certainty, says precisely that language has "divine nature because it is also solvent, because it dissolves us of unilaterality and makes us say the universal, the true."

In the same way that "The true theme of poetry, although always secret and never explicit, is poetry itself," Borges's writings elaborate the conflict of that dual and contradictory condition, of the paradoxical ambivalence of the word that distinguishes and confounds, that rescues and annihilates at the same time. "How to Undo Things with Words" would be a necessary title to complete some that are already circulating.

For example, in the "Parable of the Palace," the narrator discloses the variants of an obliteration literal insofar as literary: the word suspends the thing or, if the thing is in turn a name, the name of a name, it names it two times, through two voices, a species of re-vocation that makes it disappear like the palace that, described by the poet, remains suspended, that is to say, does not remain.

Without making any reference to the dream of Caedmon, or to Coleridge's poem, Borges recounts the story of a yellow emperor (he does not name him) who accuses a poet (he does not name him) of having robbed his palace (which he also does not name). "In the poem the palace was entire [...]. It was enough for the poet to pronounce the poem for the palace to disappear, as if abolished and annihilated by the last syllable." Because of this double lack (of the palace, of the poet), the emperor did not hesitate to have him killed. In the same way that the poet of the story, for whom the poem brought about immortality and death, by means of the word one palace is destroyed and another rises, like the successive temples of which Nietzsche spoke, which were capable of being placed and displacing themselves at the same time. By virtue of the same word, things begin to exist and cease to exist. The word re-presents them, and by means of that contradictory prefix, the things are not present (which is why they are represented) and are there again; they are presented two times. But as the parable recounts, all representation is suspicious, in reality there are no two things alike in the world.
The “Parable of the Palace,” beyond Borges’s page, alludes to more than one palabra (word), parable of the palace or, a parable of the palabra itself. More precisely, a paradox of the palabra, a repetition of the word that contradicts it while repeating it and that designates as much the vault of the palace that the emperor constructs and the poet makes disappear, as the “palite” (Fr. palais) where the word “takes place.” When the repeated particulars are crosses, they are sublated, like another form of Aufhebung, which exalts while degrading, disclosing even while suppressing it, describes and destroys at the same time. If it is known that all paradox tends toward self-contradiction and toward self-destruction, the word can do no more or no less.

Between a counterfeiting that is to imitate and contradict, Borges does not hesitate and insists on both procedures. Such that from the moment they are said, facts become counterfeits.

But let us not speak of deeds. No one is interested in deeds anymore. They are mere starting points for invention and reasoning. In the schools they teach us questions and the art of forgetting. [. . .] The images and the printed letter were more real than things. Only the published was true. [. . .] After walking for fifteen minutes, we turned to the left. In the distance I made out a sort of tower, crowned with a cupola—It is the crematorium—said someone.—Inside is the death chamber. They say that it was invented by a philanthropist whose name was, I believe, Adolph Hitler.68

For that reason, from his first writings to the most recent, Borges laments that “there is not one sole beautiful word, with the dubious exception of ‘witness,’ which is not an abstraction.”69 Perhaps Borges doubted, anticipating those terms, what Lyotard asserted several decades after: “the unstable state and the instant of language in which something that should be able to be put into words has not yet been.”70 And if the witness professed the vocation of martyr (from Gr. martur: “witness”), doubting the word, believing in the sacrifice? If, as has occurred so many times, victim and witness coincided? What testimony can a victim present? What words could he or she find for so many losses, for so much destruction? “Il ne trouve pas ses mots” (he does not find his words), it is not only that he cannot find them. And if he found them? “Il ne trouve pas ses mots” (he does not find his dead), when there is no more than damage, any pronouncement will be useless. Nor would silence be less useless. Like the dilemma of the crocodile,64 ready to devour a baby, it has no solution.

Lyotard defines the différend as a case in which the plaintiff has been deprived of the means necessary for his argumentation, and for this reason is turned into a victim. He wonders if the victim has the means to establish that he is a victim. What tribunal can judge him when no tribunal and no right foresaw the nature of a crime that shatters any legitimate state whatever? “There is no other witness than the victim, no other victim than the one who has died.”71 Witness and victim disappear at the same time and there is no possible or attenuating plea for the crime. If it is still necessary to convince, argue, deliberate, verify, only rhetoric would remain safe from the disaster, because it is one of its origins. Neither theory, nor history, nor poetry. After Auschwitz, nothing.

Proofs wear out the truth64 and make it barely probable, that is to say, as true as it is uncertain. If it were necessary to prove such a crime, the means would invalidate themselves. Once again, Hamlet is right to put on a dumb-show70 for one who debates with himself in the confines of a tragedy, a comedy could well be The real thing.66 For this reason he conceives a spectacle with the purpose of seeing the truth put on stage. A spectacle that repeats in silence a reality ever less real the more it is repeated: the words no longer count. How to resolve the paradox of the word? If the crime does not refer, the crime will not be known. If it refers, it is no longer the same. Lyotard said it would be necessary to examine the means, which “are at least of two types: some proceed by annulment, others by representation. . . . To represent ‘Auschwitz’ in images, in words, is a way of making it be forgotten.”71

If for Borges forgetting/ is one of the forms of memory, [. . .] If the other secret face of the coin,71 the word is the best-known face. Everything passes through the word, but in this way nothing really happens (pasa) either. The word is trance and transition. If one cannot speak, one must keep silent. It has been said already many times. But, what does silence rescue? In Genesis, the interdiction of God is a command in contradiction: He who creates by way of the word does not enable a word to be named himself. As Levinas said, “the marvel of a thought better than knowing. Hors sujet.”69

The narrator of the parable ends by saying:

Such legends, it is clear, do not go beyond being literary fictions. The poet was a slave of the emperor and died as such; his composition fell into oblivion because it deserved oblivion, and his descendants still look for it, and they will not find the word of the universe.70

Until now, commentaries on “UNDR”71 have not abounded, a story that not even Borges comments on when commenting on all the others in the epilogue to The Book of Sand. It is the story of a man who, realizing that the poetry of the Unma72 consists of one sole word, dedicates himself to search for it and, different from the descendants of the poet executed by the emperor, finds it: “He said the word Unm, which means wonder.”71
Like its reference, the word is strange, in a language that I do not understand. Its four letters maintain the mystery that the word signifies: wonder designates as much marvel as the bewilderment before the paradoxical event of understanding (under-under . . .), which participates in an ambivalent way in both forms of amazement. The mystery is greater because the transcription suppresses the vowels, as if they were sacred characters that, read in Hebrew, invoke public prayers in memory of the dead.74

Today there is another word that is pronounced like a strange expression, but in Hebrew, which is a known language. Almost inarticulate, it claims silence as if exclaiming a cry. It disconcerts. It is said in Hebrew, but it is already a universal word and is not even translated. It remains enigmatic and distant as if it assured via incomprehension its paradoxical universality: no one comprehends. A unique event, inconceivable. Destruction, extermination, annihilation. Even translated into all the languages it resists comprehension. Again because of a word made of four letters, reason remains in suspense; whatever reason fails.

ELEVEN

VOX IN DESERTO

Borges and the History of Sand

He told me his book was called the Book of Sand, because neither the book nor the sand have either beginning or end.

—Jorge Luis Borges

We would again have to allude to the writing of Borges, considering it a writing *avant la lettre*, insofar as it anticipates and prescribes the imagination and thought determining the historical, political, theoretical, and aesthetic tendencies that define ambivalently the culture of the second half of the last century, finalizing that century, that millennium, and other times. The revelations of his paradoxical vision, the aporias of his incertitudes, the disconcerts of suspended oppositions, the perfection of representations so precise that they obliterate what they represent, copies that surpass their originals, the vanishing of categories and genres, the undrawing of disciplinary limits, the fatality of a writing that does not distinguish although it is sustained by distinction, the progressive introduction of fiction into history, the omission that is another recourse of fiction, the totalitarian absurdity of inventories that impugn invention, the arbitrary enumerations, the incidences of possible worlds that displace known ones, the discontinuous parallelism of the encyclopedias that record or interpret them, the theoretical crises and the hermeneutic rescues of a truth, fragile and in flight, constitute some of the forms of those disparate definitions.

Observing these broken-down gnoseological series, the meticulous clarity of rigorous cartographic registers, the iconic solidity of diagrams as valid as they are debatable, the measurable distances according to exact
standards, the terminating borders between jurisdictions that tend to confront one another, the orientation of cardinal points as symmetrical as they are arbitrary, the eventualities of a utopic geography could not cease to be one of the favorite targets to which Borges would aim his negative poetics.

"What are the Orient and the Occident? If they ask me, I do not know. Let us look for an approximation," Borges replies, but in regional terms, diffusely spatial, to the same question that Augustine formulated about time, and, like the old professor of rhetoric who was a monk before converting, responds by affirming that he knows space and does not know it at the same time. Anterior and similar to the coincidences of the globalized present, Borges's epistemological fiction takes note of this planetary reduction in which the confines, being conventional, do not count; where distances, because of the immediacy of contexts and accelerated imagination, count less; where accidents are no more than accidental; where exotic places appear juxtaposed—because they are neighbors or mythical—to familiar imitations where Orient and Occident contract in a common decline that brings them closer to one another. Preceded by the redundancies of Der Untergang des Abendlandes (The decline of the west), a title in which time and space are confounded in one and the same fall, that approximation constitutes a decline in two parts for two reasons: because geographical reason declines (barely a primary topography); because conceptual reason declines (barely a discrete logic).

And how to define the Orient, not the real Orient, which does not exist? I would say that the notions of Orient and Occident are generalizations but that no individual feels Oriental. I suppose that a man feels Persian, feels Hindu, feels Malay, but not Oriental. In the same way, no one feels Latin American: we feel Argentine, Chilean, Orientals (Uruguayans). It does not matter, the concept does not exist.¹

Between prophecy or provocation, Borges's previsions were those of an epoch in which countries vanish, regionalized into markets; in which deterritorialization turns inside out the definitions of national statutes submitted to the fluctuations of a conceptual stock market in which notions of nation and narration are conflated, and not only because of homophonic occurrences. Borges's imagination mocks borders because, uncertain, they indistinctly unite or separate jurisdictions. They degrade them, running through them by means of personal topology that explodes into contingencies only conceived of in dreams, making of the whole world a common place, topoi koinoi. More than sites, indisputable arguments, they get by without fortuitous particularities, without the eventualities of history, procuring to discover, beyond idiomatic, idiosyncratic contingencies and the myths of identity that sustain them, the models of a knowledge capable of abstracting them. There the variants of being and knowing stand as instances of a movement, of a voyage that is directed beyond, toward another reality, an ultrareality where the eventual does not count; where the voyage is a disputable errancy of permanency in space, where the vision of the whole Earth can be concentrated in a sacred place or ciphered in an initial or initiatory letter that is not less so for spatializing time in writing. Because if the world was made to finish in a beautiful book, the book exists because it is beautiful—cosmos, a world—and because it remains, it does not end . . .

It would not be excessive, then, to simplify a parallelism that would implicate textual itineraries and recognize that—according to the genetic analysis of Borges's manuscripts—if the mihrab is the place that "gives place" to the aleph.¹ Associated with an "Arabic geography," the desert is the place that gives place to Borges's text, an imagination that tries to comprehend in one expression, in one moment, eternity and infinity or, at the same time, claim them for itself.

This literary reclamation desires the desert. But, more than vox in deserto, more than to speak in the desert or desire to be heard, Borges speaks—in Spanish—his desire for the desert: between desire and desert, decirlos (to say them) in one sole word. It would be necessary to begin at the beginning, but, like the end, the beginning is neither one nor is it certain; there are several, and perhaps for this reason one of the principal beginnings (principios)—which is the beginning of Writing—begins with b and not with the first letter, as if presuming that something anterior had already preceded it. One conjecture that the theologians have noted, only to have it refuted, like they must have noted and refuted a question no longer of letters but of names (nombres), a word that means "numbers" in French and "names" in Spanish, encompassing transidiomatically the dualities of a common denominator or of a similar referent.

In this way is posed a brief philological discussion, a first question of translation, of crossed languages, a question or a search for words that Borges would not have avoided and that poetically engages the titles of the books of the Torah with this allure of saying or of that desire of the desert. One more time: instead of to speak (decir) in the desert, speak (decir) the desert. The first title of the Pentateuch, Genesis, in Hebrew Bereshit, which means "beginning," names the word with which the book of Genesis begins. The second title, Exodus—from the Greek exo, "out of," and hodos, "route, voyage, act of leaving"—is the distant translation of the Hebrew Shemot, which means "Names," neither emigration nor exile but rather the Hebrew word with which Exodus begins: "These are the names . . ." Leviticus, the third title of the Hebrew Bible, refers to the priests, sons of Aaron, separating
itself from the Hebrew Ve ilea, which means “and he called,” another way of saying by Yahweh, with which the book begins. The fourth, Numbers—in Hebrew Ba-midbar—which is a title adopted by the Septuagint (the seventy translators of the Torah, or seventy-two, in order to avoid sectarian misreadings). After it, the Vulgate passes over Ba-midbar, the title that anticipates the beginning of the book, making allusion to the census of the twelve tribes in place of referring to the place, the desert of Sinai, where Yahweh addresses Moses, speaks to him. Midbar claims its close relation with the word: dibur, “speech,” diburim, “talks,” “rumors, cheap talk,” in modern Hebrew. Words and desert, both voices proceed from the same root, spoken voices rooted in the desert. On the one hand, the name of “words” is omitted to make reference to the voyage to, the way of the one who leaves, to the route or path that is abandoned or the one that one tries to rescue (Exodus). On the other hand, the place is omitted, the desert, in order to make reference to numbers (Numbers). Intersection of voices and ways in the desert: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

The fifth book of the Hebrew Bible, Deuteronomy, adopted from the Greek and Latin meaning “second law,” also does not translate the Hebrew debarim, “palabras”: “These be the words that Moses spake . . . in the wilderness.” “In the beginning” of all the books of the Torah is found the word, speech, discourse, voices that are spoken in the desert. More than etymological, more than idiomatic, the profundity of the relation between “word” and “desert” sinks its roots in a mythology of the nothing, in a letristic, consonant coincidence, dibr, originates as minimalistic, as if in a previous language, a geography of the void, an empty space that is the origin of the world that, because of the word, remains to be made. Even by opposition, a semantic relation similar but contrary is to be verified in Latin: desertus, adjectival past participle of deserere, “to separate oneself,” “abandon,” derives as sermo, “speech, language,” from the Latin serere: the desert depriving or deprived of the word. Signs cross one another in different languages, exchange signals, the semantic paths lead to a common mystery. Thought in Spanish, in the “language of Borges,” they are words that propitiate bilingual, multilingual interlacings, names for numbers and vice versa, words that reflect one another, confronting each other like mirrors, verbal mirages that attract infinite interpretations, dissimulated interior translations, transports, or metaphors of a passing secularization.

When the narrator of “The Theologians” recounts that Aureliano argues in favor of a thesis on circular time, he points out that in the subject of theology there is no novelty without danger, but dealing with the idea that the thesis he defended was “too unlikely, too amazing for the risk to have been serious,” he clarifies, in parenthesis, that “the heresies that we ought to fear are those which can be confused with orthodoxy.”

Years before writing this story, in “Circular Time,” Borges had already foreseen its plot. In place of announcing it, he prefers to remit it to the past. The misordered reversibility of this work in progress justifies the prolongation of a quote:

“I imagined some time ago a fantastic story, in the style of Léon Bloy: a theologian consecrates all of his life to confuting a heretic, he vanquishes him in intricate polemics, he denounces him, he makes him burn; in Heaven he discovers that for God the heretic and he consisted of one and the same person.”

This essay precedes, in the History of Eternity, “The Translators of The Thousand and One Nights.” An obstinate circularity, a regressive succession, series in cycles that repeat themselves sub specie aeternitatis, these are the foundations of a doctrine that affirms eternity in the multiplication of possible worlds, as conceived by Borges on the basis of and in the manner of Louis-Auguste Blanqui; like copies that repeat themselves eternally in infinite space. In Eternity through the Stars: An Astronomical Hypothesis, the plurality of facsimile stars that Blanqui supposes and describes in the reclusion of prison, the slippages of one into others, the recurrence of his astronomical phantasmagorias, the desperate illusion of coincidences and differences, constitute the intellectual substance and constant aesthetic that Borges demands and dispenses in different versions. “Of the three doctrines I have enumerated, the best-reasoned and most complex is that of Blanqui.”

Repetitions question continuity, refute succession if it is progressive, procure eternity, “whose shattered copy is time,” and also space, since it is measured by time. Being confused the coordinates—to designate them somehow—they do not order, they enable melancholic references of a geometrical indefiniteness that the seller of Bibles and of The Book of Sand, in The Book of Sand, utters in a low voice, as if he were thinking out loud: “If space is infinite, we are in whatever point of space. If time is infinite, we are in whatever point of time.” The pages of the book, like sand, are uncountable, “none is the first, none is the last.”

The sand, like “the water that in water is invisible,” is lost in the desert, where neither the sand nor the desert is distinguished. In that indefinite or infinite space, similar but opposed to the rigorous precisions traced by the labyrinth, one makes out the primordial “tops,” place and theme of a loss, the disorientation that justifies the search for the Borgesian writing.
Borges's "Thirteen Coins" or "Quince monedas," as it appears in another edition, comprise a series of very short poems included in a discontinuous way in his different editions. Among these coins of fluctuating number, "The Desert" is the place where time does not count; present, it remains suspended or does not remain, cancelled and potential, expectant, it is time in which coincide eternity and the instant, where differences vanish, soil, sun or moon, a battle or two:

Space without time.
The moon is the color of sand.
Now, precisely now,
Are dying the men of Metauro and Trafalgar.16

In another "The Desert," this one a longer poem, I transcribe here only a few verses:

Before entering the desert
the soldiers drank long of the water from the cistern.
Hierocles spilt on the earth
the water from his canteen and said:
If we must enter in the desert,
I am already in the desert.
If thirst is going to scorch me,
Let it scorch me!
This is a parable.17

"The Book of Sand" is not an "Arabic story," like the Vathek of William Beckford, nor does it take place in the desert, although the desert, secretive, is absent and present at the same time. Even if "The Book of Sand" is a relatively brief tale, it refers to an infinite book, like the sand of the desert, without limits, or with invisible edges that extend it beyond the horizon. To reduce the excesses of that extravagant extension, before

the impossibility of defining or of giving a reference to the indefinable, the narrator begins ad absurdum, making use of more geometrico, all the recourses of exactitude. Contradictorily, he defines line, plane, volume as forms of the infinite that are not those of the book, or not even its opposites. Recognizing the convention of all fantastic tales, the narrator affirms, from the beginning, that it is a true book. Given the literary verisimilitude, of that partial truth of writing, he prefers to occult—truth, the book—behind another book that is a fiction of fictions: "He opts for hiding them behind some uncompleted (descabalados) volumes of the Thousand and One Nights," a volume that is missing some parts, apparently "incomplete." Nor is "caba" foreign to that disorder that the adjective qualifies, nor do the traditions of reading contradict that dispense "reception": "The Arabs say that no one can Read to the end of the Book of the Nights."9 In addition to occulting the uncertain truth of other books, The Thousand and One Nights is one of his archetypal narratives, the spiral matrix where are produced the mirages of his abyssal imagination, anterior and interior to other books, or to the same book, that take place in the desert. More than the parable of the desert it is the voice in the desert, the word is lost in the word, they are not differentiated, just as the word is not differentiated from the book:

In the book is the Book. Without knowing it
The queen tells the king the already forgotten
Story of them both. . . .30

From the two books or from both the king and the queen? Consisting of its vigils, The Thousand and One Nights not only constitutes a book but also a temporal and nocturnal pretext of innumerable stories that the literary imagination of its bibliothecological rhetoric figure: figures of a talisman that protects or dispenses the luck of its erudition prolonged in fictions or in interminable histories that wager against time. Borges dispenses in parts (descabala) the book: "takes out precise parts in order to construct another [book] which does not claim to be entire (caba) or complete either."91 Like a magical inscription that circulates in his texts, in more or less transparent quotes or in even more secret rendezvous (cita in Spanish brings together the two passions in one and the same word: the citation and the sentimental meeting), the book comes and goes in Borges's oeuvre, a literal and figurative "transport" of his metaphors. In the same way that the genie enclosed in the vessel is not the same one who escapes from Aladdin's lamp, he only appears "by enchantment," according to the French translation of The Thousand and One Nights. Both play within the pages of Borges, weaving the plot and filtering, in bibliographical references, the autobiographical accidents that fiction reveals.
In “The South,” Juan Dahlmann “had attained, that afternoon, an uncompleted copy of The Thousand and One Nights.” It is the book with which he travels toward his destiny: the south, his fatality, the displacement in procurement of a double death. In that story, the ciphered and habitual reading postpones the duel, it serves “as if to cover reality,” believing in this way to avoid the challenge and the fight. Like The Book of Sand, between whose pages “none is the first; none, the last,” The Thousand and One Nights keeps mysteries that keep other mysteries: occults the character or occults (from him) reality, like it occulted The Book of Sand on a shelf of the library, insinuating the rigor of an inexorable law: one book occults another, or more.

The Thousand and One Nights is, moreover, title and subject of a talk published in Seven Nights. The periodical brevity, to which the tutelary title of the book that compiles several other talks refers, appears in counterpoint to the millenary nocturnal fabulation, with the verbality preceding an enumeration that mocks, because of its scarcity, the enumeration of a series that does not end. “The idea of infinite is co-substantial with The Thousand and One Nights,” the narration enables a universe where time and space are confused, where numerical precision makes fun, contradictorily, no longer of the limitations of enumeration but rather of its impossibility. The end in suspense, like in the stories of Scheherazade that suspend the ending, postpone the sentence, which is as much the verbal one as the condemnation, death, the end, always interrupted:

I want to pause over the title. It is one of the most beautiful in the world, so beautiful [. . .] I believe that for us the word “thousand” is synonymous with “infinite.” To say a thousand nights is to say infinite nights, the many nights, the innumerable nights. To say “a thousand and one nights” is to add one to the infinite.

For this reason Borges prefers that title of numerous narration to the one that it presents in English, “The Arabian Nights,” an Oriental, ethnic mention, which, like “the Arabic numerals,” do not number the pages of The Book of Sand, which pass from 400, 514, even, to 999, odd. Borges’s story The Book of Sand—two times eponymous—presents the same title for the book that appears in the story and for the book wherein appears the story. Thus the book exists outside of the story and inside of the story, vanishing the limits from both sides, providing entrance or exit to the dualities of its ambiguous diegetic statute. It belongs to “a world that is made of correspondences, that is made of magic mirrors,” which, facing one another, confuse reality with words, forging images that shed blinding light and are erased in the sand. In others of Borges’s stories, the regions, the countries owe their existence to the mentions that figure in an encyclopedia. This statute would not be unusual in a universe where Scheherazade’s life depended on her word, the continuity of the story as well, narrator and narration exist equally with the word. An encyclopedia, literary, or verbal survival dissimulates the differences that no longer oppose life to anything that is not written.

From the beginning, the word is the commencement:

I think we ought not renounce the word Orient, such a beautiful word, since in it, by happy coincidence, there is gold (oro) to be found. [and he insists] In the word Orient we hear the word gold (oro) because at dawn the heaven look like gold.

Borges discovers affinities between words that, beyond phonetic coincidences, reveal a universe articulated by a different poetic logic: arena (sand), Arab, arid, ardent, arcane, or more distant, “in the confines of the sand (arena) of Arizona,” incipient rhymes, at the beginning, textual bonds are laid out like traps in unforeseen situations.

Although “its semantics has been restricted to places,” for Borges the desert is not only infinite extension but also the place from which “one leaves” and, for this reason, a goal: an origin and a departure, the beginning and the leaving. Its desolation is, moreover, of another nature:

I see that this theme is fecund in Borges since the desert—in any case as it is lived by the Arabs—is the sheer place of loss, of a virtual loss; and frequently, it is the place where one loses and finds oneself; and it is that disposition that brings about the paradigm of the footprint, of its inscription, of its fragility, of its blurring; of its furtive slippage toward the sign, in order to reveal in it the latency of its meaning; that is to say, the testimony of a presence in absence.

Beyond tracing the roots of loss, Borges consecrates the sand as the original substance of space, deserted dust that remains in movement, since sand is not only the infinite sediment of the desert but also the shifting material of fiction in a book of which the narrator, like the mythical narrator, is a prisoner. If “the first metaphor is water,” water becomes sand like “those rivers of sand with fish of gold” that, in the first place make us think of Islam. That becoming would precipitate another experimentation of time by writing: if “the course of time and time are only one mystery and not two,” discourse duplicates it. Emblematic, remote, clepsydra names the water and its disappearance, the water stolen by the discourse that is prolonged but, above all, by the word that designates and, at the same
time, suppresses what it designates. Through the crystal of the clepsydra, the water makes transparent twice over the secret order that the passage of time administers but, like a shaker that tosses the die, "the allegorical instrument" turns around and chance returns. "Shakespeare—according to his own metaphor—put in the turn of an hourglass the works of the years," said Borges more than a half century ago.

If all history, like all story, is uncertain, Borges pushes that uncertainty to its extreme, prolonging it into a History of Eternity that tries to recount the impossible history of an eternity that has no time, or sets out to enumerate the moments of the instant that also does not have it. He recounts, nevertheless, the history of the sand, he tells it two times, the history of the desert and the number, interminably, which is another incessant form of (re)counting. The voice is doubled in the desert or, the other way around, the desert is doubled in the voice, in one same voice or at the same time. It is doubled and comes back to itself, vox in deserto, like in a mirror, almost a mirage. In the image of clepsydra, Borges exhausts water into sand, exhausts time as its slips toward the end in order to return to the beginning. Fall, that is a symbol of other falls, of equally symbolic fractures, sand decants, meticulous, without pausing, without swerving, like a verse that returns by inversion, turning around itself, in a fragile orb or two, where are passing by, because they wander and disappear, the voices that do not count.

Perhaps there was an error in the writing
Or in the articulation of the Sacred Name;
Despite such high sorcery
The apprentice of man did not learn to speak.

—Jorge Luis Borges

In one of Borges's best-known stories, the one that continues to be—with reason—his most-quoted story, resigning himself to the uselessness of all intellectual exercise, or demanding it, the narrator affirms: "A philosophical doctrine is at first a verisimilar description of the universe; the years go by and it is a mere chapter—when not a paragraph and a name—of the history of philosophy. In literature, that final caducity is even more notorious." Thus, in trying to apply this prediction to the oeuvre of Borges himself, in foreseeing, hypothetically and not without a certain irony, the reductions of a decadent epistemology or of a poetics on the path to extinction, it would not be unusual if we were to record the permanence, barely, of only one poem. In such case, if it had been left to him to decide, it would have mattered to him—Borges dixit—that "The Golem" remain; but even the entire poem seemed to him an excessive pretension and that one stanza would be enough; in that case, he preferred that it be the first:

If (as the Greek affirmed in the Cratylos)
The name is the archetype of the thing,
In the letters of rose is the rose
And all of the Nile in the word Nile.1

If it were a name, it was not pronounced. But I didn't ask. One would have to assume, because of it, the responsibility of maintaining that relic. If
it were thus so, perhaps he would have conserved "the Name which is the Key," and in such case, *that name would be the name. Or a word, at the end, of negative resonances, almost nihilistic, a voice in the desert.

The apparent circular tautology of this presumption would not be more than apparent. Without revelations or occultations, far from any apocalyptic intonations, Borges's oeuvre abounds in diverse figurations of a paradoxical aesthetic insofar as it would consolidate an *aesthetics of disappearance*. If it were thus, the strange productions of this contradictory aesthetic would have vanished, like poetry, knowledge, and the disciplines that limit it: "...there are no sciences in Tlön."

Silent, literature would have been diffused in quotes; history, in eternity. Omitted or reiterated, the suppression of its monuments that that counterproductive creation propitiates is not distinguished from the disappearance of empires, of their extensions, or of their borders in space or in other dimensions: "One of the schools of Tlön goes so far as to negate time."5 In Borges's literary imagination, even negation illuminates; progressive disappearance provoked and confirmed the history of the century. There is no despair or lamenting before collapse and harassment. Woven among his vast and various texts, it is not unusual that the forms of disappearance have found the most diverse figures in a poetics of silence, of nothingness, of annihilation. Because of that secret capacity that distinguishes literature, another poet would have already announced that the fatal vocation of the world would make him disappear in a book, like a book, in the same way that the novel about nothing to which another author aspired, would succumb to the same fate. Neither words nor things, articulated in one and the same *davar, in Hebrew*, word, action, thing, suppressed at the same time.

Among his first writings, Borges had recognized in literature the debatable privilege of announcing its end and celebrating it. To invoke and revoke at the same time would be the double and ambiguous property of the name. If the world was created by the word, it should not surprise us if it were destroyed via the same expression. The variants of literary, literal, or graphic obliteration is a constant referential figure: the empire threatened by the minuteness of cartographic description, the palace of the emperor threatened by the perfecion of the poem, the poet by the emperor, the world degraded, obliterated, to the letter.

The allusions to that minimal nominality are numerous: "There are famous poems composed of one, sole, enormous word.6" The certitude of such an assertion could be as excessive as the word itself; nevertheless, the disconcerting reduction that his fiction proposes has not sufficiently caught the attention of the specialists. That specialized unscrupulousness could be explained, possibly, by the fact that the assertion is recorded within a fiction.

Or, more than by that ambivalent statute, legitimated in part by invention, it could be explained by the fact that in the fiction in which it appears, which is "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," almost everything is surprising. As surprising as Tlön, a planet where "The metaphysicians do not search for truth or even verisimilitude: they search for amazement."7

From the perspective of that spectral aesthetic and the minimalist genealogy it implicates, it seems valid to advance the mystery of a story in which, in reality, or in the allegories—as Kafka understood them—the narrator takes on the search for a word, like one who takes on the search for a lost clue, a sacred relic, or a hidden treasure. Included in *The Book of Sand*, the story appears under the title "UNDR,8" in upper case, an acronym. Less mysterious than the mystic tetragrammaton, doubtless less venerable, it does not claim to be less prodigious. It is not difficult to recall different titles of various poems of Borges or of other authors, of stories or novels that consist of four numbers, ciphering a particular year posterior to a millennium that enables them. Nevertheless, it does not seem that there has been formulated a title so succinct, literal, and at the same time enigmatic for any other story. Although in *Other Inquisitions* it could have already called attention that the essay "New Refutation of Time"9 would be articulated in two chapters, the first has the letter capital "A" as title; the second chapter is titled, according to the same alphabetic subject matter, "B." Although circumscript, the series assures a pertinent ordering, which the rationality of the essay propitiates.

Nevertheless, there are several titles in which the nominal precariousness gives cause for thought. A poem, "I," in *The Profound Rose* (1975),11 or another, "You," in *The Gold of the Tigers* (1972),12 a poem, "He," in *The other, the same* (1964),13 might have anticipated a scarcity that, personal, pronominal, anterior, or posterior to the name, would alert us to the recourses with which language counts, dialectically or grammatically, in order not to signify, to dissipate an identity in debate. A pronoun, a word as theatrical as a mask, occults, almost anonymous, the person from which person, in Greek "mask," takes its name: "No one" is not distinguished from "Someone";4 personne, in French, the archetypal subterfuge that saved Ulysses. A long time after, without distancing himself from the itinerary of his odysseys and from the territories that Ulysses or Odisipo had founded according to the legend, giving the name to Lisbon, is the same mask: "Pessoa," the proper name of the poet, he who multiplies the occulting in patronyms or heteronyms that reveal the plurality of a life, in as many lives as masks, or more. As Pessoa says, "...the mental origin of my heteronyms resides in a tendency, in myself, organic and constant, to depersonalization and simulation. [. . .] in this way everything ends
up in silence and poetry.” Glimpsed among the poetic cracks, the mystery of the name haunts us, at the turn of roads wherein cross mythical, epic, tragic, religious tales, like the enigma of a sphinx willing to sacrifice he who does not provide the solution that is definitively only another enigma, the greatest, which is the human condition. In Other Inquisitions (1952), on more than one occasion, Borges transcribes a passage from Léon Bloy, whose combative conviction, a most militant faith deposited in the premeditations of a God who impedes him from doubting determinism—minute, secret, the most symbolic, which becomes Truth in the Sacred Scriptures—never ceases to amaze him. The admiration for one whom Borges once qualified as prophet or visionary is such that, in the same volume, with a difference of a couple of pages, he insists on transcribing the same reference, the same quote, textually, from which he omits barely a few words.10 Transformed by its new contexts, Bloy's fragment radiates throughout all of Borges's thought, associating it with the method that the Jewish Kabbalists applied to the Scriptures, “a secret brother of Swedenborg and of Blake: heresiarchs.”17 The prolonged extension, infrequent, that he reserves for him in two brief essays, the importance of these two essays in his oeuvre, justify the transcription:

Then, Léon Bloy wrote: “There is on earth no human being capable of declaring who he is. No one knows what he has come to do in this world, to what correspond his acts, his sentiments, his ideas, nor what his true name is, his imperishable Name in the register of Light. . . . History is an immense liturgical text in which the iotas and the points are worth no less than entire verses or chapters, but the importance of the one or the other is indeterminable and is profoundly hidden. [L'âme de Napoléon, 1912]18

A little further on, in “The Mirror of the Enigmas,”19 Borges again makes reference to the same book of Bloy, assigning to it as its sole purpose that of deciphering the symbol Napoléon, in which he would recognize the precursor of another hero who would come in the future since for “this journalist of combat,” as Bloy tends to be defined, every man is on earth in order to symbolize something he does not know and to contribute, in different measures, to building the City of God.

I am interesting in pointing out the “hieroglyphic character—that character of divine writing, cryptography of angels—in all instances and all beings of the world”20 that Borges attributes to the ponderous reflections of Bloy. The incomprehension of the meaning is only due to the ignorance of one’s own condition, which is the human condition, to which he returns toward the end of “The Mirror of the Enigmas”: “No man knows who he is,” asserted Léon Bloy, and for Borges, more than pointing out lack of knowledge, the very same Bloy illustrated “that intimate ignorance” of one who, despite believing himself a rigorous Catholic, “was a continuator of the Kabbalists, a secret brother of Swedenborg and Blake: heresiarchs.”

Dealing with the impossibility of deciphering the mysteries of man that are hardly dissimulated beneath the mask of the name, letters count as meaningful footprints of an occult language that, in fragments, multiplies meanings. Combining them, in infinite acrostics and anagrams, the letters become articulating symbols of a signification that linguistics denies them. Before the rigor of a scriptural, spiritual practice where nothing is contingent, the incidence of chance is discarded. Among so much determination, one should not pass over an erratum that responds to a mechanism less trivial than mere carelessness, approximating the symptomatic lapsus of shibboleth; a mot-de-passe, a password reveals by mispronunciation, by defect, identity. In the first edition of the Complete Works (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1974), as in the second volume of the edition of 1989, in the last paragraph of that renowned essay that is “The Mirror of the Enigmas,” there appears highlighted in italics the asseveration about which we are redounding, but where the typographic expert confuses “hombre” (man), with “nombre” (name). “No name knows who he is,” and the reader, without hesitation, consents.

The confusion of both terms, in addition to being theoretically fair and discursively coherent, might turn out to be statistically valid. Without giving way to the quantitative temptation of the register, passing rapidly through the poetry of Borges, one observes that the association of man and name is all too frequent, almost constant, for the confusion to have been only accidental or fortuitous. Nevertheless, the tight association, which the similarity of sounds tightens in Spanish, overflows the coincidences of a paronomasia that tends to be restricted, abusively, to mere plays on words. It is a fault to elude them when it is those plays that discover, poetically, the most profound affinities that the useless or forced will to not repeat tends to avoid or renounce, failing to see that those coincidences contribute to rescuing from forgetting a history that frequently legitimizes them.

Gentile or Hebrew or simply a man
Whose face has been lost in time;
No longer will we rescue from forgetting
The silent letters of his name.21

The alliterations, the rhymes, bring together both—man and name—in a distinct similarity, mystical, echoes of a sort of universal resonance that carelessness and silence make more mysterious.
I thought that the poet was that man
Who, like red Adam of Paradise,
Imposed on each thing its precise
And true and unknown name.\(^{22}\)

Highlighted by the end of the verse, the terms rhyme within a greater harmony that the stanza articulates. But the same ones appear again in another stanza, with which the rhyme once again, from a distance, beyond the limits of a composition or a page, in whatever passage of the book or other books. If in the Divine Comedy the faith of the poet discards the possibility that the name of Christ can rhyme with another word that is not Christ and, being without equal beyond doctrine, only rhymes with itself, man has in the name an inextricable partner with which he agrees and is confounded. This total rhyme inhabits his “Arte poética” in which each final word coincides, complete, with another, from the first to the last letter.

The name is one of the dearest masks of man, which occults him and reveals him at the same time. But this figure is not the only double, similar to the drama within the drama, or “the water in the water”—“Comme l’air dans le ciel et la mer dans la mer” (like the air in the sky and the sea in the sea), as Baudelaire had said.\(^{23}\) Like the dream within the dream of Verlaine, duality does not end there, but rather, doubled in folds, it is the origin and reserve of successive revelations and occultations. A name can hide another name and that recondite and—like semiosis—unlimited denomination displaces its secret in a deeper secret, so much so that from name to name, the true one becomes unknown:

The one in mourning was not Perón and the blonde doll was not the woman Eva Duarte, but neither was Perón Perón nor was Eva Eva but rather they were unknown or anonymous people (whose secret name and whose true face we do not know).\(^{24}\)

Metaphor of displacement, a symbol is like another symbol; ignorance, like knowledge, is complex and systematic. In the same way, it refers as much to the cosmos as to discourse, recurrent, ciphered by writing, calling them by their name, things and words are not distinguished:

\[
\begin{align*}
I & \text{ know that the moon or the word moon} \\
& \text{is a letter that was created for} \\
& \text{the complex writing of that rare} \\
& \text{thing that we are, numerous and one}.\end{align*}\]  \(^{25}\)

Different from the knowledge that is formulated, from the methods and theories that designate it, ignorance can do without disciplinary limits; such that the necessity to define, to give an end, a term, a name, is natural:

I imposed on myself, like all others, the secret
Obligation to define the moon.\(^{26}\)

More than man, to the poet, that obligation engages an Adamic, Edenic language that, secret, anterior to knowledge and the dispersion of Babel, anticipates a negative epistemology that, because unknown, does not pass through the particular dominance of a language, does not pass through knowledge, does not pass (occur).

I thought that the poet was that man
Who, like red Adam of Paradise,
Imposed on each thing its precise
And true and unknown name\(^{27}\)

Through the name, the poet recalls vaguely a knowledge anterior to knowledge and to punishment; blurry memories, dark, of another space, of another species, of other times beyond time, shades that man barely evokes, shades of shades, he names them, indissociable, ancient, and ubiquitous:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{of dreams, which could well be reflections} \\
& \text{Trunks of the treasures of the shade,} \\
& \text{Of an intemperal orb that is not named}.\end{align*}\]  \(^{28}\)

There is no need to say that, in his texts, Borges puts words into question; in the word is the secret the poet interrogates, and the answer is there too. It is a dilemma, a question, a fatal quest in which the secret is lost or the poet is lost, or both. Like in “The Parable of the Palace,”\(^{29}\) where the poet who finds the perfect word makes the palace disappear, in the same way as the emperor makes the poet and the word (or the parable) disappear at the same time. A plural and sudden disappearance precipitates, by the perfection of the form, an aesthetic of disappearance that goes beyond the word. The narrator of the parable alludes that his descendants search in vain for the word of the universe.\(^{30}\)

Ungraspable, like the horizon in flight, the poet procures that unique voice, interior, or anterior to language, to articulation, to definitions, “the etymologies, the synonyms of the secret dictionary of God.”\(^{31}\)
Secret or secretion of the word, it hides and is hidden at the same time, like the shade, required by light but illuminated, vanishes. Like in the parable, also in “UNDR” the poet tells how he no longer defines each deed, “we cipher it in a word that is the Word.” The poet realizes a setting in silence of the sound in order to “keep [the] silence,” which is to maintain it and hide it at the same time.

He said the word undr, which means wonder. What word might there be under that word?

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THIRTEEN

REPETITIONS ARE NO SURPRISE

Une “découverte” qu’on ressasse devient la découverte du ressassement.
(A “discovery” that one dwells on becomes the discovery of dwelling.)

—Maurice Blanchot

Perhaps it wouldn’t be impossible, despite the distances, to encounter responses in Buenos Aires to the various questions that I have formulated through the years in relation to Walter Benjamin, or at least to attend to some indications that might allow for an explanation of the striking coincidences that the reader observes between his thought and the work of Borges.

Although it is well known that distances have come to matter less and less, certain commonplaces continue to demand attention, topics—in as much as they are known arguments, plots, repetitions, themes and space at the same time—that both authors share. These are times of repetition, and in dealing with Benjamin and Borges’s reflections that formulate, or give form to, an actuality that is, tout court, aesthetic, mediatic, critical, linguistic, rhetorical, political, and historical, their excess ought not to astound us any more than we should be detained by the tautologies of the title, or the sayings already said, precisely because the repetitions are no surprise.

The passion of repetition is not strange to a philosopher that knew to be generous with copies, to analyze them, to allegorize them, any more than it is to a poet that tolerated them as inevitable, convinced that there, in another dimension where time doesn’t count, differences, their oppositions suspended, become mere repetitions. They are habitual and well suited for those that occupy themselves with exact replicas, with astral and technological multiplications, with reproductions (whether aesthetic or biological, secret or abominable), with reproducibility, with quotes, with translations, with imitations, with myths, with returns, with eternity and with how it was conjured up by Louis-Auguste Blanqui through his hypotheses.
An unusual and similar analogical vocation runs throughout his writing, breathing life into his thoughts and fantasies. I ask myself if an atavistic trace of the sentences attributed to King Solomon, the cheerless negation of all novelty, could have determined the poetic and intellectual trajectories of both authors, or if the sorrows of the flesh and of readings that wore down Mallarmé were those that weighed upon them the most, far beyond the analogy and its demons. Could they have proposed to imitate the dream that agitated the rest of Bouvard et Pécuchet? From whence would come “the power of imitation” that assures “the conviction that nature creates similarities”? Isn’t it true that they are created by the work of human beings? I don’t deny that iterative necessity could have given rise to the melancholic sorrow of obsession and depression, in one case, and to serene resignation in the other. The circular ruins also configure time, disguising the return under masks of order and progress. The impossibility of removing oneself from the violence of a foreknown fatality is just as inherent to history as the redundancies of the word that, in naming, refers to another word that is the same, ideal, and one that, nevertheless, without changing, is never the same and never refers to the same thing.

How are we to assume the banalities that guarantee clichés, the recurrent themes that in this period swarm with hackneyed simulacra and trivial imitations, when information is confused with the inertia of copying, of reiterating, a slowness of saying that impedes not only thinking against the grain or at l’écart des courants but also thinking . . . or thinking that, much more than noblesse, it is repetition that obliges?

Benjamin and Borges knew of the violence that was brutal and also real in the city of Buenos Aires. In spite of his fear, Borges returns time and time again to that city that he said he loved so much. There among pain and suffering that hound memory with countless recollections, his own and those of others, lived and read, pieces of an epic past that had its heroic gestures and cauldros that live and die for the homeland. A national history superimposed over familial history as its very own, memories of personal anecdotes related with discrete pride in intimate dialogues and animated gatherings. The first book of his Obras completas, Fervor de Buenos Aires (1923) begins with “the streets” of Buenos Aires.

To the West, the North, and the South
unfold the streets—and they too are my country;
I hope those flags are also
In the verses I trace.

Several poems roam those streets with their verses. Stumbling over the irregularity of the cobblestones, the poet detains himself on the corners, forever rose-colored, intoned all the more by dusks that disappear behind the portals or between the overgrown weeds of the wastelands. They are streets that remained in other times.

Strolling through Paris like a less-distracted flaneur, Benjamin describes the streets of the city, the passages through which passersby disappear, their silences and their voices deploiring the advances of progress, terrified by the tempests of history. He is afflicted by the disperse fragments like the parts of a shipwreck or like pages of manuscripts that, blown by the wind, are already beyond rescue. In an Australian film dedicated to him by John Hughes (1992), a hand attempts to seize the pages that the wind or time disperses in another storm. A single hand, as might be said of a one-way street (Einbahnstrasse), where the traffic, irreversible, is displaced in a singular sense (sens unique). The images repeat themselves, the black portfolio, the wind howling between the mountains, the spectator, silent, paralyzed like the Angelus Novus of Klee’s painting, astonished before the surprising and repeated scene; he remembers the threat and, in something more than prescience, he is made certain that the disaster is imminent.

In the film the well-known photo of Benjamin appears in parts, taken apart, loose pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, disorderly quotes, disorganized fragments, they disperse themselves or repeat themselves, prefiguring disaster and destruction. Like his life, truth is at risk; it depends on history, and it lies with the victors. “If the enemy triumphs not even the dead will be safe,” is one of his theses.

In a celebrated story, Borges quotes a passage on history and, perhaps because this fragment is dislodged from the Quixote, feigning its separation from fiction, the narrator praises history. But his is a cunning praise, just a partial approval, no longer for assigning to history the revelation of truth but rather for giving birth to it, inventing it from the origin.

From Benjamin to Borges, the tone changes but, at almost the same time, they share a certain uneasiness before confirming the dependency of a truth that, like literary fiction, remains subjected to narration, writing, and the necessary fragmentation of the quote. A few years after the Great War, Marc Bloch reflected on the subject of the falsity of the news and of the history that held that news within its bounds: “De faux récits ont soulevé les foules. Les fausses nouvelles, dans toute la multiplicité de leurs formes—simples racontars, impostures, légendes—ont rempli la vie de l’humanité” (False tales have stirred up the mobs. False novelties, in all the multiplicity of their forms—simple gossip, impostures, legends—have filled the life of humanity).4

Speaking on the subject of fragmentary visual images in Godard’s film Histoire(s) du Cinéma, Jacques Rancière observes the lack of distinction between the “the defeat of the French forces in 1940 and of German artists
in the face of Nazism, of the ability of literature and cinema to foresee the disasters of their times and their inability to prevent them." As Borges, or
his narrator, said, speaking about the same period in the famous postponed
postscript, "Postdata de 1947": "[. . ] any symmetry, any system with an
appearance of order—dialectical materialism, anti-Semitism, Nazism—could
spellbind and hypnotize mankind."

Like ancestral ruins rejected from history, misfortune accumulates in
the breaking of vessels, shewvat ha-kelim. Pierre Missac spoke "From the rup-
ture to the shipwreck," when he referred to the attempt at a certain rescue
through the mission/dismissal of the translator, or to the consolation/des-
peration of this ambivalent task and the temptation of restoring an Adamic,
Edenic unity, prior to pride and punishment, the fall, fragmentation and
dispora. The bringing-close of diverse languages by way of a translacio or
translation encodes a sort of messianic hope for translation in the light of
redemption and Franz Rosenzweig's stars, the same stars that soon imposed
themselves through mockery, violent and yellow. If progress only offers up
adversity, then regress, repetitions, reproduction, the resources of technique,
the resources of photography, of cinema, the memory of images, necessarily
partial, extracted from their contents and translated to the album, to tho-
sands of screens, all regular, all in conformity, converting diversity into a
selfsame regularity, rectangular, rigid, reductive, totalitarian, crushing—could
they all then be justified?

The photos, the suppression of the environment, the quotes separated
from their context, and the fragments of continuity that they all presup-
pose propitiate the logic of the album, the logic of collections and of the
library, which rushes out from Paradise or is made into ashes in the libraries
burned by Anselm Kiefer: the books melted in lead, in Bleierne Zeit, charred
like people, when the library of Babel or of Bebelplatz remained suddenly
empty. There, the Bibliotheks, a sculpture, an installation, a memorial of Mis-
cha Ullman, remembers the tenth of May 1933, when the Nazis flung the
books of Jewish authors into the flames, anticipating death without measure
in a massive, bestial annihilation. The quote from Heinrich Heine, which
anticipated the disaster, appears inscribed on a plaque on the ground of the
plaza: "Das war ein Vorspiel nur, dort wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt
man am Ende auch Menschen" (That was only a prelude, for where books
are burned, in the end men are burnt as well).

In "Nathaniel Hawthorne," Borges evokes one of Hawthorne's parables
entitled Earth's Holocaust. The narrator tells of how men resolve to destroy
the past, they reunite on a plain in the west of America and ignite an
enormous bonfire where they burn everything. The description of the anni-
hilation of more than twenty-four types of things, beginning with all of the
symbols or the symbols of everything, is as terrifying as it is meticulous.

It is Borges who notes that "the intention of abolishing the past already
occurred in the past and—paradoxically—that is one of the proofs that the
past cannot be abolished."

Like museums and libraries, the album becomes the ordered "blank"
of memory, a "place of memory" ["lieu de mémoire"] where, contradictorily,
the "displacement" settles in, where a wager [hors jeu] is placed and risked,
in a game that excludes Benjamin, as if his very status were to be out of
place. What is the origin of the Trauerspiel, of the tragedy, of the German
play/pain. Like so many other Jews, Benjamin ought to flee, but like so
many other Jews, he wasn't saved. "L'accès est interdit" is the title of Mis-
 sac's other article that summarizes the prohibition, the access impossible for
Benjamin, someone who found himself to be out of place everywhere. He
didn't manage to cross the Pyrenees; his body wasn't buried in a cemetery,
not even the tomb granted him passage or repose. Not admitted, inadmis-
sible: neither entrance nor exit," neither without nor within. "You shall
not pass!!" ["¡No pasarán!!"] was the slogan of the First World War, as it
was in the Spanish Civil War and as continues resonating in Paul Celan's
poem, in antifascist sermons, or in Derrida's discourse: "You shall not pass"
is the contradictory Shibboleth, the password that didn't come to pass and,
instead of allowing passage, the paradoxical mot-de-passe or password came
to nothing. It neither allows an already-dead Benjamin to pass, nor does
it grant him peace. "He passed away." A game of words or a tragic game,
a Trauerspiel, that interrupts his life as he interrupts his work on Passagen
[Arcades], which, although it was the one that he devoted the most time to
(1927–1940), remained inconclusive like the passage across the French
frontier, like so many other passages that didn't take place (another com-
monplace). Both literary passages and frontier passages are inconclusive,
that double irony or the more simple one that Benjamin didn't manage to
notice in Louis-Auguste Blanqui's book and that Borges celebrated for its
being, among those that treat the Eternal Return, the most well reasoned
and the most complex.

The observation is strange, just as the small book is strange, almost
unknown until then, Benjamin says. The discovery of Blanqui's book has
been attributed to Gustave Geffroy,10 who is not only his biographer but also
the only one in those years that mentioned and lauded this errant prisoner,
this detainer who, despite unfathomable distances, makes celestial space
his natural and liberating sphere. Anatole France11 mentions him in "Sur
la Pierre Blanche" (1903), as does Henri Lichtenberger in The Philosophy
of Nietzsche (1908),12 as does Alfred Fouillée11 (1909), and the list doesn't
end there. Although it isn't certain that Benjamin read the whole book,
Borges doesn't appear to have completed the reading either, although both
knew of its existence and it sufficed for them to know extensive passages
of the astronomical hypothesis. It has already been said that the encounter with this one of Blanqui's books was a major discovery for Benjamin, more important than were Blanqui's other books or many others from the Bibliothèque Nationale, the institution where Georges Bataille hid Benjamin's manuscript in order to save it from the deprivations of the Nazis and their patriotic French collaborators. Borges directs the National Library, celebrating the magnificent irony of God who, with his ambiguities, furnishes him with books and the night. The discovery of Blanqui, Bataille's conceit: writings in conflict that don't contradict but rather confirm the vicissitudes about which Blanqui's work speculated and which became aggrandized by his own political and literary vita.

Occupied with the job of translating, which is task, realization, and renunciation, Borges exhaustively examines translations, comparing them in essays (among the lengthiest of those that he wrote and also some of the most substantial) where history and the principles of that exercise are not estranged from his imagination. If for Benjamin the dilogy of sublation [Aufhebung] did not keep him from formulating a theory or theology of translation, that "relation of reciprocal reversibility, of mutual translation between the religious and the political that cannot be unilaterally reduced," as Löwy argues, he also would not disdain the significations that, in addition to being literary, like work [obra] (construction of houses, of buildings) and passage [pasaje] (construction of spaces like streets, between houses, between buildings), accumulate in Spanish. In Benjamin's famous book the image of the city predominates, the Hausmannized urbanization that triumphed over the barricades. Fascinated by the passages of Paris, he runs through them again and again; he meditates on parallel worlds, the ambivalences of their vague definition, between without and within, between public and private, luminous and shadowy, open and closed, transparent and hidden, street and house, making room for sentimental encounters [citaz] and textual quotes [citas], in "the vertigo of the in-between."

Before various disjunctives, zwischen zwei Stühlen, a logic of contradictions that Borges brilliantly articulates in all of its possibilities accommodates itself between two waters, in what has been called the oxymoronic thinking of its ambiguity. A not always legitimate trade is introduced into the city through passages, just as quotes come to assault and invade remote texts. Luxurious or sordid passages, of doubtful architecture, almost mysterious, they do not differentiate themselves from the passages that Benjamin transcribes, extensive and frequent as they are, in his work on—or of—Passages [Arcades]. Quotes heaped on quotes, passages of discourses as estranged as those of the city that does not belong to him, an outsider sans droit de cité who doesn't stop citing, in spite of everything. Work and life, both of them are interrupted by the tortuous passage, the site that becomes memorial, the monument of Dani Caravan at the edge of the sea so that it might be both transit and permanence, place and time, at the same time.

Borges conceives of circulating time, and, for that reason, even in the very beginning he begins repeating himself: "I tend to return eternally to the eternal Return" and, in the same way that he imagines the circularity of time, he imagines that in space the ruins of the temple are circular, such that it is not strange that what happened many centuries ago comes to repeat itself, just as terrors repeat themselves in dreams.

RESERVED PASSAGES

For some decades the transatlantic crossings of Benjamin, Borges, and Bioy, unforeseeable as they are, have preoccupied me, the celebrities of a phantasmal trinity, a supposition and, as such, conjectural, that wanders between pure fantasy and mere suspicion. If phantasmagoria, according to the Diccionario de la Real Academia Española, is that "illusion of the senses or vain figuration of the intelligence, lacking all foundation," it wouldn't be difficult to trace its chimeras back to Buenos Aires. There are few instances in the records of literary history of a pair of writers who, like Borges and Bioy, maintained intellectual, literary, amicable encounters so prolonged, so frequent and close, almost mythical, who were concentrated in the same city only a few blocks apart. Nevertheless, despite the usual affinities, it doesn't seem possible to imagine and place Benjamin among them.

A profound friendship also brought Benjamin's interests together with those of Gershom Scholem and, despite the distance, or thanks to it, a correspondence was established of which signs remain until today. The assiduous epistolary interchange brought Berlin or other cities close to Jerusalem, and similarly in the other direction, in a postal back-and-forth that lasted for years. Could Borges have met Benjamin in person or in thought? Would his work have been for Bioy (who affirmed that he didn't know it) like that of one of those unknown authors who, without their having been read, are imitated without any knowledge of the other? Is it licit to establish connections between two known parties and an unknown third? The affinities held by Borges and Benjamin have been remarked upon more than once. Missac attributes them to interest in "the secrets, only glimpsed in most cases, of the Kabbalah." Additionally, both of them root their topic—place and theme—in libraries of lettered, erudite, judicious, and fervent extraterritoriality. Borges makes the quote his paradoxical raw material in well-known stories, poems, and essays lavished with quotes, as if there were nothing other than quotes, and this resounding assertion could also have been a quote (and it is). In one of Borges's stories associated with suicide, Benjamin's choice, a tragic decision, comes as no surprise.
Running throughout the famous passages that traverse the city and recurring to the quotes that crisscross his texts, Benjamin writes his own passages. His book of Passages accumulates foreign texts as if they were its own, it heaps them up like books copied by one who lacks a library with shelves to order them or like bricks to be utilized in a construction, in an edifice with passages that perforate a city, second-degree labyrinths, an aporetic architecture, without visible exit, a desperate metaphor for the biographical peripeties that cornered Benjamin on the frontier and confined Blanqui in his cell. Well, if it were necessary to define an architecture associated with Borges, if a single myth were to point toward his construction of space, if it were the cosmic emblem, the planet and its world, that emblematic figure, without a doubt, would be the labyrinth, a commonplace in the work of Borges, a commonplace for the two of them. Might one speak of an allegorical solidarity or an allegorical sorority?

More than being enraptured by his own fantasies, Benjamin satisfies himself with attempting to capture certain fulgurations that the dreams propitiate, the secret adhesions that illuminate the affinities that he comprehended (if by comprehend one understands the reunion of diverse objects that the spirit reconciles). Eluding the diversity of their interests, it is easy to notice the connections between Borges, Bioy, and Benjamin that ought to be attended to, not only because of the Buenos Aires connection and because they share "the same cosmopolitan conviction," but also because of their eagerness to reunite diversities in order to catch a glimpse of the Truth. They are affinities that readers usually notice because diverse references concur in their reading, ones that might also well respond to more individual aspects than mere closeness. For distinct reasons, Benjamin's philosophical condition has been challenged more than once, with him being considered a learned upstart or a foreigner imperiled by the solid principles of the establishment with the lucid insights of a Selbstsdenker.22

A somewhat similar objection (or praise) has been attributed to the intellectual style of Borges's imagination, namely, his disposition toward a philosophical field that he never proposed to cultivate. Although he encountered motives (leitmotifs in the musical sense of the term) for stimulating his own lubrications (I am thinking of Martin Buber), it was poetic attraction and the harmonious sonority of discourse, more than the rigor or coherency of a traditional philosophical thought, that induced him to think or seduced his senses.

It is equally strange that Blanqui's hypothesis, which convinced neither his contemporaries nor his comrades, could have convinced Borges, Bioy, and Benjamin; it is more abduction than hypothesis, a similar fiction, circular time, faith in an imperturbable space that breathes life into faith or brings its affliction.

In Paris, Capital of the Twentieth Century [Arcades Project] as in L'éternité par les astres: Hypothèse astronomique, Blanqui on the one hand and Benjamin on the other interface space with time in inverse order, confusing history with geography, eternity with astronomy, and time with the city. Dispersed in space, were Blanqui's stars for Paris what eternity is for the nineteenth century?

In as much as they are contemporaries, Benjamin and Borges well could have been able to share readings, experiences, and events, but I don't recall that Borges mentioned or alluded to Benjamin even a single time, and it would be even less probable to suppose that Benjamin had known of Borges. Nevertheless, there is no scarcity of points of contact between the two of them, friends of friends through whom a name or an allusion could have slipped. For example, Gisèle Freund who, with few years intervening, photographed Benjamin in Paris in the middle of the thirties and Borges in Buenos Aires in the early forties. On the one hand, although at distinct moments, both shared that extraordinary friendship that the two writers, each in his own right, professed for Gershom Scholem. The relationship struck up by Benjamin and Scholem was just as profound in the Berlin years as it was in the years after the departure and establishment of Scholem in Jerusalem. Years later, conversing with Borges, could Scholem have made reference to Benjamin at some point? Scholem figures in a poem that Borges wanted to be saved from definitive disappearance, and not only because his name rhymed with "Golem." The attraction that L'éternité par les astres: Une hypothèse astronomique, that book that Benjamin "discovered" in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, exercised over Borges, Bioy, and Benjamin is no stranger to this community of interests, and Borges as well as Bioy Casares could have managed to read some uncertain version that arrived in Argentina or of which they could have become aware in some other part of the world.23 On the other hand, it is presumable that neither Borges nor Bioy could have had Eternity in their hands or before their eyes. If Löwy didn't hesitate in recognizing the fascination surrealism exercised over Benjamin (1926–1927), a similar "intensity of sentiments,"24 Benjamin experiences an even greater fascination for the discovery of the imprisoned revolutionary's astral hypothesis, a fascination that he shares—without knowing it—with Borges and Bioy. As Löwy puts it, Benjamin felt himself fascinated by Blanqui's character, that "grand vaincu, locked away in the prison cells of monarchies, republics and empires for decades."

If it is certain that Benjamin discovered L'éternité par les astres in 1938 (letter to Horkheimer, January 1st, 1938), or even before, between 1936 and 1937 (Geffroy's L'Enfermé),25 his piece "On the Power of Imitation" (1932), in addition to signaling his obsessive interest in repetitions, analogies, and mimesis, also gives clear indications of the cosmic correspondences that
he establishes between reproduction as anthropological, spiritual, and even biological fate ("Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter Seine technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" (The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction), abbreviated and translated by Pierre Klossowski in 1936). As Stéphane Moses has affirmed, the thematics of stars and constellations is present in underlying form in almost all of Benjamin’s work.

Borges’s writings, his essays, his narrations, his reasoned poetry, all could be compared, in part, to condensed, fragmentary, discontinuous, one-way writings [Einbahnstrasse], a one-way street, like the title of the book that Benjamin dedicates to his lover in those years ("This street is named Asja Laciś Street after her who, like an engineer, cut it through the author"), the book where the imaginariat of the city from which it is inseparable manifests itself.

As a final conjecture, for now, I ask myself if Victoria Ocampo could have recounted to Borges that she met Roger Cailliois in the "Collège de sociologie" in 1939, in a conference on "La fête," which Benjamin presumably also could have attended (or not—it is only probable, but he wrote something on the subject).

Brief, epigrammatic, between thought and intuition, between insight and other intellectual and poetic visions, Borges’s texts could also have been a sort of Denkbilder, a German word that has been translated, or reduced, to "notions" or thought-images, in the form of certain brief literary pieces in prose, aphoristic, lucid, and ironic. Theodor Adorno attributes to Benjamin the accomplishment of contraction in those brief Einbahnstrasse writings: sententious, narrative, heterogeneous as they are, confusions of image and idea. Benjamin proposed synthesizing them as "dialectical images," more than antagonists, figuration and concept complement each other reciprocally in order to consolidate the constitutive unity of his thought. Reunited, the intellectual and aesthetic ambivalences refer to the beginning, where they are neither opposed nor divided, before speculative reflections and aesthetic images could have laid them out at a distance, dividing up a solidarity yearned for ever since. Just as frontiers cross each other, swords are also crossed in the struggle in an emblematic display. In "Fragments," Borges repeats "a sword" fifteen times, many times as "a sword for the hand" (which is the icon of duels and combats), which might have been for Borges (as for Shakespeare) only words. The coincidences are surprising and lend a strange sense to the quotes and repetitions; their echoes, fragments of pages, relics, between thought and image, reunited in "that pile of broken mirrors" that time does not store away and that history or memory does not always rescue.

More recently, in an interview about his experiences during the Second World War, on the subject of the translation into German of Le lière de Patagonie, Claude Lanzmann’s unexpected title, which is a quote from Silvina Ocampo (that rewrites the title of "The Golden Hare," the first story from La furia, a book of hers from 1959), returns us to this commonplace and its geniuses. What does this Patagonian and southern reference have to do with a French Jew’s voluminous book of memories of his participation in the Resistance? Lanzmann, the director of the film Shoah, dared to give cinematographic form to the greatest tragedy imposed by death, the treacherous crime, with anti-Semitism as a pretext, the perverse invention of an alterity that National Socialism personified in the Jew. Before that tragic and universal lie—a structure shared by the truth—Benjamin and the German Jews constituted the same humanity, the same culture, almost the same language, the same interests, purposes, habits, foods, gestures, education, the same references. Numerous German philosophers and writers were Jews. Their fate was deportation, trains, annihilation; the loss of name, a number instead or a name that names not: Sara, Israel, the sinister joke of indenomination or disdenomination, a tomb without name. Borges, I, a Jew, or something like that.

The violence of repetition, more the faults of progress than a lack of progress, time circulates and returns: confinement, closure, the twists of the towers of the prison, the paradoxes of the passage. Eternity, constellations, sidereal space against terrestrial time.

Consequently, between writers, between pairs, pairs of three this time, in a fourth dimension, the figure in fuge of L-A. Blanqui, the prisoner who, from his reduction to his cell, made unfathomable space the place of his astral and fantastic flâneries, couldn’t have been absent. Not only does Borges write about Blanqui, he praises his figuration of space, the theme of multiple doubles, the history of eternity, attributing greater value (aesthetic) to his doctrine of eternal return than to Nietzsche’s. He mentions Blanqui in significant texts, for example, in the prologue to La invención de Morel, and specifically brings up the machine that reproduces, that imitates life, or that limits it, destroying it. Borges also wrote a review of Neil Stewart’s book, the exhaustive biography that that English author consecrated to Blanqui. Biyo Casares transcribes entire paragraphs of Blanqui in “The Celestial Plot,” a fantastic tale that imagines the plurality of worlds, on the River Plate, between Buenos Aires and Montevideo. As an example of astronomy-fiction, a genre Blanqui frequented in prison, it becomes a celestial conspiracy laid out by Borges and Biyo in Argentina or by Benjamin in the National Library. Disappointed by revolutions that are melancholic like repetitions, tedium, desperation, hopelessness, and repetitions at the beginning and the end, Blanqui says: “the same monoton, the same immobility in far-flung stars. The universe repeats itself ceaselessly, pawing at the same spot. In the infinite, eternity imper turbably interprets the same representations.”
Along with the words I dictate, there will be, I believe, the image of a great Mediterranean lake with long, slow mountains, and the inverted reflection of these mountains in the great lake. That, of course, is my memory of Lugano, but there are also others.

One, that of a November morning, not too cold, in 1918, when my father and I read, on a blackboard, in an almost empty plaza, the letters in chalk that announced the capitulation of the Central Empires, in other words, the hoped-for peace. The two of us returned to the hotel and announced the good news (there was no radiophone then), and we did not toast with champagne but with Italian red wine.

—Jorge Luis Borges

I also managed to read Meyrink’s novel Der Golem.

—Jorge Luis Borges

It does not seem unlikely to presume that it was here, in Switzerland, in Lugano, that Borges read Der Golem, the novel by Gustav Meyrink. Next to the lake that submerges these mountains, inverting them in the water in the same way, his late reflections, less symmetrical, similarly slow, return from time. As Rodríguez Monegal affirms in the monumental literary biography he dedicates to Borges, the novel attracted his interest from the beginning due, among other reasons, to the fact that "Meyrink proved that the legend was another version of the theme of the double." In a synthetic review, several years later, Borges recognizes: "I do not know if The Golem is an important book; I know that it is a unique book." The brief mention that is transcribed in the epigraph above is the only allusion he makes in his succinct "Autobiographical Essay." He was also the author of the prologue to the translation of that fantastic narrative work, a novel he not only...
includes among the foundational works of his personal library but to whose priority he tends to allude with significant frequency.

In order to confirm the presumption that the reading of The Golem occurred in Lugano, and calling upon the luck with which the genii loci tend to favor those who call upon them, it behooves us to relate the indispensable literary particulars that Rodríguez Monreal formulates with the certainty of the chronologies that innumerable scholars, essayists, journalists, friends have put into order. The recurrent preference for his prolonged stay in Switzerland during the First World War, in his remembrances, his choice there to learn the German language first, and the decisive recourses of his literary imagination come across one another in the reading of that fiction: “The first novel in German he managed to read in its entirety was a novel by the Viennese writer Gustav Meyrink. The Golem (1915) is loosely based on a cabalistic legend about a Prague rabbi who creates a creature out of clay and makes him his servant.”

From one of the many chronologies that try to introduce a dated inventory in his life, I transcribe the following: “1918. The maternal grandmother dies. The family moves to Lugano. He learns German with a volume by Heine and reads Schopenhauer, Meyrink, and the German expressionist poets. He earns his bachelor’s.” In one of his biographies, the same facts are confirmed: “The family remained in Switzerland until 1919; the last year was spent in Lugano, where Borges obtained his bachelor’s degree.”

Beyond “fantastic causality,” a notion Borges formulates to refer to a causality that, apparently, cannot be attributed to any situation or event, here there cannot even be a suspicion of a relation between cause and effect. In order to illustrate the universality of this curious magic etiology, Borges alludes to examples from various cultures: the omnipotent genies of The Thousand and One Arabian Nights, the legends of Hasidim, as well as Chinese traditions. If on more than one occasion we have recurred to the protection of the genii loci and done so without attenuating their omnipotence, it would seem impossible in these circumstances not to call upon their providential tutelage to attend to a theme that, in light of the precedent observations, acquires a further relevance.

From the most ancient of myths to the reflections advanced in recent years, concerns about the nature of knowledge have adopted different forms that tend to oppose the recourses of reason to the revelations of the imagination, the rigor of disciplinary procedures, with their theories and methods, to the openness of aesthetic vision, its dreams and realizations. Semiotic plurality—and the variety of perspectives it tends to enable, as well as its incidence over related disciplines—continues to attend to the contemporary alternatives of this ancestral reflection on truth, observing the different arguments of a discussion that has been repeated throughout history. Still in force, its philosophical and religious, scientific and poetic theses constitute an inchoate subject that could be designated as an “epistemological matter”—in the same way one still speaks about the legends of a “Celtic matter” or matière celtique narrating the deeds associated with a hero and his mystic search for truth—in that it deals with a matter both substantial and elusive, a recurrent theme that procures the legitimization of a knowledge in which the inventions of the imagination do not discard the orderings of rational models.

At the end of the twentieth century, a century that proclaimed so many ends, and at the beginning of the twenty-first, it is of interest to revise a poetic end, comprising, once again, the possible convergences between knowledges that, proceeding from truth or beauty, tend toward specific fields, searching, more than for a counter position or a complementarity, for a profound vision capable of attaining forms of universality ever more necessary.

Starting from the poetic imagination, I propose that we initiate, more than the mere revision of a lucid end, the instances of a discourse of pretention, that verbal aptitude, at once strange and specific, of a word that says and at the same time negates what it says. It is of interest to observe the terms that precede a poetics of disappearance, as if the possibility of a performative action as well as abolition by the word, a faculty that also abolishes itself, were inherent to language. Surpassing the limits of conceptual segmentation, we would be reminded of the inclination of thought to recuperate aspects of a primordial unity, a set of learning that—without nullifying its specificity—attempts to integrate the learning of different fields of knowledge, by way of a discourse that makes reference while at the same time suspending it.

It would not seem inopportune to consider, apropos of the “Golem effect”—to which the semiotic treatises tend to allude, especially in opposition to the “Pygmalion effect”—some of the resonances in contemporary thought of this first myth, but from the perspective of poetry. Consequently, we would not attend, at this opportunity, to the associations that technology has multiplied around this notion, not to the meaning "embryo" that golem denotes in scientific, modern Hebrew, proper to the field of biology, nor to the doctrinal ambiguities that the term suggests in Genesis, but rather to the myths that, between creation and disappearance, beginning and end, transmit the verbal condition of truth implied by the imagination as well as by knowledge.

Just as the word the rabbi inscribes in the forehead of the golem to give it life is “true,” so is “truth” that which is at stake and at risk, like art, poetry, theory, ideology, the humanities, history, reality: culture devoted to
progress and to technology is doomed, it will disappear one day and, perhaps, humanity will disappear with it. A theory of knowledge that does not discard imagination can also not ignore a theory of truth that analyzes the relation of coherence (representation) or of language games, social practices, the rules of language learning, which are involved in the discussions related to truth.

The “literal” destruction of the golem—its obliteration or disappearance consequent to the elision of a letter—emblematizes a semiotic quartet in which the tensions between epistemological skepticism, on the one hand, and metaphor as an instrument necessary for cognition, on the other, bring up a question that is closer to aporia than to the recourses of method. Wittgenstein claimed to find more philosophy in crime novels and in westerns than in the minds of his eminent colleagues, even more: “For the good of philosophy it should be written in the form of poetry.”

Like the sciences, or philosophy, or poetry, fiction tends to be concerned with the truth. Miguel de Cervantes in his Don Quixote (1605–1615) and, after him “Pierre Menard, author of Don Quixote” (1941), in his, both affirm, word for word, “truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, deposit of actions, witness to the past, example and advice to the present, warning to the future.” In the parodic register of Cervantes, the quotation of the sentence of Cicero, altered, makes fun of the elegance of historical truth; in the literal repetition of Borges’s story, “barefacedly pragmatic,” the parody is more severe. Faced with a similar trick, Sherlock Holmes, for his art, is amazed and wonders—a semantic miracle that English does not usually distinguish: “It is, I admit, mere imagination; but how often is imagination the mother of truth?” Such literary frequency makes us suspect that, from the ironies of narrative perspective, that truth that is affiliated with two mothers would be as disputable and probable as any paternity.

If it is the case that homonyms continue to tempt contemporary speculations, it is nevertheless no question of becoming a “chasseur de homonymes,” nor of failing to recognize that “locus classicus of signs in action, paronomasia,” nor of attributing to pure coincidence—in order to avoid the luxuriant expedient of “coincidences”—the diversity of meanings united by one and the same word. It is of greater interest to observe how the words reveal, in their semasiological similarities, that ancestral disposition not to differentiate forms of knowledge that the traditional disciplines tended to oppose by way of the demarcation of limits. The transdisciplinary vocation demanded by semiotics, on the contrary, has contributed to making more flexible or even suspending disciplinary boundaries. Today’s epistemological situation and the concomitant inadvertence of limits in different fields favors this suspension, as if there were a common cause that would force us to e-liminate them, or as if all elimination were “a question of limits,” such as to suppress all unknowns in an equation in order to leave only one. Almost annoyed by the insistence, Sherlock Holmes says: “How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth?” More than “revelation,” since the term can perturb a tradition that still finds itself determined by the form of thinking of the “Lumières,” it would be necessary to reason philologically, remembering that “the age of science is also the age of literature.” In this case, perhaps one of the most significant examples of those homonymic coincidences would be that of the semantic alternatives of “theory.” The history of the word itself constitutes an epistemological archive, the key to solving this question, since it partakes from its origins of the two poles that we are trying to superimpose. An entire shared semantic field implies the affinity between Spanish unexpected pairs: reflexión and reflejo (mental reflection and reflection in a mirror), especulación and espejo (speculation and mirror), teatro and teoría (theater and theory), appealing to the same convergence from a sensorial function—that is confounded with an intellectual function—to a conceptual knowledge that passes through imagination. John Ruskin pondered the appreciation of beauty by the “theoretic faculty,” making the exultation of contemplation predominant in theory.

It catches our attention that the relation between zones common to the same knowledge is distinguished as distant or opposite. Some figures that are opposed on account of their meaning are shared paronomastically by geometry and rhetoric: ellipsis (an omission), hyperbole (an exaggeration), and between both, or comprising them, at two ends, the parabola. We must conclude that, either the denominative repertoire is limited—which would seem not to be the case—or rather that the homonym discovers profound affinities where persuasion (seduction) and abstract discernment are not opposed, as if this in indissociable duality were a deep foundation of the word, the fable, of something that is “another thing” (allegory) but at the same time negates that difference. That abstraction, nevertheless, requires rhetorical restitution, as if passing through language it were impossible to avoid figuration. In the same way that in speaking of the “truth” it would be impossible to avoid the etymon (Greek for “true”) and discuss, as in Cratylus “truth as the exactitude of names.” Nevertheless, to return to Greek philosophy I would not leave aside the Jewish myth, thanks to an unexpected connection that unites two different and distant “characters” (Golem and Cratylus) associated in one poetic fusion.

In one of our last conversations, Borges did not lament in the face of the forgetting into which, as he foresaw, his work would disappear. Although this certainty did not weigh on him, he wished that, among the thousands of pages, one poem could be conserved: “The Golem.” But then, repentant at having staked too excessive a claim, he reduced his wish to one stanza, the first:
If (as the Greek affirmed in the Cratylus)
The name is the archetype of the thing,
The letters of rose is the rose
And all of the Nile in the word Nile.

Why preserve only “The Golem”? Why only one part? Why the first stanza? Why not all of it? Why not only a name? Many years earlier, in the famous “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote,” already cited, the narrator, agreeing with the author, affirmed:

There is no intellectual exercise that is not infinitely futile. A philosophical doctrine is at first a verisimilar description of the universe; the years turn and it is a mere chapter—if not a paragraph or a name—of the history of philosophy. In literature this caducity is even more notorious.

If we were to recognize a predominant theme in Borges’s story, that predominance would be the relation between the truth and history or the truth and fiction, but, above all, between the truth and its versions. For some time now, bibliometric techniques have quantified titles, themes, and authors cited. Without recurring to the techniques of that quantification, it would not be outrageous to affirm that Pierre Menard, an author who doesn’t exist or, an author of a work that does not exist or, what is worse, that already existed under a different but proper name, is still, if not the most quoted author, the one who is overquoted: “Unlikely, but true,” exclaimed a character of that same story, putting himself more on the side of history than of fiction or poetry—according to Aristotle’s opposition—stretching, once again, the tensions between the statute of truth and the forms of invention that reveal it.

It is not the first time that, anticipating by many years the alarming forecasts of a century split down the middle, Borges foretold the disappearance of literature, of poetry, of the word.

Given this poetics of disappearance from which he tends to rescue one word, what word would survive the first stanza? What would be the last word? Nile?

Nevertheless, in light of the biblical or cabalistic theme of the poetry and the Judaic context that nourished that aspiration, that Egyptian “survival” would be surprising.

There is no lack of surprises in that stanza: knowing the remote polarization of both cultures, to begin “The Golem” with the affirmation of the Greek would be the first. Nor is it that predictable in poetry, the vocative use of a philosophical reference. Nor does it fit the poetic tradition to begin by opening a parenthesis: if it begins by interrupting or suspending, what remains for the finale? The poet uses terms in italics, another unusual practice for poetic typography. That “In the letters of rose is the rose” is certainly the conviction of Plato’s eponymous character. “All the Nile in the word Nile,” said Borges, and in these italics he finishes. But if the conjectures are resplendent, the final word Nile, the last or only that remains after the elimination that the poet prophesied with less resignation than joy, would be the only relic. Vernichtung, in German: a destruction that erases even the traces of that annihilation, in English, nil. Its French homonym, Nil, returns to the name of the river.

In “Le démon de l’analogue,” Mallarmé speculates about the painful enjoyment (pénible jouissance) that the words of sad nature produced in his mouth.

He did not avoid that same analogical perversity taking over his words in order to suppress the reference at the same time that he invoked it. “The Penultimate is dead,” said Mallarmé, stressing the strange magic that torments the syllable nil, penultimate and nil, on the verge of disappearing in “that absurd sentence.” He attributes that disquiet to a labor of linguistics that interrupts daily, as he says, his noble poetic faculty. If indeed it is not a question of a confirmation, it does not cease to be an interesting coincidence.

It is not strange that an aesthetics of annihilation swaddles a century that has made of sheer annihilation its shadow, of silence and stillness, its danse macabre. In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul said: “Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.”

According to certain contemporary academic radicalisms, the prophecy has already been verified: if history disappeared again, if poetry was condemned and hermeneutics grew through the decline of theories—or the inverse, if the death of the author was announced more than once, confirming greater deaths that preceded it and those of them who announced it, if in this disappearance en masse, reality also fell, whom could it surprise that the work disappears and there only remains a word? Nobody, the negation gives name to a character, or is the name of a poet. Pessoa, Fernando Pessoa, who recalls in Lisbon the voyage of Odysseus, the name of a person, of a mask, which is its meaning in Greek. Personne, or pessoa, designates a person and nobody at the same time, semantic extremes between which the imagination swoons; nothing, one word, in-none-dated, covered by the waters, annihilated.

Like Cratylus, Borges believes in the truth of words, in the similarity they guard between themselves and with things, and this is why he would preserve a stanza, the first, and the final word, several times final: Nile, a variation of nil or of nihil, res nata, “nothing” is the contradictory redemption. In Genesis, golem designates the man created in the image and likeness, an
embryo, a “larva,” mask and specter, a being who still is not or is no longer. Similar is strange. He who prohibits imitation, does he imitate himself? That is why, observing the contradiction more than the interdiction, the rabbi of Prague does something further: he gives life to his semblant by way of the word, inscribing emet, Hebrew for “truth,” in the same way as, in order to destroy it, he obliterates aleph, the first letter, leaving met, in Hebrew, and it remains transformed into a cadaver, or it does not remain at all.

Despite the aforesaid oppositions, one and the same cognitive passion associates the Jews with the Greeks. From the beginning, in Genesis, the Jews unite knowledge and love into the same term, and this ambivalent union precipitates the Fall. For its part, in philosophy, in one and the same term, the Greeks unite knowledge and love, in order to accede once again to the archetypes. As the poet has said: “Man kann auch in die Höhe fallen, so wie in die Tiefe” [One can fall into the heights, just as into the depths].

FIFTEEN

THE PLACE OF THE LIBRARY

To my mother

It is rather curious that “The Library of Babel” is one of Borges's stories in which, if indeed literature is referred to, as in so many other of his writings, those references to books, stories, quotes, are less numerous and more trivial than one might have predicted. The library of a narration that lacks literary references or where only a few are mentioned continues to be a library? The narrator describes the place, the administration of space, aspects and details of the building's construction, the number of books, of pages, of lines, of letters. Those materials Borges's narrator proportions count more than the books it contains, than the stories told by the books, than the quotes, which count so much. However, when dealing with a library in an enigmatic story, contaminated by unreality, to reason according to a realistic logic would be neither logical nor realist. Nor is the procedure unusual in a writing that, like Borges's, invents its own system. For example, one of his most recurrent, and most recognized, provocations consists of confirming the authenticity of the Koran by pointing out that in the Koran there are no camels. He understands that an imposter would abound in camels, caravans of camels on each page. Coherent with this vision, he argues that if, in the story “The Garden of Forking Paths,” the problem is time, the author “does not once use the word time.” Perhaps the significant literary lack of the library can be justified in a similar way.

For this reason, here, in the National Library of France and at the celebration of the centenary of the birth of Borges, I am not interested in delving into the library, or the authors, or their books, or their readers, but rather into the tensions that are produced between a place and letters, a back and forth that make of the library the common place par excellence,
toward which all letters converge. I would run through the itinerary of an
imagination that parts from a place, a sacred place, until arriving at a let-
ter, a sacred letter, that displaces it. But, as all places and all letters exist
in writing, I would like to legitimate, by way of the name, by way of the
letter, a place.

“Borges and the library”: the theme seems excessive. By proposing it in
these circumstances, the formulation implies something more and something
less, since I could not well keep from referring to “Borges in the Library.”
Despite the monumental dimension, this location, in a determined space,
is also a reduction. Be it of or in the library, it is a question of “Borges’s
universe,” but this formula already exists as the title to a book that was
dedicated to him here, in France, some years ago. I presume that this title
alluded to the first words of one of Borges’s stories that configures a “pas-
sage” \( (\text{pasaje}) \) of today’s literary landscape \( (\text{pasaje}) \).

“The universe (which others call the Library),” as is well known, are
the first words of “The Library of Babel.” This story insinuates in turn
“The caprice or imagination or utopia of the Total Library,” the first words
and the brief essay that Borges published years earlier in the journal Sur.
In dealing with Borges it would seem impossible, from the beginning, to
ecluse the vinculum of the quote, that is to say, to begin by evoking another
book or one of his literary texts in order to protect, through the auspices of
previous publications, the initiation of one’s own discourse.

In recent decades, much has been said of quotes and ciphers, but even
so, there has been perhaps insufficient emphasis placed on that anaphoric
necessity of discourse that makes use of a quote as a key and as an initiation.
As if it were possible to make use of the word without realizing that the
word had already been used before, as if the B that the commencement of
the Bible introduces had been the model for all commencements to come;
since even that first initiation, “Genesis” \( (\text{genesis}) \) for some, “Heading” for others,
which begins by describing the origins of the universe, does not begin with
the first letter \( (\text{aleph}) \) but with the second letter \( (\text{beth}) \), whose traces are
mimetically, mystically associated with a house, the universal dwelling, the
universe.

On this occasion, despite my having tried to avoid them, it was not
possible for me to dispense with the quotes that constitute a theme which,
because it is too well-trodden, becomes more and more difficult to broach. It
has attained a greater resonance above all on the basis of Borges as well as on
the basis of Walter Benjamin, another bibliomaniac, impassioned by a “col-
collection” \( (\text{collection}) \) that was of books first, of quotes later. Nevertheless, and with
the intention of attenuating that predominant meaning but without suspending
it, I would not fail to recall the other meaning, stronger, more fortunate, in

my view, which the word \textit{quote} has in Spanish (cita), a language in which it
means “meeting,” a sentimental “rendezvous” where amity and amorous-
ness are confounded again in one and the same literary passion. It is both
the idiomatic and foreign meanings that I would now try to keep in play.

It cannot be surprising that the meaning of cita, of a meeting of pas-
sions, is verified in a library. In this place privileged by the riches of the
heritage and the archive, where the recording and conservation of knowl-
dge enable the search (of what existed) or research (of what will exist), it
is where, more than in any other place, Borges’s cita, with Borges or with his
readers, is imposed. It is the \textit{diferénd} of this verbal, semantic disjunctive
with which today’s speaker is confronted almost despite herself: on the one
hand she procures with anxiety a new meeting, a new conversation with
Borges; she recalls Buenos Aires, Maipú Street, simulating, by way of the
same words, a return to the first years of the decade of the eighties; and
on the other, because they are excessive, she tries to abolish the \textit{quotes},
to deny herself the discursive strategy of supporting herself abusively on the
same strategies that Borges incomparably consecrated.

Although the futility of the effort would justify not making it, it
would be difficult to adopt, without incurring parody, the literary recourse
to which Borges gave a different scale, various scales, almost all of them.
For that reason, it is impossible not to stay, in some way, on the margin of
Borges: everything that is said, be it a commentary of his work or not, is
inscribed on the margin of Borges. More difficult still would be not to recur
to repetition. As in the troubles his imagination devised, like the sacred or
more or less profane books that had already considered the problem: from
Ecclesiastes to the theory of reading, their histories, their rhetorics, insist
on the fact that it is impossible not to quote; moreover, if I say, “Nothing
is left for us but quotes,” I would be demonstrating that impossibility.

All of which goes to say that to negate the quote—or one of its mean-
ings—would only be another example of \textit{preterition}, an “omission,” which is
what the word means in Latin, a confession that by being pronounced is
thus repealed. Despite the fact that it would be risky to affirm, on the one
hand, that Borges had never named this figure, since there can be no wit-
tness to all pronouncements, on the other hand, if fiction could guarantee
convictions, we could recall one of his most explicit texts: “To always omit
a word, to recur to inept metaphors and obvious paraphrases, is perhaps
the most emphatic way of indicating it.” Although the metaphor was the
recurrent figure, invoked, inventoried, theorized by Borges, poetized in
writings and conferences, he was, without a doubt, the greatest craftsman
of preterition, who unfolded, on the basis of this figure of negation, his
aesthetic. From irony to paradox, passing through the different forms of
contradiction, more than to persuade as to his reasons, preterition serves him to think his fiction, or to imagine his hypotheses, in the conjectural and brilliant sense of abduction.

Just as there exists a negative theology, or a negative dialectics, one could conjecture, as well, that this figure constitutes the rhetorical archetype of his “negative poetics”: a figure that is permitted to negate itself and, by way of this very negation, instead of making the negated expression disappear, is brought unexpectedly into relief. It would even be the specific figure, inherent to language, which for Borges—close to mention, to the mendacious—tends to be synonymous with fraud. Obliteration, that is to say, the literal negation of an entity by writing, does not exclude another obliteration at a second level: a negation of a negation, that becomes a superlative negation, an epic of writing itself, if not a representation of its tragedy.

The elaborations of his negative poetics in which preterition is a rhetorical display are numerous. The literary variations of the Yellow Emperor, for example—one of his mythical, infamous characters—who, in order to assure his presence beyond the accidents of geography or history, either commands walls to be built and books to be burnt, or commands a proud palace to be built for the greater praise of the poet. The ode being perfect, its exactitude rivals the palace that disappears, provoking the annihilation of the poet and the poem at the same time. In “The Parable of the Palace,” the epic of disappearance is poetic and geometric at the same time, like “word” (palabra) and “palace” (palacio) in Spanish, both figures begin by coinciding, and by way of that coincidence come to disappear into one another, equally.

The genius of the poem and of the poet bring the palace into relief (in the sense of the German aufheben [normally translated in English as sublate, in Spanish, relevar—W. E.]). In the same way that in “Of Rigor in the Sciences” the description of the empire is not distinguished from the diagrammatic tracing or from the prestidigitation of a cartography that supersedes—because it is analogous, meticulous, perfect—the territories that it represents as well as their mere representation. Perhaps his text is more concise; in a few lines he proposes the thesis that consolidates—contradictorily—his fiction: the more rigorous the knowledge, as is said of the climate, of the temerity of weather, the more scientific the descriptions that formulate it, the more devastating, at least within literary limits.

Fulminating, the poetic brevity of the parable precipitates a series of disappearances: of the palace, of the poet, of the poem, that “afforded him immortality and death.” “The Maker,” which is Borges, questions as much the creation by the word as the fact that disappearance occurs along the same path. The authority of the author like the authority of the emperor are confounded in the same command, as if, having sentenced poetry, in those same years of the twentieth century, theory, history, geography, ideology, words, and things had all been sentenced at the same time. The bit of reality that remains perishes among the exacting precisions of the sciences and technologies, among the words that discuss it, and there is no leftover, because it has already been said... it is silence or it is literature.

The evidence of annihilation should not surprise us too much, neither the usurpation of the landscape by the word, nor the desolation it affords. In the beginning, the word designates the desert, desertion, it is the same, in its origin, as the one that designates discourse or sermon. Things disappear, like in the desert, when faced with discourse. As it is said: “It’s in the Bible,” but it is there that the word in the desert is the double of the desert. More than etymological, more than idiomatic, the profusion of the relation between “word” (palabra) and “desert” (desierto) sinks its roots into a myth of nothingness, in a lettristic, consonant, minimal coincidence: dhr. The mystery of affinity originates, like in a previous, anterior language, in an aesthetics of the void that is a vision of the beginning and the end. A similar semantic relation, but contrary, is verified in Latin: desertus, adjectival past participle of deserere, “to separate,” “to abandon,” derives, like sermo, “tongue, language,” from the Latin, serere: the desert, private or deprived of the word, as was said before.

But let us return to the library that is the theme of this talk and, above all, the place of this meeting, where the library is put into question, or pose the question of the library. In whichever of the two cases, the question does not cease to be a quest, a “question” and, according to Borges, the greatest, so much so that the objective is assimilated to the question of the Universe. As has been said of other questions, it supposes a problem. But, above all, it supposes the incursion of various redundancies that do not seem deplorable, hardly avoidable, necessary, even desirable.

To speak of a library in a library would be one of the first redundancies. Given the previous considerations, to what extent is it prudent to represent what is present? The prefix re- is an ambiguous prefix, it duplicates the reference that it precedes at the same time that it resinds it. To represent, it seems like a dream; confusing or vanishing: it evokes, which is to say, it names two voices, two times. It would not be the first time that duplication resinds. And if the risk of the Yellow Emperor who sees his magnificent lodgings, patios, libraries, the hexagonal room, the paradise or garden disappear, would it not only be an artifice of paranomias but also one of the contradictory fatalties that posterity dangles over the palace exposed to poetry and to history? Why, according to “The Garden of Forking Paths,” is the problem of time, which is the greatest problem, the only one that does not figure in the pages of the book that has the same name as the story: The Garden of Forking Paths? It is the title of the chaotic novel by
Ts'ui Pên—that monk who is the author of the eponymous book in which "he does not even use the word that means time." The story deals with a garden, and there—as in another Garden that is longed for—time disappears in "that lost labyrinth" that the narrator imagines under the species of paradise: "I thought in a labyrinth of labyrinths, in a sinuous growing labyrinth that would embrace the past and the future and that would in some way implicate the stars. Absorbed in those illusory images, I forgot my persecuted destiny."*

Since reason is only part, one sole reason is never enough. Nor is speaking of the library in a library the only redundancy. In relation with Borges, the library is an allegory, emblem and synonym, of his literature, of his persona, which confounds mask and identity in the same word. In "The Garden of Forking Paths" is confounded the title of a story with the title of a book; between both a parabola could be formed, because of its allusion to Paradise, to a space without time or to the time of all times, that totality which fulfills and annuls it. Proximate or similar to eternity, the foresight of Borges, which figured Paradise under the species of library, alludes to the felicity of comprehending, of the happiness afforded by Talmudic or theological readings that cipher the parda, a garden, an orangery in modern Hebrew but, before anything else an acronym that doctrinally, etymologically, is formed by the initials, in Hebrew, of those four readings propitiatory by orthodoxy: pshat (simple meaning), remez (the complete allusion to the void formed on the basis of something expressed in the text), drash (a second-grade void, concerning not the text but the unsaid context), and sod (the hidden meaning, totally absent from the text).*

The futures are various, the times numerous, all options are possible. Different from the story that speaks of the forking paths—"it is an incomplete, but not false image"—in which a possibility is opted for that excludes the others, in that other dimension all possibilities are encompassed. A réponse normandé? "I chose all"? Absurd or a joke, to conceive of the total choice is semantically impossible, is an aspiration that logic rejects. To choose within the totality of the library, within that collection, is the function of homo legens—lector, elector, who cannot read without e-lecting. The plurality of times that brings with it a plurality of worlds, serves to console the persecuted, condemned character, it is a cosmic variation that proceeds from France, a "hypothesis" of the story's character that reminds us to Louis-Auguste Blanqui.

Although the controversial "Communard," "the bronze voice that shook the previous century" may be no expert in astronomy, or in astrology—as indeed the author of The Garden was not either—his book, Eternity through the Stars: An Astronomical Hypothesis, constitutes an obligatory starting point for understanding one of the most traveled itineraries of Borges's imagination. It determines and configures his will to fiction, as a philosopher could have proposed the will to truth.

Given the differences between them, given the apparently contrary political, historical, and biographical coordinates that oppose them, although it seems unlikely, the cosmogonic vision of Blanqui, the hope for a revolution that, more than political is literally astral in virtue of the repeated and different worlds that he imagines, the events that are repeated until infinity in the spaces that are multiplied like copies, like exemplars of the same books, the multitudinous lookalikes that people Blanqui's fiction justify the surprising alternatives of the greater part of Borges's texts. Speaking of facsimilar worlds and dissimilar words, and also of interminable space, Borges reveres him: "His book is beautifully titled L'éternité par les astres; it is from 1872."

In the story, "The Total Library"—it is one of the anticipations of the better-known "The Library of Babel"—the narrator affirms: "... I would add that it is a typographical avatar of that doctrine of the Eternal Return that, adopted by the stoics or by Blanqui, by the Pythagoreans or by Nietzsche, eternally returns." These are not the only times he cites Blanqui. Nor is it necessary that he do so. Both hold that each individual exists equally in an infinite number of exemplars, with and without variations. In "The Garden of Forking Paths":

I felt again that pullulation of which I spoke. It seemed as if the humid garden that surrounded the garden was saturated to infinity with invisible persons. These persons were Albert and I, secret, kept busy and multifine in the other dimensions of time.

If, for the writer as for the poet, the world does not exist except in order to end in a book, this belief is symmetrical with that of the legions of believers who do not doubt that it began there. The thousands of exemplars of that total book assure a vastness and variety of possible words, of times and spaces in which the eventuality of events is always repeated, although in different forms. Like Blanqui, like Brio Casares—but that is another story—the reader finds in the French terrorist's astronomical hypothesis an escape from the cloister of the numerous prisons in which Blanqui suffered. An exit from the cloister of the libraries in which Borges lived, from the felicity of the paternal library from which he never wanted to part to the vicissitudes he suffered in the Miguel Cané branch of the Municipal Library, where he resisted nine years of sadness, monotony, ignorance, of which he only recalls numerous heartaches in his "Autobiographical Essay" and some interviews.

No less than the world, the library is that "prisonhouse of language" from which every poet suffers and which Nietzsche pointed out. An author
who appears cited several times along with Blanqui, although Borges considers the German philosopher's theories on the eternal return to be less interesting than those of "that phantasm of the bourgeoisie"—as Marx calls him—who consoles himself in astronomical fiction.

The narrator of "The Garden of Forking Paths" refers to the Chinese writer, but the interpellation to the addressee could be applied in these circumstances:

Different from Newton and Schopenhauer, his ancestor did not believe in uniform, absolute time. He believed in infinite series of times, in a growing and vertiginous network of divergent, convergent, and parallel times. This weave of times that bifurcate, split, or are secularly ignored, comprise all possibilities. We do not exist the majority of those times; in some you exist but I do not; in others, I and not you; in others, both of us. In this one, which a favorable chance brings me, you have arrived at my house; in another, when crossing the garden you found me dead; in another, I say these same words, but I am an error, a phantasm.  

Although the narrative intrigue may restrict laying out the articulation of the thematic incidents, the voice, its tone, the ironic insinuation, the register between philosophical and essayistic specific to his fiction, the mystical emphasis of a certain epistolary style in "The Library of Babel," its conceptual foundations do not differ too much from the lines of Blanqui quoted by Borges, by Bioy Casares, on more than one occasion. The three are obsessed with the "bifurcations" of this "eternalized present" of which Blanqui speaks, completed by infinite worlds, identical.  

What I am writing at this moment in a dungeon of the fort of Taureau, I wrote and will write throughout eternity, at a table, with a pen, beneath these garments, in similar circumstances. Just so, all of them. [...] The number of our lookalikes is infinite in time and in space. [...] there is not here either revelation or prophet, but a simple deduction of spectral analysis and of the cosmogony of Laplace. These two discoveries make us eternal. Is it a godsend? Let's take advantage of it. Is it a mystification? Let us resign ourselves.

And so Blanqui continues with his cloistered and methodical quests, bumping into, among books and stars, the pullulating multitude of his lookalikes. All those individuals who, similar to him, exist in infinite numbers of exemplars, with and without variations, with his melancholy optimism, with his stars that multiply, bifurcate, perpetually, because "The universe repeats without end and marches in place. Eternity interprets, imperturbably, in the infinite, the same representations."  

Bioy, Blanqui, Walter Benjamin, Borges or his characters, are seduced by the hypothesis of plural exit through the multiplication of times. Their hope is rooted in that plurality. I cite a few lines from an article he dedicates to Blanqui in the magazine Sur: "Blanqui crams, with infinite repetitions, not only time, but also infinite space. Imagine that there is in the universe an infinite number of facsimiles of the planet and of all its possible variants. Each individual exists equally in an infinite number of exemplars, with and without variations."  

We would have to recall one of Borges's first books—which he himself submitted to the most severe censorship to the end of his days but posthumously reedited—"The Size of My Hope," which replicates from the title "The Size of Space," the small volume that Leopoldo Lugones (1921) had written a few years earlier on mathematical questions, but which is not often remembered. The author discovers in the writings of Blanqui a buttress for an aesthetic vision that goes beyond mathematical disquisitions or political or police injustices, engaging, in a literary way, a species of eternity sub specie of the library: "the universe brusquely usurped the unlimited dimensions of hope," he said in "The Library of Babel."  

"To speak is to incur tautologies," says the narrator, who confesses to be the author of "This useless and wordy epistle [which] already exists in one of the thirty volumes of the five shelves of one of the uncountable hexagons—and also its refutation." It would not be unusual, then, for one of Borges's poems to speak of a poem or of poetry, its own or another's, just as if in a book one spoke of a book or of literature. They are foreseeable redundancies, in the same way that it is also foreseeable that in a library one would speak of libraries, or of Borges, as the Quixote is already in the Quixote, and the Koran in the Koran.  

More than any other author, Borges appears as a prosopopeia that personifies the library, not only because he makes of the library his narrative, poetic, autobiographical topos par excellence, but equally because, if there exists an emblematic image of Borges's thought—more than the well-trodden labyrinths, the reiterated ambiguous mirrors, the gestures of a tiger, more fixed than ferocious—this image would be that of the library, the place wherein are crossed and reconciled the visions and divisions of reading. Or rather, those lost labyrinths (a hypallage in this case, since it is the individual who is lost there), similar to lost paradises, among those self-facing and ambivalent mirrors, where is reflected, several times, the image of a reader inclined over a page. Mirrors in the desert or in discourse that are also mirages or a miracle of reflection. Wondered, his eyes half closed, inclined over the indistinct open pages of a book of sand, the reader does not
notice that time is slipping way into the clepsydra, which “steals water” or life or time itself, busy as he is with the word. Among these waters being lost is blurred the face of Narcissus who, while repeating himself annuls himself. Similar to the stubborn stripes of the obsessive tiger, his lines are confused through the bars, like replete shelves or through crystals, suggested by Kurd Lasswitz’s Traumkristalle, in which are aligned the books of the total library.\(^{40}\) Identical to “The Other Tiger,” literary, rhetorical, equally mysterious:

It is a tiger of symbols and shades,
A series of literary tropes.\(^{41}\)

They are nothing but variations on a theme: the literalness of the library, just as Borges concludes in “Pascal’s Sphere” as regards universal history, which is nothing other than “the history of the different intonations of some metaphors.”\(^{42}\) Even when a character who is tired, wonders, in one of his “Utopias”: “There are still museums and libraries?\(^{43}\) the library does not cease to be the archetype of the symbolic modulation of his poetic and intellectual imagination.

From one story to the next, the “imperfect writers” of “Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain,”\(^{44}\) or the “imperfect librarian” in “The Library of Babel,”\(^{45}\) or in the previous “The Total Library,” “of astronomic size,” in which

Everything will be in its blind volumes. Everything: the meticulous history of the future, [. . .] Everything, but for each reasonable line or each correct notice there will be millions of senseless cacophonies, of verbal ramblings, and of incoherencies. Everything, but generations of man can pass by without the vertiginous shelves—the shelves that obliterate the day and that chaos inhabits—having granted them one tolerable page.\(^{36}\)

Everything that occurs, occurs in the library. There everything is repeated, a totality that, in French, facilitates the alliteration—another paronomasia—with tautology: repetition as totality, in Latin, in toto is not audibly distinguished from its own repetition. Tautology, repetition, identical proposition, from tauto “the same,” contraction of to auto “the same thing,” a term of rhetoric. Frequently used with a pejorative value, it becomes a term of logic in the twentieth century. The word designates a complex proposition that can only be true, that is to say, a proposition in which the predicate says nothing that the subject does not say. The redundancies had already been anticipated, although on this occasion they are not totally superfluous, they would be, in addition to abundant, inevitable.

Although it is of Babel, the library is total: “everything is in Everything,”\(^{47}\) is also a quote but this time from Jules Laforgue, one of Borges’s favorite poets. The sentence, especially tautological, is the watchword of Pan, the character of “Pan and the Syrinx or the invention of the seven reed flute,” from his Moralités légendaires: “It is for something that Everything is in Everything!”\(^{48}\) The circularity of tautology describes and confirms the totality to which it remits, an affirmation that cannot be true, since the predicate does not differ from the subject. In virtue of that specular revelation that reflects everything in everything, Borges repeats other authors, the reader repeats Borges, other authors repeat Borges, turns and returns of rings formed by two serpents that never stop devouring themselves mutually: “I affirm that the Library is ineliminable.”\(^{49}\)

It is notable that, when passing from “The Total Library” to “The Library of Babel,” Borges obsessively ciphered his imagination into a geometric figure: the hexagon. The galleries are hexagonal in the same way that the rooms are hexagonal, “For four centuries already men have worn out hexagons.”\(^{50}\) The narrator does not stop insisting on the figure of the hexagon, of the term or of its derivations. The author of the epistle says that someone proposes to conquer the books of the Crimson Hexagon, “In some shelf of some hexagon (reasoned the men) there must exist a book that is the cipher and perfect compendium of all the rest.”\(^{51}\) Without a doubt, beyond the mystical interpretations that the geometric figure evokes, its allusion to the number six that, Kabbalistically, alludes to the six days of the creation of the Universe, the alchemical unfoldings and limitations through which one arrives at the mysterious figure,\(^{52}\) it makes sense to insinuate a historical reading that would add another redundancy to the series of inevitable redundancies.

To speak of hexagons in a hexagon . . . Beyond the banality of repetition and of cartographic diagramming that gives place to the obvious association, it would be pertinent to recall that the French reference does not seem far off: “It is enough for me, for now, to repeat the classical saying: The Library is a sphere whose complete center is whatever hexagon, whose circumference is inaccessible.”\(^{53}\)

Borges recalls, in another text, that it is in the Timaeus where Plato says that the sphere is the most perfect and uniform figure, considering that all points on the surface are found equidistant from the center. He observes as well that the circumference is one of the mystical constants about which alchemical reflection has most meditated.\(^{54}\) He distances himself from Pascal’s affirmation in order to adequate, to his geometric vision of the Library, the mysterious and reiterated reference, but he approaches it when he shudders before the terror that distance, silence, space, eternity, the infinite; the spheres inspire in him. (“The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens
What then will man become? Will he be equal to God or to the beasts? What frightening distance!\footnote{56}

He felt the incessant weight of the physical world, he felt vertigo, fear, and solitude, and he put them in other words: “Nature is an infinite sphere, whose center is everywhere and circumference is nowhere.” Thus Brunschvig publishes the text, but the critical edition by Tourneur (Paris, 1941), which reproduces the erasures and variations of the manuscript, reveals that Pascal began to write effroyable: “A frightening sphere, whose center is everywhere and circumference is nowhere.”\footnote{57}

He pauses to register the variations of the famous affirmation of Fragment 72. He speaks in Other Inquisitions of “Pascal’s Sphere” and of “Pascal,” in another text. In his lucubrations, however, more than in Pascal’s Pensées he is interested in Pascal himself. Curiously, he does not register that Blanqui, accustomed to the melancholic meditation of the numerous dungeons in which he had been recluse, also initiated the first chapter: “L’Univers—L’Infini,” alluding to the same “magnificence of language” of Pascal: “L’Univers est un cercle, don’t le centre est partout et la surface nulle part.”\footnote{58} It is possible, on the other hand, that he had at hand Laforgue’s carnivalization, which reads:

Art is everything, from the divine right of the Unconscious;
After it, the deluge! And its slightest look
Is the infinite circle whose circumference
Is everywhere, and immoral center nowhere.\footnote{59}

As is noted in the La Pléiade volume, the publication of “Examenación of the work of Herbert Quain”—the story that precedes “The Library of Babel”—appears in Sur, both in the same year (Sur, n. 79, 1942), between “India,” the text by Fernán Silva Valdés, a translation into Spanish by Rafael Alberti of the Forse de Maitre Pathelin, and an article by Roger Cailllois titled “Exámenes de conciencia,” similar to the title of his story; an article that comments on three contemporary stories—Tragiélie en France by André Maurois, Sept mystères du destin de L’Europe by Jules Romains, and À travers le désastre by Jacques Maritain. According to Jean-Pierre Bernès, this contextualization ably baronizes the text of Borges’s fiction, which has all the appearances of a chronological note.\footnote{60} I would even say that he begins in a mocking way by giving the text the funereal character of a necrological note: “Herbert Quain dies in Roscommon,”\footnote{61} but in neither case should the homogeneity of the cultural context it implicates be disregarded.

If we take into account that only infrequently, in his writings, did Borges describe the space in which the actions of his stories took place, the meticulous detail of the place, of the locale, of the ambiance that “The Library of Babel” presents is surprising: “Vast ventilation shafts in the middle, surrounded by very low banisters,”\footnote{62} and on it goes. If we also recall that one of his recourses of universalization consists of the decircumstantialization of episodes, opting, precisely, not to mention the places that are no more than accidents of universal space or, with similar purposes, to ironize the precise procedure of descriptive mention by way of oniric juxtapositions, their meticulousness is unusual. He alludes to the streets he mentions in the nightmare that is “Death and the Compass”: “a nightmare in which figure elements of Buenos Aires deformed by the horror of nightmare”\footnote{63} similar to mythical localization (Heliopolis or the garden of Thebes), extravagant clarifications like “El Cairo, Illinois,” couplings that, like the Parisian metro station called “Sèvres-Babylone,” do not end up any less eccentric than “Illiers-Comboly.” The attention to the literary and municipal construction of place is suggestive, or curious.

Among many other procedures, another example of decircumstantialization—a globalization avant la lettre—he begins by misleading the reader, as in “Theme of the Traitor and the Hero”.\footnote{64} “The action occurs in an oppressed and tenacious country: Poland, Ireland, the Republic of Venice, some South American or Balkan state . . . [ . . ] Let us say (for narrative comfort) Ireland.”\footnote{65}

Or, in the conclusion to another story, he opts, with the same purpose, for mixing up or erasing particular footprints: “The story was in fact incredible, but it imposed itself on everyone, because substantially it was true. The tone of Emma Zunz was true, the modesty true, the hatred true. True as well was the outrage she had suffered; only the circumstances were false, the time and one or two proper names.”\footnote{66}

Nevertheless, he is the author of a book that orders the itineraries of its voyages according to a country or place. An ATLAS,\footnote{67} Borges? It would seem unlikely, however, and without giving greater concessions to geographical circumstances, his atlas is to be denominated like he denominates a History of Eternity,\footnote{68} or of Infantry,\footnote{69} as discontinuously historical. As a consequence, more than forced it would be contrived not to make the association of the hexagon with France. Among such contexts, that insistence on hexagons cannot not be associated with the colloquial metonymy that schematizes or identifies metropolitan France with the hexagon. A common denomination, affective, a certain discretion of nationalist modesty avoids the name of the country and, in order to abstract it, more geometrico. I do not believe that it would have occurred to General de Gaulle to say in those years that “Thousands of the covetous men abandoned the sweet natal hexagon,”\footnote{70}
although he could certainly have referred to “the venerated secret hexagon that sheltered him,” as the geometric and rhetorical figure occurred to him after 1934. Since then it has become a stereotype, a domestic appellation: a commonplace, which competes with the more nostalgic “douce France”: “Like all men of the Library, I have traveled in my youth; I have been a pilgrim in search of a book, maybe a catalogue of catalogues; now that my eyes can almost not decipher what I write, I prepare myself to die a few leagues away from the hexagon in which I was born.”

One could affirm that for Borges, in general terms, the place is, like the common place for Aristotle, more than a site, an argument, a rhetorical topic, convincing, cognized, cohabited, common. The space of the library legitimates the localization of the common place, an abundant reserve or quarry of redundancies where it would be, more than infrequent, incoherent to find something new: “Clearly, nobody hopes to discover anything.” Nevertheless, the new is not necessarily the unheard of: “The new is new if it is unexpected.” Such that the library, in addition to propitiating the common place, propitiates the effective recourse of surprise: “Serenity.”

In order to discard any suspicion of pejorative insinuation in the argument of the common place, we could have to confirm the strategic arguments of a logic that would facilitate, because it is known, the invention of reasonings necessary for the case at hand. A fourth axiom, which the narrator does not formulate, could be that all which exists there, like in an Arabic legend, exists because it has already been written: “The certainty that all is written annuls us or phantasms us.” The two anterior axioms: “The Library exists ab aeterno” and “The number of orthographic signs is twenty five,” are affirmations that allude explicitly to “The Total Library,” to Kurd Lasswitz, whom he does not name in this story but to whom he attributes the complete inventory that only comprises, to elaborate its totality, out of the twenty-five letters of the alphabet, the period, the comma, and the space, the motif of greatest attention in the previous story. He does not present the affirmation as a third axiom but rather as “the fundamental law of the library”: “There are not, in the vast Library, two identical books.”

This identification between place and common place would not be alien to Borges’s poetics. As if words gave place, literally, to a portion of space, narrowing conventional place and conventional language in one and the same contraction. To verify the substitutions of a place for a word or the contrary are constant mechanisms of his textual magic. We had begun with the letter beth, which is both things, the space man inhabits and the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, following with the map that displaces the Empire, with the poem that displaces the palace, with the library that displaces the Universe. Walls and books have maintained an intimate and adverse association of mutual conservation and reciprocal substitution, a movement, a literal metaphor: displacement.

The place where this displacement is observed most clearly, to the letter, is in one of his most quoted stories: “The Aleph.” For Borges, the Hebrew term designates a point, a letter, a word, a title, a story, a book, an anticipatory allegory of the mediatic universe: everything. Everything: what existed and will exist, including what will not exist. The narrator clarifies: “He clarified that an Aleph is one of the points of space that contain all points.” That the letter cannot do without spatialization is clear. What is also clear is the confusion—notwithstanding the contradiction—between letter and space, or their partial reciprocal necessity. As the letter needs to be inscribed against time in a place, Carlos Argentino Daneri, the vulgar poet of the story, needs this aleph that exists in the basement of his house in order to write his poems: “he said that to finish the poem his house was indispensable, since in a corner of the basement there was an Aleph.”

But it is not the only displacement to illustrate narratively the substitution of the place by the word. It is necessary to have recourse to genetic research and to compare it to the manuscript of “The Aleph,” one of the few that are conserved from Borges’s oeuvre. In a previous version of the text to the published one, the name of the initial letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the aleph is not mentioned, but instead he writes “mīhrāb,” that sacred space dedicated to worship, from where the imam addresses the prayer. It constitutes, in Muslim religious architecture, the most important space of the mosque, to which the wealth of the decoration adds an even greater dimension. Important for the history of art and theology, object of historical, artistic, sociological, philological, and, to a lesser degree, liturgical reflection, it is “a refuge, the most secret place of the temple, which symbolizes the essence of the dogma.”

At a conference on The Thousands and One Nights, Borges wonders: “What are Orient and Occident? If you ask me, I do not know. Let us look for an approximation.”

In cardinal, hemispherical terms, Borges poses himself in relation to space the same question that Augustine formulated in relation to time and, like the ancient African bishop, he responds by rejecting the question and formulating it again. In Borges’s epistemological fiction—anterior and similar—like in the computerized present, planetary distances and differences are no more than accidents of space, which only counts eventually. The mīhrāb is the sacred place, the place of all places, it becomes the aleph, a letter that is the mysterious unity from which all letters spring. In the epistemological fiction of Borges, space is literalized to the same extent that the letter is spatialized. That movement replicates the back and forth of the first letters of the Hebrew alphabet: the beginning begins with beth, a house, a tower, a library, in order to insinuate that before this letter began, space had already begun. Perhaps so that the letter could exist and displace it.
SIXTEEN

FICTION BETWEEN FRAUD AND FARCE

Parodies and Properties of the Name

Our songs will all be silenced—but what of it? Go on singing. Maybe a man’s name doesn’t matter all that much.

—Orson Welles

The subject I studied was philosophy: I remembered that my uncle, without invoking a single proper name, had revealed to me its beautiful perplexities.

—Jorge Luis Borges

There is little novelty in affirming (or confirming) that with every day the world becomes more Borgesian. For decades it has been known that not only is Borges one of the greatest literary events of his century but also that major nonliterary events occur at the margins of Borges.¹ Prophetic and provocative, “perhaps without intending it,” their speculations anticipate, among other advents, the progressive exhaustion of theories,² the caducity or uselessness of taxonomies,³ the adequation of truth to the convenience of the chronicler,⁴ the indistinction of antagonisms⁵—beyond the eventualities—the poetic and plural resonances that prevail over authority or the individual author, the multiplication of the wonders that technology sets in screens (they normalize in quotidian practice some of his most unbridled fictions),⁶ the gradual and virtual disappearance of reality in its representation,⁷ the conservation of writings in books that fade away,⁸ cyclopean and virtual encyclopedias. In this world that Borgesizes itself almost unknowingly among limitless series of copies, the easiness of plagiarism thrives, alongside
infatuation with proper names, their insignificance or their renown, the 
vanity and variations of the vacuum.

These are, without intending it, some of the most provocative predictions
from Borges's disconcerting imagination that, when crossed with Bioy
Casares's fictions and his insistent production of copies that menacingly
abound, predisposes a reality that is to come, a reality that the present
also confirms. Few writers achieved, as Borges did, the transformation of
discontinuous fragments, the abstruse referentiality, the literal and suspect
quotes, frank and apocryphal, always innumerable, copies as faithful as they
are aberrant, in that fantastic revelation that his works hold in store.

On the other hand, in spite of the uninterrupted preoccupation with
mimesis and the ancestral antecedents of the topic, narrations that made an
inaugural and contradictory universe out of copies were nothing common, as
were those that did so out of the machines that produce and register them.
Those inventions put to work by Bioy's fantasy, a culture that sets up
photographic and cinematographic revelations and the technological procedures
that propitiate them, rendering the vicarious and infinite experience of a
regime of copies without original. Hybrids are not lacking in his stories and,
as with fables and chimeras, medical experiments oscillate between games
of immortality and inhuman procedures, a cruelty no less cruel for being
mechanical, one that engages the plot in a terror that knows no quarter.

The bonds of their friendship are firm, their social and cultural affinities
embrace, and, their works being so different and so happily opposed,
the literary collaboration between the both of them, oftentimes extraordinary
for its solidarity and durability, also consolidates itself through those
coincidences. A close personal connection was established between those
two writers who shared an animated and admirable vita literaria, as well as
a doubtless celebrity. Borges and Bioy read the same books, they consulted
the same encyclopedias, they frequented literary circles common to them
both, they cultivated the same friendships and adhered to similar causes,
without it ever instigating or insinuating any rivalry or redundancy between
their writings, their affects, and their pronouncements. It is striking that
that close-knit mutuality never gave rise to disagreements; to the contrary:
“As dissimilar as we were as writers, the friendship fit because we had a
shared passion for books.”

It is as if they had convened a pact of precedence, but one free of
ceremony, each one making room for the other, or even for a third person,
both of them stepping aside in order to make room for Biorges. Neither one
nor the other but the two of them, contracted into a civil and literary entity,
with a proper name and proper identification. “Biorges” appears validated
by the nominal rule coined by Emir Rodríguez Monegal and documented
by Gisèle Freund, providing him, beyond just poetry, with full rights to
the city. A previous series of photos, realized by Silvina Ocampo as in order
to document the metamorphosis of one and the other author into a
third, appears reproduced in Album, the book that the Spanish Ministry of
Culture would publish as an homage to Adolfo Bioy Casares in order to
also celebrate, through that monumental edition realized in Madrid (1991),
the awarding of the Premio de Literatura en Lenguas Castellana Miguel de
Cervantes (1990). In “An Abstract Art” (“Un arte abstracto”), from the
Crónicas de Bostas Domecq, farce does not ignore that famous photographic
superimposition that, in taking shape in bronze and passing into words, takes
on a sarcastic relief at various points:

The funds collected didn't allow for the erection of two busts, and
the chisel had to limit itself to a sole effigy that artistically agglutinated
the vaporous beard of the one, the roman nose of the two,
and the laconic stature of the other.

In his Memorias, Bioy remembers the plot of a story that had been
proposed, between three instead of two, this time with Silvina Ocampo.
However, since that sum of two authors together with a third failed to pro-
duce the necessary trinity of literary collaboration, the miracle remained
unperformed. In that story a sort of literary and intellectual testimony would
have been formulated with the precepts necessary for the writer's task. I
reiterate here the transcription of a passage, one especially pertinent among
others of equal genius:

In literature it is necessary to avoid:

[. . . ]—Pairs of grossly dissimilar characters: Quixote and Sancho,
Sherlock Holmes and Watson.

—Novels with heroes in pairs. The difficulty of the author consists
in: if he ventures an observation of a character, he will invent a
symmetrical one for the other, thereby abusing contrasts and languid
coincidences: Bouvard et Pécuchet.

Treacherous and shared, those recommendations give clear signals as to
the augural and amicable code that celebrates the grace of beginning; one
of Borges's stories departs from a certain data with which Bioy could have
provided the narrator; another story begins by invoking his name and, as
is well known, Bioy's "perfect" novel begins with a preface by Borges that
to acquaintance through traditions, legends, and a copious literary and cinematographic current that recollects and liberally distributes them.

Under the double and more well-known denominations of H. Bustos Domecq and B. Suárez Lynch, denominations that are double as well, the two writers jointly signed various texts, rendering individual responsibility indiscernible; they are doubles of doubles and, despite the time transpired, its flows streaming down in sinuous folds, the phenomenon doesn’t fail to surprise. But the interest that gives rise to their cooperation doesn’t limit itself to that double or quadruple seal that, progressively, ensconces two authors in a third, or in various others. As Rodríguez Monegal said, “the profound symbiosis established between those two authors so different in age, style and temperament” continues clamoring for attention, and it is a symbiosis so closely united that it could make way for “an affair of Bustos Domecq,” a question less cryptic but equally representative of a final and choral harmony, consonant with various voices, one that accentuates “the categorical difficulty of knowing what belongs to the poet and what belongs to language,” as if such discrimination were still feasible.

Convictions about the plural nature of the author (which could without annoyance rival the often announced theories of his disappearance or his death) should not be strange for those who understand that quotes and copies enjoy privileged literary protection. They should understand even more, then, the dual proliferation of an author, real and imaginary at once. Biographical constancies cause the binomials Bustos Domecq/Suárez Lynch/ Lynch Davis to resemble the condition of the heteronyms of Pessoa, “The work of the author outside of his/her person,” as the poet defined them in order to distinguish them from pseudonyms. And this with even more reason, because the names that Borges and Bioy adopt are neither false, nor do they compete with the surnames that identify their works individually, since those signatures renew their devout attachment to a familiar onomastic and appear as legitimated by the prodigious branches of their superannuated genealogical trees.

H. Bustos Domecq as much as B. Suárez Lynch, the names with which they underwrite Seis problemas para don Isidro (1942) or Un modelo para la muerte (1946), both authors brandish surnames adopted from ancestors to which they feel bound by loyalty to a venerated family tradition. The environs of the River Plate region are not the only place where it is common habit to bear surnames doubled for nobility—or not—and, when those names are juxtaposed, they usually give indications of an aristocratic or diacritical presumption; there is little difference between the two.

For example, an inscription of the author’s forebears appears in “On the Rigor of Science,” a masterpiece in twelve lines where Borges poetically anticipates and condenses the preoccupation with copies and the risks of
that infinite, substitutive risk that not only replicates reality but also breaks it to bits.\textsuperscript{26} Borges attributes that work to Suárez Miranda and, after asking him for the compound reason behind the surname, he responded that two names end up being more verisimilar than one alone. Perhaps that double attribution is sufficiently valid for it to be repeated more than once, a procedure of verisimilitude that recurs to proper names in order to consolidate itself, as also happens in the Crónicas.\textsuperscript{27}

In writing together, Borges and Biy strum an almost insensible chord [cuartero poco cuartero], as if parody required the excesses of both in order to play itself out:

It was a private madness of Borges and I, one that saddened all of our friends. We spun out exorbitant stories, written like Russian dolls; one joke within another joke. We wanted to write detective stories, and they came out as satirical detective stories. But we had a great time while we wrote them.\textsuperscript{28}

With a humor that takes pleasure in the presumptuous mannerisms of a literature that is more affected than academic, Borges and Biy exaggerate to the point of caricature. Bustos Domecq imitates the laudatory literary swelling of prologues and slanted panegyrics, accumulating bombastic redundancies, in liminal and preliminary words, with pedantic and grotesque characters, submitted to narrative conventions and quotes both ornamental and inopportune. The contrasts of adjectivalization, affected sayings, modulated voices and poses, disturbed notes and footnotes mock the paradigms of outdated literature and, more than anything else, the conceit of a stereotypical and insufficient critical apparatus. There is no lack of displays of hyper-snobbiness that glot in overused foreign vocabularies, the most trite sayings and verses—in French, bien sûr—effusive veneration of the patria, and vernacular anti-Semitism.\textsuperscript{29} Nor do they dissipate the excesses of a vulgarity that persists in feigning refinement and elegance when it is found to be in bad taste.

The prologue to Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi presents a note on H. Bustos Domecq edited by the “educator, señorita Adelma Badoglio.”\textsuperscript{30} But, as is evident in the first edition, the educator indicated was first named Adelia Puglione. Borges and Biy didn’t miss a chance to play with proper names. Certainly, history changes and prologues usually accompany it in those changes, and there is no question as to whether it is those variations that justify their marginal function. For that reason, it is useful to observe that, on the same page, the first edition recalls the time “During the government of Iriondo” (and there was one or more Iriondos in Santa Fe), while in the 1964 edition the first educator—although she is named second—speaks of the time “During the Labruna intervention . . . ” And there is room to ask to which Labruna is the educator referring. To the famous footballer from the River Plate, known as el Feo, coinciding with that “loving nickname” that Bustos Domecq was called by (“in private”), as Gervasio Montenegro remembers in his “Liminal Word” (“Palabra liminar”). Well, the educators of both editions agree in praising Bustos Domecq’s “interesting studies at the elementary school” just as they agree in recognizing that his prose is “blighted by certain Gallicisms, attributable to the youth of the author and the lessened intellectual tone of the period.” In referring to Rosario, in the province of Santa Fe, both women sing the praises of “the Argentine Chicago.” For his part, in that semblance where Gervasio Montenegro presents Don Isidro Parodi as “Bicho Feo” (ugly bug), he describes him as both an “homme de lettres” and a “gentleman-burglar” (gentleman-burglar), without ever forgetting to underline the particularity of the honorific that graces him: “En la movida crónica de la investigación policial, cabe a don Isidro el honor de ser el primer detective encarcelado” (In the jumbled chronicle of police investigation, don Isidro has the honor of being the first incarcerated detective). But how then to explain that suddenly the name and surname of the diligent educator, Ms. Adelma Badoglio, could reappear to revise the translation realized by Fernando Bauzá in an article included in that exquisite edition of the álbum?

In summary, the authors play with fraud and faith like they were playing with dice: All is true! In this parodic version or diversion, Borges and Biy invent a fictitious author (Bustos Domecq), and they also invent the author of the biography of that invented author (Adelma Badoglio), who herself is preceded by a previous invention (Adelia Puglione), which is surprising among the credits of an essay in an official book, a maneuver that, if not monarchical, is almost majestic; they also invent the prologist (Gervasio Montenegro), a member of the Academia Argentina de Letras (an institution that appears mentioned in the ‘64 edition, but not in the one from ‘42), who is himself likewise a fictional character, invading, more than once, the space of truth that the prologue—another convention—ought to accredit.

The trick works, but it soon loses its novelty as this isn’t the first time that, maliciously, fiction stakes a wager in that game. A couple of centuries before, and in the style of a prologue, Jonathan Swift, among others, had already introduced his book of adventures by way of apocryphal letters directed to an apocryphal editor, in order to increase verisimilitude and to redouble, through this well-known mechanism, the folds of a fiction that calls upon the most conventional editoral margins in order to make a mockery of them.

The stratification of falsities makes room for a slippery mise en abîme, a fraud without refrain that plunges fiction into farce. Functioning rather like a garnish, prologues try to certify the authenticity of a pseudonym, but,
for the sake of legitimacy, they avail themselves of various false authors, as if to say that somehow telling two or more lies is lying less, as if two false detectives might be able to discover the truth thanks to the licenses of the "roman policier" from which Bustos Domecq takes, as Gervasio Montenegro observes in the prologue, the cold intellectualism in which Arthur Conan Doyle, among others, had immersed this genre. Moreover, traversing a geography of tricks and magical sleight of hand, it is Bustos Domecq himself that underpins the prologue of B. Suárez Lynch's "Un modelo para la muerte," and don Isidro Parodi as much as Gervasio Montenegro appears in the presentation of that work's "Dramatis Personae." There Bustos Domecq defines Parodi as: "The aged hairdresser from the barrio Sur, today confined in the National Penitentiary, [who] solves police enigmas from his cell." 

And what if that strangeness was another trace of the "Blanqui effect," of the fascination that his spectacular phantasmagorias and his tone, more skeptical than ironic, exercised over Borges and Biyo and that, despite the distances, was so familiar to them?

In order to ridicule the good intentions proper to the prologue, B. Suárez Lynch appears as a disciple of Bustos Domecq, who points out that epigonal condition: "My Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi marks out for him the path to true originality." To dissipate any remaining doubt, the publication of Bustos Domecq's works is attributed to an editorial or press called Oportet et Haereses, a name that, in a double game, literally quotes the words of one of St. Paul's epistles: Oportet Haereses esse ("it is necessary that there are heretics"). The editorial seal seems to part ways with that learned reference, however, by taking into account the teachings of the saint but slanting them toward more secular writings, the Pauline stigma is let slip.

In "Dos fantasías memorables" (Two memorable fantasies), also from Bustos Domecq, manager Pablo Oportet's editorial printing-enterprise is mentioned several times, allowing for a hagiographic wink without decontextualizing the reference. Inserting himself into less orthodox domains, the narrator uses the quote in order to invoke the homophonetic terminology of two famous wines, Oporto and Jerez, with whose prestigious production Biyo Casares's family was directly entangled by its unusual genealogical branches, but that is another story.

They secretly play with names that are proper and strange, false and authentic, grotesque and dynastic, names in which hilarity resounds: Hilarión Lambkin Formente, or parody: Isidro Parodi, or consonances: Julio Herrera (Crónicas ... ), names that trace out links between works, names, and men. There are so many jokes that a dossier could be filled with the varied recourses of a humoristic onomastic and those emblematic patronyms that give off sparks in all directions, breathing new life into smoldering literary infatuation, inflaming the establishment of that "little world" overpopulated by writers, critics, professors, and academics, those who keep the cult of name and renown [hombre y renombre], who incestuously interchange papers, hiding them away or plagiarizing them. It's not a bad idea to write about what one knows and, for that reason, both writers write about writing. All of those writings are the overwriting of a literati, one that proclaims its poems with great care, making them coincide word for word with Julio Herrera y Reissig's Los parques abandonados (The abandoned parks), with each of the three parts of the Divine Comedy or with select chapters of the Quixote.

Beyond the major works of world literature, Borges and Biyo's mystifications don't avoid ridiculing the wisdom of their own works in upbraiding repartee, and it should be remembered that César Paladín is not the only one to whom Bustos Domecq dedicates—alongside his impiety—the niceties of an homage. If the theme treats how it is that farce takes charge of critical and literary commonplaces, the name Pierre Menard cannot be left out.

In our time, a copious fragment from the Odyssey inaugurates one of Pound's Cantos and it is well known that T.S. Eliot's work agrees with verses from Goldsmith, Baudelaire and Verlaine. Paladín, in 1909, had already gone further. He annexed, in a manner of speaking, a complete opus. Los parques abandonados, by Herrera y Reissig ... Paladín bestowed it with a name and passed it on to the press, without removing or adding a single comma, a norm to which he was always faithful. We are in this way before the most important literary event of our century: Paladín's Los parques abandonados. Nothing could be more remote, it is certain, from Herrera's homonymous book, which itself didn't repeat a previous one.

At various opportunities, harking back to those years of initiation in a joint writing, Biyo recalls that they both decided to invent a story whose protagonist was Dr. Praetorius, a German sometimes—or a Hollander—at other times. At some point, the name could have referred to a German philanthropist, Dr. Praetorius, who, through "hedonistic [means]—music, incessant games—murders children." In addition to being ridiculous, and painfully ironic, that perverse substitution coincides with a similar inversion in one of Borges's stories. In "A Weary Man's Utopia" ("Utopía de un hombre que está cansado"), Borges points toward a similar inequity:

"It is the crematory," someone said. "The death chamber is inside.

They say it was invented by a philanthropist whose name, I believe, was Adolf Hitler."

Almost insufferable, sarcasm is crossed with the wickedness of that story that never came to be the first of the series. Biyo says
... and we projected a police story—they were Borges's ideas—that
dealt with a doctor Praetorius, an immense and delicate German,
the director of a school, where through hedonic means (obligatory
games, music at all hours), he tortured and murdered children.
This plot, never written, is the point of departure for all of Bustos
Domecq and Suárez Lynch's work.65

He announces that the story could have been called “Doctor Praeto-
rius.” “But we spoke so much of this story, we discussed it so much that
in the end we never ended up writing it.”66 Nevertheless, he takes up another
aspect of the character in “There Are More Things,”41 which tells of a
foreigner, Max Pretorius, who acquires a house associated with the happy
memories of the narrator's youth, although only in order to destroy it. In
one of Bustos Domecq's Chronicles, “An abstract art,” “the man on whom
eyes, fingers and astonished faces converge is the Fleming or Hollander, Frans
Pretorius.”67 Paradoxically, one work, inexistent but in possession of a title
and sinister protagonist, initiates the saga of Doctor Praetorius that, with
distinct first names and identities, emerge unforeseen in Borges's stories and
those that he shared with his friend. But there is even more: Bioy affirms
that that never-written story was found by Daniel Martino.68 Nevertheless,
the phenomenon is not so strange: if a written text is able to disappear, an
unwritten one may well be able to be found and to appear.

It would be necessary to tarry with the variations of Praetorius and
the transformations of the character's character, from the pious goodness of
his German model, the great humorist, envied by his colleagues and loved
by his patients, to the various inhumanities of later versions, just as much
literary as cinematographic. From that point on it would be preferable to
refer to the protagonist of Curt Goetz's comedy, which premiered in
Berlin in 1934 and was a noted success: Dr. Med.[Medizinisch] Hiob Prætorius.
Facharzt für Chirurgie und Frauenleiden. Eine Geschichte in Sieben Kapiteln.50
[Hiob Prætorius. Specialist in surgery and female complaints. A story in
seven chapters.] The comedy, which met with great success, was brought
to the cinema in Germany by Goetz himself and, subsequently, to the United
States, by Joseph L. Mankiewicz in 1952. Following the existing references
formulated by Alfredo Grieco y Bavio, I became aware that in Argentina
itself they had exhibited the

film The Bride of Frankenstein (1935) by James Whale, with a libretto
by John L. Balderston and William Hurlbut, which premiered in
Buenos Aires on the 17th of July, 1935, in the Monumental cin-
ema (Lavalle y Esmeralda). The last showing was in the Mundial
cinema (1260 Belgrano) on the 22nd of September 1935. There,
Ernest Theisiger played Dr. Septimus Pretorius.51

Decided upon investigating and identifying the microbe of human stu-
pidity (“Der Milbrohe der menschlichen Dummheit”), the admired doctor from
Goetz's work, who has a cadaver rescued live from a coffin for an assistant,
could have inspired, although with a contrary sign, that series of diabolical
doctors that people Bioy's teratological demography. But Goetz's Dr. Praeto-
rius is a good man, a philanthropist who marries a patient in order to save
the offended honor of a young woman and employs the man that he rescued
from the other world as a servant in order to save him from the postponed
condemnation that burdens him. But more than the vicissitudes of his charac-
ters, from beginning to end, Goetz's work gives an account of a situation that,
for reasons that extend beyond its circular, Britannic, detectivesque structure,
could have been devised by Borges and would have been celebrated by Bioy.

The first act takes place in a library where, in front of the fire of a
classical chimney, in a comfortable recliner, underneath the light of a floor
lamp, the dramaturge is startled to encounter Sherlock Holmes meditating.
According to the custom imposed by the narrator, the detective dialogues
with Dr. Watson about a mystery that is worrying him. In this case, it is the
death of Dr. Praetorius and his wife, who wrecked the car they were driving
to the opera. The final scene is set in the same place. Sherlock Holmes
will go on solving the enigma with prudent abduction, a solution—comic
or not—that could be able to coincide with the horrifying plot of that story
that never ended up being written, or not, but that initiated, despite its
phantasmal condition, the Don Isidro Parodi detective series, a series that was
problematic from the outset. At the end of Goetz's comedy, thanks to the
revelations of the servant—who, like Sherlock Holmes himself, was revived
after being dead—the detective conjectures the reason for the pair's death.
Holmes describes the following dialogue:

The Professor [Praetorius] asks: “Why, my dear, am I unable to
encounter the microbe of human stupidity?” And she tells him,
[... ] “Possibly, my dear, because you are too stupid.”

Upon discovering that the truth is rooted in his own stupidity, he was
able neither to contain his laughter nor to control the steering wheel, such
that laughter was the cause of his death, in the same way that the pleasure
that the children enjoyed was an entertainment that provoked their own
deaths: “And what better than an entertaining finale of laughter?” Watson
says, and with this entertaining finale it ends.

According to the information given to me by Grieco y Bavio and the
diligences of his erudite generosity, Borges could have known of this plot
through Olaf Anderson's meticulous description of it.52 “Notes on German
theater. Dr. Job Praetorius” appeared in the July 1st, 1934 edition of La
Nación, and it is worth transcribing at least a few lines:
Goetz knows the public and, it seems, also the formula for making
discrete and entertaining theater, something not at all easy today.
We know that Ibsen was a passionate reader of newspapers, and
without allowing ourselves the intention of placing Goetz at the
height of the great Scandinavian, it may be said, nevertheless, that
he has put journalistic passion into his piece, and not only his own,
but also the spectator's. His formula consists in coordinating the
heterogeneous, reuniting various fables in a more or less dramatic
action and presenting it folded up like the pages of a newspaper.
Nothing is missing: police, automobiles, politics, music, medicine,
tribunals and "theater" in abundance; everything is here in swarming,
human variety, without the artifice being noted. Such are the
ingredients, and shake well before writing.

Humor—sarcasm—the model—unusual—the detectivesque frame of
the action; the intrigues to which a famous doctor dedicated to finding
the microbe of human stupidity is exposed in order to develop a serum capable
of combating it; the police story suspense of the work; the irony with which
Curt Goetz utilizes laughter as a strategy to mock dismal episodes. In order
to negotiate the same sort of episodes, the ingenuity of both Borges and
Bioy springs into action and passes off Praetorius's epiphanys as laughable. An
irony that well could have encoded the ludic key, the paradoxical
imagination, lies and mentions that occult identity in order to be able to discover
it, discursive alibis for the crime that they disseminate so that it might be
possible to reveal the truth, they all confirm Borges and Bioy's interest in
their own police narrations and those of others.

From inside cell 273, Isidro Parodi is informed as to the disputes
involving his clients, identifies those culpable, solves the enigmas, and
discovers the frauds of which the majority of those that come to consult him
have been made the victim. An imbalance of register and a comic contrast
of discourses is established between the intricate vicissitudes that Parodi's
loquacious interlocutors narrate and the immediate, sententious simplicity
with which he explains those offenses, clearing away the unknowns, analyzing,
in a flash, the happening, to all seeming like a prestidigitator that pulls a rabbit from a hat, as if the gesture and the effect were both only
natural. A magic formula: "Hokuspokus" (which is the origin of "hoax," a
word that is both a trick and the title of another of Goetz's comedies, the
most successful of his works and much earlier [1923] than Hitob Praetorius,
in whose cinematographic version Goetz himself plays the main role). "A
magician is just an actor... playing the part of a magician," said Orson
Welles, accumulating verbal and visual hoaxes in his film essay. A logic of

nonsense lends support to the first incoherency: the narrative denouement,
having little to do with the ups and downs of the story, swerves toward an
absurd solution and celebrates a fatal finale in the key of laughter. Shunderson, Doctor Praetorius's assistant, condemned to prison for a crime that
he is believed to have committed, whose story is decisive for clarification
of the enigma, confirms, after his debt has been paid and once he is free,
that the supposed crime had not been committed and—better late than
never—he commits it.

There are various characters in Bustos Domecq's work that find themselves
in a similar situation, and, paradigmatically, Parodi himself is also in
the same sort of jam, condemned for a crime perpetrated, not by him, but
by "one of the young boys from the Pata Santa bar [. . .] a precious electoral
element" and, even worse, with the aggravating factor that "Isidro Parodi
had committed the error of renting a room from a clerk in commissary 18,
for which he already owed more than a year's worth of payments."

If the detective genre expects and counts on readers to identify themselves
with the detective, to attentively follow the scenes of the story, in
an attempt to solve the intrigue by way of the clues that are offered and,
consecutively, to presume to know the identity of the killer, in this novel the
same happens but as a joke. Laconic and ill-humored, with the sarcasm of a
Creole who is mistrusting from experience and knowing with age, immobile
in his cell, rarely interrupting the outlandish discourses of his visitors, Parodi,
sententious and patient, hears, meditates, and invents alibis and concisely
discovers the guilty party, solving the six enigmas without hesitation. If the
reader identifies with the detective, this model of a detective is also a model
of a reader, or of a model reader: they keep silent, capture hints and, in
accordance with their conjectures, conclude the story, like a judge closing
a dossier or a magician giving a final flourish.

In the novel, written by a double author going by a double name, the
story that wasn't written but that suddenly appears published, that ought
to have been the first of the Seis problemas . . . , isn't. In this way, as in a farce
or a sleight of hand, Dr. Praetorius appears and disappears. An epiphanys
of proper names can take part in the fiction, a farce or a fraud, a trail
that leads the reader down the right path or that conceals it. As Gervasio
Montenegro might have said, the work is "comme une aubergespagnole,"
the only things you find there are what each person brings.

If Alfonso Reyes was one of the first to observe that sufficient attention
had not been granted to Bustos Domecq's work or to Isidro Parodi's
problems,11 if a similar evaluation was offered up by the first critics (Emir
Rodriguez Monegal, Alfred Mac Adam, Donald Yates) that commented on
it, if the authors themselves said that "there is nothing written on Bustos,"
if that negation was true, it isn’t any longer. Much has been written since, and, between silences and redundancies, it is worth quoting the last words from that famous, unwritten but already published, story: for now, “Let us disdain vain erudition” [“Desdeñemos la vana erudición”].

NOTES

AUTHOR’S INTRODUCTION


TRANSLATOR’S INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

2. Lisa Block de Behar, Una palabra propriamente dicha (Argentina: Siglo XXI Editores, 1994).
5. William Shakespeare, Hamlet, II.ii.
11. Although the actual German adds a letter, again the omnipresent n, the unknown of pure change, to the nth degree: redner; a redner is rather one who builds ships.
13. Ibid., 7.
16. And yet Kabbalah, as Bloom has said, is not mysticism but interpretation, "a theory of writing," Harold Bloom, Kabbalah and Criticism (New York: Continuum, 1975), 52.
17. See chapter 6 of this book.
18. Etymology, what Deleuze and Guattari call "a specifically philosophical athleticism" (What Is Philosophy, 8), is one of Block de Behar's cherished tools. Her analysis of the relation between chance and fall appears in chapter 8.

ONE. FIRST WORDS

2. Ibid., 444–450.
4. August of 1999 marked the centennial of Borges's birth. Beyond the chronological precision of commemorations, the intention of this book was to contribute to his constant celebration.
5. Perlas de la sabiduría judía (Antología de los hagiógrafos y de Pirke Avot), 2ª edición bilingüe ampliada (Buenos Aires: Editorial Yehuda), 317.
6. There is a connotation of the phrase cita sin fin that "Endless quote" does not capture, namely, that of a cinta sin fin, or tape recorder on auto-reverse, a metaphor of audio reproduction that resonates with Lisa Block de Behar's notion of the quote [W. E.].

TWO. VARIATIONS ON A LETTER

2. English in the original.
6. Borges, Obras completas, 173. (Where no volume number is indicated for Borges's Obras completas, the author is citing the single-volume 1974 edition [W. E.]).
7. Ibid., 773.
10. Ibid., 801–802.
11. Ibid., 802.
12. The following depends on the double meaning of the Spanish word parábola: parable and parabola [W. E.].
13. Ibid., 441.
15. Ibid., 773.
23. Ibid., 124.
24. Ibid., 124.
26. Entendre in French means both to hear and to understand [W. E.].
28. English in the original.
29. English in the original.
30. Borges, Obras completas, 627.
31. Ibid., 885.
35. Ibid., 12.
41. Leopoldo Lugones, El tango del espacio: Ensayo de psicología matemática (Buenos Aires: Ateneo, 1921).
42. Harold Bloom, Kabbalah and Criticism (New York: Continuum, 1983), 90.
43. Borges, Obras completas, 772.
45. Borges, Obras completas, 772.
46. English in the original.
47. English in the original.
49. English in the original.
50. As Borges says in an issue of La Maga (issue in homage to Borges, Buenos Aires, February 1996).
51. That union that according to the concepts of Isaac Luria, taken up again by later currents, “portrays the Messiah as cleaving to the divine power in order to restore the divine system to its harmonious status.” Moshe Idel, Kabbalah: New Perspectives (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988), 57.
52. The word means “lay” while maintaining an etymological association with “reading” or “lecture” through the Latin verb legere.
53. Adorno, Negative Dialectics, 76.
55. English in the original.

THREE. PARADOXA ORTODOXA

2. Ibid., 1068–1073.
3. Ibid., 259.
4. Ibid.
5. In the original: “(a)copiar,” a play on words between “to copy” and “to gather or store” [W. E.].

17. Ibid., 78.
20. Revelations 1: 12.
23. A popular magazine devoted to rural themes [W. E.].
26. The eponymous character of a dialogue of Plato that often carries the subtitle “On the Precision and Property of Names.”
28. The action of calling, as much in the religious sense in which God calls, attracts to Himself a person, a people, as in that of the action and result of an installing voice; although similar, that vocation does not correspond completely with what linguistics considers performative utterances.
30. In this case we would have to understand motivation in two of its senses: 1) in general, as movement or that which puts into movement (from Latin: motor, moere: to move); 2) specifically, linguistically, as a principle opposed to the arbitrariness of the sign, a natural reason of being or the (onomatopoetic) possibility that the sign is imitating the thing.
32. Proprio, which also means “own” [W. E.].
33. Leopoldo Lugones, Obras poéticas completas (Madrid: Aguilar, 1974), 197.
35. Reading Dante, Luce Fabbri de Crescatti observed that some Italian nouns carry two meanings: one subjective and the other objective. “The distinction is
found in the Latin grammars apropos of the specifying complements that carry out a subjective as well as an objective function, when the idea of an action or a sentiment is included in the respective noun. There are still today nouns that can have a specifying complement of both kinds. Typical example: "The love of God" (of God is ambiguous. According to the context it could be 'the love of God for the world' or 'the love of the world for God')."

From Informe sobre sustantivos italianos susceptibles de dos significados, uno subjetivo y otro objetivo, unpublished manuscript by Luce Fabbri de Cressatti, whom I asked and now I thank.

39. What follows depends on the words clave and llave in Spanish, both of which are translated by the English "key," the former denoting the musical key and connoting the more figurative meanings of "key," the latter the literal, physical object [W. E.].
40. Edmond Jabès, Ça suit son cœur (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1975), 58.
42. Lectarios—The term I use for those characters who, in the text, appear as listeners of an out-loud reading realized by another character: neither proper listeners nor proper readers (the Gutres, little Marcel of the Recherche, little Jean of Les mots, etc.); they are included in a literary species whose complexity requires an attention that I will give it in another work.
43. Borges, Obras completas, 1071.
44. Ibid., 1072.
47. Derrida, La dissemination, 182.
50. de Man, Allegories of Reading, 77.
52. Ibid., 718.
53. 2 Corinthians 3: 6.
54. I analyzed the detailed development of this thesis with reference to Woody Allen's film The Purple Rose of Cairo (1985) where, in the same way as in "The Gospel according to Mark," the narrative action implies more than a narrative action and, between them, the characters move from one to another diegetic space. This ironic transit is verified, as in "The Gospel according to Mark," in a cinematographic narrative that has cinematic narrative as its theme, a transit enabled in turn by the conviction that legitimates credulity, seduction, literalness, a conviction shared by the characters of these narratives in which "I am in heaven" is heard intoned at the beginning and the end, in heaven or in eternity. On the basis of T. S. Coleridge and beyond the quote from Borges transcribed in the epigraph, the transit is conceived and consolidated in a most Borgesian way.
55. Gérard Genette, Figures III (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 243–251: diégese (equivalent to history). In normal usage diegesis constitutes the spatio-temporal universe referred to by the tale or in which the story plays itself out. Genette uses the term in the sense that E. Souriau gave it when he opposed diegetic universe, as the place of the signified, to universe of the screen, as place of the filmic signifier. Metalesis: a transgression that consists of the reference to the intrusion of a narrator or the extra-diegetic narratee into the diegetic universe (or of diegetic characters into an extra-diegetic universe). The effect produced is one of strangeness, humorous or fantastic, and insinuates the impossibility of remaining outside of the narrative. (Definitions formulated on the basis of Genette's texts and assembled in Maldoror 20 [1985]: 142–150.)
57. Ever since the Divine Comedy, in Italian the name Galeotto (Galeotto), character of the Breton Cycle, has been used autonomastically to designate whichever character, object, or situation provokes an amorous relation: "Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse!" (Galeotto was the book and he who wrote it.) Dante, Inferno, v, 137.
60. Ibid., 1025.
61. Ibid., 462.
68. Victor-José Herrero Llorente, Diccionario de expresiones y frases latinas (Madrid: Gredos, 1985), 77.

FOUR. ON "ULTRAREALISM"

1. Both the cabaret and the magazine were founded by Rodolphe Salis. The first issue appeared on January 14, 1982. Allais did not publish anything in Le Chat Noir until 1883. The biography of François Caradec is in Alphonse Allais: Œuvres anthèmes (Paris: R. Laflont, 1989).
3. Ibid., 221-226.
4. This painting by Malevitch was presented in a vanguard exposition in Saint Petersburg in 1915.
11. This fragment from the letter to Arnauld (July 14, 1686) is cited with frequency: "If in someone’s life or in the entire universe each thing had gone a different way than has actually occurred, nothing could stop us from saying that it was another person or universe that God had chosen." Quoted from "Mondi possibili, logica, semiotica," VS 19/20 (1978): 125.
14. Metz: "... ‘the open-ended’ stories of which cultural modernity is so fond are closed sequences of non-closed events. The closure of the recounted (raconté) is a variable one, the closure of the story (récit) is a constant" (Essais sur la signification au cinéma, 32).
16. The term derives from funiste (French): "people who install or repair chimneys." In the figurative sense, funiste, that of a person lacking gravity, seems to come from the expression, "c’est une farce de funiste," "an expression repeated by the hero of a vaudeville (La famille du funiste, 1840) in which a suddenly wealthy funiste boasts of his good turns." Dictionnaire historique de la langue française (Paris: Robert, 1992).
17. In the issue from May 15, 1880.
21. Eco, Limits, 64.

24. Walter Benjamin, Passagen-Werke (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982).
26. "While, because of my occupations and interests, I feel here in Germany completely isolated from the men of my generation, there are in France some manifestations (writers like Giraudoux and especially Aragon, like the surrealist movement), in whose work I see that which also preoccupies me." Briefe, 446, following the translation of Ricardo Ibarlucía, “Benjamin y el surrealismo,” in Sobre Walter Benjamin: Vanguardias, historia, estética y literatura. Una visión latinoamericana (Buenos Aires: Alianza Editorial/Goethe Institut, 1993), 153.
32. Abensour, "Walter Benjamin entre mélancolie et révolution," 221.
40. Metz, Essais sur la signification au cinéma, 30.
41. "Everything is full of sense, he said, I reveal much of it to you but I will not show you all of it, I allow a shadow of suspicion or even of skepticism to glide over my purpose, because I do not want you to conceal in code what I am showing you, nor to make resurge, by your interpretations, a phantom, the phantom of the referent." Umberto Eco, "La maîtresse de Barthes," Magazine Littéraire 314 (October 1993): 45.
42. Borges, Obras completas, 431.
43. The 1910 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica includes the following entry: “America. I. Physical Geography. The accidental use of a single name, America, for the pair of continents that has a greater extension from north to south than any other continuous land area in the globe, has had some recent justification, since the small of the geological opinion has turned in favour of the theory of tetrahedral deformation of the earth’s crust [...] roughly represents the triangular outline that is to be expected from tetrahedral warping; and although greatly broken in the middle, is nevertheless the best witness among the continents of today to the tetrahedral theory. There seems to be, however, not a unity but a duality in its plan of construction, for the two parts...”

44. Borges, Obras completas, 802.

45. Ibid., 847.


48. Ibid., 89.


50. “... the curious thesis of Dunne, ‘according to which each man, at each instant of his life, disposes of an infinite number of futures, all foreseeable and all real.’” Borges, Obras completas, IV (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1996), 331.


52. Ibid., 48.

53. Ibid., 57.

54. Ibid., 58.

55. Ibid., 60.


57. Bioy Casares, La trama celeste y otros relatos, 60.

58. Borges, Obras completas, 434.

59. Ibid., 472-480. “Different from Newton and Schopenhauer, his ancestor did not believe in uniform, absolute time. He believed in infinite series of times, in a growing and vertiginous network of divergent, convergent, and parallel times. This weave of times that bifurcate, split, or are secularly ignored, comprise all possibilities. We do not exist the majority of those times; in some you exist but I do not; in others, I and not you; in others, both of us. In this one, which a favorable chance brings me, you have arrived at my house; in another, when crossing the garden you found me dead; in another, I say these same words, but am an error, a phantasm.” Ibid., 479.

60. Ibid., 499-507.

61. Ibid., 507.

62. Ibid., 571-575.

63. Ibid., 525-530.

64. Ibid., 550-556.

65. Blanqui, L’éternité par les astres, 152.

66. “The palimpsests and codices burned, but in the heart of the fire, among the ashes, there perished, almost intact, the twelfth book of Cícadas Dei, which narrates how Plato taught in Athens that, at the end of time, all things would recuperate their previous status, and that he, in Athens, before the same audience, would again teach this doctrine. ... In Phrygia they called them simulacra, and also in Dardania. “The Theologians,” Obras completas, 550-552.


70. “Perhaps contaminated by the monotonities, they imagined that each man is two men and that the true is the other, the one who is in the sky. They also imagined that our acts project an inverted reflection, such that if we stay awake, the other sleeps, if we fornicate, the other is chaste, if we steal, the other is generous.


73. Blanqui, L’éternité par les astres, 151.

FIVE. BORGES AND GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ


2. Crónica was the name of the first “independent and uncertain” weekly of which he was the editor-in-chief. See Gabriel García Márquez, Vivir para contarla (Mexico: Diana, 2002), 143-144.

3. Ibid., 404.


5. García Márquez, Vivir, 483.


7. The title of García Márquez’s memoir (see note 2).


10. Ibid., 112.

11. Ibid., 519.

12. William Egginton considers in a different vein the theme of “spacing” and “minimum distance” in both narrative passages. See “Sobre el espaciamiento: el espaço paranoico del Dr. Franca,” in Espacios y discursos compartidos en la literatura de América Latina: Actas del Coloquio Internacional del Comité de Estudios Latinoamericanos
17. García Márquez, Cien años de soledad, 49.
20. Wittgenstein, Tractatus, 5.61, 115.
22. Ibíd., 489.
23. Alfonso Cerda Catalán, Contribución a la historia de la sátira política en el Uruguay: 1897–1904 (Montevideo: UDELAR/Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias, 1965), 49–50. I am grateful to Prof. Arturo Rodríguez Peixoto for informing me of this publication.
27. García Márquez, Cien años de soledad, 44.
28. Ibíd., 45.
30. García Márquez, Cien años de soledad, 47.
31. Ibíd.
34. Ibíd., 6.53, 151.
35. Stéphane Moses, “Ideas, nombres, estrellas: Las metáforas del origen en Walter Benjamin,” in Ingrid Konrad Scheurmann, Para Walter Benjamin (Bonn: Inter Naciones, 1992), 188.
37. García Márquez, Cien años de soledad, 45.
39. Ibíd., 49.
40. Ibíd., 316, 322.
41. Moses cites Benjamin as having written, “the harmony of the spheres depends on the rotation of stars that don’t touch one another.” “Ideas, nombres, estrellas,” 188.
42. García Márquez, Cien años de soledad, 337.

SIX. A COMPLEXLY WOVEN PLOT

*This piece was presented in Paris on January 30, 1995, in the framework of the CAS/ISCAM seminar at the CNRS, while another colloquium (organized by the same team), convoked around the theme Noveau monde, Autres mondes, Surréalisme et Amériques, had already given me the occasion, a year before, to pose and discuss these questions.

1. “Objective chance is that stroke of luck through which is manifested to man, still most mysterious, a necessity that escapes him although he experiences it vitally as a necessity. [. . .] it is the place of manifestations so exalting for the spirit that they let filter through a light that could pass for that of a revelation,” André Breton, “Conferencia de México,” Oeuvres Complètes II (Paris: Gallimard, La Pléiade, 1988), 1280.
2. Born in Puquet-Théniers on February 8, 1805; died in Paris the first of January 1881.
5. Ibid., 142.
8. Ibid., 27–53.
9. Ibid., 57–72.
10. Ibid., 201–211.
15. Ibíd., 571–575.
22. Borges, Obras completas, 467.
23. Blanqui, L’éternité par les astres, 104.
27. Ibíd., 100.
NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

7. Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?,” Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie (Paris: 1969). I quote from the English translation published by Adams and Searle in Critical Theory Since 1965 (Gainesville UP of Florida, 1986): “... we find the link between writing and death manifested in the total effacement of individual characteristics of the writer [.. .] his link to death, which has transformed him into a victim of his own disappearance. [.. .] Another thesis detached us from taking full measure of the author's disappearance. [.. .] This is the notion of écriture” (140).

18. It is not the first time I insist on this idea. After its death sentence had been pronounced, the author has more than once failed to resign himself to its own disappearance; its phantom (a revenant) returns, continues to haunt us from the very writings of those who condemned it.


“Of the critique of judgment as a means of combining the two parts of philosophy into a whole.”


26. Ibid., 43.

27. Ibid., 57.


30. English in the original, from “shooting” on.

31. “... for some mysterious reason” was in English in the original, as were the film title and MGM slogan [W. E.]. The original of the letter that Puig writes to Monegal from Buenos Aires, on February 6, 1969, figures among the copious correspondence conserved and classified in the Firestone Library of Manuscripts and Rare Books, of Princeton University.


NOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHT

8. THE IRRONIES OF A BLIND SEER

7. de Man, The Resistance to Theory, 120.
8. de Man, Critical Writings, 125.

11. Ibid., 479.
12. English in original.
16. Borges, Obras completas, 496.
17. Ibid., 498.
18. I am referring to Oscar Wilde, with whom Borges shares, in addition to numerous narrative and poetic coincidences, epigrammatic formulations, ironies and paradoxes, substantial aesthetic convictions, common references, and the same address in Paris.
20. de Man, Blindness and Insight, 110.
33. Borges, Elogio de la sombra, Obras completas, 1016.
35. “Insight” in English in the original.
38. English in the original.
41. Borges, Obras completas, 890.
42. Ibíd., 890.
46. Bessière, Énigmatique de la littérature, XI.
48. English in the original.
49. English in the original; Borges, Obras completas, 868.
50. English in the original.
51. Borges, Obras completas, 211.
53. Ibíd., 425.
54. Borges, Obras completas, 737.
64. Barnstone, Borges at Eighty, 12.
65. Borges, Obra poética, 113.

NOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHT

67. Ibíd., 353.
68. Ibíd., 353.
69. Ibíd., 463.
73. Helmut Hatfield, Estudios sobre el barroco (Madrid: Gredos, 1973), 190.
77. La Santa Biblia, Antiguo y Nuevo Testamento, antigua versión de Casiodoro de Reina, revisada por Cipriano de Valera y corregida posteriormente con diversas traducciones y con los textos hebreo y griego (Miami: Editorial Vida, 1981), 633.
78. On many occasions Borges has busied himself with the Golem. In “La vindicación de la Cábala” (Discusión, 1931), in the prologue to El otro, el mismo (1958), in his poem “El golem” (ibíd.), in his talk “La cábala” (Siete noches), he gives it a most important place in his memories in An Autobiographical Essay and, above all, he defines it minutely in his Libro de los seres imaginarios, relating with Der Golem by Gustav Meyrink (1915), perhaps the first book he reads in German. In “Guayaquil,” a story from El informe de Brodie, the narrator tells this to Zimmermann.
82. Ibíd., 178.
83. Quoted by Sebeok, A Sign Is Just a Sign, 19.
84. Borges, La cifra, 71.
85. Borges, Obras completas, 626.
86. Ibíd., 623.
88. Sebeok, A Sign Is Just a Sign, 19.
89. Borges, Obra poética, 201.
90. Borges, La cifra, 11.
91. Borges, Siete noches, 149.
93. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha, edición y notas de Francisco Rodríguez Marín (Madrid: Ediciones La Lectura, 1911).
94. Borges, Obra poética, 201.
NOTES TO CHAPTER NINE

96. Ibid., 500.
97. Borges, Obra poética, 459. The title is in English in the original.
98. Ibid., 459.
99. Ibid., 167.

IX. SYMBOLS AND THE SEARCH FOR UNITY

1. This text corresponds to a presentation given at UC Berkeley, in the plenary session of the Fifth Congress of the IASS/AISS (June 12, 1994): “Semiotics around the World: Synthesis in Diversity.”
3. Wim Wenders and Jean-Luc Godard follow a path not too different from a century that did not skimp on them cinematographically: Josef von Sternberg, Luis Buñuel, of various angels, both colorful and exterminating.
6. Diablein is composed of dia, “through,” and ballein, from ballo, throw, shoot, hit, fall, or drop.
7. “The first comprises all mere ideas, those airy notions to which the mind of the poet, pure mathematician, or another might give local habitation and a name within that mind.” . . . The second Universe is “that of the brute actuality of things and facts” (quoted by Sebeok in The Play of Movements [Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1981]).
8. The normal use of the Spanish word is that of “meeting” [W. E.].
11. English in the original.
14. “Congressus ‘action of meeting’ from which ‘sexual union,’ derived from Lat. congreri ‘to meet,’ from cum-(co) and gradii (walk). The word was introduced to the meaning ‘sexual union,’ proper to the XVI and XVII centuries and at the origin of ancient juridical specialization of the legal proof destined to establish the impotence of a husband (with the testimony of a matron or wise woman), case invoked to annul a marriage” (Alain Rey, Le Robert: Dictionnaire historique de la langue française [Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1992]).
20. “Chance came from the evolution of the Latin cadere ‘fall’ (chair) taken as feminine, properly ‘action of falling,’ especially used in Latin in the game of knucklebones” (Alain Rey, Le Robert).
23. In the initial paragraph, the narrator, before transcribing and translating Brodie’s report, notes that he will omit some verses of the Bible and a “curious passage about the sexual practices of the Yahooos that the good Presbyterian confined to Latin.” Borges, “El informe de Brodie,” Obras completas.
24. English in the original.
27. Ibid., 190 d, 131.
28. Ibid., 191 e, 132.
34. Genesis 4.1: “The man knew Eve, his wife . . .” The note clarifies that “The verb ‘yáddi, ‘to know,’ is regularly used to signify sexual relations, speaking as much of man as of woman. . . . The same expression as in other Semitic languages, with the verbs meaning ‘to know.’ The initiation to an act covered in mystery seems to us the origin of this use of the verb ‘to know.’” La Bible: Ancien Testament, trans. and notes by Édouard Dhorme (Paris: Gallimard, 1956).
37. Dialogues, 193 a, 133–134.
40. Quoted by Sebeok in “One, Two Three, Spell UBERTY. (In lieu of an introduction),” ibid., 3.
42. Octavio Paz, Árbol adentro (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1987), 34.
46. Ibid. He comments on David Knuth's article on pages 260 to 295.
47. Ibid., 272.
48. Ibid., 264. He is alluding to Scott Kim's book Inversions (Peterborough, NH: Byre Books, 1981), "in which a single written specimen, or 'gram,' has more than one reading, depending on the observer's point of view," 274.
49. Ibid., 279.
50. Ibid., 279.
51. Ibid., 264.
52. Ibid., 261.
53. At the 10th Congress of the Association of Academies of the Spanish Language, Madrid, May 24–28, two letters of the Spanish alphabet were suppressed and there were rumors of a third suppression.
54. Eco, La ricerca della lingua perfetta, 358.
56. Ibid., 31.
57. Eco, La ricerca della lingua perfetta, 90.
58. Peirce, "Lowell Lecture XI, 1866," 503. "In many respects, this trinity agrees with the Christian trinity: indeed I am not aware that there are many points of disagreement. The interpretant is evidently the Divine Logos or word; and if our former guess that a Reference to an interpretant is Paternity be right, this would also be the Son of God. The ground, being that partaking of which is requisite to any communication with the Symbol, corresponds in its function to the Holy Spirit." Ibid.
60. In Hebrew, earth is Adam, red is Adam, and blood is Dam.
62. Continent, both continent and container. This is one of the philosophical definitions of space: the container where material objects come together.

TEN: THE PARADOXES OF PARADOXES

NOTES TO CHAPTER TEN

27. “Your mind must leap from a third-person perspective—‘he’ or ‘she’—to a first-person perspective—‘I.’ Comedians have long known how to exaggerate this leap. . . To see ourselves as others see us. . . This dramatic shift is a discovery.” Douglas R. Hofstadter and Daniel C. Dennett, The Mind’s I: Fantasies and Reflections on Self and Soul (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 20–21. The text with which the book begins is “Borges and I.” It would have been interesting to observe that dramatic chance—in the strong sense of the term, as well—on the basis of the story we are analyzing here.
28. Derrida, La Dissémination, 120.
32. Ibíd., 556.
38. Ibíd., 508.
40. Borges, “De las alegorías a las novelas” and “El ruseño de Keats,” Obras inquisiciones, Obras completas, 718 and 745.
41. I here adopt both literary notions of the two famous essays of John Barth that appear, respectively, under those titles in The Friday Book (New York: Perigee Book/Putnam, 1984), 62–76 and 193–206.
44. Although Borges does not explicitly consider this semantic and numeric aspect of the term, he titles one of his last collections of poems The Cipher (La cifra, Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1981).
45. Heraclitus, fragment 51, quoted in Abel Jeanniné, Héraclite, 111.
48. Ibíd., 353.
49. Borges, Obras completas, 488.

50. Ibíd., 490.
51. Ibíd., 490.
52. Ibíd., 718.
54. Paz, Arbol adentro, 179.
56. The Venerable Bede (672–735) recounts in his Ecclesiastical History the double poetic revelation that illuminated Cædmon, an illiterate shepherd who receives in a dream his first poem and his poetic vocation at the same time. Both, poem and poet, are begun by “The Beginning of the Created Things,” Ecclesiastical History of the English People, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin, 1955).
57. Borges, Obras completas, 802.
59. Borges, La cifra, 12.
61. “One day, a crocodile trapped a baby who was playing by the back of the Nile. The mother begged the animal to return to her child.—So be it, said the crocodile. If you guess exactly what I am going to do, I will give you the child. But, if you are wrong, I will eat it.—You are going to eat it!—screamed the mother.—I cannot give it to you. Because if I give it to you, you would have been wrong and I had already warned you that in that case your child would be eaten.—On the contrary! You cannot eat it because if you do so, I would have said the truth and you had promised me that, in that case, you would return him to me. And I know you are an honorable crocodile, respectful of the given word.—Who is right? What will happen?” Falleta, Livre des paradoxes, 149.
63. Ibíd., 18.
64. This is an expression from Georges Bataille. Jean Beaufret quotes it in his prologue to Le poème par Farnenides (Paris: PUF, 1955), 10.
65. English in the original.
66. English in the original.
68. Borges, Obras poética, 353.
72. Borges attributed to Adán de Bremen the description of a town called Umos.
74. This is the meaning of the Spanish verb meldar: “To study,” “to teach,” “to read Hebrew.” Joan Corominas and José A. Pascual, Diccionario crítico etimológico castellano e hispano (Madrid: Gredos, 1985). Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged gives for “to meld,” “to show or announce (a card or combinations of cards . . .)”
ELEVEN. Vox in Deserto

2. If we attend to the meaning of fall that is designated by both Untergang (decline) and Abendland (Occident), the title of the book by Oswald Spengler duplicates the crepuscular condition. Oswald Spengler, Der Untergang des Abendlandes; Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte (Munich: Beck, 1922).
3. Borges, "Las mil y una noches," 67. Those of us born in Uruguay—whose official denomination is "The Oriental Republic of Uruguay," because the country is located, seen from Argentina, to the east of the Uruguay river—are "Orientals." Borges himself, born in Buenos Aires, identified himself as "Oriental" because of having been conceived in the hacienda of the Heades, in Rio Negro, a province of Uruguay.
4. I am thankful to Salvio Martínez and Jorge Panses for the information about the manuscript of the story "The Aleph," which Borges had dedicated to Estela Canto, where in place of aleph appears mibrab, crossed out in all cases.
5. It is the only specific entry that the CD-Rom of the Encyclopædia Universalis presents in its extensive reference for "Geography."
8. Deuteronomy, ibid., 145.
10. Ibid., 550.
11. This text appeared under the title "Three Forms of the Eternal Return," in La Nación of Buenos Aires, December 14, 1941. The story "The Theologians" was published in 1947 in Anales de Buenos Aires.
12. English in the original.
14. Ibid., 397–413.
20. Ibid., 69.
21. Ibid., 69.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWELVE

26. Ibid., 429.
29. Borges, Obra poética, 512.
30. Ibid., 512.
31. This is the definition of the verb descabalar given by the Diccionario de la Real Academia Española.
32. Borges, Obras completas, 525.
33. Ibid., 529.
36. Ibid., 61.
37. Ibid., 73.
38. Ibid., 63.
42. Borges, "Las mil y una noches," 64.

TWELVE. THE MYSTERY OF THE NAME

3. Ibid., 201.
5. Ibid., 436.
6. Ibid., 436.
7. Ibid., 436.
3. The film One Way Street: Fragments for Walter Benjamin (1992) was produced by the director with the assistance of the Australian Film Commission.

THIRTEEN. REPETITIONS ARE NO SURPRISE

12. Ibid., 381-382.
13. Ibid., 214.
16. "There is no human being capable of saying [with certitude] what he is. No one knows what he has come to this world to do, to what correspond his acts, his sentiments, his thoughts; [who are the closest to him among men], nor what his true name is, his imperishable Name in the register of light. [Emperor or docker, no one knows his burden or his crown.] History is like an immense liturgical text in which the totas and the points are worth the same as entire verses or chapters, but the importance of the one or the other is indeterminable or profoundly hidden" (I transcribe the quote extracted from L'âme de Napoléon, as it figures in the "Notes et variants," established by Jean Pierre Bernès for the French edition, Borges, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), i: 1693.
18. Ibid., 716.
19. Ibid., 720-722.
20. Ibid., 722.
22. Ibid., 127.
26. Ibid., 127.
27. Ibid., 127.
28. Ibid., 266.
30. Ibid., 802.
31. Ibid., 708.
33. Ibid., 51.


"Are you acquainted with Blanqui's astronomical reveries?" Hippolyte Dufresne asked. The aged Blanqui, prisoner in Mont-Saint-Michel, could see nothing but a bit of sky through his occluded window and had no neighbors other than the stars. They made him an astronomer, and he grounded a strange theory of the identity of worlds in the unity of matter and its governing laws. I read a memoir some sixty pages long where he shows that form and life develop in exactly the same way in a great number of worlds. According to him, a multitude of suns, fully the same as ours, have illuminated, illuminate or will illuminate planets all similar to the planets in our system. There are, there were, and there always will be other Venus, Mars, Satirns and Jupiters wholly similar to our Saturn, our Mars, our Venus, as well as Earths as all resembling our Earth. Those Earths produce the same things as our Earth and bear forth plants, animals, and men that parallel our earthly plants, animals and men. There the evolution of life is identical to the evolution of life on our globe. Consequently, thought the aged prisoner, there is, was, and there will always be, throughout space, myriad Monts-Saint-Michel, each one containing a Blanqui."

13. Alfred Fouillé, "Note sur Nietzsche et Lange: 'Le Retour éternel,'" in Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger, 34, 67, 1909. "Those who have studied Nietzsche, including Mr. Lichtenberg and myself, have left undecided the question of knowing whether Nietzsche had any knowledge of Blanqui's doctrine of the eternal return of things. What is certain is that in 1866 Nietzsche knew of Lange's book on the history of materialism. He adopted Lange's idea that the world of sense is a product of the body and that the real body remains as unknown to us as another reality. And yet Nietzsche's attention couldn't but have been attracted to a very important page on Blanqui in Lange's History of materialism. In note 73 of his chapter on Lucretius, recalling the 'eadem sunt omnia semper,' Lange cites Blanqui's work, L'éternité par les astres, hypothèse astronomique (Paris, 1872). Let us remember, he said, a fact in no way lacking in interest. As of lately a Frenchman has newly formulated the thought that all that is possible exists or will exist in some part of the universe, be it in a state of unity or in a state of multiplicity; it is an irrefutable consequence of the absolute immensity of the world, and thusly also of the finite and constant number of elements whose possible combinations ought to be equally limited.' This last idea belongs to Epicurus (Lucretius, II, 480-S21)."
NOTES TO CHAPTER THIRTEEN

14. In 1981 Giorgio Agamben discovers among Bataille's papers five envelopes containing manuscripts by Benjamin (Arcades, Baudelaire, other documents of a personal nature, among others). Bataille passed them to Adorno and he passed them to Scholem.


23. See Lisa Block de Behar, En clave de be: Borges, Blanqui y las leyendas del nombre (Mexico: Siglo XXI editores, 2011).


33. Louis-Auguste Blanqui, La eternidad a través de los astros, Traducción y nota preliminar de Lisa Block de Behar (Mexico: Siglo XXI editores, 2000), 60.

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FOURTEEN. THE IMAGINATION OF KNOWLEDGE


8. He mentions (in Vázquez, ibid., 143) the “work of the German Jew Martin Buber History of Hasidim.”

9. I recall in passing that it was Umberto Eco who founded an Italian journal “on line” under this name, coedited with Gianni Riotta, director of La Stampa in Turin.


17. From Lat. eliminare, “faire sortir, mettre dehors,” of ex-limen, liminis, “seuil.” (one or more unknowns) of a group of equations such as to obtain one equation with only one unknown. Alain Rey, Dictionnaire historique de la langue française (Paris: Le Robert, 1992), 673.


20. Idea—from Gr. v. idein, aorist of hórim = to see.


FIFTEEN. THE PLACE OF THE LIBRARY

2. Ibid., 270.
3. Ibid., 479.
4. This text corresponds to an address given at the Bibliothèque nationale de France on December 4, 1999.
6. I prefer to remit the term to the French “Pan,” where it signifies a fragment, recalling, however, at the same time, that in Greek it alludes to the totality that the prefix pan- continues to signify.
12. “The concept—the organon of thinking, and yet the wall between thinking and the thought—negates that yearning. Philosophy can neither circumvent such negation nor submit to it. It must strive, by, way of the concept, to transcend the concept,” Theodor W. Adorno, Negative Dialectics, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1983), 15.
15. Ibid., 801.
17. Ibid., 472–480.
18. Ibid., 479.
19. Ibid., 475.

22. Borges, Obras completas, 479.
23. The French phrase alludes to responses that are as astute as they are ambiguous.
27. The narrator is referring to Theodor Wolff, Der Wetlauf mit der Schildkröte: Geliste und ungeliste Probleme (Berlin: A. Scherl g.m.b.h., 1929), which he mentions in the same story. Borges en SUR: 1931–1980, 24.
30. Borges, Obras completas, 479.
33. Ibid., 152.
34. Borges en SUR, 227–228.
37. Borges, Obras completas, 468.
38. Ibid., 470.
39. Ibid., 470.
40. Borges en SUR, 26.
41. Borges, Obras poética, 133.
42. Borges, Obras completas, 638.
43. Ibid., 55.
44. Ibid., 461–464.
45. Ibid., 465–471.
46. Borges en SUR, 26–27.
48. Ibid., 204.
50. Ibid., 468.
51. Ibid., 469.
53. Borges, Obras completas, 466.
NOTES TO CHAPTER FIFTEEN

54. Ibid., 636.
56. Ibid., fragment 394, 145.
57. Borges, Obras completas, 638.
58. Blanqui, L'Éternité par les astres, 37.
62. Ibid., 465.
63. Ibid., 270. El paseo Colón becomes “La Rue de Toulon”; las quintas de Adrogué becomes “Triste-le-Roy.”
64. Ibid., 496-498.
65. Ibid., 496.
66. Ibid., 568.
69. Ibid., 289-345.
70. Ibid., 468.
71. Ibid., 465.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid., 468.
75. That natural talent that some people have thanks to which they come upon interesting and valuable things by chance. The word was created by Horace Walpole who, in a letter of January 1, 1754, addressed to Horace Mann, claimed to have created the term on the basis of a fairy tale, “The Three Princesses of Serendip.” (Serendip is the old name of Ceylon, or Sri Lanka.)
77. Borges, Obras completas, 470.
78. Ibid., 466.
79. Ibid., 467.
80. Ibid., 633-635.
81. Ibid., 617-628.
82. Ibid., 623.
83. Ibid.
85. Ibid., 18.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIXTEEN


SIXTEEN. FICTION BETWEEN FRAUD AND FARCE

4. “At the end of tenacious ruminations, he resolves to silence the discovery.”
5. “Judas sought hell. Because the happiness of the Lord was enough for him.”
10. Adolfo Biay Casares, Memorias (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1994), 78.
15. “If the experiment doesn’t fail, this Aristotelian third man tends to differ from his components.” Ibid.
16. Biay Casares, Memorias, 80-81.
19. Ibid., 260.
26. "In that Empire, the Art of Cartography achieved such perfection that the map of one sole Province occupied an entire City, and the map of the Empire an entire Province." Borges, "Museo," El hacedor, Obras completas, 1: 847. Cited in "Naturalismo al día," Crónicas de Bustos Domecq, and previously in the section "Museos" of Los Anales de Buenos Aires 1, 3 (March 1946) (Suárez Miranda, Viajes de Varones Prudentes, libro cuarto, capítulo XIV, Lérida 1658).


28. Borges and Bioy Casares, Museo, 240. See also Bioy Casares, Memorias.


33. B. Suárez Lynch, "Un modelo para la muerte." Borges, Obras completas en colaboración, 149.


38. Ibid., 17.

39. Rodríguez Monegal, Borges: A Literary Biography, 290.


42. Borges and Biyo, "El Doctor Praetorius," Museo, 41


44. Borges, "Utopía de un hombre que está cansado," El libro de arena, Obras completas, III: 56.

45. Quoted in Borges and Biyo, Museo, 41.


47. Borges, El libro de arena, 33.
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