

# SEMIOTICA

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**Special Issue**

**Jorge Luis Borges: The praise of signs**

Guest Editor:

Lisa Block de Behar



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Rédacteur en chef Jean Umiker-Sebeok

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## Special Issue

**Jorge Luis Borges: The praise of signs**

Guest Editor:

LISA BLOCK DE BEHAR

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## Preface

LISA BLOCK DE BEHAR

For some time now it has been frequently observed that there are striking similarities between the specific questions of semiotics and Borges's literary imagination, as much in his critical fiction as in his poetic speculation. Despite their frequency, these affinities continue to attract attention. Nevertheless, it is not appropriate to consider Borges a semiotician, or to compare him with any other bourgeois prosaist who is unaware of — and dazzled by — his own rhetorical skills. Even so, Borges himself remarks in the epilogue to his *Obras Completas* that 'He enjoyed belonging to the bourgeoisie'. His foresight and parody of the prejudiced simplifications of an entry to be eventually found in the *Enciclopedia Sudamericana* (to be published in Santiago de Chile in 2074) communicate the sceptical confidence he bestows upon this kind of widespread superstition, a form of survival that the encyclopedia tends to engage. Bourgeois or otherwise, Borges shares his amusement at his social condition, which is attested to by the urban references to his surname and opposed by the georgic recollections of his first name (more clearly in *George* than in the Spanish *Jorge*). Borges was probably aware of the fact that the reflective quality of his writing and the aesthetic alternatives of his thought are akin to notions elaborated in the fields of philosophy, epistemology, logic, poetics, history and, as well, by semiotics — academic institutions of which he knew how to do without.

On the other hand, if present-day aesthetics, critical theory, or hermeneutics struggle for a position in the widening sphere of an arguable disciplinary topography — if gnosiological definitions question their own limitations and their doctrines — if methodological foundations collapse — if taxonomic doubts impugn the rigidity of inventories that do not encompass the inventions they try to classify — if oppositions fail to justify the ordered series because they criss-cross them — if other uncertainties elude present-day science — perhaps it is then unnecessary to recall that for well over a century numerous thinkers, philosophers, and writers have been reading Borges. After Borges, presumably,

they started to hesitate, interpreting as metaphors the aporias of his rhetoric of indecision, as allegories the paradoxical variations of a poetics of preterition that bridge the chasm between the imagination of the possible and its opposite, convinced, like some characters of Borges's fiction, that time mingles differences, multiplies doubts, and plots suspicions that are ultimately filtered by an unforeseeable net that intercepts and lets them through.

It is true that Borges does not speak about semiotics at any time, but we might consider the fact that many of those who devote themselves to the doctrine of signs talk about Borges and establish comparisons between his findings and the enlightened intuitions of Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce followers produce and describe the correspondences among the subjects they approach, starting from the revealing games of Borges's curious literary imagination, verifying contrastively and without forcing the terms, the similarity of Peirce's theoretical principles, the parallelisms of his best argumentation, with the vision and the ubiquitous writing of Borges, which refer to other multifarious writings.

These same scholars examine the vision and the endless writing of Borges and find in his poetical arguments a sequence of deep coincidences that cannot be ascribed to chance, logic, or the conventional fixations of chronology.

It is possible to conjecture that, rather than being explained by fate, these coincidences and parallelisms are those of an arguable *Zeitgeist* or signs of the times that leads to simultaneity. Such is the case when similar topics are unexpectedly approached at the same time. While a gnosiological instance defines the knowledge of an age, the contemporary relevance and intellectual proximity of the philosopher, that is Peirce, and the writer, that is Borges, may be explained by aspects that are half-historical and half-biographical. Nevertheless, neither the signs of history nor biographical data are enough to explain so many and such suggestive similarities.

The close relationship that Charles S. Peirce and William James developed on the northeastern coast of the United States has been mentioned in numerous accounts. A similar relationship developed on the coast of the River Plate, with Macedonio Fernández (a singular Argentinean anarchist philosopher, whom Borges considered his '*maître à penser*') and Borges's father, who was a professor of psychology, as he is inclined to make us aware in the mentioned epilogue. There were, and there are, some traces — rather more than a presumption — of a relationship between William James and Macedonio Fernández across the continent, although so far records of their correspondence have not been found, except the commentaries of those close to them and the

profound impression made by the reading of James on Macedonio's thought and work. Neither are there any doubts about the weight of the thought of both men and of the amical acquaintance of Macedonio with Borges's father: Jorge Guillermo Borges (another William, as he himself used to point out), who passed his convictions on to his son. The personal presence of Macedonio, as well as the peculiarities of his behavior, were decisive during the years of the writer's youth. These links establish the transitivity of an ascendancy, an influence or a triangulation of influences, far beyond simple conjecture, important enough not to be discarded.

Hence it is not necessary to insist on a disciplinary reason, widely justified by the recurrence of an association; in any case, and to avoid the eventuality of history and biography, I will resort to one of Borges's oldest and sharpest remarks. In a famous essay, apropos the risk of imposture due to the redundant invocation of that which is already present, he states: 'in the Arab book par excellence, in the *Alcoran*, there are no camels; I believe this absence of camels would be enough to prove that it is Arab'. If 'semiotics' does not appear *litteraliter*, to the letter, in his work, this omission would be a coherent hint, albeit not the only one, of the specificity of the epistemological praise credited to it. It is necessary to recognize, moreover, that Peirce does not often mention the word either.

Borges's inventions, his playful modulation of ideas and keywords appear over and over again in the volumes that the semiotic libraries are still cataloguing and in the files that scholars continue to work on. So much so that it would be redundant to describe the clarifying contributions that they are formulating from their particular disciplinary perspectives, provoked by the lucid revelations of a universe that Borges has charmed with the spell of a secret harmony, with the wisdom to which his prophetic literary adventures have given place. In this sense, Umberto Eco's narrative prodigality and its tight links with his semiotic quest is significantly renowned. After Eco, and thanks to him, the consolidation of a symbolic vision is produced that neither scholarship nor current reading can continue to understand as a division — and Borges is not alien to this event. With a strong grip on Borges's insights, Gérard Genette, for his part, has posed systems of analysis, categories of thought, on the basis of his thorough approaches to the writer. They are only two of the conspicuous academic derivations among the profuse fortune stemming from the inventions of a writer who, unravelled, is the origin of an imminent mythology.

Conjectures constitute one of the strategies of thought that produce the striking similarities between Borges and Peirce. Iván Almeida



examines them, discovering that they respond to the equal fascination both felt for maps. He recognizes the frequency of the conjectural activity in daily life due to the extremes of perplexity in the face of the transcendent, and to the speculation as comprehension of the data that the relations between the mind and the world demand. Almeida considers in particular 'abduction', as a fundamental and primary conjecture, the aesthetic originality presented by Borges's perplexity. He also considers the writer's bemusement and his desire to provoke comprehension, without failing to refer to the careful revision of the concept of abduction in Peirce, pointing out its differences with induction. In this sense, he recognizes abduction as the resource used by interpretation, assimilating it to the geographic category called 'orientation'. Almeida picks up Eco's remarks on abduction in order to take on the recognition of the universe as texts, and of texts as the universe. This identity gives place to a cartographic theory according to which the descriptions of maps contain the maps themselves, just like dreams contain those who dream them, ruling out the possibility that something or someone might be left outside that textual universe.

Jean Bessière's 'method', in the literal sense of the term, is unexpected. It has to do with the particular status of Borges's imagination, avoiding the considerations the writer himself formulates apropos his poetics, the critical postulations woven into it, one of the main objects of analysis of his literary writing. Against a tradition that observes procedures founded on the articulations of a specious self-referential cloister, Bessière directs his attention toward the fabric of aporias that question the very condition of the method and its application. In this area where poetics, rhetoric, and epistemology coincide with semiotics, Bessière chooses a critical itinerary. One of the greatest difficulties of this path consists in avoiding the temptations propitiated by Borges's reflections themselves, by means of a thought that appears to revise the one that the plays of the imagination precipitate. Bessière's approach discovers basic aspects of the writer's universe and of literary myths that continue to multiply themselves around those who, like Borges and few others, have been defined as writers/readers par excellence. For Bessière, Borges is a reader who has read it all but who has not read Borges's texts. It is interesting to face the possibility of this incomplete totality since what it leaves aside is precisely the work with which it is concerned. Hence Bessière's belief that Borges's criticism does not validate his own fiction, nor account for its curious intellectual and intertextual texture that reserves its enigmatic potency, giving place to a daily convergence where the human mind distinguishes and identifies reality and narrativity at once.

In spite of the prolonged and profuse exegesis dedicated to Borges's work, its reading continues to cause the same impression of strangeness even in the most forewarned of readers. This strangeness is part of the mystery his imagination reserves, duplicating it. Therefore Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron sets out to examine the traces of the 'unknowable unknown' that, formulated in different ways, continues to be the object of semiotic, hermeneutic, and psychoanalytic research. These are traces presented by language, even in its most codified or current forms. But they are also registered by visual images and their details, a complex vision of the world and its complexity, which transmits and ciphers the enigmatic statute of the sign. Borges's texts do not avoid this perplexity. Considering him as an author of fables, insofar as they not only constitute a genre but also configure the ways of thinking that generate polysemia, Chénieux-Gendron observes the difficult statute of the subject in his stories, the proceedings of fragmentation, of collage, thought, language. These resources preserve the bemusement and animate the presence of the mystery in daily life. The uncertainties, the irony, the confusion between the truth and the relative possibility of this certainty, of erudition as a form of fiction, converge in the identification of author and reader. The latter traverses an encyclopedia so as to corroborate the shortcomings of knowledge, always incomplete, lying on the border between the world and the words.

Claudia González Costanzo is interested in crossing Borges's poetic vision with Peirce's theoretical conception, starting from some logical alternatives allowed for by disjunction. Starting from this figure of logic, González Costanzo observes the mechanisms through which Borges reverts the negation. The way he transforms it into one of the possible forms of affirmation, overcoming the antagonistic limits of contradiction, of the mechanisms of reasoning when they are polarized in a binary form, giving way to a plurality that weakens the limits of definitions. In this sense, she approaches the unlimited depths of semiosis by means of the recognition of an enigmatic characteristic that is the name and the key of knowledge. It constitutes one of the fundamental resources of Borges's imagination and Peirce's speculations. Even in their differences, they share an indeterminacy that turns out to be of special interest, from the epistemological doings founded by semiotics, to the illustrations of an intuition that this discipline orientates rigorously. González Costanzo underscores the attention to those resources of inconclusion and coincidence in Borges's fiction that have configured, from many years and increasingly so now in our changing times. These references contribute to the understanding of temporality, because it is not conceived as necessarily successive. She observes that a reading

of Borges's fiction through Peirce's notions highlights the adverse relationship between successive temporality and disjunction.

Jorge Medina Vidal begins his essay with some considerations on semiotic research and the contributions that this discipline offers to the determination of the 'truth' in a literary text. In Borges's writings, this question constitutes one of its constant features, for instance, finding out the differences between his 'real' self and his 'persona' who is the producer of texts, such as he himself opposed repeatedly. Medina Vidal thus contributes to the knowledge of the unfolding that is necessary for the poetic practices of a tradition Borges did not ignore, and the detectivesque strategies unravelled by his literary disposition. Through the convergence of different ways of semiotic examination, Medina Vidal proposes an approach to the truth of the author, the privileged first reader, to the truth of the reader with whom the former establishes several links and to the majority of the users, who actualize in different times the repertoire of signs that Borges organizes for this purpose and to which he is not himself foreign. This quest of truth is not alien, from Medina Vidal's perspective, to the processes of legitimization. From the times of epic antiquity, it bestows on the poet the faculty of transmitting the song of the divinity who, according to historic posterity, has passed down the power of myths or of beliefs to a less mystical stadium. The linguistic system or the wide landscape of literary quotations constitute themselves into a similar legitimization. In this space the look of the author, the look of the readers or of the others, present the communitarian dimension that duplicates the transit of a semiosis analyzed by Medina Vidal from the starting point of several stories by Borges.

The production and reception of signs constitute a specifically human faculty that, approached through Peirce's thought and Borges's literature, suggest much more, according to Floyd Merrell, than the most rigorous demonstrations or argumentations. His suggestions favor intuition, premonition, conjectures, and operations that best solve the unlimitedness of a semiosis as slippery as it is unavoidable. He also suggests the unreachability of an interpretant that substracts itself from the possibilities of a clear definition, as could happen with other objects that traditional science believes to observe effectively. In Borges's stories, 'The Aleph' and 'The Zahir', as well as in a novel by Italo Calvino, Merrell recognizes the impossibility of eluding interpretation, an activity as unavoidable as is thinking. In a semiotic world such as ours, crossed by signs everywhere, linguistic signs are but a minor part of this profusion of signs and the *zahir*, albeit prelinguistic, does not fail to be a symbol, an index, and an icon at the same time. As such, it is part

of a semiotic process that overflows the reductive linearity of the linguistic sign. Also in 'The Aleph', Merrell corroborates this 'non-linguicentrism' — a term he coins — which does not stick to that linearity. He observes other stories by Borges's in the light of reflections about different processes of communication. Exposed to the unforeseeability of interpretations, these processes make apparent the futile attempt to encompass all possibilities of imagination.

Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu's essay pits Borges's oeuvre against the hermeneutical tradition running from Schleiermacher to Gadamer to Ricoeur. It argues that the interpretive strategy required for situating the Argentine master's work more properly amounts to an alternative hermeneutics, or 'Borgermeneutics'. Mihăilescu's claim is that Borges's work is by and large made up of 'essays', in the Montaignian sense in which the essay is the genre that memorizes the heterogeneity of experience. Thinkers such as Dilthey and Gadamer perpetuate the romantic legacy of the axiom-like 'totality of life' and 'unity of experience' involved in the interpretation of literary texts. As an anti-romantic writer of the nontranscendental, Borges suggests that heterogeneous experience resists totalization, and that the objects of knowledge (love, death, literary texts, etc.) are objective correlates of an experience, rather than givens to which experience is to be subjected. Experience is thus saved from its exhaustion and from being transformed into a fetish. The first hermeneutic reading of Borgean texts is accordingly overcome by a second one. As the first reading leads to exhaustion, its other, the second reading, picks up a nightmare for hermeneutics' unitary experience. The second reading imposes itself, and requires both defamiliarization and a leap of faith not unlike the leap into the anagogical reading of the Writ. In the leap, hermeneutic circularity is overcome; the exhaustion of texts and readers is overcome by 'pure lines' ecstatically relating instances of what Peirce calls Firstnesses. Borges's arch-detective story, 'Death and the Compass', is analyzed by Mihăilescu as a prime example of the leap from the first to the second reading. The *ekstasis* of Firstnesses that make up his second readings leave us to confront his texts as distant others rather than as myths to identify with in rituals of reading.

Jorge Luis Borges's considerations on the question of translation from the domain of literary writing is read and developed by Susan Petrilli in the light of Charles S. Peirce's general theory of signs, with particular reference to the famous triad that distinguishes between symbol, icon, and index, as well as to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the artwork. Reasoning through Zeno's paradox concerning Achilles and the tortoise, Borges maintains that while a translation will never catch up with the



original text from the point of view of chronology, time, and space, it may indeed even surpass it from the point of view of artistic rendition. Petrilli affirms that if we understand 'fidelity' in terms of creativity and not as imitation, repetition, reproduction of the original in the form of its literal copy in another language, the translating text must establish a relation of alterity with the text-object of translation. A translation must be at once similar and dissimilar. According to Petrilli, this is the paradox of translation. The greater the distance in terms of dialogic alterity between the two texts, the greater the possibility of creating an artistic reinterpretation, understood as another sign interpretant in the potentially unending semiotic chain of deferrals from one sign to the next, in which the so-called original text also takes its place. For translation to be successful, therefore, in terms of creativity and interpretation, the relation to be established ideally between the translated and the translating text should be dominated by iconicity rather than indexicality or symbolcity.

Extremely close to the practices of his own characters, Borges includes among his varied literary doings the task of the translator, which is closely related to another one of his priorities, the condition of the reader. Augusto Ponzio attends to the different literary facets that Borges exercises with unusual characteristics, and he reunites them in a unity summarizing the plurality he encompasses. This condition, similar to Pierre Menard's authority, is complemented by the others with which it is confused, in an aspiration of alterity Bakhtin insists on as inherent to writing. According to Ponzio, Borges's knowledge of other languages, and the distance this implies, allowed him to appreciate the limitations of his own language. From this exteriority, natural in a translator who suffers idiomatic resistance and tries to overcome it, the writer leaves traces of someone else's language that establishes its concomitant familiarity and bemusement. The writer/translator shares one and the same attitude, which implies loving what is distant and forgetting oneself. He opts for a textual invisibility that becomes apparent, in Bakhtin's vision, in the visibility of the silence that reveals the author. Ponzio points out the attributes and, according to the same theoretician, they define the literary language and its tendency towards plurivocity, ambiguity, parody, the alterity of the other who, contradictorily, facilitates the proximity that identification demands.

Luz Rodríguez Carranta's point of view is different, since she deals fundamentally with texts published by Borges in the magazine *El Hogar* of Buenos Aires in the thirties. In conformity with her habitual perspective, according to which critical analysis uses a semiotic appreciation of literary communication in a direction compatible with rhetoric,

Rodríguez Carranta observes the double transformation precipitated by Borges's writings. On the one hand, she observes how Borges introduces modifications to his style and thematic options, both conditioned by the objectives of a massive publication in a society accessing to popular modalities and the media with equal familiarity. On the other hand, she notes the influence of Borges's style and the singularity of his subjects on the thinking habits of his readers. Hence Rodríguez Carranta recognizes a function of 'educator journalist', seldom remembered, in the literary work of Borges, she considers above all other aspects, the epideictic and biographic genres, both from the particularity of the same didactic conception but going against the expectations of the genre. Instead of tending towards the conservation of established values — one of the primary didactic aims — Rodríguez Carranta believes that Borges resorts to their forms in order to challenge and impugn them, propitiating the cult of a critical attitude capable of resisting the simplifications of the propagandistic practices that strengthen national and racial determinism.

Through an unusual form of intertextuality, consisting in the deliberate omission of referential data, László Scholz sets out to examine the work of Borges in relation to the thought and the work of Miguel de Unamuno. This omission may constitute yet another variation — paradoxical, unexpected — of a constant exercise of allusion in the writings of Borges. But, in this case, the practice that avoids the mention of Unamuno's proper name, his work, and mainly the quotations he gathers in his writings, is particularly striking in an author who insisted like few others on recording numerous mentions to other authors. It could be interpreted as a form of adverse intertextuality, corroborating Borges's disposition towards different forms of quotation, from one extreme to the other: on the one hand it is possible to verify his excessive tendency to make intertextual data explicit; on the other, the suppression of the quotation, of the proper name of the other, to make them barely implicit. In spite of this absence, or precisely because of it, Scholz looks into Borges's texts to find the clear prints of Unamuno, the similarity of the techniques of both writers, taking care to unravel what is almost a rhetoric of this absence and its reasons. While Scholz is aware of the complex phenomenon of intertextuality and the different modes of its literary instances, it is significant that this has not been an object of consideration or restitution by the investigations of literary criticism. In failing to consider this relationship, literary critics seem to limit themselves to confirming the marks that the author points at without straying from the path he has traced and marked according to his will.

It is still surprising as to what extent the thought of Borges during the thirties and the forties anticipated the formulations posed by prestigious theoreticians well into the second half of the century. Alfonso de Toro turns to these considerations, which are of vital importance not only in the intellectual speculations of these thinkers, but also in the conformation of an imaginary still determining both literature and the postmodern vision. Rarely do we see in the history of ideas and of images a record of filial relationship that the main philosophic and semiotic currents do not hesitate to acknowledge. Their motives originate in Borges's writing, which supports his thought, methods and doctrines. Like those other scholars of contemporary art, de Toro underscores the aesthetics of fragmentation as an antecedent of the tendency toward the quotation of texts already written and of other artistic formulations. At the same time, he finds in this aesthetics the principles of the disposition towards enigmaticity that Borges's work presents and, in his nonmimetic fiction, a lability on the verge of the thinkable. Within this liminal situation takes place the quest for a universality that does not exclude the condition of a purely Argentinean and Latin American writer.

Noemí Ulla is interested in analyzing a dimension that could be inscribed in a metapoetic archive of poetry on poetry. Her perspective consists of collecting those poems by Borges in which the poet celebrates other poets. In this archive she distinguishes different relationships established by Borges the poet with those who preceded him; hence the postulate of four series according to the distance he observes, the definition of the poetic voice, and the semiotic resources with which Borges modulates the enunciative distance. According to Ulla, the first series is defined by poems of open endings, Borges's voice registering the respect imposed by a greater distance. In the second, the dialogue of homage he establishes with the poets brings them together, the voice of admiration gives place to a more human conviviality and a fuller communication. In the third, she includes those poems that resort to plastic, fixed images, almost frozen at the time of the consecration. The fourth series includes poems that do not manifest an homage through figuration, but rather through an intellectual relationship distancing them from Borges's poetic circumstance. Starting from the definitions of A. J. Greimas, Ulla analyzes a poem that Borges dedicates to Cervantes. Like in other poems where Borges celebrates the author of *Don Quixote*, here the relationship between poets becomes closer and Borges ends up by identifying himself with him.

'The inventions of philosophy are no less fantastic than those of art', said Borges and, as can be inferred from the close bonds between his imaginary and the diverse studies that semiotics has propitiated in the past decades, it was necessary, rather than foreseeable, that

a special issue in honour of Borges should have appeared on occasion of the centenary of his birth, something that has been Thomas Sebeok's conviction, as editor in chief, for several years.

Varied and valid are the reasons justifying the profound interest professed by Sebeok for the writer's work. Beyond its inaugural literary significance and the sort of epistemological coherence of its imagination, because Borges and Sebeok share the same time, the endless time of having been, I would juxtapose their affinities in the same way that Sebeok knew to juxtapose, by way of a common "economy of research," the figures of Peirce and Sherlock Holmes. I would observe the exercise of the grace of thought, the play of musement with which both filter imagination through erudition and ideas. If we had to think of a figure who emblemized those rare coincidences between writer and scholar, I would not hesitate to propose Holmes, who manages to discover truth from the vantage of fiction, the detective adventures to which we tend to return, as to a good habit that remains with us; death and dreams are two others, as Borges said in the poem he dedicates to him and to which Sebeok referred with joyful frequency.

Dealing with Borges, however, given his early and still relevant refutations of time, so ubiquitous in all his books, this publication cannot be explained solely by the punctual celebration of anniversaries. The essays included in this volume reveal the multiplication of the curious attention dispensed to Borges's work by those scholars who face the plausible magic of his writings, always amazed to discover in them, with the passing of time, dreamlike precisions which these times confirm. To justify the encounter that his writings foster, one should better resort to Borges's language and take shelter, once again, under the double meaning of the word '*cita*', the homonymy that in Spanish does not differentiate the sentimental or friendly encounter — 'a date' — from the textual citation, 'a quotation', a several times literal encounter from which passions, fiction, and disbelief are not absent. The particular textual properties implied by *cita* and which have not been overlooked by the scholars in this disciplinary semiotic field, present in the writings of Borges an aesthetic relevance not yet exhausted by academic and literary approaches. Since for many years Borges has been constantly quoted in semiotic discourse and in the fictions it approaches, this encounter with Borges, this *cita* ever differed and different, could not be missing from *Semiotica*.

## Note

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vision into another in English. I would like to express my gratitude to Arturo Rodríguez Peixoto. His invaluable help has been, once more, decisive in ensuring a harmonious coordination. Last but not least, I acknowledge the scrupulous reading of Bernadine Dawes, assistant editor of *Semiotica*, whose accurate insights made sure that we did not deviate from the severe editorial criteria, which are among the welcomed 'norms' contemplated in this publication.

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## Borges and Peirce, on abduction and maps

IVÁN ALMEIDA

I would like to begin with an enigmatic quotation:

When I was a boy, my logical bent caused me to take pleasure in tracing out upon a map of an imaginary labyrinth one path after another in hopes of finding my way to a central compartment.

If we try to guess who is the author of the fragment above, it is quite probable that, because of the context, the name of Jorge Luis Borges would arise. This conjecture is reasonable but wrong: in fact, the author is Charles Sanders Peirce, from *The Simplest Mathematics* (CP 4.533). Peirce is the architect of a theory of guessing, which he tried to derive from the Aristotelian concept of 'abduction' ('abduction is, after all, nothing but guessing', Peirce [CP 7.219] says). The other, and the most common, word for 'abduction' is 'conjecture'.

Borges's reiterated recourse to a conjectural way of thinking is well known, and it constitutes a great point of confluence with Peirce's philosophy. Furthermore, Peirce also shares with Borges a fascination for the theory of maps. And both dialogue indirectly through their common references to the pragmatism of William James and to the theory of maps developed by his idealist disciple, Josiah Royce. Peirce was at the same time Royce's rival and friend. Borges (1989/96: 4.433) declares in 1939 to have discovered his theory in about 1921, 'in one of Russell's books', but he was so deeply captivated by it that in 1963, in 'Otro poema de los dones' he thanks the 'divine Labyrinth of causes and effects', among others, 'for Zeno's tortoise and Royce's map' (Borges 1989/96: 2.315).

The aim of this essay is to consider the confluences and divergences between Peirce's explicit and Borges's implicit theory of conjecture. It is not a matter of weaving artificial links between the two authors one loves. Rather, I wish to share a surprising discovery of some family likenesses, focalized here through the theme of maps and mapping as a way to resolve the question of the guaranties of conjecturing.

As we have experienced in the exercise proposed above, conjecturing consists in provisionally asserting something without sufficient arguments. Nevertheless it constitutes, paradoxically, the most frequent inferential activity in human day-to-day existence. Ordinary conjectures range from the assertion of God, to simple strategies in finding lost objects, through the interpretation of texts, events, intentions, and also through medical diagnoses, scientific hypotheses, riddle solutions, and detective investigations.

Should we, hence, admit that human beings spend most of their time making wrong inferences or uttering unfounded discourses? Or is there in the constitution of the universe some pre-established harmony that guarantees the right to make, provisionally, these kinds of intellectual decisions? For Peirce, the legitimacy of conjecturing (or abducting) lies in a kind of optimistic presumption about the relationship between the mind and world. This presumption — which is in its turn also a conjecture — is called by Peirce 'fundamental and primary abduction'. I hope to show that the originality of Borges's way of conjecturing is built, precisely, on the radical originality of his own underlying 'primary abduction'.

#### Outlines of the Peircian concept of 'abduction'

*Abduction* is the inferential activity that, once an aberrant phenomenon is found, tries to discover or construct a norm according to which this aberration can be interpreted as a normal case. Its basic question can be formulated as follows: What must or can be supposed to be true so that this unattended phenomenon can find therein a way of normalization, able to make it comprehensible? Or, more simply: What should be the question to which this result can constitute the answer?

In order to propose a variation on the classic Peircian example, let us suppose that I find on the carpet a small black round-headed screw, which obviously should not be there. This is a trivial but not normal find. Looking around for a while, I realize, say, that my computer has the same kind of screws. The economy of my ordinary logic impels me to search for a missing screw, first of all in my computer. If this is the case, my discovery is no longer exceptional, and the mind can finally rest. Another example, supplied by Peirce: we can find fossils and remains of fishes in the middle of a desert: this is an aberrant fact that troubles the reason; at this moment, and without any previous proof, the inner semiotic mechanism of abduction releases itself in the hope of finding some frame of plausibility within which this odd fact could be declared

to be a case; and thus the conjecture that the sea formerly covered this area produces the necessary satisfaction for reason.<sup>1</sup>

The logical structure of the abduction is, according to Peirce (CP 5.189):

The surprising fact, *C*, is observed;  
But if *A* were true, *C* would be a matter of course,  
Hence, there is reason to suspect that *A* is true.

We can also propose a few literary examples:

I read, some days ago, that the man who ordered the erection of the almost infinite wall of China was that first Emperor, Shih Huang Ti, who also decreed the burning of all the books that were written before his time. That these two vast undertakings — the five to six hundred leagues of stone opposing the barbarians, the rigorous abolition of history, in other words, of the past — had proceeded from the same person and had become in some way his attributes, inexplicably satisfied me and, at the same time, disturbed me. To investigate the reasons for this emotion is the purpose of this note. (Borges 1989/96: 2.11)<sup>2</sup>

Or, summarizing a narrative plot, how is it reasonable to interpret a sequence of unexplained murders, where the first was committed in the north, followed by an explicit reference to the first of the four letters which form a name; then the second, in the west, with a reference to the second letter of the same name, then the third in the east, followed by a mysterious message telling that this is the last murder of a triangular series, related to the 'last' letter of the same name? (Borges 1989/96: 1.451)

Our knowledge is, in fact, made up of habits, and these habits (the ordinary belief) determine what is expected. A problem, therefore, is something we do not expect to find in the normal state of events (for instance, the unexpected triangular closure of a structure redundantly announced as being quadrangular). Such a situation asks for the logical process of interpretation. We need to elaborate presumptions based on a rearrangement of facts, because a problem troubles the thought and, following Peirce, 'thought in action has for its only possible motive the attainment of thought at rest', since the irritation produced by the doubt is for him 'the motive for thinking' (CP 5.397).

Our knowledge of any subject ... never goes beyond collecting observations and forming some half-conscious expectations, until we find ourselves confronted with some experience contrary to those expectations. That at once rouses us to consciousness: we turn over our recollections of observed facts; we endeavour so to rearrange them, to view them in such new perspective that the unexpected experience shall no longer appear surprising. This is what we call explaining it,

which always consists in supposing that the surprising facts that we have observed are only one part of a larger system of facts, of which the other part has not come within the field of our experience, which larger system, taken in its entirety, would present a certain character of reasonableness, that inclines us to accept the surmise as true, or likely. (CP 7.36)

The keyword of this paragraph seems to be the verb 'to explain'. Abduction is a process of explaining something that falls outside our ordinary expectations. The method of this process is presented — at least at the beginning — as a 'rearrangement' of the observed facts.

This perspective is central to understanding the difference between abduction and induction. Induction aims at a generalization of an individual fact, but seeks for facts. Abduction aims at an explanation, keeping the individual facts as individuals, but seeking a theory (CP 7.218). A theory or, at least, a frame. In a rather Borgesian formulation, Peirce (CP 7.196) says that when we are confronted with unexpected facts, our spontaneous reaction consists in 'working up biographies to fit them'. In this way, we can say that among the different inferential devices, only abduction deserves the name of 'interpretation'.

Now let us summarize some conditions inherent in the act of abducting:

1. One abducts when there is insufficient data to affirm or insufficient arguments to prove something that one is somehow 'forced' to explain. This kind of situation is the most frequent in everyday rational assumptions.
2. The abduction thus becomes a kind of 'reasonable decision' that, considering the insufficient information as 'symptoms', rearranges them in order to find the 'best explanation' (which seems to imply that there is more than just one possible explanation).
3. The comparison of possible interpretations follows the principle of 'reasonability' often combined with a maxim of economy of steps. This is why sometimes the abduction prefers to begin by borrowing an argument from a similar situation already proved. In this way Umberto Eco (1985: 168) recalls that the term 'abduction' is normally used in English as a synonym of 'kidnapping' (like in Mozart's opera, *The Abduction from the Serraglio*).
4. Abduction can give some rest to reason, and can lead to an eventual demonstration, but being a pure conjecture, it can never be considered as proof. In Kantian terms it can be said that the very nature of the abduction as intellectual activity can be assimilated to the geographical category of 'orientation': 'To orientate oneself in thought means: when

the objective principles of the reason are insufficient, to make up one's mind to assert, following a subjective principle of the reason' (Kant 1923: 136).

### The primary abduction

A very striking experience for every Borges reader is the profusion of conjectural formulas, not only, of course, when he explores a particular 'detection' plot, but even in his most poetic creations, not to mention his theoretical essays. It can be said that conjecture or, to be more accurate, abduction, is Borges's normal way of reading the world, as well as the essential trait of his *ars poetica*. But the Borgesian abduction also assumes some specific features that we have to consider, albeit only because of the new light they project onto the general problem of interpretation.

There is an exclusive condition of abducting, considered as an inferential device, that is very seldom considered, even though it seems to determine its essential difference in relation to induction and deduction. This characteristic, which becomes extremely relevant as soon as we are confronted by Borges's literature, is the 'recursiveness' of abduction. This means that we cannot conceive a deduction of deduction, nor different levels of enclosed induction. Still, a normal abduction can only be guaranteed by another abduction, set at a higher level.

Speaking more concretely, behind each ordinary abduction there is another abduction (another presumption) concerning our faculty of reasoning that allows us to provisionally accept some hypothesis only because it is 'agreeable to reason'. This means that all our inferences and thoughts start from the presumption that there is a secret, yet fragile, harmony between reason and reality. Peirce considers that 'the existence of a natural instinct for truth is, after all, the sheet-anchor of science'. (CP 7.220)

As a starting hypothesis, this 'rational instinct to truth' is already abduction. It is an abduction of abduction or, in reference to Umberto Eco's terminology, a 'meta-abduction': 'It consists in deciding as to whether the possible universe outlined by our first-level abductions is the same as the universe of our experience' (Eco 1983: 207). This means that every abduction is implicitly set in another more general abduction that concerns the relationship between knowledge and the world. Its formulation could be as follows: 'if abducting was logically and ontologically legitimate (meta-abduction) and if ... (first-level abduction), then this result should be justifiable'.



Peirce calls this foundational presumption 'primary abduction':

I now proceed to consider what principles should guide us in abduction, or the process of choosing a hypothesis. Underlying all such principles there is a fundamental and primary abduction, a hypothesis which we must embrace at the outset, however destitute of evidentiary support it may be. That hypothesis is that the facts in hand admit of rationalization, and of rationalization by us. That we must hope they do, for the same reason that a general who has to capture a position or see his country ruined, must go on the hypothesis that there is some way in which he can and shall capture it. We must be animated by that hope concerning the problem we have in hand, whether we extend it to a general postulate covering all facts, or not. Now, that the matter of no new truth can come from induction or from deduction, we have seen. It can only come from abduction; and abduction is, after all, nothing but guessing. We are therefore bound to hope that, although the possible explanations of our facts may be strictly innumerable, yet our mind will be able, in some finite number of guesses, to guess the sole true explanation of them. That we are bound to assume, independently of any evidence that it is true. Animated by that hope, we are to proceed to the construction of a hypothesis. (CP 7.219)

In fact, the 'primary abduction' also seems to be, for Peirce, an object of abduction. Actually, the assumption that what is 'agreeable to reason' (the formula is very frequent in Peirce) should be true presupposes itself a deeper assumption: how shall we think about the relationship between mind and world in order to render reasonable our right to make conjectures? To this level belong most Borgesian conjectures.

Peirce assumes that in this harmony the relation between the terms follows a strict orientation. 'The mind interprets the world' means that the point of reference is the real world and the sign is the mind: Mind → World. There is no way to invert the arrow, which shows at the same time the ontological priority, the direction of the reference and hence the sequence of the inferential dependence. In fact, this Peircian assumption is always triadic, because the harmony between mind and world postulates a third level, where this harmony is reckoned by the Interpretant. But this is not the only way of conceiving a primary abduction, as we shall see.

### Characteristics of Borgesian abduction

Borges's way of abducting is far from canonical. Particularly, the way he builds his own primary abduction is basically and thoroughly aesthetic. This statement, which has become a common cliché, calls for an explanation.

### First

Concerning the goal of conjecturing, Borges's disagreement with Peirce's conception is striking. One makes conjectures, according to Peirce, to bring reason to rest. Reason is troubled by perplexity and doubt, and since its natural position is rest, it tries, by abduction, to attain at least a provisional state of quietude. For Borges, on the contrary, the 'normal' state of reason is not rest, but the poetic vibration that precedes every assertion. If we reconsider the introduction to 'The Wall and the Books' quoted above, we can see that what is agreeable to reason is at the same time what is capable of disturbing it: 'inexplicabilmente me satisfizo y, a la vez, me inquietó' [inexplicably it satisfied me and, at the same time, it disturbed me] (Borges 1989/96: 2.11). Therefore the goal of a single abduction is not to resolve the trouble but to 'investigate the reasons for that emotion'.

This is why, later in his essay, Borges will state each hypothesis in a modal way: 'perhaps', in order not to banish the fundamental pleasure of perplexity. And that is why the article ends with a definition of the 'aesthetic fact', as if it were the only possible way of explanation: 'the imminence of a revelation that does not occur is, perhaps, the aesthetic fact'.

Curiously, Peirce has a small theory of the expression 'perhaps', which seems built to fit Borgesian presumptions, even if it was, in fact, conceived for Aristotle:

His physical hypotheses are equally unfounded; but he always adds a 'perhaps'. That, I take it, was because Aristotle had been a great reader of other philosophers, and it had struck him that there are various inconsistent ways of explaining the same facts. (CP 7.202)

Also the 'rearrangement of facts' — necessary to produce a correct abduction — obeys to the perplexing aim Borges assigns to the activity of reason: to remain in trouble. Dunraven, a character in 'Abencaján el Bojarí', expresses Borges's voice by thinking 'that the solution of a mystery is always inferior to the mystery. The mystery has a touch of the supernatural and even of the divine about it; while the solution, of sleight of hand'<sup>3</sup> (1989/96: 1.604–605).

Moreover, a conjecture can be recognized as true even though it has not resolved the problem: 'La cuarta conjetura, como se ve, no desata el problema. Se limita a plantearlo, de modo enérgico. Las otras conjeturas eran lógicas; ésta, que no lo es, me parece la verdadera'. [The fourth conjecture, as we can see, does not unravel the problem. It limits itself

to stating the problem in a vigorous way. The other conjectures were logical; this one, which is not logical, seems to me to be the true one] (Borges 1989/96: 3.39).

## Second

Concerning the 'rearrangement of facts', Borges's abduction neglects one of the conditions of Peircian standards. Following Peirce, the decisive distinction between abduction and induction lies in the fact that, instead of counting objects, abduction deals with different 'characters' of one object, in order to determine a 'class' of objects and hence a principle of recognition: 'A number of characters belonging to a certain class are found in a certain object; whence it is inferred that all the characters of that class belong to the object in question' (CP 2.632). This principle of recognition, based on the empirical observation of the facts, which constitutes the first condition of every detection activity (cf. Sherlock Holmes and his analysis of cigar ashes), is systematically absent from Borges's abduction, even when the question is about detective methods of reasoning.

Don Isidro Parodi, the infallible private detective who resolves every riddle without leaving his jail cell, fails when he is confronted with a simple 'empirical abduction'. Let us consider this fragment of *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi*:

El 9 de septiembre entraron dos damas de luto en la celda 273. Una era rubia, de poderosas caderas y labios llenos; la otra, que vestía con mayor discreción, era baja, delgada, el pecho escolar y de piernas finas y cortas.

Don Isidro se dirigió a la primera:

—Por las mentas, usted debe ser la viuda de Muñagorri.

—¡Qué gaffe! *dijo la otra con un hilo de voz*. Ya dijo lo que no era. Qué va a ser ella, si vino para acompañarme. Es la *fraülein*, Miss Bilham. La Señora de Muñagorri soy yo. (Borges 1979: 57)

[On September 9 two ladies dressed in mourning entered cell number 273. The first was a blond woman, with powerful hips and plethoric lips; the other, dressed more discretely, was small, slim, with a bust of a student and elegant, short legs.

Don Isidro spoke to the first:

—Apparently, you must be Muñagorri's widow.

—What a gaffe! (*said the second, with a thin voice*) You have already spoken incorrectly. How could it be she? She just came to keep me company. She is the *fraülein*, Miss Bilham. I am Mrs Muñagorri.]

Parodi has no gift for simple everyday abductions. He is only infallible where empirical acuteness is not necessary. Even to decipher very pragmatic riddles, the only information he needs is about discourses, not about facts.

This attitude fits Borges's theoretical positions concerning detection: the Borgesian detective is all but a 'Zadig'. Borges considers Conan Doyle a 'writer of secondary importance' (Borges 1979: 849) because of the privilege given by Holmes to the analysis of facts (ash traces, tracks) at the expense of pure speculation. As suggested by the title of a book by John T. Irwin, what Borges looks for is, indeed, a 'Mystery to a Solution', and not the contrary.

These two exceptions regarding the canonical Peircian abduction can find their explanation in the original way Borges assumes the characteristics of the 'primary abduction'. Before considering this originality, let us remember two important statements expressed by Umberto Eco. The first is 'primary abduction' in general: 'I think that the general mechanism of abduction can be made clear only if we assume that we deal with universes as if they were texts, and with texts as if they were universes' (Eco 1983: 205). The first part of this statement (universes→books) ultimately quotes Galilei (1956: 6).<sup>4</sup> The second (books→universes), quotes Borges.

Now a second statement by Eco (1985: 16) that contains a hypothesis about Borges's mechanism of conjecturing: 'I will call this mechanism ... the mechanism of conjecture in a sick Spinozian universe'. Borges's universe is 'Spinozian', because it postulates that the order and the connection of things are identical to the order and connection of ideas. But it is 'sick' because its rules are not the rules of positive science, but the paradoxical ones of fiction. Perhaps the qualifier 'literal' instead of 'sick' would be a more adequate option, as we will see.

My purpose is now to revisit these assessments in the light of the paradigm of maps, common to Peirce and Borges. The personal reading Borges does of this paradigm leads to his heterodox conception of abduction.

## Borges and Peirce, on mapping

Josiah Royce, the common reference for Borges's and Peirce's theory of maps, has a very similar position to the one Eco credits Spinoza concerning the roots and guarantees of abduction: the unity of human thought with the external world. His way of approaching this problem involves a special meaning relating to the notion of *representation*: a meaning that

Peirce has also often considered, with reference to the logical treatment of the German term *Abbildung*, 'used in 1845 by Gauss for what is called in English a map-projection' (CP 3.609).

In his essay 'Magias parciales del Quijote', Borges quotes a fragment of Royce's *The World and the Individual*, to which Peirce has also devoted a long review article:

To fix our ideas, let us suppose, if you please, that a portion of the surface of England is very perfectly levelled and smoothed, and is then devoted to the production of our precise map of England. ... This representation would agree in contour with the real England, but at a place within this map of England, there would appear, upon a smaller scale, a new representation of the contour of England. This representation, which would repeat in the outer portions the details of the former, but upon a smaller space, would be seen to contain yet another England and this another, and so on without limit. (Royce 1959, 504-505, cf. Borges 1989/96: 2.47)

Borges (1989/96: 2.47) quotes very roughly this text, gives the exact references, and then comments upon it:

Why does it trouble us, that the map is included in the map, and the Arabian nights in the book *The Arabian Nights*? Why does it trouble us that Don Quixote is a reader of the *Quixote* and Hamlet a spectator of *Hamlet*? I think I have found the reason: such inversions suggest that if the characters of a work of fiction can be readers or spectators, we, their readers or spectators, can be fictional.<sup>5</sup> (1989/96: 2.47)

Peirce, for his part, also comments this text, paraphrasing it in a quite Borgesian way. What he discusses indeed is something like the prolegomena to the possibility of the Aleph — a point in which all the maps of a series converge:

Imagine that upon the soil of England, there lies somewhere a perfect map of England, showing every detail, however small. Upon this map, then, will be shown that very ground where the map lies, with the map itself in all its minutest details. There will be a part fully representing its whole, just as the idea is supposed to represent the entire life. On that map will be shown the map itself, and the map of the map will again show a map of itself, and so on endlessly. But each of these successive maps lies well inside the one which it immediately represents. Unless, therefore, there is a hole in the map within which no point represents a point otherwise unrepresented, this series of maps must all converge to a single point which represents itself throughout all the maps of the series. In the case of the idea, that point would be the self-consciousness of the idea. (CP 8.122)

These texts invite us to consider the question of the harmony between world and mind in terms of map projection (*abbildung*). As a *representamen*, a map is a bidimensional diagram. As a diagram, it can only represent the contours of a land. As having only two dimensions, it needs a third dimension to be considered (an *Interpretant*). This is Peirce's canonical theory. But Borges's style of thinking implies a systematic tendency to a *reductio ad impossibile*<sup>6</sup> of any standard theory. In this case, as a diagram, a map can, by means of a progressive filling up, tend to be continuous (i.e., to become an 'image' instead of a 'diagram'). On the other hand, as a bidimensional figure, a map can blow up until it entirely covers the land it represents, thus abolishing the possibility of any *Interpretant*. These two conditions allow other ways of conceiving the presumption of representation that underlies every theory of abduction.

Let us survey, with Borges and Peirce, some of the possible ways of thinking about representation provided by map theory. First of all, a map is not only an abstract diagram, it is also an object in the world, which can be used, for instance, to hide something on the wall. Peirce, introducing his abductive theory of remembering, imagines precisely a map covering one-quarter of one of Rafael's most famous frescos<sup>7</sup> (CP 7.36) and Royce says: 'Our map and England, taken as mere physical existence, would indeed belong to the realm of "bare external conjunctions"' (1959: 507).

Taking the relationship between maps and territories in a more abstract way, as the relation between representation and world, Borges, too, considers this possibility of a map's intromission in the land by proposing in his short story 'La muerte y la brújula' a 'real' interference of the interpretation into the progress of facts. Since abducting is also a fact, it interferes with the facts it is supposed to explain. At the end of the story, the murderer says to the detective: 'I knew you would conjecture that the Hasidim had sacrificed the rabbi; I set myself to justifying this conjecture'<sup>8</sup> (1989/96: 2.507).

Beside this possibility of interaction there is the more curious possibility of a simple substitution. The diagram can become more and more precise and its dimensions can grow until it covers the territory. The condition is that the map must lie upon the very territory it is supposed to represent, which is always *mutatis mutandis* — the case of the 'primary abduction'. We all know the famous Borges's forgery 'Del rigor de la ciencia':

En aquel Imperio, el Arte de la Cartografía logró tal Perfección que el mapa de una sola Provincia ocupaba toda una Ciudad, y el mapa del Imperio, toda una



Provincia. Con el tiempo, esos Mapas Desmesurados no satisficieron y los Colegios de Cartógrafos levantaron un Mapa del Imperio, que tenía el tamaño del Imperio y coincidía puntualmente con él. Menos Adictas al Estudio de la Cartografía, las Generaciones Sigüientes entendieron que ese dilatado Mapa era Inútil y no sin Impiedad lo entregaron a las Inclemencias del Sol y de los Inviernos. En los desiertos del Oeste perduran despedazadas Ruinas del Mapa, habitadas por Animales y por Mendigos; en todo el País no hay otra reliquia de las Disciplinas Geográficas. (1989/96: 2.225)

[In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In Time, those Unconscionable Maps were no longer satisfactory, and the Cartographers' Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire and which coincided with it point for point. Less Attentive to the Study of Cartography, succeeding Generations considered that such a vast map was Useless, and, not without Irreverence, they abandoned it to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winter. In the western Deserts, there are still today Tattered Ruins of the Map, Inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in the whole Land, no other Relic is left of the Disciplines of Geography.]

In this case, the map finishes up by representing itself. Peirce says:

If a map of the entire globe was made on a sufficiently large scale, and out of doors, the map itself would be shown upon the map; and upon that image would be seen the map of the map; and so on, indefinitely. If the map were to cover the entire globe, it would be an image of nothing but itself, where each point would be imaged by some other point, itself imaged by a third, etc. (CP 3.609)

This means that if the map entirely covers the territory and if it exactly represents each object in it, it becomes not only a self-representative (solipsist) representation, but also an infinite representation of itself. Consequently, it is possible and justifiable to conceive a map without territory, in which each enclosed map represents the next enclosing map in a universe in which there is nothing but maps...

Imagine that upon the soil of a country, that has a single boundary line ... there lies a map of that same country. This map may distort the different provinces of the country to any extent. But I shall suppose that it represents every part of the country that has a single boundary, by a part of the map that has a single boundary, that every part is represented as bounded by such parts as it really is bounded by, that every point of the country is represented by a single point of the map, and that every point of the map represents a single point in the country. Let us further suppose that this map is infinitely minute in its representation so that there is no speck on any grain of sand in the country that could not be seen represented upon the map if we were to examine it under a sufficiently high magnifying power. Since, then, everything on the soil of the country is shown on

the map, and since the map lies on the soil of the country, the map itself will be portrayed in the map, and in this map of the map everything on the soil of the country can be discerned, including the map itself with the map of the map within its boundary. Thus there will be within the map, a map of the map, and within that, a map of the map of the map, and so on ad infinitum. These maps being each within the preceding ones of the series, there will be a point contained in all of them, and this will be the map of itself. Each map which directly or indirectly represents the country is itself mapped in the next; i.e., in the next (it) is represented to be a map of the country. In other words each map is interpreted as such in the next. We may therefore say that each is a representation of the country to the next map. ... (CP 5.71)

We can say that the Borgesian universe is made of such a presumption. What is supposed to be 'the real' is only a 'dream' (fiction, representation) that encloses another dream. There is nothing but dreams, and the notion of reality is only a question of 'relative position': every dream is a dream for its container dream, and the real world for its contained dream, like every map is a map for the container map, and a territory for the contained map. The orientation of the arrows is still valid, but it does not indicate two different realms.

The dreamer in Borges's 'Las ruinas circulares' discovers this system of sliding representations at the end of his adventure: 'With relief, with humiliation, with terror, he understood that he, too, was but appearance, that someone else was dreaming him'<sup>9</sup> (1989: 1.45).

In the traditional structure of representation (Mind→Reality) there is, of course, the possibility of enlarging the series in both directions. For theology, for instance, reality is, in its turn, to be referred to the Divine Mind (Reality→Divine Mind). For the theory of creative fiction, the Mind can create a new Reality (Fictional Reality→Mind). But in all circumstances, Mind and Reality are reciprocally extrinsic, even if some 'rational belief' urges us to postulate some harmony between them. For Borges, on the contrary, there is no harmony, but rather something like a reverse emanation between representing and represented. And this is perhaps the moment to reconsider his 'Spinozism'.

It can be said that the philosophy of Spinoza results from a cabalistic *abductio ad impossibile* of Aristotelian theory of substance (cf. *Ethics* 1.15 in reference to Aristotle's *Physics* 3.5). If it is essential to an infinite substance not to allow any limitation, the consequence is that it cannot be limited by anything else, and, hence, that there is nothing but this substance. The rest of beings can thus only be conceived as infinite attributes (manifestations) of this infinite Substance. Spinoza himself had considered the possibility of the paradoxical condition of a map containing a map. But it is precisely because this presumption leads to the

conclusion of 'infinite subsets', which he reckoned absurd, that he refused the existence of more than one substance (Spinoza 1925). On the contrary, what Peirce, Royce, and Borges are presuming is the acceptance of Cantor's theory of transfinite numbers, which, forecasted as 'absurd' by Spinoza, allows an *abductio ad impossibile* of his own conception of a unique substance: if we are only appearances of God, and if every appearance of God shares His substance, God himself can be considered, in turn, as merely apparent as we are. In consequence, to say that there is nothing but the divine Substance is the same as saying that there is nothing but appearances.

Such is the hesitation that concludes the second sonnet of Borges's 'Chess':

God moves the player, who moves the pawn.  
And behind God, which god begins the round  
Of dust and time and dream and agonies?<sup>10</sup> (1989/96: 2.191)

And the God's melancholic confession to Shakespeare, in 'Everything and Nothing':

I do not exist, either. I dreamed the world the way you dreamed your work, my Shakespeare: one of the forms of my dream was you, who, like me, are many and no one.<sup>11</sup> (1989/96: 2.182)

This *progressio ad infinitum* is also *abductio ad impossibile*: if every dreamer is dreamed by another dreamer, to say that we are all dreamed dreamers is the same as saying there is no dreamer at all. Borges bases on the special condition of Spanish 'impersonal verbs' the following suggestion:

the concept of life as a long dream, perhaps without dreamer, a dream that dreams itself, a dream without subject; the same way one says 'it snows' ('nieva'), 'it rains' ('llueve'), it should be possible to say 'it thinks', or 'it imagines', or 'it feels' without necessarily having a subject behind these verbs.<sup>12</sup> (Borges and Ferrari 1992: 224)

This 'literal' Spinozism, which is not necessarily supposed to be sick, allows Borges to draw new inferences concerning primary abduction, one of them being the abolition of the boundaries between universes and books. The universe is to be read, as a book, and the conditions of its understanding are the conditions of text analysis. This is why the Borgesian detective, to practice his art of guessing, needs nothing but discourse. This is also why, in Borges's conjectures, the search for the 'best

hypothesis' is led by textual principles. What is 'possible' is less important than what is 'interesting':

'It is possible, but not interesting', Lönnrot answered. 'You will reply that reality has not the slightest need to be interesting. And I will reply in turn that reality may avoid the obligation to be interesting, but that hypothesis may not.'<sup>13</sup> (1989/96: 1.500)

The truth of a hypothesis does not depend on facts:

Many conjectures may be made to explain Droctulft's act; mine is the most economical; if it is not true as a fact, it will be true as a symbol.<sup>14</sup> (1989/96: 1.558)

Finally, reality itself (i.e., the universe) is as conjectural as our hypothesis:

my eyes had seen that conjectural and secret object whose name men usurp, but which no man gazed on: the inconceivable universe.<sup>15</sup> (1989/96: 1.626)

Now, when the map takes the place of the land for another map, a new paradox arises, which was considered by both Peirce and Royce. Peirce says:

On a map of an island laid down upon the soil of that island there must, under all ordinary circumstances, be some position, some point, marked or not, that represents *qua* place on the map, the very same point *qua* place on the island. (CP 2.230)

This means that in the infinite specular progression of maps into maps, there must be some point that represents its own position in the land, which is at the same time its position on the map. And that presupposes the abolition of the representation:

and that point that is in all the maps is in itself the representation of nothing but itself and to nothing but itself. It is therefore the precise analogue of pure self-consciousness. As such it is self-sufficient. It is saved from being insufficient, that is as no representation at all, by the circumstance that it is not all-sufficient, that is, is not a complete representation but is only a point upon a continuous map. (CP 5.71)

But since a map upon a map is pure fiction, we are gradually led to conclude that the only self-sufficient reality is the fragile and conjectural one of fiction of fiction, 'a point upon a continuous map'.

This is the meaning of the invariable perplexity Borges assumes to deal with conjectures: reality itself is, for him, conjectural and continuous,

hence human reason has to work not in order to reach rest in a final solution, but to cover the distance between the terms of a hesitation: 'a revelation that never occurs'.

But on the other hand, this presumption justifies the ontological and epistemological priority granted by Borges to the enclosed representation over the enclosing one. For instance, in the short story 'El otro', in which between two versions of the same person one must be declared true at the expense of the other, the winner is the one who can demonstrate that he has been dreamed by the other. Moreover, in an essay about Dante, Borges paradoxically confers the privilege of the correct knowledge to one of the fictional characters of the *Divine Comedy*.

We know Dante in a more intimate way than his contemporaries did. I could say that we know him as Virgil did, who was one of his dreams. We certainly know him better than Beatrice Portinari could have known him, certainly better than anybody else.<sup>16</sup> (1989/96: 3.212)

We can now come back to the implications of this analysis to the question of primary abduction. It can be concluded that there can be many types of primary abduction, each of which determines the legitimacy of the conjectures. The question is, hence, to know or to decide, each time, which is the universe presumed to ground human reasonability.

Borges's universe is a 'pluriverse'<sup>17</sup> that, as a map lying upon its territory, tends to have only two dimensions, but performs an infinite set of enclosed representations. In this map, privilege is always given to the enclosed element. In this map, by hypothesis, there is no place for an external object. It is a sober universe, in which a desert, or a simple line, can become an infinite labyrinth. It is an endless and fictitious universe that does not allow for any final realistic interpretation. It is a universe that is like a book that is like a universe, which only asks to be read. Its rationality is governed by the changeable and indefinite laws of bewilderment and by the syntax of perplexity. One can ask, at the end, whether, in this universe, there is still place for some interpreter, whether, for this map, some traveller has been planned. The answer seems to be suggested by the magic serenity of this melancholic parable:

A man sets out to draw the world. As the years go by, he peoples a space with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, instruments, stars, horses and persons. A short time before he dies, he discovers that this patient labyrinth of lines traces the outline of his own face.<sup>18</sup> (Borges 1989/96: 2.232)

## Notes

1. 'Fossils are found, say those like the remains of fishes, but far in the interior of the country. To explain the phenomenon, we suppose the sea once washed over this land' (CP 2.625).
2. ['Leí, días pasados, que el hombre que ordenó la edificación de la casi infinita muralla china fue aquel primer emperador, Shih Huang Ti, que asimismo dispuso que se quemaran todos los libros anteriores a él. Que las dos vastas operaciones — las quinientas a seiscientas leguas de piedra opuestas a los bárbaros, la rigurosa abolición de la historia, es decir del pasado — procedieran de una persona y fueran de algún modo sus atributos, inexplicablemente me satisfizo y, a la vez, me inquietó. Indagar las razones de esa emoción es el fin de esta nota'.] (Borges 1989/96: 2.11)
3. 'Dunraven, versado en obras policiales, pensó que la solución del misterio siempre es inferior al misterio. El misterio participa de lo sobrenatural y aun de lo divino; la solución, del juego de manos'.
4. La filosofia è scritta in questo grandissimo libro che continuamente ci sta aperto innanzi a gli occhi (io dico l'universo), ma non si può intendere se prima non s'impara a intendere la lingua, e conoscer i caratteri, ne' quali è scritto. Egli è scritto in lingua matematica, e i caratteri son triangoli, cerchi, ed altre figure geometriche, senza i quali mezzi è impossibile a intenderne umanamente parola; senza questi è un aggirarsi vanamente per un oscuro laberinto' (Galilei 1956: 119).
5. '¿Por qué nos inquieta que el mapa esté incluido en el mapa y las mil y una noches en el libro de *Las Mil y Una Noches*? ¿Por qué nos inquieta que Don Quijote sea lector del *Quijote* y Hamlet, espectador de *Hamlet*? Creo haber dado con la causa: tales inversiones sugieren que si los caracteres de una ficción pueden ser lectores o espectadores, nosotros, sus lectores o espectadores, podemos ser ficticios' (Borges 1989/96: 2.47).
6. Curiously, the Aristotelian formula is not *reductio*, but *abductio ad impossibile* (apagōgē eis tò adynaton). What shows that, despite the forced derivation Peirce makes of his abduction from Aristotle's *apagōgē*, Borges, who didn't know Peirce, remain always near the original field where all derived assumptions of the term 'abduction' can exist together.
7. 'For example, let a person entering a large room for the first time, see upon a wall projecting from behind a large map that has been pinned up there, three-quarters of an admirably executed copy in fresco of one of Rafael's most familiar cartoons. In this instance the explanation flashes so naturally upon the mind and is so fully accepted, that the spectator quite forgets how surprising those facts are which alone are presented to his view; namely, that so exquisite a reproduction of one of Rafael's grandest compositions should omit one-quarter of it. He guesses that that quarter is there, though hidden by the map; and six months later he will, maybe, be ready to swear that he saw the whole' (CP 7.36).
8. 'Comprendí que usted conjeturaba que los Hasidim habían sacrificado al rabino; me dediqué a justificar esa conjetura' (Borges 1989/96: 2.507).
9. 'Con alivio, con humillación, con terror, comprendió que él también era una apariencia, que otro estaba soñándolo' (Borges 1989/96: 1.455).
10. Dios mueve al jugador, y éste, la pieza /¿ Qué dios detrás de Dios la trama empieza / de polvo y tiempo y sueño y agonías? (Borges 1989/96: 2.191).
11. 'Yo tampoco soy; yo soñé el mundo como tú soñaste tu obra, mi Shakespeare, y entre las formas de mi sueño estás tú, que como yo eres muchos y nadie' (Borges 1989/96: 2.182).



12. 'el concepto de la vida como un largo sueño, quizá sin soñador ..., un sueño que se sueña a sí mismo, un sueño sin sujeto; de igual modo que se dice nieva, llueve, podría decirse se piensa, o se imagina, o se siente, sin que necesariamente haya un sujeto detrás de esos verbos' (Borges and Ferrari 1992: 224).
13. '- Posible pero no interesante -respondió Lönnrot-. Usted replicará que la realidad no tiene la menor obligación de ser interesante. Yo le replicaré que la realidad puede prescindir de esa obligación, pero no las hipótesis' (Borges 1989/96: 1.500).
14. 'Muchas conjeturas cabe aplicar al acto de Droctult; la mía es la más económica; si no es verdadera como hecho, lo será como símbolo' (Borges 1989/96: 1.558).
15. 'mis ojos habían visto ese objeto secreto y conjetural, cuyo nombre usurpan los hombres, pero que ningún hombre ha mirado: el inconcebible universo' (Borges 1989/96: 1.626).
16. 'A Dante lo conocemos de un modo más íntimo que sus contemporáneos. Casi diría que lo conocemos como lo conoció Virgilio, que fue un sueño suyo. Sin duda, más de lo que lo pudo conocer Beatriz Portinari; sin duda, más que nadie' (Borges 1989/96: 3.212).
17. This term, ascribed to William James, is used by Borges himself in his commentary on 'The Congress' (Borges 1985: 75).
18. 'Un hombre se propone la tarea de dibujar el mundo. A lo largo de los años puebla un espacio con imágenes de provincias, de reinos, de montañas, de bahías, de naves, de islas, de peces, de habitaciones, de instrumentos, de astros, de caballos y de personas. Poco antes de morir, descubre que este paciente laberinto de líneas traza la imagen de su cara' (Borges 1989/96: 2.232).

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## Beyond solipsism: The function of literary imagination in Borges's narratives and criticism

JEAN BESSIÈRE

### Borges's justification of literary imagination

We shall consider the status of the literary work and imagination according to Jorge Luis Borges. An examination of the critical works and articles, on the one hand, and the narratives and poems on the other hand, are the basis for this study, which avoids mingling an analysis of Borges's narratives and poems with the literary thought that Borges's criticism develops. Not to dissociate the narratives, poems and criticism can only blur the very words of that thought, and make the reader unaware that the whole of Borges's work is not self-interpretive.

Consequently, we exclude two stands: first, one that reads a thinking in poetics into the narratives and poems, and second, one that applies criticism's tenets to the literary works. These two stands refer to two hypotheses. A writer's thought is the basis of his work. The work of a writer, as well as the poetics and thinking that the reader can deduce from a writer's works, cannot be at odds with the principles of that writer's criticism. Any counter-argumentation that rejects the continuous link between a writer's literary work and criticism or points to the discrepancies between both, as deconstruction exemplifies, does not run against the two hypotheses. In the case of counter-argumentation, the two hypotheses are still the conditions for negating the link and deconstructing. The two critical stands and any kind of counter-argumentation that refutes them are supported by the belief that the whole of a writer's work is a continuous self-referencing game that includes the writer's *persona*. Moreover, regarding the status of imagination in Borges's work, these critical stands compel us to assume that the imagination can only be viewed as the agency of Borges's imaginary, which makes him able to impersonate any spectacle of reality and unreality.

Against these critical trends, we choose to underline that Borges's literary works and criticism can be read as reciprocal *aporias*. Of course,

this reading cannot invalidate what is obvious in Borges's literary works. Many of Borges's narratives are self-referential and self-explanatory in some ways. Moreover, Borges often inscribes his own image in his narratives and poems; he less often discloses his writing's genealogy. However, he never discloses the reading he made of his own work although many hints of this reading are available. These hints are not straightforward because most of them refer to the readings of other writers' works. Consequently, Borges's literary works and criticism do not encompass one another because neither the literary works nor the criticism complies with Borges's critical tenets: any characterization of a literary work includes the definition of reader and reading; no literary work is free from the particulars of the relation to the reader that it bears or implies, nor is it independent from the relations that are proved or set up by the reader or critic. Borges, the reader, never reads Borges, the writer, as if his literary works did not respond to their author and his criticism could not embrace his creative writing. Establishing this fact compels us to conclude that Borges's works and criticism do not achieve a reciprocal self-referential game. This conclusion is not a surprise to the reader since he can read in Borges's criticism, on the one hand, that the subject's self-reflexive attitude is indefinite and does not restore the subject's identity or image, and, on the other hand, that the validity of any thought about an object should relate to the object as a map relates to the ground it represents: it should be the quasi-analogical presentation of the object. Because of the failure to characterize Borges's criticism as mediating his own literary work, and his literary work as mimicking his criticism, the application of Borges's criticism to his own literary work leads either to an indefinite regressive move or to the reiterations of the literary work's arguments and of his critical formulations. In other words, as the dreamer is enslaved by the dream of another dreamer, the literary works and their authors are enslaved by the whole of literature and writers by the whole of time. Reiterations, or a failure to disclose a specific mediation about the literary works in the criticism, makes reading both kinds of texts an exercise in reciprocal analogy. Borges's literary works and criticism cannot validate one another in an explicit and continuous way.

Borges formulates this discontinuity of his creative writing and criticism by saying that his creative intention and literary production are heterogeneous, and the objective value of criticism cannot be proved. Therefore, literature cannot be aware of its own effects, since the creative intention remains foreign to the literary work's final version; and criticism appears to be irrelevant *per se*, since it cannot account for the whole of the literary works. The result is that knowledge of criticism

proper cannot be fitted to the literary works. The latter remain estranged from any kind of knowledge, specifically the one exemplified by a writer's intention.

These observations can be interpreted in a way that may confirm the reciprocal implication of Borges's literary works and criticism. Literary works are fictions of the imaginary and display its systematic images. Literary criticism is the fiction developed by a thought that identifies reading with a repetition of the imaginary that the literary works display. If creative writing and criticism seem to be exercises in skepticism, the imaginary is the prison of literary works and criticism. It makes the acts of writing and reading solipsistic. Everything that has been written about Borges's mentalism amounts to commenting upon this solipsism.

But reading skepticism and solipsism into Borges because his literary works and criticism do not apply to each other accurately results in failing to recognize that the inadequacy of literary works and criticism should be interpreted on their own ground. This specific interpretation must put the function of the imagination to the fore and prevent us from reading Borges's literary works and criticism as a mere equivalent to fiction and a display of the imaginary.

From a general perspective, reading the discontinuity of literary works and criticism on their own ground amounts to defining them as free games, or imagination's function. Literature cannot think its own effect, although it can represent it. Literature is a kind of performance of which the implied competence and knowledge cannot be disclosed. Criticism is a knowledge that cannot be fitted to the performance of the literary act. Literature is problematic because it cannot justify the knowledge it bears. The open self-reflexive move of the literary work is the consequence of this lack of justification. Criticism is a knowledge that does not lead to any conclusion about the literary work. Criticism's bearing on literature is contingent. Since literature does not display any criteria of knowledge and since criticism is unable to impose criteria upon literature, both are free games.

Borges exemplifies these observations, in relation to literature, by noting that a library cannot be deciphered, and, in relation to criticism, by recognizing the right the reader has to impose meanings on the literary work. Both examples must be looked upon according to their implications. In order to be able to say that a library cannot be deciphered, we dream that it can be deciphered. In order to justify the meanings that the reading imposes on the literary work, we must dream that this work holds meaning and knowledge although it cannot disclose them precisely. Consequently, the free game of literature, which Borges



often symbolizes with dream presentations, presupposes a kind of regulation, as the free game of criticism does since the hypothesis of criticism holds that the knowledge of criticism should have its counterpart in the literary work.

The fact of being undeciphered and of imposing meanings are the tokens of the imagination's game. To be 'undeciphered' does not mean that the literary work holds a secret, but that the imagination's game allows many meanings and pieces of knowledge. The imagination's game makes the literary text a kind of homophony. Homophony implies that the literary work is not without any rule but with many rules, and even changes the way they are stressed. The many meanings imposed on any reading of a literary work are also the effects of the imagination's, whose prop is the literary text. These meanings are also homophonic — their homophonic basis is the very literary text — and in a homophonic relation to the literary work's knowledge — the homophonic mediation is the literary text again. Criticism can neither fit the literary text accurately nor impose its criteria, but its imagination's game presupposes that criticism shares rules with the literary text.

When Borges asserts that dreams are aesthetic creations, he not only underlines that they can be beautiful artifacts, but also affirms that they reactivate various meanings, and can always be understood and consequently written. The literary work of art and the dreams that are its token cannot disclose their own knowledge, but exhibit their changes in meaning. When Borges reminds us that Scott Origen thought that the Holy Scriptures withheld an indefinite number of meanings and that a Spanish Kabbalist wrote that there are as many Bibles as there are readers of the Bible, he does not deny the authority of the Bible or Holy Scriptures, but he regards any reading of them as relevant. Criticism cannot be equated with any final relevance, but it proves itself relevant through the various meanings it imposes on the work. The dream may be an illusion; the critical analysis may be wrong. In both cases, the imagination may be misleading and solipsistic: the man who dreams that he is the object of another dream is enclosed in the solipsistic prison of dreams; the critic who offers one more interpretation about a literary work is enslaved to his desire to interpret. But whatever the illusion and ensuing mistakes may be, they are exercises in imagination. Imagination is a faculty that belongs to our life perspective since it allows many perspectives upon the human act that creative writing symbolizes, and upon human production and the world that is figured in the literary work. The imagination at work and represented in the literary work and critical analyses allows changes in self-presentation and self-reference of the literary work and in the interpretations that the

critical analyses offer. These changes have a rationale although they may seem arbitrary.

The rationale of the imagination is to be interpreted through the paradoxical effect of imagination's game. The more solipsistic the literary work and critical study seem to be, the more commonplace and commonsensical they appear. Literary work and critical analyses cannot aspire to a kind of universal validity, since the first one is unable to disclose the knowledge that is the condition for its performance, and the second one fails to prove that its knowledge applies in the right way. However, both are as common as dreaming or interpreting. Imagination's game allows for a multi-interpretation of its presentation, either in the literary work or in its criticism, and consequently makes the literary work, with its language and symbols, the display of shared language and symbols, and the critical analysis the public examination of the literary work. Since literature is a performance that does not exhibit knowledge, and criticism is a knowledge that does not perform, imagination is, with regard to the literary work, the imagination of knowledge, that is to say that which can justify the literary work publicly, and, with regard to criticism, the imagination of the correspondence between all literary forms and interpretations, that is to say, what makes the criticism always relevant. By underscoring that literature has become mental in modern times, Borges points out that, although literature and criticism are without explicit rules, they tend to delineate the rules that regulate each of them. Imagination allows this delineation and identifies these rules to our life forms: dreams, beliefs, languages, actions, history.

From these remarks, the imagination, in Borges, is to be defined as the faculty that relates his literary work's free performance and his criticism's free knowledge to the worlds that give them rules. These worlds are our very common world that encompasses our life forms. Consequently, the imagination in Borges should be read neither as the imagination of unreality or otherness, nor as the imagination of solipsism, but as the imagination of the commonplaces which exemplify our whole world and life forms. In Borges, the aesthetic literary experience is questioned neither from the self-reference that literary works present, nor from the imaginary transgressions that are narrated, but from imagination's game that supposes the constant agreement upon the life forms that men share. The imagination is ruled by the necessary and free public understanding of its presentations. Consequently, it is deconstructive of all discourse and forms that explicitly display the rules of their meanings and constructions or identify their meanings as secret and refer their forms to cryptic rules of construction. The imagination negates the objective state of affairs and rational language that do not allow us to

recognize the whole of our life forms and private language at once. Because of the imagination, a literary work is not the token of objective or private knowledge but the manifestation of our agreement upon the whole of our life forms. Consequently, literature is a kind of performance whose implied competence and knowledge cannot be disclosed, because it speaks from the beginning the language of knowledge — the language of life forms and commonplaces. Criticism is an act of knowledge that cannot be fitted to the performance of any specific literary work because, from the beginning, it is the knowledge of life forms.

### The function of imagination as exemplified by the narrative

In order to exemplify the function of the imagination in his literary works, Borges resorts to the evocation of imaginary objects that are strange or secret objects — *Holy Writ* in the narrative 'El libro de arena', 'aleph' in the narrative 'El Aleph'. But strangeness and secrecy, evidence and muteness are not qualities per se of the imaginary objects and books. These features are the tools needed to represent the knowledge of the literary work and the relevance of criticism, and to picture the imagination that produces images of the commonplaces that are our life forms.

The *Holy Writ* book, in the narrative 'El libro de arena', is one and multiple, limited by its cover, and contains an infinite number of pages. Through the infiniteness of the *Holy Writ*, the imagination exemplifies the double status of the imaginary object and the literary work. The object is pictured according to several perspectives but with one single identity. So, the book is said to be monstrous, although it is equal to any book in the National Library and can be handled and read by a man who is not a monster. In other words, the imagination presents its object as a world of its own, and attuned to the whole world. This ambivalence or contradiction can be defined as the consequence of the minimal act of the imagination, that is, to impose the image of what is at once according to a rule and against any rule. Under the conditions of such a minimal act of the imagination, this book is what two men — or many men — share after the book is deposited in the library.

In 'El libro de arena', the imagination allows for the intervention that does not deconstruct the commonplace but makes it a kind of happening. This book is described as an apparition and seems to have a life of its own. The apparition and life proper are not the tokens of the imaginary but symbols of the commonplace, which is not only a *locus* but also a current event. The conclusion of 'El libro de arena' is explicit. The

difficulty in reading and handling the book is not the consequence of a hidden or too-rich meaning, but of the fact that the book bears the description of the whole world and the whole world cannot be under control. The imagination does not communicate any kind of otherness but the world's presentation that presupposes the world is complete and forever has been and will be our commonplace. Literary works do not disclose knowledge because they show the rules or conditions of it, which is the wholeness of the world and the common sense of representation. Borges's imagination is not to be identified with the faculty that makes it possible to construe counterfactuals, alterities, and incalculables, but with the faculty that exhibits the paradox of the commonplace. The commonplace is the rule of discourse and presentation. The rule cannot be specified because it allows the expression of all life forms. *Holy Writ* can be defined as a counterfactual book, an alien book, a book that does not meet any calculus, but these characteristics do not fit the fact that the book can be allotted a location in our world.

Consequently, the narrative's stress upon ubiquity, time, and simultaneity does not associate the *Holy Writ* with any kind of imaginary projection, nor does it identify the world of the narrative with any kind of projected world. The imagination shows the imaginary as autonomous and self-developing. Ubiquity, time, and simultaneity characterize the object — in this case, the *Holy Writ* — as if it were one with time and space on the one hand, and, on the other hand, as if it were not in time and space. The imagination presents the intuition of time and space so that they are no longer the frame into which the truth of an object can be expressed, but they become what allows us to perceive whatever is happening anywhere at any time — 'Si el espacio es infinito estamos en cualquier punto del espacio. Si el tiempo es infinito estamos en cualquier punto del tiempo' [If space is infinite we are now at any point in space. If time is infinite we are at any point in time] says Borges (1989/96: 3.69) — and be one with the whole world. Because of the play of the imagination upon time and space, the literary work is always whole and confronted with the idea of the whole. The intuition of time and space shows that the present moment, represented by the book, is the moment of the necessary and of the contingent. Consequently, this representation exemplifies the wholeness of time and space. The imagination does not transgress the rules of time and space — the book *Holy Writ* is handed to the narrator at a specific time and place, and the narrative's timeframe complies with these rules — it frames our world experience and makes possible the presentation of the whole world per se.

Because the narrative cannot be associated with imaginary projection, the imagination links the tautology of the writing — a writing represents what it presents — with the belief in what we can see, and consequently in what we can present and represent. *Holy Writ* is a sacred book and, because it is sacred, it is an object and a sign of belief; but religious belief is not the point of the narrative. The book is the token of the belief in whatever it is we see. Because of the imagination and the objective belief that it bears, we do not have to choose between what we write, present, and represent, and what we see. The imaginary object is a written object, but it does not enslave the reader to this writing. It makes possible a vision — *Holy Writ* is said to be seen. However, this vision does not amount to an entrapment of the reader — the narrator of 'El libro de arena' is able to get rid of *Holy Writ*. Finally, this vision is not counterfactual — *Holy Writ* can be seen in reality because it can be placed on a bookshelf.

As 'El Aleph' demonstrates, no contradiction should be read between the explicitness of these visions and writing, which allows us to represent and recognize daily life, and the opaqueness of the experience — these visions and writing — which cannot be intersubjective. Through *imagination* and *belief*, the writer can illustrate our world, although he can validate neither the world itself nor the presentation of the world that the narrative offers. Though fiction cannot be authenticated by the writer or his persona, it is a pure and truthful representation, because the imagination is one with the word, and the word is expressive, which means that the word is the token of the belief in the world, as any belief is a belief in the world. On one hand, writing is the experience of a quasi-dream. It retains the solipsistic quality of a dream, and expands according to a reflective line that encompasses and demonstrates the vision that is its condition — the dreamlike quality of imagination's representations. On the other hand, both the peculiar vision and writing of 'El Aleph' amount to envisioning the daily and ordinary life of any time, any place in the whole world, and to picturing them.

The belief is adequate to the verbal expressiveness because it is the belief in the minimal identity of the world — the world is the unity and uniqueness of its times, places, events and spectacles. The imagination is adequate to the verbal expressiveness because it neither chooses nor selects any thing among things, any time among times, as the word does. To associate the imagination with the belief allows us to recognize the verbal expressiveness and make up the literary work according to it. Then, writing is freed from the reflexive move which is useless since it does not come to the verbal expressiveness. Consequently, the literary work is assertive truth though it can be compared with reality on a punctual and

temporary basis only — the *aleph* is *one* letter which is seen for a few moments *only*, and the writing of this experience cannot be repeated. The reciprocal integration of the world and literary work is singular, and the literary work is defined as a quasi-happening. Writing, imagining and believing all together are the solution to the inability of writing to proceed when writing is identified with calculus (i.e., with a rule), or the continuous integration to reality (i.e., with negating imagination's game), or with self-reflexivity (i.e., with the imagination of writing only).

Because the imagination is identified with the exhibition of life forms in Borges's narratives, and because it cuts across the function of the literary imagination that has been in use for the past two centuries, it is possible to bypass the limits of poetics and aesthetics related to his works. Finally, this results in negating the limits imposed by the imagination of the imaginary, the imagination of realism, and the imagination of writing. These imaginations are kinds of limitations, because each presents or supposes a self-contained world, where everything is given from the start. In the imaginary, everything is possible in extension but nothing in comprehension — we are free to imagine an infinite number of lives and situations, but they are all included in the set of possibilities that the imaginary defines. The imagination of realism excludes any representation or possibilities that are not of this reality. The imagination of writing characterizes writing as one kind of possible world, and so results in challenging the creative process.

Borges does not exclude the representations of these imaginations in his narratives. 'El libro de arena' and 'El Aleph' can be read according to the imagination of the imaginary, the imagination of realism, and the imagination of writing. However, this does not mean that the imagination in Borges's works is inconsistent. Borges plays with these various kinds of imaginations in order to show that nothing is more enigmatic and uncertain than our present time, because, while we can be sure of what we imagine, we always remain uncertain about what we live. This does not mean that our life is cryptic but that reality can have no possible bearing: it can be a happening. The only way to demonstrate this feature of reality is to demonstrate that the imagination of the imaginary, the imagination of realism, and the imagination of writing are inadequate to any particular image of this happening. *Holy Writ* cannot account for the reality in which it appears, although it is related to the whole world of this reality; neither can 'El Aleph' although it discloses daily life.

Consequently, Borges's imagination in the narratives is the imagination of reality in a very specific way. Since reality is a kind of happening that Borges's characters cannot foresee, and since this inability does not prevent them from being aware of the world and its wholeness,



imagination is a schema that provides the representation of the means to obtain the image of the contradictory concept of reality — contradictory because the wholeness of the world does not equate with any whole set of possibilities, and appears extensive and comprehensive at once. This is exemplified by 'La biblioteca de Babel': the library cannot be deciphered and, in order to say that the library cannot be deciphered, we must dream that it can be deciphered. Put in other words, imagination should be characterized as purely intentional: we can neither draw nor picture nor understand what we imagine in this way. The pure intentionality of the imagination enables the narratives to tackle reality's contradiction — the world's wholeness does not equate with any whole set of possibilities — and, at the same time, to represent any reality and its happening. The pure intentionality accounts for the dreamlike character of the narratives, and the ability to tackle reality's contradictions makes useless any reference to solipsism. The paradox of a literary text — the fact that the implied competence and knowledge it bears cannot be disclosed — is a paradox of the imagination, since imagination is only a schema. Imagination is not dissociated from the belief in what we see or represent, because it is the schema that allows representations and images of what cannot be represented per se.

### The function of imagination in Borges's criticism

Reminding us of Plato's characterization of books — 'los libros son como las estatuas; parecen seres vivos pero cuando se les pregunta algo, no saben contestar' [books are like statues; they look like living beings, but if asked something they cannot reply] — Borges (1989/96: 3.267–268) points to the public muteness and evidence of books: although they are manifest, they are not active in public communication. Consequently, literary criticism does not aim at interpreting books, but at imitating their public character and at making this imitation the means to experience and show the objective spirit of human kind. This aim entails seeing the various literatures as a unity — the unity of the public space that literary works constitute — and defines reading not as a response to the literary works, but as an act of construing this public space in time. Borges knows that this act is our mind's act, specifically, the act of the imagination that connects books together in order to point to the public space. In order to demonstrate the mind's act and to prove that reading equates with experiencing the public space in history, Borges exhibits the contradictions of any literary criticism and defines them as the ways through which we become aware of the mind's act. Consequently, literary criticism is

different from any reflexive move of the reader and from any entrapment by literature or literary hermeneutics. It shows that man cannot live without believing in himself. Literary criticism is the imagination of this belief, which allows us to affirm the permanent exercise of the objective human spirit. The objective human spirit responds to all books and makes manifest the public sphere that books exemplify.

To interpret works and literatures according to the unity of literature, and to put them under the aegis of the continuous similarity of literary creation, as Borges does, means that criticism utilizes two representations simultaneously, that of realism, which makes the reading of literature an archetypal reading, and that of nominalism, which defines each individual work as inclusive of every detail of the world and of every literary work. Moreover, readings and the samples of reading that literary criticism offers throughout history presuppose the experience and awareness of time. The unity of literature and the continuous similarity of literary creation do not prevent the writing of criticism from being a time-bound process. It comes after literature and puts the literary works in time since it changes the literary work although it does not alter the texts' words. Consequently, the duality of realism and nominalism that characterizes literary criticism must be complemented by the duality of the time experience that literary criticism brings to the foreground — the experience of eternity and the experience of the present moment.

Because of this duality of the time experience it presupposes, literary criticism attains a kind of contradiction. Negating literature's eternity should entail ignoring many books. Identifying literature with only its eternity should equate disregarding the literary works' diversity because the eternity of literature commands that literature should be thought about only according to its genres. Practicing literary criticism and reading make us perceive the literary work in time and space, and consequently refer to the eternity and presentness at once, while the literary work, as exemplified by 'El libro de arena' and *Holy Writ*, represents its object and time at once. To say that literary criticism is knowledge and competence without performance means that it can never make the eternity and presentness of literature a single spectacle, as the literary work makes one spectacle with the actions, subjects, and objects it represents.

Literary criticism can only imagine this spectacle but cannot be it. When, quoting Paul Valéry, Borges writes that the history of literature should be the story of the mind, he repeats, from the perspective of literary criticism, that literature has become mental in modern times, and he points out the fact that literary criticism should not be the study of the literary works but of literature's eternity. However, eternity is

invisible and literary archetypes are not revealed to men — 'Acaso un arquetipo no revelado aún a los hombres, un objeto eterno (para usar la nomenclatura de Whitehead), esté ingresando paulatinamente en el mundo' [Perhaps an archetype as yet unrevealed to men, an eternal object (to use Whitehead's nomenclature), is gradually entering the world] (Borges 1960: 30) — the only way to outline archetypes is to compare literary works, although no rule for comparison is available since archetypes are not revealed. Consequently, comparing literature is an act of the imagination that is time bound in two ways: it scans various periods of history and it confirms man's sense of time. If one compares the time status of the literary work to the time status of criticism, both appear symmetrical. The literary work anaesthetises empirical time, because imagination is a schema. Literary criticism points to empirical time while outlining archetypes. The critic knows that, although the aesthetic experience is assertive and confirms the autonomy of the literary work, this work is also defined by its situation in the history of literature and in the history of its reading. In other words, and contrary to literary imagination that in literary work neither negates the multiplicity of logos through the unity of logos, nor negates the unity through the multiplicity, the critical reading cannot read logos into the various logoi. With regard to the critical reading, the logos is neither its reason nor its common place. The critical reading can only imagine logos and define it as the ideal that commands its process.

Consequently, the critical imagination does not stop drawing continuities because the critical comparison cannot make the archetypes definitely manifest. Instead of recovering logos, it mediates between time, history, and archetypes in a provisional way. It presupposes that human language and creations are historical, and that man's historical consciousness is the reading's only commonplace. The critical imagination is akin to the very experience of history, as this experience is defined by Borges (1960: 162): 'la historia universal es una Escritura Sagrada que desciframos y escribimos inciertamente, y en la que también nos escriben' [universal history is a Holy Book that we decipher and write with uncertainty, and which is also written to us.] History's paradox — history makes man and man makes history, it is written and man writes it — is the paradox of the critical imagination. This imagination deciphers the archetypes and also writes them in history: 'El poema *'Fears and Scruples'* de Robert Browning profetiza la obra de Kafka, pero nuestra lectura de Kafka afina y desvía sensiblemente nuestra lectura del poema' (1960: 147–148) [Browning's poem *'Fears and Scruples'* prophesizes Kafka's work, but our reading of Kafka tunes up and diverts sensibly our reading of the poem].

From this perspective the cult of books to which intertextual reading is akin, should not be interpreted as the consequence of recognizing the ideal of the logos, but as the recognition of the very material required to construe the reading in history. Books are the only material that makes the coagulation of individuals' and groups' experiences possible in history. Consequently, for the critical imagination books are monuments, contrary to the literary imagination that identifies the book with instability, and to the Ancients who characterized the book as antecedent to conversations, and to religions that identify it as God's creation. It is why, for the critical reading, the book is a form that is solid and allows the meeting of the writer and the reader. This meeting is the basis for the critical imagination and for the common spirit shared by the writer and the reader, and objectified only through the form of the literary work. Menard writes the *Quixote* again, which does not mean that Menard duplicates it, but that the very writing of the work is the single commonplace for two distinct thoughts that bear specific historical features. This commonplace does not suppose any hermeneutic continuity but writing's stability, which is the only representation of the common spirit shared by the writer and reader.

Strikingly, even when the literary work offers an explicit representation of the world's ubiquity and wholeness as does Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, the critic is not freed from his time and history predicament. Borges's (1989/96: 3.343) *Nueve ensayos dantescos* is not a commentary on the *Divine Comedy*'s fiction and its 'lámina de ámbito universal', but a historical study of the work's meaning that remains enigmatic not because Dante misconceived his characters and the theological implications of his work, but because 'Un libro es las palabras que lo componen' [a book is the words that make it up] (Borges 1989/96: 3.353), which are the only medium of meaning. The work's words are to be read verbatim because the work does not respond to the reader whatever its imagination's span and effects are: the reader remains a stranger to the wholeness hinted at by the work unless he conceives by himself, as Borges does in the preface to the *Nueve ensayos*, a world that is complete. Failing this conception, literary criticism can only be the picture of the work's reading. This picture does not display the hermeneutic debates about the text, since the work means only what it means. It expresses the objective spirit that the various literary works and their readings constitute:

'Un gran libro como la *Divina Comedia* no es el aislado o azaroso capricho de un individuo; muchos hombres y muchas generaciones tendieron hacia él. Investigar sus precursores no es incurrir en una miserable tarea de carácter jurídico o

policia; es indagar los movimientos, los tanteos, las aventuras, las vislumbres y las premoniciones del espíritu humano'.

[A great book like *The Divine Comedy* is not the isolated or random whimsy of an individual; many men and many generations have tended towards it. To investigate its precursors is not to incur in a mundane, juridical or police-like task; it is to look into the movements, the attempts, the adventures, the insights and the premonitions of the human spirit.] (Borges 1989/96: 3.363)

The critical comparison does not disclose a genre or archetype but the activity of the human mind. The critical imagination mediates the various works and defines them as reciprocal mediations in history. Against the imagination of wholeness and the ubiquity of the literary work, the critical imagination delineates the continuous action of the human mind in history.

Finally, the functions of these two imaginations, narrative and criticism, allow us to explain why Borges does not construe his criticism as a reflection of his literary works. The imagination of narratives is devoted to representing the presence and uncertainty of reality — which means that reality is defined as the constant possibility of a future that we cannot prophesize and as an expectation we cannot specify. The imagination of criticism is devoted to the definition of the mind's ongoing activity in time and history — which means that the mind does not expect anything new since it is the unity of thinking. The imagination of narratives offers us the belief in what we see and represent and the imagination of criticism offers us the belief in what we say and write. Each of these beliefs is a way to objectify our belief in our world, our mind, and our spirit. Although these beliefs are connected to dreaming and to the subject's reading power, Borges suggests they are discovered, since the first belief allows man to recognize reality and the second one enables him to identify his own mind's act. Consequently, Borges' criticism cannot reflect his literary works since such a reflection would miss the rationale of criticism and narratives: although the belief cannot be grounded on the exactness of a piece of reasoning, it is necessary to life, because it is the belief in the daily life and its spectacles and in the public sphere that should be associated with the human mind.

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## The feeling of strangeness and the 'unknown relation'

JACQUELINE CHÉNIEUX-GENDRON

Writing around the work of Borges, writing on the work today, may appear to be an act of infinite pretention. I would not be attempting it but for the friendly insistence of Lisa Block de Behar, who has published not one but several major books on this body of work that is so emblematic of our century.<sup>1</sup> It is she who pursues me through the Thebaid, where we taste the pleasure of reading without having to sort out the diverse flavors.<sup>2</sup>

Since I am trying to rediscover the origin of this taste, I shall speak of an *inexhaustible* text. Not in how it offers a thematic of the inexhaustible (the library, sand, the labyrinth), but in how, from a poetic and semiotic perspective, the reader must always sniff out meaning, or, to put it as Dante would, must always pursue the 'fragrance' of that wild beast that haunts language: at the heart of Latin, Dante tells us, is the odor of the Vulgate. One recalls the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, in which Dante states (and in Latin, no less!) that he must choose the maternal language, which is 'at the heart' of the fourteen Italian languages. But he must invent that language from these fourteen others, and hunt down his proper language as one would hunt down a panther whose scent one picks up in the woods, unforeseen, labile, ever elsewhere, like the sense of smell itself:

Now that we have hunted among the wooded hills and meadows of Italy without discovering the panther we are stalking, let us seek its traces in a more rational way, so that with ingenuity and zeal we may entrap in our net that animal who scatters its fragrance everywhere and shows itself nowhere. (Dante 1981: 73)

Poetic language flees through the Italian forest, because it has its roots in maternal language, the most archaic, most noble language — most noble because it is the oldest, although it is called the vulgar tongue:

I will proceed to define the vernacular as the language which children gather from those around them when they first begin to articulate words; or more

briefly, that which we learn without any rules at all by imitating our nurses. (Dante 1981: 43)

The *scent* of maternal language and the *inexhaustible* character of language, such are the poles around which I shall seek to translate my impressions of reading.

My impression corresponds, as I see it, with what Guy Rosolato means, in a more conceptualized way, by 'the unknown relation'.<sup>3</sup> His idea derives its meaning from the contemporary psychoanalytic notion, itself post-Freudian, of the 'object-relation': the term 'that designates the mode of relation of the subject with his world, the relation that is the complex and total result of a certain organization of personality, of a more or less phantasmatic apprehension of objects, and of such privileged types of defense' (Laplanche and Pontalis 1976 [1968]).<sup>4</sup> The contemporary application of the term 'object-relation' modifies the equilibrium that Freud had established, in a perhaps too rational way, between the source of a drive, its object, and its aim. The source, or organic substrate, passes cleanly to the second plane, and the very notion of aim fades in connection to that of relation:

What becomes the center of interest in 'oral object relation', for example, are the avatars of the incorporation and the means by which it finds itself again as signification and as phantasm prevalent at the heart of all relations of the subject to the world. As for the status of the object ... [one would have oriented oneself] rather toward a conception of a typical object for each mode of relation (one speaks of oral objects, anal objects, etc.). (Laplanche and Pontalis 1976 [1968]: 406)

Rosolato, however, looks to explore a field other than the one in which symbolic organization develops in relation to the father — notably the object-relation. He is specifically interested in the interaction between the mother and the *unknown* — an infinitely broader term than that which indicates the illusory object — and more precisely the 'perspective object', which substitutes for and embodies the maternal penis in the phantasm of the child. As André Green put it, in a synthesizing article, Rosolato builds his thought on the Lacanian triad language/father/symbolic, but he further constructs a sort of symmetrical triad, which is the inverse or complement of the Lacanian triad (Green describes it as its 'pendant'), and this is the triad mother/death/unknown.

From that moment on, the 'perspective object' — the concept elaborated upon by Rosolato, a 'highly polysemic' concept, as Green described it, and an elusive representation that continues to evade one's grasp — is an interface between antinomial fields: visible/invisible,

known/unknown. Ultimately, the perspective object marks the conclusive location of the visual, united with the maternal order of things, and perhaps its archaic primacy over the other senses.<sup>5</sup>

I would like to reveal the marks and traces of this *unknowable unknown*, and to outline its semiotic, specifically in Borges's work because the inexhaustible interrogation that one finds in Borges's texts on art and on the inexhaustibility of man is not a vague and imprecise *lamento*. Let's not forget that the *unrecognized* (the knowable unknown) is often best perceived by critics: as for French criticism on this theme, it was Didier Anzieu who listed in an acutely pertinent article (1971: 177–210), following Gérard Genette, the 'systems of identification' that the tales follow.<sup>6</sup> All the processes of repetition, symmetry (or more precisely 'double specular symmetry'<sup>7</sup>), solipsism, the horror of death and its corollary, the pursuit of the divine, are tied together in a knot, which is the central problem of writing: 'Every person is a system of permutation of many persons'. In the tale 'The Immortal', Homer, as any creator, created a hero in his image: he calls him 'outis' [nobody] as Ulysses describes himself to Polyphemus. 'Soon, like Ulysses, I shall be Nobody; soon, I shall be all men — I shall be dead' (Borges 1998: 194).<sup>8</sup> Anzieu comments: 'For the same reason the author, who is nobody, is understood by so much of the world because it is he who can make everyone understand that man is, like him, nobody and everybody at the same time' (1971: 185).

Yet the conception of *time and body* that underlies this thematic and these principles of poetry — and Didier Anzieu makes this perfectly clear — has a side that, far from attaching itself exclusively to the Oedipus complex, is also the concern of circular ties to the maternal image (Anzieu 1971: 192, 198). Anzieu further remarks, in his preface to the 1989 French translation of Julio Woscoboinik's *Le Secret de Borges*, that 'the narcissistic dimension is simultaneously preponderant, natural, and authentic', in contrast to the Oedipal themes, which are more exceptional, more affected, and more artificial. This is the first trail that I would like to follow, in wondering what 'odor' of Borges's language — what signs and tracks, what semiotic, in short — we can define by using the conceptual networks adopted from Rosolato, understanding perfectly well that I am using them less as elements of a body of psychoanalytic doctrine than as the horizon of a certain psychoanalytic reflection bearing on culture and the relationship to knowledge. In the present essay I shall limit myself to citing Borges the prose author, since I am not sufficiently fluent in Spanish to risk a similar reading of his poetry.

First, however, I would like to emphasize the unique position of the subject of writing in Borges's narratives. One could say that the shiftings

of history and of the stories the author indulges in come under the floating aesthetic of the 'true-lie' (to recapture Aragon's expression), or of the delicate work of forgery, to use the term that Borges himself used when comparing his 'Universal History of Iniquity' [*Historia universal de la infamia*] to Marcel Schwob's *Vies imaginaires*:

In my *Universal History*, I did not want to repeat what Marcel Schwob had done in his *Imaginary Lives*. He had invented biographies of real men about whom little or nothing is recorded. I, instead, read up on the lives of known persons and then deliberately varied and distorted them according to my own whims. (Borges 1978: 239)

But this, however, is not quite the difference between Schwob and Borges. For both, the issue is how to focus the look and memory of the reader through the signifying anecdote. For both, the problem lies in writing biographies in which the reference of detail is nonexistent or unverifiable. From that moment on, the biographer must 'choose from among the realms of human possibilities that which is unique'. In his preface to *Vies imaginaires*, Marcel Schwob clarifies the biographer's actual responsibility and his awesome freedom, in which a sense of humor and a taste for the strange crystallize. This choice, at the heart of a 'chaos' of possibilities among distinctly human psychological traits, is made in the most irrational way, and is based on whatever it can dream up — a taste for the bizarre, or a taste for the unique. Schwob brilliantly notes:

The ideas of great men are the common patrimony of humanity: each one of them really only possesses his own peculiarities ... Histories remain mute on these things. In the collection of raw materials that records provide, there are not many remarkable and inimitable breaks ... Plutarch's genius sometimes makes him an artist; but he wasn't always able to understand the essence of his own art, since he thought in terms of 'parallels' — as if men properly described in all their details could resemble each other! (Schwob 1979: 172–173)<sup>9</sup>

And in the preface to *Roi au masque d'or*, Schwob, speaking through a character from another world, insists on the meager assistance that psychological analysis can provide, an idea that converges with his comments on the notion of choice:

Although your psychologists have divided the passions into light swatches of extremely delicate nuances, their work seems restricted, in short, to a few acts necessary for the conservation of your species. (Schwob 1979: 41)

A comparison with Aragon's poetics is profitable: it leads to a better understanding not only of the floating position of the writer, but also of

the connection to the visual, something obvious in Borges, but hidden in Aragon. The latter — in effect recapturing the poetic reflections of the Russian formalist V. Kaverine, who analyzed all the opening sentences of Chekov's narratives<sup>10</sup> — emphasizes both the beginning of the signifier (the *incipit*, which imposes itself on the writer as a necessary syntagma<sup>11</sup>) and the rewriting of literature. The example that Aragon provides, however, allows us to understand that 'rewriting' is, above all, a mechanism that infuses the audible dynamic with visual elements. When Fénelon (1987 [1699]) tells the story of Telemachus to his student the Duke of Burgundy, he writes: 'Calypso cannot be consoled after the departure of Ulysses. In her grief, she is unhappy at being immortal'.<sup>12</sup> Aragon recovers the same sounds of the beginning, but enriches them with interpolated clauses which generate visualizable images:

Like a seashell on the beach, Calypso disconsolately repeated the name of Ulysses to the foam that carries ships afar, unmindful in her sorrow of her immortal self.<sup>13</sup> (Aragon 1997: 22)

The connection that Borges established between film (a visual art if there is one) and biography is well known. The title of the article he published in *La Prensa* in 1929 captures it perfectly: '*El cinematógrafo, el biógrafo*' [The cinematograph, the biograph]. Thus, as he sees them, Josef von Sternberg's 'cinematographic novels' [las novelas cinematográficas] are characterized by the editing of their significant moments, as well as the 'long-range development or sequencing of laconic details' (Borges 1974: 221).<sup>14</sup> If editing is a matter of choice, which is moreover more metaphoric or emblematic than metonymic, then, focusing on the laconic detail — a gesture or expression without obvious psychological content — is a matter of using enigma, sometimes as a visual figure (as emblem) of the unknown, sometimes as speech in a double or triple sense.

To say 'laconic' is to say concision by moral exigency. Laconia, where the inhabitants of Sparta principally resided, is an austere province where such qualities as endurance, modesty, and, ultimately, the virtues of silence are valued. Laconia valued action over discourse, which was presumed to be narcissistic and rhetorical — in short, an Athenian form of flattery. The Borgesian notion of the 'laconic detail' thus brings together two specific aspects: the reduction of the visual field and the scarcity of words.

Let us first address this *reduction* of the visual field, and in so doing, the very nature of the visual itself. In 'The Automatic Message', André Breton (1978: 97–109) described the notion of the 'unverifiable visual' as



if the epithet denoted its very nature.<sup>15</sup> In Borges's work, visual details abound, which are both extremely cinematographic and enigmatic in their signification. Recall how Borges cites José Hernández's *El Gaucho Martín Fierro*: 'There was once a young Italian prisoner / Who always spoke of a boat / And we drowned him in a pond / because of the plague. / He had blue eyes / like a young albino foal'.<sup>16</sup> Borges's commentary on this passage is also relevant: 'the supreme effectiveness of the stanza resides in the postscript or the moving addition of memory: "he has the blue eyes of a young albino foal" is very characteristic of someone [a writer] who assumes an event to be already known and to whom memory restores one more image' (Borges 1974: 196).<sup>17</sup> In effect, this detail conveys straightforwardly, without symbolism or rhetorical effect, the absurd singularity of a destiny. It is magnificently silent on the execution, restricting itself to the brutal merging with water — this superb *element*, bearer of dreams, possibly rich in storms, which might have born magnifying associations, as it had carried the young Italian from Europe to the Americas, turns out instead to be diminutive, possibly muddy, and in any event a vehicle for death. It is a pond. And it is in a pond that the young Italian will have been drowned, in a gesture of everyday horror.

Those scenes in Borges's work also come to mind in which we see falling bodies, already stiffening from imminent death. Villagrán the giant Mexican, for example, walks into a bar of drunkards and is cut down by Bill Harrigan ('The Disinterested Killer Bill Harrigan'): 'The glass falls from Villagrán's hand; then, the entire man follows' (Borges 1998: 33).<sup>18</sup> The Yardmaster, already stabbed to death ('Man on Pink Corner'), comes back into the shed where everyone is dancing: 'He came in, and he took a few unsteady steps into the clearing that we all made for him, like we had before. He stood there, tall and unseeing, and then he toppled like a post' (Borges 1998: 50).<sup>19</sup> Death, as an event, announces itself like an incomprehensible gesture, as the place of the mechanical and already inanimate in man (the post). Rainer Maria Rilke understood this instant when everything would again become possible, specifically life, and when the fate of the Fall is already ineluctably inscribed: in the *silence* that precedes the collapse of the house's retaining wall in the great fire:<sup>20</sup>

In the course of great conflagrations ... noiselessly a black cornice thrusts itself forward overhead, and a high wall, behind which the flames shoot up, leans forward, noiselessly. All stand motionless and await, with shoulders raised and brows contracted, the awful crash. The silence here is like that.

But one also encounters the enigma in the preconceived, laconic expression, or in the simultaneously unrefined and decisive speech of

provocation: '“Seems like you're always in the way, asshole,” he muttered as he passed by me — I couldn't say whether it was to get it off his chest or because he had his mind on something else' (Borges 1998: 49).<sup>21</sup> One could relate such constructions to the art of the insult or, in another narrative, the juxtaposition of disparate, scenic places, but the latter forms can both still be analyzed by traditional rhetorical devices. They are thus far less enigmatic:

In the rhetorical figure known as *oxymoron*, the adjective applied to a noun seems to contradict that noun. Thus, gnostics spoke of a 'dark light' and alchemists, of a 'black sun.' Departing from my last visit to Teodelina Villar and drinking a glass of harsh brandy in a corner bar-and-grocery-store was a kind of oxymoron: the very vulgarity and facileness of it were what tempted me. (Borges 1998: 244)<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, the *mise-en-scène* of this fascination appears in the critical article upon the Icelandic Kenningar (in 'A History of Eternity'), in which Borges examines the enigmatic and powerfully archaic expressions belonging to the Icelandic poetic tradition. Are these coded, rigid, and formulaic metaphors, of which Borges gives us a comical list, only 'sophisms, deceptive and languid exercises', to which metrics traditionally refers by the term 'padding'?<sup>23</sup> Or rather, is their primary role not to put us face to face with the strangeness of the world: 'they can provoke the lucid perplexity that is the unique honor of metaphysics, its reward and its source'.<sup>24</sup>

Such enigmas as these, which ordinary, everyday words or coded language utters and reports, are like the visual detail, 'unverifiable' by nature. They seem to me to be the anchor points of the 'unknown relation' in the work of Borges.

A remarkable function of the enigmatic detail is that the very vacancy of the sign permits its use in a prophetic sense. In some way, the unknown relation is characterized by reproducing itself in time, so that it is identical to itself, and becomes thus a prophet of its own effect.

One recalls the final paragraph of Borges's article 'Narrative Art and Magic' [*El arte narrativo y la magia*]:

I have described two causal procedures: the natural or incessant result of endless, uncontrollable causes and effects; and magic, in which every lucid and determined detail is a prophecy. In the novel, I think that the only possible integrity lies in the latter. Let the former be left to psychological simulations. (Borges 1998: 81–82)<sup>25</sup>

Yet these 'magical', 'lucid', and 'primitive' details are strongly visual, and strongly affected symbolically, conducting the narrative through

moderated expansions, juxtaposed to one another and cut by intertitles. These sequences are articulated through their medium, following a moral thread, which is neither a narrative (in the chronological sense), nor really even 'logical'.<sup>26</sup>

Let's reread the story of 'Hakim, the Masked Dyer of Merv' (Borges 1998: 40–44).<sup>27</sup> This narrative is a tale to the extent that we cannot be certain of its verisimilitude. It is, on the one hand, comprised of a series of narratives of veiling and unveiling that elaborates a semiotic of the discontinuous, of problematic or impossible nomination, and that weaves together a series of interrogations of the visual and the theatrical. One recalls the story of the dyer, who learned his trade from an uncle, and who spoke of purple dyes as hitmen speak of blood, or as alchemists speak of gold and mercury — as a middle and mediating domain, a place where things are magically transformed: 'a dyer — the craft, known to be a refuge for infidels and imposters and inconstant men, which inspired the first anathemas of his extravagant career'.<sup>28</sup> The subheading of this section is 'The Scarlet Dye' [*La púrpura escarlata*]. Five episodes follow, in chronological, but above all symbolic order, under the intertitles 'The Bull', 'The Leopard', 'The Veiled Prophet', 'Abominable Mirrors', and 'The Face'.<sup>29</sup> The first two 'movements' of the text offer stories, under the sign of animalism, of veilings of the face or of blindings: the bull is a mask carried by a nameless man, accompanied by two blind men. The leopard, blinded, it seems, by Hakim, is the emissary victim of a scene in which it serves as a 'touchstone' in order to reveal the extraordinary power of the would-be prophet (specifically Hakim). The other three episodes are also constructed around the register of the veil, of the double, and of unveiling, but this time under the sign of humanity. *The progression of the tale, however, insists on one detail, that of the dyer's craft, functioning as fate*. Just as the dyer in practicing his craft transforms and ennoble his material and is at the same time cunning with it, so too the mask ennoble the leper, and permits him to exercise his guile and his will to power.

What Borges designates by the term 'detail' is thus in this case what theorists of poetry have designated by the term '*mise-en-abyme*': a specular image, a model reduced to an essential function. Through this function, the detail makes itself sacred. Its role in the detective novel, where this function is exacerbated, is well known (and was by both Borges and his friend Bioy Casares).

One 'detail' among others is the proper name, with which Borges plays with insistence, and which manifests its role prophetically. In 'The Aleph,' the figure of Beatriz Elena Viterbo, which traverses the entire tale, is introduced to provoke in the reader an echo of the name of Dante's beloved. In 'The Garden of Forking Paths' (1994), the coincidence

between the name of an individual and the name of a city, Albert, functions as a prophetic metaphor. One could easily cite other examples. The emblematic city of Buenos Aires (in 'In Praise of Darkness' [1969]) is designated, like a herald of the female body from the third verse, by a series of infinitely precise places to which memory attaches itself: 'It is the wall of la Recoleta ...; it is a big tree ...; it is a numbered door'.<sup>30</sup>

It is necessary to speak here of another place of vacancy: that which surrounds the infinitely *other*, bound occasionally to the undefined. As an epigraph, one might recall here the Borgesian crack about the English and their taste for literature of the sea: 'the sea: the Pampas of the English'.<sup>31</sup> What amazes me, in the work of this child of the cities, nourished on books in closed spaces, is the introduction of savagery or bestiality: through tigers, for example, which are emblematic of both the work and the 'iniquity' of men. One could say that there had been the accident, as a child, then the death of the father, and in the same year the gravest illness, ultimately blindness, anticipated, ineluctable, and finally occurring, and that this series of obstacles to a fate has something to do with the *savage* beginning of death at the very heart of human life. It is not enough to say that the English speaker encounters here a current of different linguistic origin, that of 'non-English' Hispanicist literature, in this domain where epic, narrative, and popular poetry construct and saturate nineteenth-century Argentine culture. This thematic and linguistic 'other' is in no way restored to alterity, but rather to the unlimited. In effect, on the one hand, if Borges derides the thematic of the *Pampas* and of the *Gaucha*, and of the latter's pretended spontaneous generation, it is in order to restore this literature to the status of *the* literature. I cite his ironic denial:

Pastoral life has predominated in many regions of the Americas, from Montana and Oregon to Chili, but these areas, until now, have fervently resisted writing *El Gaucho Martín Fierro*. It is thus not enough to have a hard cowboy and a desert.<sup>32</sup>

As for the undefined, it is undeniably there, be it thematic in a geographical sense (the horizon of the desert), or in a moral sense — perplexity before human wickedness, or before psychological motivation. The undefined always gives rise to vertigo, and mirrors human complexity. And finally this sensitivity to the undefined blends the enigmatic signs that comprise the *details* that I discussed earlier. Therefore, speaking of *El Gaucho Martín Fierro*, Borges makes this commentary:

This coming and going in time prevents us from clarifying certain details: we don't know, for example, if the temptation of whipping the wife of the murdered

black man is the brutal act of a drunk man or — as we would prefer it — the vertigo of despair, and the fact that we are perplexed by the motives makes the gesture more real.<sup>33</sup>

All that I have advanced to now progresses toward the idea that a certain major vacancy in Borges's writing lies in the status of his subject. Borges's critical fortune abundantly illustrates this remark, above all, at the thematic level. The subject of the opening tale in 'The Book of Sand' is 'the other' (1998: 411–417). In 'The Circular Ruins,' the subject creates his object but also is thought by it (1998: 96–100). The dreamed object can invade you, like the sand dreamed by the prisoner of 'The Writing of the God' (1998: 250–254). In 'Story of the Warrior and the Captive Maiden' (1998: 208–211) the obverse and the reverse of a medal are one and the same thing. Aesthetic theoreticians have often observed the uniquely autoreflexive status of poetic writing: the writer observes himself writing and gives us some of the keys to understanding literary writing and reading. It is well understood that any new opening on an enlarged domain of knowledge casts light on its proper aporias. One symbolic way of communicating this fact is that in such cases the text 'knows more' than the author. There is an (imaginary) past to the text, of which one finds some examples throughout Borges's work, from 'Hakim, the Masked Dyer of Merv,' to the two initial pages which 'are missing' from 'The Garden of Forking Paths,' and from there to the 'Fragments from an apocryphal Gospel'.<sup>34</sup>

My remark on the status of the subject deals more fully with the relation to knowledge that one finds in Borges's work. The author Borges generates an incommensurate domain of knowledge by gathering from and sorting among diverse, very respectable domains of knowledge, all of which aspire on their own to encyclopedic status.

Yet Borges's borrowing from these diverse encyclopedias is not a work of compilation. The collage effects that he generates do not seek to vividly conjure up the feeling of the 'uncanny,' but instead convey the affect of the real, the threshold of which is profoundly enigmatic. Far from the surrealist collage, which seeks to disconcert us so as to drive us away from literature and into the field of the imaginary, Borges's collage binds us hand and foot to the literature of 'ordinary' life, but only along its enigmatic edges. One has seen how the carefully evoked comic gesture, or ordinary speech ('get out of my way') restores us to the field of a precautionary adherence to the truth of all time.

Borges's own identity as author derives from such gestures. More than an 'author' of encyclopedias with hidden levels (as one might say of the magician's hat), more than an 'author' of anthologies, more than an

'author' of critical texts in which poetic reflection opens the way for decades of collective reflection, Borges appears to me as an author of fables — fables, that is, insofar as fable is not understood as truly being a literary genre. It is less a genre than a mode of the functioning of thought, which finds its formal expression in language. Significantly, it is in his *Rhetoric*, not in his *Poetics*, that Aristotle establishes the 'genre' of the fable, and he defines rhetoric as the conduct of a thought in and by the system of language. The definition of fable thus follows not formal criteria, but rather structural criteria that one can enumerate: first, the situation of power that gives rise to it, the writer knowing more than the reader at any given moment; then, the substantiating function that animates it; followed by the detour to fiction to which it proceeds; and finally, the polysemy that it generates. The situation of 'power' and the substantiating function appears at the beginning of fables on the one hand, and in their conclusion on the other, always moralizing, and no longer narrating. Thus, the body of the text, in which at the same time *both* a 'story' and a 'moral' are given (and which one senses, since one is anticipating it before actually obtaining it, explicitly in exoteric language, *in fine*) plays on polysemy. Clearly, it is very much a matter of a 'Library,' but it is also a matter of the universe (in 'The Library of Babel,' precisely this polysemy is thick from the start).<sup>35</sup> In a more classic, but not dissimilar manner, a fable by La Fontaine *begins* instead by the indication of polysemy, or putting the generalization inherent in the anecdotal story another way: fable 5, 12 ('Les médecins') refers to the roles of its characters, since their proper names already provide the moral of their possessors: 'Doctor So Much the Worse was going to see a sick man / who was also visited by his colleague So Much the Better.' One could easily go on. But in the end, what I am calling 'vacancy' in the writing of Borges is also immanent within the status of the very act of reading to which it gives rise.

One clearly recognizes the way in which Borges's encyclopedic work, at least until the end of the 1940s, is incessantly thumbing its nose at its readers (who always believe that they possess certain knowledge). This warped and elusive reference, to which Borges's immediate circle turned its attention, with his agreement and sometimes with his help, calls for a critical reading. Alerted, a smile on our lips, our head full of uncertainties — we believe and disbelieve, at the same time, we don't want to. What would we do without the critical apparatus of the beautiful editions that we now read? We would compose other stories of indeterminate status from these texts, telling them to dinner guests or to other friendly readers. Indeed, the half-true, half-false story — in short, the 'plausible' story — possesses the unique power of



self-generation. Recall that 'Hakim, the Masked Dyer of Merv' begins with the line: 'Unless I am mistaken, the original sources of information on Al-Moqanna, the Veiled (or, more strictly, Masked) Prophet of Khorasan, are but four. ...'<sup>36</sup> The 'Index of sources' at the end of his 'Universal History of Iniquity' indicates that the source of this tale is Sir Percy Sykes's *A History of Persia* (London, 1915) and *Die Vernichtung der Rose* (Leipzig, 1927), the anthology elaborated by a certain Alexander Schulz (Borges 1989/96: 1.345). Yet if Roger Caillois turned his attention to the verification of the sources, J. P. Bernès delighted in teaching us that the second source is in fact fictional, its author's name having been taken from that of Borges's friend, Alejandro Schulz. Whatever the Borgesian erudition of the reader of Borges, the cultivated reader *can only* renounce his credibility at the same moment that the author, in accordance with the novel's original use, declares to us that his narrative is authentic or subject to authentication. Such an act gives rise to a unique position of reading, hesitating between the relation to the 'true' and the relation to the 'plausible.' Are we cultivating ourselves by reading an encyclopedia, or are we distracting ourselves by reading fiction? Or again, are we entering an anthropological space, where the citation puts the author in the position of the reader's brother? I have always thought that André Breton's cleverness — his genius — in writing the *Anthology of Black Humor* was to lure us, we not particularly clever humorists of the quotidian, through the vertiginous and dark domains of the fierce humorists Swift and Jarry. When Breton reads Swift, he assumes a fraternal position in relation to us.

My proposal, however, is this: like an anthology, an encyclopedia is 'in essence' made to be *paged through*, and it is precisely this *role* of the interlocutor, in this case, the reader, that Borges seeks. Encyclopedias and anthologies are books that are inherently 'without closure': on the one hand, they are incomplete, unfinishable by their author, and on the other, they are manufactured by *temptation*, offering us both *incitement* and a restless lure. Coming face to face with such a work, we are incited to dream about two parallel poles: the man who knows everything and the man who knows that he knows nothing. We are brought to recognize *both* the roots of the *libido sciendi* and those of intellectual frustration. The role of the reader is thus far more important with respect to encyclopedias or anthologies than with any other type of book, such that it is based on the 'editorial' needs of the public of a particular generation, and in a particular epoch. Unfinished and unfinishable, the encyclopedia can always add one more article. An anthology, for its part, is clearly the work of three figures: the author cited by the compiler of the 'selection', the editor who proposes the selection, but also the

reader who is going to be lured by the editor's selection (one recognizes here the responsibility of the selection). The book's lack of structural completion is of course the last challenge for us to consider. If the reader has opened such a book, he will not be able to close it again because (as in Borges's tale) the letters will proliferate and reproduce themselves. The reader will become the co-author of another anthology, comprised of other texts and other images. Vagueness and subjectivity are essentially the underlying roots of the anthology, just as the drive toward scientificity (which is also at its core a scientificity that calls itself into question) is the root of the encyclopedia.

In Borges's work, the rise of the *Alma Mater* is known to have replaced the paternal library and the maternal readings. Indeed, the place of the mother in these texts seems to me to be locatable in the playful reading implied by the texts' writing. This game was thus less one of *fort-da*, than of miming the circulation of the senses, which establish themselves, according to Winnicott, between what will become the *inside* (the ego) and the *outside*. The place of the mother is also perceptible in the 'complex' status of the writing subject, who on the one hand is more often than not an author of fables, and who is on the other hand also dreamed up fantastically by his own text. Ultimately, what I have most strongly emphasized in this study is the use of the visual detail as a sort of personal herald that elaborates 'perspective objects', the emblem of which was *the aleph* of the tale by the same name. Such objects are comparable to, but different from, those associated with Salvador Dalí's paranoiac-critical method. In an article in *Minotaure* 7, Dalí argued that the wireless spool in the foreground of a photograph of plump shopkeepers gives us a more playful and free equivalent to the textual objects to which I have drawn our attention in Borges's text. 'Deplorable objects of insignificance,' writes Dalí, 'which, at this moment, carry us Surrealists away from the better part of our time, and the better part of our space' (1935: 56–57). What is open to the imaginary without restrictions in the work of Dalí and the Surrealists, and by extension to *loss*, is in Borges's work full of the self and the culture of the strange, *but the signifying strange*, at the edge of the world, at the edge of words.

Translated by Adam Jolles

## Notes

*Translator's Note:* I would like to thank Josh Ellenbogen and Aaron Tugendhaft for their kind assistance with this translation.

1. I have particularly benefited from reading two of Lisa Block de Behar's books (1984; 1998).
2. Being the simple reader that I am, I found the core of Borges's references in the admirable French editions (1993 and 1999).
3. Guy Rosolato, a member of the Association Psychanalytique de France, published the core of his work with Gallimard and with Presses Universitaires de France. For an introduction to this work, now considered a classic in France, see Jean-Claude Arfouilloux (2000).
4. English translation, 1974, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co.).
5. Jean-Claude Arfouilloux explains the orientation of Guy Rosolato's thought by expressing it in relation to two well-known Freudian notions: the feeling of the 'uncanny' (*unheimlich*), on the one hand, and the question of the 'unrecognized' (*unerkannt*), on the other.

In effect, the feeling of strangeness that Freud described to Romain Rolland in 1936, after visiting the Acropolis, can serve as a point of reference for understanding Rosolato's theories: it links together the 'oceanic feeling' to which Rolland himself had given so much importance; the effusional lyricism to which Ernest Renan had given his most eminent literary formulation, some sixty years before; and, moreover, the feeling of the 'uncanny' explored by Freud in 1919. Yet, already according to Renan, the Parthenon was carried away in the fascination with a 'nameless abyss'. And what seems to have fascinated Freud during his tour is an absence: the absence of another temple, one which is no longer — perhaps the temple of Jerusalem, destroyed and rebuilt so many times. The mystery of the renewal of history through the insistence of men to rebuild. This fascination also refers to the similar mystery of the divine, of the sacred, and finally, since the Parthenon is dedicated to Pallas Athena, the mystery of the feminine and of the difference between the sexes. The columns that are fully silhouetted against an empty space, having avoided the destruction of the nineteenth century, figure similarly to the opening of Woman. The look seeks to fill in this hollow, in substituting for it a 'perspective object', an elusive representation that continues to evade one's grasp.

On the other hand, J. C. Arfouilloux remarked that the 'unknown relation' generalizes and displaces Freud's oft-evoked question of the 'unrecognized' (*unerkannt*). One recalls that Freud used the metaphor of the 'navel' in reference to the limits of the interpretation of dreams, showing that the best interpreted dreams guard a node of obscurity, which resists interpretation and does not allow itself to be completely clarified. The navel, in effect a privileged metaphor, condenses (in its form, its appearance, and its symbolic stakes) various interrogations of humanity on what is not recognized in origins, in the maternal, in femininity, and perhaps by extension in the differences between the sexes and among the generations. 'The dream-thoughts, which must generally remain unfulfilled, branch out in all directions in the tangled network [*réseau*] of our thoughts, and it is from a denser point within this network [*entrelacement*] that desire emerges from the dream, like the mushroom from its mycélium. The *unrecognized*, however, refers to what has been known of the mother, of the origin, and what has been subjected to primary repression in inscribing itself in the form of the first *signifiers of demarcation*, enigmatic *signifiers* which are not directly accessible to consciousness' (J. C. Arfouilloux). In 'the navel' of the dream resides the '*unrecognized*'. The *unrecognized*, however, assumes at least the virtual possibility of recognition. To retranslate these 'visual-analogical' or 'demarcative' signifiers into their original language, but with some words taken from 'verbal-digital' language, is notably

- the object of analysis. Thus, beyond this knowable unknown, necessarily emerges an unknowable unknown, which marks the untraversable limit of absolute knowledge.
6. Julio Woscoboinik's (1989) is more descriptive and much less suggestive.
7. Double specular symmetry [*double symétrie spéculaire*] is Anzieu's term to indicate that which binds the virtual image with the 'real' object, on the one hand, and that which switches the right and left halves of the virtual image, on the other (see Anzieu 1971: 191).
8. 'en breve, seré todos: estaré muerto' (Borges 1974: 533–544).
9. The book contains 'Le Roi au masque d'or', 'Vies imaginaires', and 'la Croisade des enfants'.
10. Aragon sums up Kavérine's argument as expressed in *Novyi Mir* 1 (1969): '[these sentences], astonishingly similar in their structure, often consist of principal clauses, without subordinate clauses and are often made up of a single word, daring the reader straight away with no humming and hawing, and with precision ...'. And to cite also the anecdote that Tolstoy took upon himself to write in *Anna Karenina* in order to have it reread, in the hands of his son, Pushkin's *Les invités s'étaient réunis à la datcha*.
11. 'For me, the sentence when it appears suddenly (dictated?) and from which I leave for something that will be the novel, in the unlimited sense of the word, has this character of a crossroads, not exactly between vice and virtue, but more between remaining silent and writing, between life and death, between creation and sterility. And it happens not at the level of will, of the Herculean decision, but in the choice, the arbitrariness of borrowed words (from whom? why?) like the strange detour of the highway interchange. A constellation of words — ordinarily called a sentence — thus plays the role of fate for thought' (Aragon 1969: 41–42).
12. 'Calypso ne pouvait se consoler du départ d'Ulysse. Dans sa douleur, elle se trouvait malheureuse d'être immortelle' (Aragon 1969: 92).
13. 'Calypso comme un coquillage au bord de la mer répétait inconsolablement le nom d'Ulysse à l'écume qui emporte les navires. Dans sa douleur elle s'oubliait immortelle' (Aragon 1966 [1922]: 13).
14. 'el desenvolvimiento o la serie de esos pormenores lacónicos de larga proyección'.
15. The question Breton passionately addresses is how can we determine the source of the 'visionary' power of the poet: is it a verbal-auditory or a verbal-visual automatism? If I follow this line of argument, he responds from the former, and not from the latter.
16. 'Había un gringuito cautivo / Que siempre hablaba del barco / Y lo ahugaron en un charco / Por causante de la peste / Tenía los ojos celestes / Como potrillito zarco'.
17. 'la eficacia máxima de la estrofa está en esa posdata o adición patética del recuerdo: tenía los ojos celestes como potrillo [*sic*] zarco, tan significativa de quien supone ya contada una cosa, y a quien le restituye la memoria una imagen más'.
18. 'La copa cae del puño de Villagrán; después, el hombre entero' (Borges 1974: 318).
19. 'Entró, y en la cancha que le abrimos todos, como antes, dio unos pasos mareados — alto, sin ver — y se fue al suelo de una vez, como poste' (Borges 1974: 333).
20. 'Everyone is stock-still, shoulders hunched, faces tensed up around the eyes, and waiting for the terrible slow. Such is the silence'. (*The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* [Rilke 1984: 5].)
21. 'Vos siempre has de servir de estorbo, pendejo — me rezongó al pasar, no sé si para desahogarse, o ajeno' (Borges 1974: 332).
22. 'En la figura que se llama *oximoron*, se aplica a una palabra un epíteto que parece contradecirla; así los gnósticos hablaron de luz oscura; los alquemistas, de un sol negro. Salir de mi última visita a Teodelina Villar y tomar una caña en un almacén era una especie de oximoron ...' (Borges 1974: 590).

23. In this sense, Borges deploys a dozen different metaphors to describe a sword, each one more extraordinary than the next: 'Ice of the battle', or 'Fathom of rage', or again 'Fire of the helmets', which end up approximating Surrealist metaphors, 'Oar of blood', 'Wolf of wounds', 'Branch of wounds': 'la espada: hielo de la pelea / vara de la ira / fuego de yelmos / dragón de la espada / roedor de yelmos / espina de la batalla / pez de la batalla / remo de la sangre / lobo de las heridas / rama de las heridas' (Borges 1974: 373).
24. 'Las *kenningar* nos dictan ese asombro, nos extrañan del mundo. Pueden motivar esa lúcida perplejidad que es el único honor de la metafísica, su remuneración y su fuente' (Borges 1974: 379).
25. 'He distinguído dos procesos causales: el natural, que es el resultado incesante de incontables e infinitas operaciones; el mágico, donde profetizan los pormenores, lúcido y limitado. En la novela, pienso que la única posible honradez está con el segundo. Quede el primero para la simulación psicológica' (Borges 1974: 232).
26. To the contrary of what Valéry thinks of the novel, in his intellectualism founded on geometric models: 'Peut-être serait-il intéressant de faire *une fois* une oeuvre qui montrerait à chacun de ses noeuds la diversité qui s'y peut présenter à l'esprit et parmi laquelle il choisit la suite unique qui sera donnée dans le texte. Ce serait là substituer à l'illusion d'une détermination unique et imitatrice du réel, celle du *possible-à-tout instant* qui me semble plus véritable' (Valéry 1957 [1937]: 1467).
27. This is the essay that borrows from Marcel Schwob's *Roi au masque d'or*.
28. 'arte de impíos, de falsarios y de inconstantes que inspiró los primeros anatemas de su carrera pródiga' (Borges 1974: 324).
29. 'El toro', 'El leopardo', 'El profeta velado', 'Los espejos abominables', 'El rostro'.
30. 'Es el paredón de la Recoleta ... / Es un gran árbol ... / Es una puerta numerada ...' 'Elogio de la sombra' (Borges 1974: 1009).
31. 'del mar, pampa de los ingleses' (Borges 1989/96: 1.182).
32. 'la vida pastoril ha sido típica de muchas regiones de América, desde Montana y Oregón hasta Chile, pero esos territorios, hasta ahora, se han abstenido enérgicamente de redactar *El gaucho Martín Fierro*. No bastan pues, el duro pastor y el desierto' (Borges 1989/96: 1.179).
33. 'Ese vaivén impide la declaración de algunos detalles: no sabemos, por ejemplo, si la tentación de azotar a la mujer del negro asesinado es una brutalidad de borracho o — eso preferiríamos — una desesperación del aturdimiento, y esa perplejidad de los motivos lo hace más real' (Borges 1989/96: 1.197).
34. 'Fragmentos de un Evangelio apócrifo', *Elogio de la sombra*, originally published in 1969 (Borges 1989/96: 2.389–390).
35. 'The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries' (Borges 1998: 112).
36. 'Si no me equivoco, las fuentes originales de información acerca de Al Moqanna, el Profeta Velado (o más estrictamente, Enmascarado) del Jorasán, se reducen a cuatro ...' (Borges 1989/96: 1.324).

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**The foundation of western thought in  
the twentieth and twenty-first centuries:  
The postmodern and the postcolonial  
discourse in Jorge Luis Borges**

ALFONSO DE TORO

In several previously published works I try to develop criteria for the discussion about postmodernity and postcolonialism in European and Latin-American culture, literature, and theatre, particularly as they relate to the work of Jorge Luis Borges. I do so with the intent of offering a scientific debate without the usual and well-known polemics on the topic. To start, I would like to summarize the main characteristics and constitutive marks of Borges's work that are at the same time the main characteristics of postmodern and postcolonial knowledge. Another preliminary remark seems to me to be important: I am not going to read Borges 'from outside', meaning 'from the center', from the postmodern or postcolonial European or North American system or from the perspective of the theory of Lacan, Derrida, Deleuze, or Baudrillard, but I will concentrate on the essential topics or problems of the last century, that are an inherent part of the work of Borges as well as European and North American culture. My approach is very much to the contrary: I have read postmodern philosophy and theory through Borges's work in a constant back and forth interconnectedness, and from his work I was able to confront postmodern and postcolonial issues. It is through these theories that I approach Borges and his works. There is no discrepancy between my reading of the text-object and my theoretical reading, since the object and the theory constitute a single unit. In this reading I did not omit the polemic of an 'Argentinean' and a 'universal' Borges who is 'stolen' by the culture of the center. I believe Borges is universal, and therefore, there is not a hierarchy of topic and sites. Instead, Borges's Buenos Aires is a place as real or mythical as Uqbar, since Borges does not produce a mimetic, illusionist literature of 'local color', but a self-referential literature. Having made this brief but necessary clarification, I can proceed with the central topic of this paper.

Borges's literary practice is characterized by a multilayered signic organization that has profound consequences to the treatment of reality and fiction. The text is a product of reading, and it follows that writing is a permanent rereading, as is rewriting. This 'rewriting' leads to the

dissolution of the characters, of the narrator's identity, and to the constitution of two fundamental and ever-present levels: the level of the textual object and the metatextual level. These are always found in a playful tension that leads to the overcoming of fiction as fiction. Borges's text performs its own 'fictionalization', that is, the narrated history is always unmasked as a 'fabrication', or as metatextual. Thus we do not perceive any attempt to materialize it.<sup>1</sup> Borges resorts to a series of textual techniques and philosophical theories that during the second half of the twentieth century, were widely practiced and well established by postmodern philosophy, and by literary theory. Thus, Borges goes much further with his theory and practice of literature than the authors of the 1950s vanguard by creating his own devices, devices unknown at that time. This should be clearly understood once and for all. Some of the central devices introduced by Borges are: *deconstruction* (Foucault 1966; Derrida 1967: 172; Culler 1983; de Toro 1992: 145–184; 1994a: 5–32), *rhizom* (Deleuze/Guattari 1976; de Toro 1992: 145–184; 1994a: 5–32) and *simulation* (Baudrillard 1981; de Toro 1995: 11–45; 1999a: 137–162; 1999b: 129–153). The act of rereading of Borges, like the act of rewriting, is not a mimetic and intertextual activity, but an overcoming elaboration (*verwindende Verarbeitung*) and a recodification of signifiers that perform as referential units or as referential *simulated* markers. The signifier is attached to a rhizomatic structure where any origin (*Ur*) and any final trace (*telos*) intersect with an infinite disseminating plurality. Instead of an orderly mimesis loaded with meaning, a simulation takes place as reality or as a literary-fictional textuality, but without a reality (referent) and without a text, as stated by Baudrillard, 'Le simulacre n'est jamais ce qui cache la vérité — c'est la vérité que cache qu'il n'y en a pas. Le simulacre est vrai' [The simulacrum is never that which conceals reality — it is reality that hides that which it does not have] (1981: 9).

In referring to the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1976) we are able to understand the rhizome as an organizational principle in which one element is connected to others of a very different structure. Thus, a non-hierarchical, scattered, opened, and always developing movement takes hold. Topically formulated, we have a network of knots that produce a bifurcation that connect themselves to other knots. As a result the relation signifier/signified is of no consequence, except in terms of the form of the relation at the level of the signifier. Therefore, the question that arises is not what the signified of a syntagm is, but rather how the syntagm is connected. Simulation with Baudrillard (1981) can be understood as the placement of hyperreality, as the implosion of a reality that leads to the dissolution of the Western metaphysical realism, or of the limits between reality and fiction, with the narrator as a mediating site.

For the duality between an I-narrator and an I-actant is dismantled: the I-narrator is split into several I's, thus assuming a hybrid identity (this is also the case for the third person narrator).

There also disappear the traditional limits between the author and the reader, between the author and his characters. Through these devices the structure becomes fragmented, while the text becomes somewhat anonymous and experiences a reduction towards itself. Thus Borges, with his literary theory and practice, evolves what the *nouveau roman* and the *Tel Quel* group later showcased during the 1960s and 1970s: the self-referential generation of textuality. With this the author becomes a 'scriptor' (*scripteur*) and it is he who motivates and starts the activity of the reader as co-author, since he must go through the rhizomorphic play set up by the author and the narrator. The reader is then obliged to equate the processes of reading and writing. In several interviews and essays, Borges, based on his reading of Kafka's work, stated that each writer is first and foremost a reader. Thus, each reader becomes a co-author.

Borges's deconstructive devices do not attempt to produce a signified, a traditional type of message, instead they seek the search as a goal. For the reader, a true 'adventure trip' takes place by means of different signifying systems, which, due to their iteration throughout the centuries, have lost their denotative capacity. Thus they allow only for the search of other carriers of meaning. Then, by a radicalization of this search, it becomes solely the search of signifiers, which are more often than not attached to signifieds, whose function is that of a 'hook', but which are later found to be without meaning.

Having briefly described some fundamental terms and conceptions of Borges's literary discourse, we can proceed to deal with some central aspects of his thinking. But let me underline, again, that Borges introduced the very foundations of western thought during the second half of the twentieth century, and it is here that we discover Borges as the *Urvater* of postmodernity and postcoloniality. Thus at the very base of the central aspects of Borges's writing are 'anti-intertextuality', 'the anti-fantastic', 'rhizomatic simulation', and 'guided randomness' (= *azar dirigido* / *dirigierter Zufall*).

**Postmodernity: Referentiality, mimesis, anti-fantastic, anti-intertextuality, rhizomatic simulation, and guided randomness**

*The problem of referentiality and mimesis*

Borges introduced a new literary paradigm in the twentieth century (postmodernism), and in this I have detected at least two pivotal literary

positions. Firstly, Borges does not consider literature as 'mimesis of reality' (independent of the definition of the term of 'mimesis' in literary criticism), therefore his literary activity has nothing to do with realism. Instead, Borges suggests that literary activity, as a 'mimesis of literature/fiction', is a mirror of literary references, a weaving of networks that emerge in the form of intertextuality. He refers to the topic position of 'reality vs. fiction/mimesis of reality' in order to replace the notion of 'reality' through mimesis of the fiction/literature. He clearly states that the world and reality are constituted by signs. Thus the author has detached himself from the ontological notion of 'reality'. His second position represents a radicalization of the first, in as much as the opposition 'mimesis of fiction vs. literature' as a condition for literary activity, is replaced by an even more drastic opposition of 'mimesis of fiction/literature vs. pseudo-mimesis of fiction/literature'. The notion of 'reality' is replaced by 'mimesis of fiction/literature' and the notion of 'fiction' by 'pseudo-mimesis of fiction/literature'. This then negates and questions not only the intertextuality, but the presence of the fantastic in Borges's work. Borges's texts, at best, establish relations with other texts, but not with reality. Reality emerges only as a quotation, and when evoked, it proceeds from other texts. The relations with other texts is evidently *intertextual*, if by intertextuality we understand the *intertextual practice* as defined by Genette (1982) and by criticism in general (Lachmann 1982; Pfister/Broich 1985). Borges admits that he creates his texts from other texts (*Als-Ob-Prinzip*), but he does not *practice* intertextuality, since the 'pre-text' (de Toro 1992: 161) is not used as such, that is, as a *contextual* form: Borges *invents/imagines* such texts. His literature is a major simulacrum. It is hyper real because his discourse overcomes the semiotic limits between reality and fiction. Such limits, if they still exist, are inscribed in books, and even these are undermined (*sie lösen sich auf*) by Borges as is masterfully exemplified in 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote'. Accordingly, when literature is inscribed instead of reality, literature becomes reality, is made into reality and is thus hyper real. As a consequence of the elimination of reality and mimesis as literary components, that is, the opposition between 'reality' vs. 'fiction', Borges's texts cannot be classified *pars pro toto* as mimesis of reality, or as the clash between reality and fiction, or as what is known as the fantastic. The epistemological and narratological definition provided by Todorov (1970) is based on the uncertain doubt of what has taken place. Thus the fantastic springs from the opposition between 'fiction' and 'reality'. By foregrounding the notion of mimesis in relation to literature/fiction, Borges compels the reader to change his/her receptive attitude. He/she may not expect from Borges's work a traditional and coherent story,

or the reflection of a given reality or a message. Instead, the text must be understood as an immanent reality, on its own, at the very moment of reading. Its structure is marked by a tangled web that contains an indeterminate amount of known, less known, unknown, or simply invented texts, all of which are valued by different predicatives such as 'universal' or 'trivial' by a given cultural system, but not by Borges himself. The reader may or may not accept this adventure if he/she decides to trace the names of people and works, of quotations and allusions, or if he/she simply agrees to be overtaken by the flow of the signifier and attracted by the search inscribed in the texts. For it seems that for Borges a distinction between the different *genres*, and objective valorizations with respect to literature do not exist, only personal preferences do so. Thus, only signs exist as objectivity, never the 'works' themselves, with syntagms or morphosyntagms as determining units. In this sense Borges is a minimalist and a fragmentarist. His reading activity makes him a producer of texts with the opposite never taking place. Or, in other words, his reading makes him a mediator of multiple signs which then allows him to create a rhizomorphic system.

As I indicated above, Borges's texts do not address the opposition of 'literature' and 'mimesis of literature', but rather the binomial mimesis of literature vs. pseudo-mimesis of literature. Borges creates a dialogue with other texts, *de facto* imagines/invents those texts, which in turn make believe that they imitate something (for instance, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'). He leads us to believe that his point of departure is an encyclopedia and other texts, which are entirely or partially invented. Another alternative he uses is to erase the original referential connections to such a point that they get lost in endless traces.

Thus Borges's texts are not intertextual for at least three reasons. First, he marginally (*debole* = weak) codifies his texts, he removes them from the evoked referential system, and finally he simulates a referential system that quotes and makes believe that he is going to imitate it. His model is exactly the opposite of what takes place in Cervantes' *El Ingenioso Hidalgo, don Quijote de la Mancha*. Since Borges imagines his referential systems, his intertextuality becomes self-referential, a phantom, a simulation. Therefore, this allows him to do away with the duality that characterizes intertextuality.

Borges aesthetic position is similar to that of Roland Barthes (1970) in *S/Z*, as shown by his description of the ideal vanguard literary text. From the perspective of Derrida and the *Tel Quel* group, *scriptible*, or a literary activity where reading and writing are found in the process of an equivalent and open relationship; reading is transformed in a rewriting. In Borges's and Barthes's cases we have a reading in an absolute present



(from the absolute of *hic et nunc*):

*c'est nous en train d'écrire*, avant que le jeu infini du monde (le monde comme jeu) ne soit traversé, coupé, arrêté, plastifié par quelque système singulier (Idéologie, Genre, Critique) qui en rabatte sur la pluralité des entrées, l'ouverture des réseaux, l'infini des langages. (Barthes 1970: 11)

Past literatures are activated by Borges the author and by the reading performed by the implicit reader of Borges's texts. However, neither in the textual production nor in the textual reception is the objective to attribute to the quoted texts a new meaning in terms of the present. Despite the fact that this activity was central for the Konstanz school of theory of reception, the objective remains neither to interpret nor to reconstruct them. Since texts are reproduced in a radically fragmented form, they only serve as the base for the next text, which has little to do with the syntagm being used. In our view, this is the central aspect of Borges's poetics, and it is this aspect that led him to the conception that all texts have already been written. For Borges then, his work becomes the repetition of other already written, known or unknown works, and therefore, he can state that he limits himself to 'writing notes' about them.<sup>2</sup>

Borges's position is not simply a 'coquetry', but rather the cornerstone of his literary system, which resulted in a new theory of reception.<sup>3</sup> Thus, he denies the possibility of reactualizing (making contemporaneous) the original meaning of past literary texts. What Borges takes from the original texts is not their content, but rather their structure, which is placed at a different level and therefore transformed. The texts used seem to have only one meaning, and to generate one idea. This is why Borges always reveals his sources as fiction within the fiction.

The opposition 'mimesis of literature/fiction' vs. 'pseudo-mimesis of literature/fiction' suffers a final transformation that provides a probable response as to why Borges simulates. Additionally, it provides an answer regarding the phantasmagoric absence of writing: the transformation is realized in the opposition 'pseudo-mimesis of literature/fiction' vs. 'reception/dream/mystical experience'. Thus we have a signifier that becomes ciphers and symbols of perception, in traces that motivate *différance*. Borges himself describes this process when he states that dreams always precede literature and the act of writing (Borges 1985: 17, 22). This tension between perception and dream, which is rhizomatic by nature, is nonhierarchical, unconscious, always open to movement, and develops following the principle of randomness, or of a trace without origin or finality. In its signic, linear, and intentional organization, it becomes neither a dialectical form nor a logocentric metaphysics of the

idea of the idea, but is preserved in all its diversity. It is here that we find the epistemological place that allows me to state that Borges's writing is placed 'beyond literature' (de Toro 1999a: 137–162; 1999b: 129–153), and that the signifieds err without meaning, as in the 'El idioma analítico de John Wilkins' and in 'Undr'.

### *The anti-fantastic and anti-intertextuality*

In what follows I will make a case of why Borges's literature is not fantastic or intertextual, as most of the studies on his work have stated for decades.

Fantastic literature is anchored in narrative structures that cannot avoid the attempt to transgress a topographic or normative boundary (Lotman 1973). In addition, the structures of a mimetic type are conceived according to a given historical-cultural model of the world, and as such are prone to changes and transformations. What is conceived as the norm — limit and transgression — varies from culture to culture and from epoch to epoch. Thus these elemental 'mimetic' structures are inscribed in the contrastive relationship of 'reality' and 'fiction' as described by Jakobson (1971 [1921]: 373–391), Tynjanov (1971 [1924]: 393–431) and Höfner (1980).

When revising the research done on the 'fantastic', we learn that it is defined by the opposition 'reality vs. marvelous', presupposing that the fiction is always fixed on imitating reality in detail, on shaping it, on problematizing or competing with it.<sup>4</sup> This, however, is exactly the reverse procedure employed by the novel. Thus the relationship 'literature/reality' can be subsumed by the opposition 'reality vs. fiction', where the fiction status, according to Lotman (1973), is that of a secondary modalizing system. Without the opposition of the inexplicable and the real, the 'fantastic' cannot be defined and the transgression of laws and norms of a given world (i.e., the transgression of laws of the verisimilitude) are considered fantastic. Consequently, the narration and the fantastic world contain all the elements of the everyday world, while the characters are confronted with events that transcend the experience of the real world.

Todorov (1970: 28–51; and in particular, page 49) defines the 'genuine fantastic' perceived by the reader and the characters, as the indecidibility of what has taken place, as shown by the phrase 'un événement étrange, qui provoque une hésitation chez le lecteur et le héros', which implies the identification between the reader and the character. Even if for Todorov this is not a *sine qua non* principle but a necessary condition, his definition

is still very problematic since it is a mode of reading and not a 'poetic' or 'allegoric' element of the text. These two literary devices, or modes of reading, are not considered as fantastic because they erase the necessary ambiguity that must govern the real and the supernatural. According to Todorov, this must be the case. For if everything which is only supernatural were considered a self-referential literary act, that is, lacking a mimetic reference or connection to the real world, then this would constitute something purely marvelous that one could accept or refuse. It would not, however, produce a conflict with the real, or with the marvelous interpreted allegorically, and so it would function metonymically or metaphorically as substitution of something else. Thus it would be either referential or self-referential.

It is in relation to this definition, accepted by investigators at large, where my doubts pertaining to the fantastic genre began. On the one hand, this definition would not apply when analyzing Borges's work, while on the other hand, as I will attempt to explain and show in what follows, Borges's work constitutes a negation of the fantastic.

Reality can only be defined by means of mimesis, through imitation of the external textual system 'reality', and in relation to a given concept of reality 'Q', of a culture 'Y', and in a given 'epoch X'. I propose to define 'mimesis' as the 'imitation of any given reality x', thus allowing for diverse referential systems, such as reality, and books. I also keep the term 'anti-mimetic' for defining a self-referential literature, or one where this type of reference is predominant. In our context it is indifferent that 'mimesis' has been historically as just imitation. It also means that the form in which imitation is practiced as a compatible mimetic action with or without a given conception of reality, or as everyday experience. Something that depends on historic-pragmatic variables, it is not only and primarily a problem pertaining to imitation.

Regarding the fantastic in Borges's work, Bioy Casares (1996: 9–15; 1972: 222–230) proposes, in his introductory essay to the *Antología de la literatura fantástica* of 1940, several criteria to define the fantastic which are key to our own argumentation. Bioy quotes Borges's text, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' with relation to different types of fantastic plots. This text is defined as a 'metaphysical fantasy'.

With 'The Approach to al-Mu'tasim', 'Pierre Menard', and 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', Borges created a new literary genre, part essay and part fiction. These stories, exercises in unceasing intelligence and buoyant imagination, devoid of heaviness or of any human element — either emotional or sentimental — are destined for intellectual readers, for students of philosophy, and almost for specialists in literature. (Bioy Casares 1972: 228)

In the prologue to the collection of texts under the name of 'El Jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan', the first part of *Ficciones*, Borges (1989/96: 1.427) himself classifies 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote', 'Las ruinas circulares', 'La lotería de Babilonia', 'Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain', and 'La biblioteca de Babel' as fantastic stories. But 'El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan' is classified as a detective story, or something of that sort. At the same time, Borges considers the rest of the stories contained in *Ficciones*, as well as those under the title of 'Artificios' similar to the ones quoted above 'no difieren de las que forman el anterior' [do not differ from those which form the previous one] (Borges 1989/96: 1.483). In 'El Aleph', however, there is no prologue, but in the epilogue all the stories are classified as 'fantastic' (Borges 1989/96: 1.629).

In Borges's 1932 essay 'El arte narrativo y la magia' (1989/96: 1.226–232) and in the prologue to Bioy Casares's *La invención de Morel*, there are a number of observations regarding the status of the fantastic. Since both texts were profusely commented, analyzed and masterly interpreted by Rodríguez Monegal (1976), I will thus limit myself to some brief statements. I agree with Rodríguez Monegal when he states that Borges rejects a certain type of realistic literature with sociological overtones and adopts a fantastic literature instead. Monegal understands the 'fantastic' as 'art/artifice' (see also de Toro 1992, 1994a, 1994b, 1998): literature is understood as something consciously fabricated and therefore does not attempt to imitate. What is central to Monegal's argument, however, is Borges's negation of reality as a referential system, and thus the negation of causality, as well as of time and space. It is this aspect that Borges addresses in the prologue to Bioy Casares's work and in his 'El arte narrativo y la magia'. The 'fantastic' for Borges then, is the equivalent of *fictionality*, *literariness* and *literature* which was reiterated in an interview in 1985. In this interview he states something similar to what he had already stated in his conference ('La literatura fantástica') in Montevideo in 1945 (see Monegal 1976: 185). This topic is also present in 'La flor de Coleridge' and in 'Magias parciales del Quijote':

Podría decirse que la literatura fantástica es casi tautológica, pero toda literatura es fantástica. (Borges 1985: 18)

[It could be said that fantastic literature is quasi-tautological, but all literature is fantastic.]

Thus he categorically established the homology 'fantastic=literature/fiction'. According to this definition supernatural events do not play any role whatsoever (cf. Borges's [1985: 25] observations on Wells and Kafka)

because these events are not considered as realist according to the nineteenth-century definition of this term. There is no doubt about Borges's position, particularly when he argues that 'La Segunda parte del Quijote es deliberadamente fantástica; ya el hecho de que los personajes de la segunda parte hayan leído la primera es algo mágico, o al menos lo sentimos como mágico', [The second part of *Don Quixote* is deliberately fantastic; the very fact that the characters of the second part have read the first one is something magical, or at least we feel it is magical] (Borges 1985: 18) concluding further down that 'La literatura es esencialmente fantástica' [Literature is essentially fantastic] (Borges 1985: 25).

As is well known, Borges paid particular attention to *Don Quixote*,<sup>5</sup> as shown by the prologue which has as a background the picturesque novel. Ginesillo de Pasamontes (condemned to the galley), tells Don Quixote and Sancho Panza that he is writing his own life story and adventures, and that the title of his book is *La vida de Ginés de Pasamonte*, following in the tradition of *Lazarillo de Tormes*. Cervantes establishes a parallel between life *in actu* and in the writing of that life and deconstructs paradoxically the 'realist' textual subtype that attempts to represent life as it is. Thus Cervantes establishes yet another parallel between Don Quixote and Sancho by confronting them with their own story. In part II, chapter 2-4, the 'bachiller' Sansón Carrasco informs Don Quixote and Sancho Panza that their story has been published in a book entitled *El Ingenioso Hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*. We now have the duplication of the original in two additional works, and thus the characters have changed from imaginary characters to real ones. What began as fiction became a book, and for Don Quixote and Sancho Panza the book about their adventures becomes part and parcel of historiography. Both characters become 'readers' of their own story and discuss with Sansón Carrasco segments that, in their view, are incorrect and falsely rendered by the chronicler. Sansón Carrasco responds by stating that the poet must narrate the story as if 'esta hubiese ocurrido de esa forma' [it had taken place thus] and not 'como ésta ha ocurrido realmente' [as it actually took place], since that is the job of the historian. It is obvious that Sansón Carrasco is quoting Aristotle's *Poetics* and is thus reflecting on the relationship between reality and fiction (verisimilitude).

In 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' the *hrönir* surface from an imaginary planet, Tlön, into the 'reality of the fiction'. In Cervantes, the graphemes jump from the fiction to the real world, whereas in Borges we have objects and signs (the letter of the alphabet of Tlön). The origin of the origin of *Don Quixote* is to be found in the chivalry novels, that is, in fictional works. The origin of Tlön, however, is found in an article from an encyclopedia where a country called Uqbar is described, and here lies the

difference with Cervantes: the encyclopedia does not exist! Thus both authors proceed in a similar but also in a very different manner. The difference is inscribed in the attitude they adopt towards the relations of reality/fiction and in the way they deal with this relationship. Cervantes considers this relationship problematic, and thus merits a subject, but for Borges this is not the case at all. Whereas the question of whether or not writing is capable of capturing reality is at the very center of Cervantes's thinking, it is not present in Borges's case. Cervantes does not succeed in providing an answer to his question due to the complexity of reality and how it was conceived during Cervantes's time. Borges, instead, remains in the world of signs, since books maintain references only with signs and not with other systems. This is why Borges, in his terminology, views *Don Quixote*, and all writing (literature) as fictional or 'fantastic'.

Cervantes did not concern himself with the status of his writing, with whether it is fantastic or not, but rather he attempted to free himself from the tyranny of mimesis and of verisimilitude. He struggled with reality and took literary models as a referential system in order to resist the mimesis. It was Cervantes who opened the debate in the modern era of the opposition of 'reality vs. fiction' which would later be continued by Stern, Fielding, Diderot, Balzac, and Flaubert. In this case we are not dealing with the opposition of 'reality vs. supernatural', but rather with an epistemological-literary problem. Cervantes does not explain how his imaginary and phantasmatic characters were suddenly transformed into flesh and blood and serious characters who deserve to become subject matter for historiography. He abandons the opposition 'reality vs. imaginary' by not explaining how historiography spurts into reality which remains as something to be deciphered.

Our purpose in comparing Cervantes and Borges is to elucidate what Borges understood by 'fiction'. For Borges then, fiction is an anti-referential textual work, thus in no way, shape or form does he construct an opposition when defining 'fiction' as 'fantastic'. This becomes transparent when in 'La literatura fantástica' Borges lists distinctive categories pertaining to his definition of fantastic, categories such as 'the book within a book', 'the contamination of reality by means of dreams', 'travel through time', and the 'double'. In his interview of 1985 (Borges 1985: 25) he refused to define the 'fantastic' and instead left the term to 'float' ambiguously:

Todo es posible ... no sé, por ejemplo, en el caso de Wells tenemos un hecho fantástico entre muchos hechos cotidianos; en cambio en el mundo de Kafka no, todo parece fantástico. Todo puede ensayarse, pero lo importante es que el resultado sea feliz. (Borges 1985: 17)



[Everything is possible ... I don't know, for example, in the case of Wells we have a fantastic event among many daily events; in Kafka's world, however, everything seems fantastic. Everything can be tried out, but what matters is that the result be good.]

What is central for Borges is *imagination* and *dream*. In the same interview (1985), Borges stated that 'Arthur Machen ... afirma en su libro *Los tres impostores* que la función del hombre de letras es inventar una historia maravillosa y contarla de una manera maravillosa' [Arthur Machen ... states in his book *The Three Impostors* that the function of the man of letters is to invent a wonderful story and tell it in a wonderful way] and added that 'lo importante es soñar sinceramente, creo que si no hay un sueño anterior la escritura es imposible. Yo empiezo siempre por soñar, es decir, por recibir un sueño' [what matters is to dream sincerely, I believe that if there is no previous dream writing is impossible. I always begin by dreaming, that is, by receiving a dream before starting to write] (Borges 1985: 22).

Borges's conference in 1945, and the 1985 interview, reiterate his opinion pertaining to *Don Quixote* and fantastic literature (Borges 1985: 25). There is a difference, however, between the conference and the interview regarding the function that he attributes to the notion of the 'fantastic'. Borges considered fantastic literature 'como verdaderos símbolos de estados emocionales de procesos que se operan en todos los hombres. Por eso, no es menos importante la literatura fantástica que la realista' [as true symbols of emotional states of processes that take place in every man. For this reason, fantastic literature is no less important than realist literature] (Monegal 1976: 188). Thus processes and emotional states represent subjective perceptions of certain mystical forms. In the interview, when asked if he had been influenced by mystic literature, he replied that he had hardly read it except for the illuminists Swedenborg and Blake, and some Sufis, which is really an ironical *pointe* because Borges knew mysticism very well.

An excellent example of how Borges frees himself from the mimesis by the anti-fantastic and the anti-intertextuality is provided by the prologue to 'El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan' in *Ficciones* (Borges 1989/96: 1.429) where Borges quotes *Sartor Resartus, The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh* (1833/34) by Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881). This work, according to Borges, represents a perfect example of an author that has not only summarized and commented on books, but who has also simulated them. Borges also wrote about imaginary books such as *The Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*, where there is an article on Uqbar and one on Tlön, an imaginary planet in a fantastic culture. If we were

to ask ourselves what we have learned by reading Carlyle that may contribute to our interpretation of Borges's stories, the answer is: nothing.

We experience exactly the same situation with Johannes Valentinus Andreae (1586–1654), who in 1616 published a book entitled *Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz anno 1459* in Strasburg. Although this was a fictitious work, it was held as a serious and true scholarly work to the point that Andreae was tried for heresy. Borges attributed to Andreae, the theologian from Württemberg, the work *Lesbare und lesenwerthe Bemerkungen über das Land Ukkbar in Klein-Asien* (1641). Thus the author Andreae was a real and a historical person, but the work attributed to him was invented, as was Borges's story 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'. The work that Andreae actually wrote was not mentioned by Borges, but apparently he had taken the name Andreae from De Quincey's (1785–1859) *Writings* (Borges 1989/96: 1.433).

In *Writings* we find a detailed summary on Andreae's life and work. As with Carlyle, however, we are no further ahead with regards to the traditional constitution of signification. What we have learned is reduced to the banal realization that the authors and works quoted by Borges were used in the attempt to replace reality by books, and that these books simulate books (any books). What this tells us is that Borges did not proceed in an intertextual manner, but instead he 'imitated' intertextuality. Thus when he simulated those texts, they remained similar to other texts but were not located in their place of origin. One may ask why Borges would proceed in such a fashion. Let us first state that intertextuality is the result of the principle of mimesis, where a posttext maintains a dialogue with pretext which results in an intertext (de Toro 1992: 145–184). Specific stylistic and semantic structures are taken from the pretext as is the case with Cervantes, where the chivalry novels are the pretext for *Don Quixote*. These novels then form a dialogical hypertextual base, or more precisely, an unmistakable and clear codification. In Cervantes's case this procedure can be clearly described in terms of the function of a chosen model with respect to another, by stating the reference and the transformation of that reference. This is also the case when only a hypotextual activity is present, that is, when literary dialogism is not obvious because we are still able to describe the underlying palimpsest by painstakingly isolating the functional changes from one text to another. When we speak of intertextuality we must start from a mimetic activity where the intertextual device uses strong or weak systems of codification which, at the same time, can be partially or completely decoded. If we do not start from the concept of mimesis, then we cannot speak of intertextuality, since the interaction will not be recognized. This matter does not reside in the imitation of a whole system

or a chain of syntagms, since smaller structures such as a lexeme, or a given *genre*, have the capacity to evoke a whole system, or a complete *genre* tradition. From any perspective then, what is important is the functionality of such structures, and the value of such dialogism as knowledge.

Borges quotes many texts in his stories. A good example of this is provided by 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'. However, these texts are not 'used' as a whole or a part of the level of the text-object, as Borges did not operate a syntagmatic-semantic function change to the quoted segments of the pretext present in the posttext. As a result, Borges's stories do not have an intertext and this is why intertextuality is not practiced, at least as it has been defined up to now: Borges *simulates* the practice of intertextuality. If Borges's writing was only an elitist form of *l'art pour l'art*, a literary game, and if a 'logic-rational' signification was absent from his writing, then we would not need to ask ourselves why he simulates. But we must ask this question. The answer is found at the epistemological level. That is, beyond fictional literature, in the field of pure signs, in the conception that the world *is* absolute signs and literature *is* agnostic-semiotic work that results from a profound skepticism and from the awareness that the world and reality cannot be seized since they are subjective and fragmented perceptions of the world. Thus Borges obliterated the 'I' as a center. Instead he opted for simulation and began to develop a rhizomatic thinking. This posture achieved the level of a semiotic mysticism literalizing the Gnostic discourse that was used as a type of signification. This is why 'the' truth does not exist for Borges, and if it does, it does so as an empty signified that wanders, loses itself, and is diluted as is the case in 'Undr' and 'La escritura del Dios'. Truth can only be foreseen or glimpsed at in the briefest of instants and may be experienced as a vision, a dream, or in the mystical trance, and this is why it is not transmissible. Borges rejected the possibility of scientific knowledge (empirical/positivist or logic) for the same reason as Flaubert, in the nineteenth century, in his unfinished novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1964).

It follows then, that if Borges did not produce a mimetic literature, since he hardly refers to reality, then his writing simulated the literary mimesis and his texts could not be, *per definitionem*, classified as fantastic. Borges disengaged himself from all mimesis pertaining either to reality or to literature, by replacing the principle of mimesis with the principles of simulation (in a third-degree Baudrillard 1981) and with rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 1976).<sup>6</sup> Earlier I had pointed out that Borges replaced the binary opposition 'reality vs. fiction' with 'mimesis of fiction vs. pseudo-mimesis of fiction'. In the former, 'fiction' means a mimetic-referential literature and 'mimesis of fiction' an antireferential, antimimetic, and

self-referential activity. I agree with the critique that recognizes that Borges's 'fiction' is not equivalent to an external referentiality to the text, but rather a literature as a kind of specific 'fantastic writing' as we have it explained above. However, for Borges the notion of the 'fantastic' suffered a profound transformation, and this is what I have attempted to demonstrate above. Genette (1964: 323–327) stated that Borges's scholarship was the very condition of the modern fantastic *genre*, and Chiacchella (1987: 103) shared this point of view. I, however, disagree with both of them in establishing scholarship as intertextuality; Borges *simulates* intertextuality but in addition uses the rhizome as a writing device.

**'Rhizomatic simulation' or 'guided randomness'**  
(*'azar dirigido'*/'*dirigierter Zufall*')  
[1998]

### Rhizomatic simulation

The term 'rhizome' is anchored in six principles: *connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, asignifying rupture, cartography* and *decalcomania*. The rhizome is an ad libitum device of proliferation that has no center or origin. It brings to an end binarisms such as subject/object, and I/you, since the various element cannot be subsumed by a superior system. The rhizome allows for the crossing of different systems (historical events, social groups, theories, etc.) into one contiguous site, thus the various formations function without hierarchy. The rhizomatic thinking also has the capacity to 'deterritorialize' and 'reterritorialize' systems. The rhizome has no mimesis or similitude but instead allows the convergence of several heterogeneous systems. Additionally, the rhizome is associated with virtual reality and simulation with respect to reality. It is here where we find a connection between the rhizomatic theory and Baudrillard's (1981) simulation. He understood simulation as a virtual reality that is not empirical and therefore has no reference. It is an invented reality which produces something that does not exist, thus simulation becomes a virtual reality which replaces reality as hyperreality:

Aujourd'hui l'abstraction n'est plus celle de la carte, du double, du miroir ou du concept. La simulation n'est plus celle d'un territoire, d'un être référentiel, d'une substance. Elle est la génération par les modèles d'un réel sans origine ni réalité: hyperréel. Le territoire ne précède plus la carte, ni ne lui survit. C'est désormais la carte qui précède le territoire — précession des simulacres — c'est elle qui engendre le territoire et s'il fallait reprendre la fable. ... (Baudrillard 1981: 10)

For Baudrillard (1981: 12–13), simulation is the elimination of reference and this is why simulation has a high combinatory capacity. It is not, however, mimesis as parody, but rather the replacement of the ontological category of reality (*dissuasion du réel*). It contains all the signs of the real, but *de facto* it *simulates/replaces* (it does not reproduce). Simulation rejects the difference between reality and fiction, between what is true and false, between origin and effect, and eliminates causal relationships and thus radically expands the rhizomatic playfulness. This phenomenon is simple. There are signs that seem to hide something, others that seem to simulate something, and yet others that simulate something that does not exist. The first type represents the tradition of what is considered to be true and secret, while the second gives rise to the epoch of simulation (Baudrillard 1981: 16–17). The medium becomes the message (Baudrillard 1981: 41) and then it devours the message. The ever-growing quantity of information reduces the content to zero.

#### *'Guided randomness' and simulation*

After studying the work of Robbe-Grillet, the serial-aleatory music of Boulez, and Borges's work, I introduced the term 'guided randomness' (de Toro 1987; 1998). This device, when used in Borges's work is expressed by a rhizomatic structure; opened, and not ordered by dreams. Thus dreams and mystical visions are *literalized* and determined, or in other words they are 'guided'. The question that remains is once again why did Borges invent and simulate books? I believe that Borges attempted to express the perception processes within the perception context of a 'semiotic dream', that is, of a dream transcoded in signs. We have already established a new opposition: 'pseudo mimesis of fiction vs. perception/dream/mystical experience'. We have, then, a trans-codification of signifiers that do not seek signifieds or references, but instead transform themselves in a desperate symbol, in a dream that attempts to communicate that which is possible to experience only in a situation of total subjectivity and intimacy. In this context, Borges's assertion that dreams must precede literature and the act of writing, acquires all of its significance. The 'guided randomness' is what I have called 'rhizomatic' simulation and the device that characterizes the rhizomatic literary expressions. I have also defined this type of literariness as the attempt to recodify signs, that due to their trajectory in the narration, have lost their significance (as is the case in *Pierre Menard*) (cf. also Schulz-Buschhaus 1991: 390–391). Therefore, Borges went beyond literature when he reached the limit of what is thinkable

(as is shown in his classification of animals in a Chinese encyclopedia in 'El idioma analítico de John Wilkins' or when he freed the signs from the signifier and transformed them into mystical signifiers, magical and open, capable of triggering a mystical revelation as in 'Undr').<sup>7</sup> These transformations may be described as follows:

#### *Oppositions*

'reality' vs. 'fiction'  
'reality vs. fiction' vs. 'mimesis of fiction'  
'mimesis of fiction' vs. 'pseudo-mimesis of fiction'

#### *Disintegration of Oppositions*

'pseudo-mimesis of fiction'/'rhizomatic-guided literary activity'

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'perception/dream/mystical experience'  
rhizome/simulation

#### **Postcoloniality**

We understand postcoloniality as being a part of postmodern and poststructural thinking, knowledge and life. It is also the discourse of the colonizers and the colonized, of the periphery and the center, and a cultural notion that recodifies and perlaborates: the past and the present are in the future. Postcoloniality as a postmodern perspective is characterized by a deconstructionist attitude and thinking, that is, a critical/creative reflection, both intertextually and interculturally. It is also characterized by the thinking that recodifies history (or de-centers history), by a heterogeneous or hybrid thinking, which is subjective and radical, and by a radical particularity and diversity that is therefore universal. Postcoloniality does not exclude but rather includes a multi-dimensionality. In other words, the interaction of the diverse codified series of knowledge that aims to unmask what is contradictory and irregular in colonialism and neocolonialism, is what is imposed as the history, the truth. This procedure serves to interpret contradictions, plurality, ruptures, and the discontinuity of the culture actualized in a whole array of discourses, including the fictional discourse (see de Toro 1995: 16–21).

Borges also had an impact in the field of postcoloniality by his initiating a paradigm change which at first was not recognized. A good example of this is provided by the 'El escritor argentino y la tradición'.



My position springs from two premises. The first proposes that Borges is an author who appropriated the past, and by appropriating his debt with the past, he created a future. 'If Latin America is peripheral and colonized and everything is imported', then there exists the legitimization to appropriate cultural elements from the center. From the moment that Borges began his readings and initiated his travel through literature, he used literature not as an intertextual pastiche, as a parody, but he elaborated (*Verarbeitung*) and perlaborated it (*Verwindung*), producing his unmistakable, purely Borgesian (Argentinean?) discourse. The second premise is that the value of Borges's discourse, during modernity and neocolonialism, is neither recognized nor considered in the best of cases as it is avidly ransacked, without acknowledgement, and his contributions are denied, only to be reclaimed by the center. This situation partly changes when he is wrongly quoted without faith, and with indifference, but again, as in the first premise, he is made part of the center.

Borges's discourse presents the battle of a difficult relationship between periphery/center. This could be summarized in the following types of relationships: a) it is known, but it is hidden (i.e., *nouveau roman*, *roman Tel Quel*); b) it is known, but it is refuted as archaic (Ricardou); c) it is employed as a point of fundamental beginning (Foucault); d) it is employed, but it is partially misinterpreted (Baudrillard); and e) it is totally ignored (Deleuze and Guattari).

A brief analysis of the well-known text by Borges 'El escritor argentino y la tradición' will serve as an illustration of some of these points. Borges began his text by stating that the problem of the Argentinean writer and tradition is impossible to resolve. What is impossible to resolve is that which would characterize Argentinean literature (*lo argentino*), the question of Argentinean identity and its relationship with others, and that the periphery wants to be the center, and with the center (Borges 1989/96: 1.267). In fact, Borges states that the problem 'does not exist', for it deals with a rhetorical and pathetic problem, that is to say, with localisms, and with pub-patriotism. Thus the 'problem' for Borges is reduced to an 'appearance', to a 'simulacrum', and to a 'pseudo problem'.

The 'Argentinean' problem addressed here is the Latin American problem and, in general, that of the periphery. What Borges was really addressing, however, was the relationship between the periphery and the center according to the meaning that Bhabha and Spivak attributed to these phenomena. He analyzed the arguments used to constitute a legitimate discourse of the Argentinean and in so doing, refuted point by point, generic, thematic, and simply formal elements. Borges's argument can be summarized in three theses, which he exposed and argued against, and substantiated with diverse examples.

The first thesis concerns ideas of 'local color'. Argentinean literature is based on *gaucho* poetry and its lexicon, and in the procedures and themes which form an archetype, or a paradigm. Borges qualified this criteria as 'instinctive and lacking argumentation'. The representatives of this thesis used *Martin Fierro* as an example and, in its paradigmatic function, was compared with the works of Homer. Contrary to this thesis, Borges gave the example of *Alcorán*, Ricardo Güiraldes' *Don Segundo Sombra*, and his own works, particularly *La muerte y la brújula*.

The second thesis states that Argentinean writers must follow the Spanish tradition in order to ground their own work. The third proposes that Argentineans are estranged from the past, separated from Europe, and thus it is as if they were to find themselves in the first days of creation. With this in mind, searching for themes and European procedures would be a mistake. Borges's arguments against the first thesis are found in *Martin Fierro* as a paradigmatic work, but as a link in a chain it is not archetypal, it is not the starting point, nor is it even the origin. Furthermore, the equation proposed between the *gauchesco* genre and the art of the *payadores* (travelling country singers) is not a valid one since they are substantially different genres. Whereas the *payadores* tried to use a cultivated language and purposely avoided popular language, the cultivated writers of the *gauchesco* genre, such as José Hernández (1979), preferred to employ localisms to such an extent that they felt they had to provide the readers with a glossary in order to render the reading possible. Additionally, while the *payadores* favored general themes, the cultivated writers preferred the more popular and locally specific themes. Borges concludes that the *gauchesco* literature is as artificial as any other literature and so the criteria of local color does not adequately define what is Argentinean. He presented a series of examples of works which do not employ local color but are Argentinean (one needs only to remember Borges's negative opinion of *Salambô* by Flaubert). As such, Enrique Banchs mixes the local with the universal in *La urna*. For example, the roofs of the suburbs of Buenos Aires, and the nightingales belong to the Greek and Germanic traditions. According to Borges the Argentinean is rooted in the use of images: the nightingale symbolized Argentinean shyness, the difficulty they have in exposing their privacy, and their reluctance to be intimate.

This problem is located in a self-conscious and culturally peripheral context, but if one discusses the questions of essentialism, identity, and 'influences' from the Center, there is no problem. It is in this way that Borges refers to Racine and Shakespeare, who took their themes from Italian, Greek, and Latin antiquity. Yet no one would contest the fact that Racine was a French writer or that Shakespeare was an English writer.

Thus Borges adds that those who defend 'local color' should reject this theory as typically foreign aesthetics.<sup>8</sup> Another example is Borges's *Alcorán*, a work in which camels are not mentioned, because, according to Borges, that which is a part of that culture does not need to be mentioned specifically. The absence of camels is transformed, in this case, into a test of authenticity for the *Alcorán*, which is a case of doubt, but it is not the negation of its identity. Now then: who would persist in mentioning the camels? Borges asks himself:

Un falsario, un turista, un nacionalista árabe mencionaría a cada paso los camellos y sus caravanas. ... Mahoma, como árabe, no tenía por qué saber que los camellos eran especialmente árabes; eran para él parte de la realidad, no tenía por qué distinguirlos ... pero Mahoma como árabe, estaba tranquilo: sabía que podía ser árabe sin camellos. Creo que los argentinos podemos parecernos a Mahoma, podemos creer en la posibilidad de ser argentinos sin abundar en color local. (Borges 1989/96: 1.270)

[A quack, a tourist, an Arab nationalist, would mention camels and their caravans all the time. ... Mahomet, being an Arab, had no reason to know that camels were not essentially Arab, for him they were part of their reality, there was no reason to distinguish them ... but Mahomet, as an Arab, was at peace: he knew he could be an Arab without camels. I believe that we Argentineans can be more like Mahomet, we can believe in the possibility of being Argentineans without abounding in local color.]

In another example, Borges quoted some of his own early works which abounded in localisms, and which he considered to be '*libros ahora felizmente olvidados*' (Borges 1989/96: 1.271). He also criticized his own text, '*La muerte y la brújula*', which is, by his own account, a nightmare in which elements of Buenos Aires are deformed, and the places are called by French names. Despite everything, however, the readers discover '*el sabor de las afueras de Buenos Aires*' (Borges 1989/96: 1.271).

A final example noted by Borges is *Don Segundo Sombra* by Ricardo Güiraldes. Although this book qualifies as a national symbol, according to Borges, it is full of metaphors 'de los cenáculos de Montmartre, cuya fábula toma de *Kim* de Kipling y cuya acción tiene lugar en la India, obra que a su vez está bajo el influjo de *Huckleberry Finn* de Mark Twain, epopeya del Mississippi'. He remarks that this novel, which is considered a national symbol, has required three cultural contexts in order to be considered epic. Furthermore, he finds it unacceptable that 'los nacionalistas' pretend to 'venerar las capacidades de la mente argentina' limiting 'el ejercicio poético de esa mente a algunos pobres temas locales, como si los argentinos [pudiesen] hablar de orillas y estancias y no del universo' (Borges 1989/96: 1.271).

Arguments against the *second thesis*: Regarding the option to follow the Spanish tradition, Borges has two objections. First is that if Argentina (and Latin America) may be defined as the attempt to separate itself or distance itself from Spain, then to propose the former colonial power as an example of the origin is indeed a contradiction. The second is that the enjoyment of Spanish literature is acquired and the Spanish texts are not always well received by readers: 'difícilmente gustables sin aprendizaje especial' (Borges 1989/96: 1.272), unlike French or English literature, which does not create problem with their reception as Spanish literature does. With regards to the arguments against the *third thesis*, Borges did not share the opinion that Argentineans (and Latin Americans) are estranged from the past, separated from Europe, nor that they find themselves in a state of initiation and that is why all cultural association with Europe can be perceived as false, precisely because in Latin America there is another historical and temporal sensitivity. Because the bond with the old world is so close, everything that occurs there has a great impact in the new world, especially in Argentina.

After having refuted all of the possible cases of the discourse of *Argentineanness* from the categories presented above, Borges concluded with a lapidarian statement: Argentinean (Latin American) tradition is submersed in Western culture and so it has an even greater right to that tradition than those nations which are the owners of that tradition. Latin Americans act within Western culture, but without being tied to it, and so, from there the capacity for innovation arises:

Creo que los argentinos, los sudamericanos en general, estamos en una situación análoga; podemos manejar todos los temas europeos, manejarlos sin supersticiones, con una irreverencia que puede tener, y ya tiene, consecuencias afortunadas. (Borges 1989/96: 1.273)

[I believe that we Argentineans, South-Americans in general, are in a similar situation; we can handle every European topic, we can handle them without superstitions, with an irreverence which can, and in fact has, fortunate consequences.]

For Borges this discussion of *Argentineanness*, of identity, and of the self, is a false problem since it reflects '*el eterno problema del determinismo*'. That is, it reflects the eternal question of the origin, of the unifying trace, and of the continuity in time. Borges professes an open condition, of postmodernity, when he states that:

nuestro patrimonio es el universo; ensayar todos los temas, y no podemos concretarnos a lo argentino para ser argentinos: porque o ser argentino es una fatalidad y en ese caso lo seremos de cualquier modo, o ser argentino es una mera afectación, una máscara.

Creo que si nos abandonamos a ese sueño voluntario que se llama la creación artística, seremos argentinos y seremos, también, buenos o tolerables escritores. (Borges 1989/96: 1.274)

[our patrimony is the universe; to deal with every subject, and we cannot stick to Argentinean matters to be Argentinean because either being Argentinean is a fatality and in that case we shall be so anyway, or being Argentinean is a mere affectation, a mask.

I believe that if we abandon ourselves to that voluntary dream called artistic creation, we shall be Argentineans and we shall also be good or tolerable writers.]

This quote is a perfect example of what I have described as post-coloniality: the association and the relationship of one's own context with that of others who are outside their own locality, and the appropriation and the claim of cultural discourses and phenomena that belong to all, not only to one cultural region.

From early on, Borges showed us which road to follow, with a certain success. The Borgesian discourse is indelible and unmistakable, but is it Argentinean? The question seems meaningless, but if we try to answer it we can say that Borges's discourse is Argentinean only from a civic and geographical point of view. It is peculiar that for a long period of time, possibly even today, the great majority of Argentineans and Latin Americans, including the academic world, have failed to see, or refused to accept, that Borges was Argentinean and Latin American.

What makes Borges great is his universality. This is found in his capacity to incorporate in his literature and thinking what is local and universal, a literature without ideological and geographical borders. He shares this characteristic with Kafka, for whom Borges always felt a special fascination and interest, as is demonstrated when he describes Kafka's work. When doing this he describes his own work and writing. This fascination is obvious in a writing that never ends, which always escapes ('postergación infinita', Borges 1982: 10, 19) and can never be determined in a given space ('regressus ad infinitum', Borges 1982: 9, 19), as is exemplified in the following quotation:

Kafka en cambio tiene textos, sobre todos en sus cuentos, donde se establece algo eterno. A Kafka podemos leerlo y pensar que sus fábulas son tan antiguas como la historia, que esos sueños fueron soñados por hombres de otra época sin necesidad de vincularlos a Alemania o a Arabia. El hecho de haber escrito un texto que trasciende el momento en que se escribió es notable. Se puede pensar que se redactó en Persia o en China y ahí está su valor. (Borges 1983: 3)

[Kafka, on the other hand, has texts, mainly among his stories, where something eternal is established. We can read Kafka and think that his fables are as ancient

as history itself, that those dreams were dreamt by men of other times without any need of linking them to Germany or Arabia. The fact of having written a text which transcends the moment in which it was written is remarkable. It can be thought it was written in Persia or in China and there lies its worth.]

## Conclusion

Borges's writing, in the 1940s, effected a quantum leap with regards to the epistemological basis of his work, and the cultural and philosophical thinking which was further developed in the second half of our century.

Since signs are impregnated with signification, Borges has had to rewrite them (in the sense that Lyotard uses this notion). In this rewriting he achieved the limit of what is thinkable and imaginable, thus he created 'linguistic monstrosities' (Foucault). Here resides the paradigm change and the fantastic component in its semiotic-epistemological level: the limit is manifested in what he thinks and writes, of what he seems to recognize but is rendered in a different manner.<sup>9</sup> Borges created his own brand of the fantastic in as much as he '*n'altère aucun corps réel, ne modifie en rien le bestiaire de l'imagination*' (Foucault 1966: 7). Here we are describing the rhizomatic simulation: Borges *makes* 'literature with literature', in the same manner as the 'crocodile *makes* the resemblance of bark with bark'. The classification of the animals appears, in traditional thinking, as an irritant and a transgression. This is due to the placing together of diverse and even opposed semantic and pragmatic fields which have no relationship among themselves. Borges connected them by using an arbitrary continuity of terms which exclude each other. The 'monstrosity' of Borges's writing does not reside in the weaving and proximity of the terms used, but rather in the sharing of a common space (= text, written page) which rejects any semantic or pragmatic linkage. In this manner Borges erased the habitual language and replaced it with absolute signs, and thus we do not have a common logos. It is here that the 'terror' that Borges's texts provoke emerges, and so the abyss of what is not comprehensible is opened. This is the site of the fantastic *par excellence*, the site of pure fiction, of writing and literature, as Finné proposes for this textual subtype, but more importantly, a fiction without mimetic background. This is also a playful site, artificial (rhizome), and self-referential which contradicts the traditional notion of the fantastic. Following Foucault, Borges produced:

le désordre qui fait scintiller les fragments d'un grand nombre d'ordres possibles dans la dimension, sans loi ni géométrie, de l'hétéroclite; et il faut entendre ce mot au plus près de son étymologie: les choses y son 'couchées', 'posées', 'disposées'



dans de sites à ce point différents qu'il es impossible de retrouver pour eux un espace d'accueil, de définir au-dessous des uns et des autres un lieu commun. (Foucault 1966: 9)

The concept of the library topically represents what Borges practiced and Foucault described: the production of a disorder constructed by fragments of a limitless number of possible orders that are rhizomatically reproduced. Borges apparently evokes a discourse as if this were established a priori, and then proceeds to arrest its logos and to deconstruct it. The fact that Borges's metaphysical vacuum may be labeled fantastic as a result of an antimimetic activity, playful and unstructured,<sup>10</sup> should not be confused with the type of discourse that functions against the given order of having a transcendental effect (or a transcendental meaning) as Finné seems to suggest. The effect of such a procedure lays in its unimaginability and its subjective perception. It is inscribed in the representation of the relativity of the real, as real as a vacuum which results in the fascination of a terrible infinity and not a '*harmonie consolatrice*' (Finné 1980: 10): its negation is realized as desire. It is here where the antiteleological nature of Borges's writing is inscribed by means of the relativity, iconized in the symbol of the 'rhizomatic labyrinth', that leads to its dissolution with the unlocking of the enigma of 'Undr' as 'Undr'. With regards to the symbol of the labyrinth as the emblem of the fantastic, Borges replies:

Quizá el fin del laberinto — si es que el laberinto tiene un fin — sea el de estimular nuestra inteligencia, el de hacernos pensar en el misterio, y no en la solución. Es muy raro entender la solución, somos seres humanos, nada más. Pero buscar esa solución y saber que no la encontramos es algo hermoso, desde luego. Quizá, los enigmas sean más importantes que las soluciones. ... (Borges 1983: 25)

[perhaps the end of the labyrinth — if the labyrinth has an end — is that of stimulating our intelligence, of making us think about the mystery, not about the solution. It is very strange to understand the solution, we are but human beings. But looking for that solution and knowing we do not find it is something beautiful, of course. Perhaps, the enigmas are more important than the solutions. ...]

Thus Borges has abandoned the normal experience of language, of the world and of knowledge. His chattering finality works as a goal and places us in the absolute referentiality: he never asks where from and where to. Borges's writing overcomes the theory of similitude and Foucault's *différance*, by obliterating them both: what remains is the rhizome and the simulation.

## Notes

1. The 'metatextual' level we are referring to, corresponds to the *mise en abyme* in the double meaning assigned to it by Gide, that is, first as a thematization of the organization of diegesis, and then as allegory of literary narrative techniques. Finally, Borges's metatextual narrative techniques correspond to the utilization that the authors of the *nouveau roman*, of the *nouveau nouveau roman* make of these narrative techniques and to those of the *Tel Quel* group of the 1950s and 1960s, that is as a deconstruction of the semantic field and of the literary genres.
2. Borges writes in the Prologue to *Ficciones*: 'Desvarío laborioso y empobrecedor el de componer vastos libros; el de explayar en quinientas páginas una idea cuya perfecta exposición oral cabe en pocos minutos. Mejor procedimiento es simular que esos libros ya existen y ofrecer un resumen, un comentario. Así procedió Carlyle en *Sartor Resartus*; así Butler en *The Fair Haven*; obras que tienen la imperfección de ser libros también, no menos tautológicos que los otros. Más razonable, más inepto, más haragán, he preferido la escritura de notas sobre libros imaginarios. Estas son *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* y el *Examen de la Obra de Herbert Quain*'. (Borges 1989/96: 1.429)
3. This is why I do not share Jauss's opinion that Borges foretold the Reception Theory of the Konstanz School (1987: 30ss.).
4. See Jakobson regarding realism and fantastic literature (1971: 373–391); also Höfner (1980); Wünsch (1991: 17ss.); Thomsen and Fischer (1985) and Penning (1985: 37–38, 50).
5. Borges (1989/96: 1.444–450, 2.45–47, and 2.177): 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote', 'Magias parciales del Quijote' and 'Parábola de Cervantes y el Quijote'.
6. Baudrillard considers Borges's writing as a simulation of a second degree. I have pointed out elsewhere the Baudrillard is mistaken on this issue since Borges's writing is a simulation in itself; cf. A. de Toro 1992, 1994a, 1995.
7. I have dealt with the notion that Borges's writing is 'beyond literature' in A. de Toro (1999a: 137–162, 1999b: 129–153).
8. This is discussed by Hugo within his historical-cultural theory in *Préface de Cromwell* (1971).
9. de Toro (1992, 1994a, 1995). I am referring to the following text of Borges y Foucault: 'El idioma analítico de John Wilkins' (Borges 1989/96: 2.86): 'En sus remotas páginas está escrito que los animales se dividen en (a) pertenecientes al Emperador, (b) embalsamados, (c) amaestrados, (d) lechones, (e) sirenas, (f) fabulosos, (g) perros sueltos, (h) incluidos en esta clasificación, (i) que se agitan como locos, (j) innumerables, (k) dibujados con un pincel finísimo de pelo de camello, (l) etcétera, (m) que acaban de romper el jarrón, (n) que de lejos parecen moscas'.
10. Foucault (1966: 7): 'Dans l'émerveillement de cette taxinomie [d'une certaine encyclopédie chinoise citée par Borges], ce qu'on rejoint d'un bond, ce qui, à la faveur de l'apologue, nous est indiqué: l'impossibilité nue de penser cela. ... La monstruosité ici n'altère aucun corps réel, ne modifie en rien le bestiaire de l'imagination; elle ne se cache dans la profondeur d'aucune pouvoir étrange. ... Ce qui transgresse toute imagination, toute pensée possible, c'est simplement la série alphabétique (a, b, c, d) qui lie à toutes les autres chacune de ces catégories. ... La monstruosité que Borges fait circuler dans son énumération consiste au contraire en ceci que l'échappée commune des rencontres s'y trouve lui-même ruiné. Ce qui est impossible, ce n'est pas le voisinage des choses, c'est le site lui-même où elles pourraient voisiner. Les animaux ... où

pourraient-ils jamais se rencontrer, sauf dans la page qui la transcrit? Où peuvent-ils se juxtaposer sinon dans le non-lieu du langage? mais celui-ci, en les déployant, n'ouvre jamais qu'un espace impensable'.

10. Cf. 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius': 'Los metafísicos de Tlön no buscan la verdad ni siquiera la verosimilitud: buscan el asombro. Juzgan que la metafísica es una rama de la literatura fantástica' (Borges 1989/96: 1.436).

Borges repite esta fórmula en una entrevista (1985: 23): 'Son el ápice de la literatura fantástica. El Dios de Spinoza, por ejemplo, supera a todo lo inventado por Kafka o Poe. Y no lo digo contra la teología o filosofía, al contrario, es una exaltación de ellas. Una obra como la *Ética* de Spinoza o *El mundo como voluntad y representación*, de Schopenhauer, o el sistema del Buda son obras maestras de la imaginación, sí'.

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## A garden for ideoscopy

CLAUDIA GONZÁLEZ COSTANZO

*El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan* is a disconcerting book, as its first readers came to discover. Very few of them could follow the labyrinthine detail of its plots or recognize, under its different layers of irony and parody, its truly revolutionary nature. Most of them had to react as did Mother, who asked Borges why he insisted on writing that kind of stories that scared her.

— Emir Rodríguez Monegal

### The key lies in the enigma

There is nothing new in this article — nor in the words which begin it, a fact that ominously recalls some of the best known Borgesian formulations. However, it is almost a rule of decorum that this should be so: it is the duty of thousands of professionals of the sciences and the *belles lettres* to feed the muddle of forgettable writings whose only aim is to keep up the hope that out of such profusion will come a single offspring worthy of interest.

Those impossible inventories that Borges used to invent again and again (to show the unavoidable impossibility of the inventory, or, what is the same, that inventories are always invented) could include such erudite writings — on condition that one of its chapters be entitled 'Borges'. Borges wrote 'The Borges'; some other writer will write 'The Borgeologists'. And perhaps the inventory should also include the expressions that allude to Borges's ubiquity, not only because he is the point of reference of so many scholars, but also because on getting acquainted with his work, one realizes that nothing seems to escape the empire of his gifts. Among those impossible inventories a saying might slip in, an alteration imposed by the omnipresence of another saying that has survived for two thousand years: 'All labyrinths lead to Borges'.



After accepting the inevitable impregnation that comes from the proximity of several texts, and after giving up all attempts at novelty, it becomes acceptable to introduce these lines, with a renowned short story by Borges as a touchstone.

'El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan' is, among many other things, a spy story with the format of a detective story. Its key lies in the enigma and the resolution of the enigma. So does it consecrate the coincidence between police search and scientific research, which could not escape our cautious minds and that deserved, among others, Sebeok's well-known study on the methodological proximity of Sherlock Holmes and Charles Sanders Peirce (Sebeok and Umiker-Sebeok 1987). The enigma, if multiplied inside a garden — one of the many labyrinths of the story — is an unnecessary dialogue between the main character and Stephen Albert (a name that turns out to be the key to the military operation upon which the detectivesque elements of the story are centered; a man who poses and solves the epistemological problems that lie at the core of this story). Stephen Albert devotes himself to the unveiling of two mysteries on which several generations of scholars had worked unsuccessfully: a novel and a labyrinth built by an 'illustrious' ancestor of the main character. He ventures a series of hypotheses that lead to a series of failures, until he dares to conjecture that the whole problem is incorrectly posed: there have never been two mysteries. The novel was the labyrinth — 'A labyrinth of symbols' (Borges 1989/96: 1.477).

The touchstone I have chosen conjugates four primary observations evident in the text, and some others that a poor imitation of Stephen Albert's hypothetical doings allows us to add. The four primary observations are the following:

First, the attempts to understand the work of Ts'ui Pen failed while the ordering system of reality used for this purpose was the very system that the work questioned. It was necessary to realize this — that this system was a construction only valid until some event demonstrated the opposite. Such a system was that of successive logic. From an instrument of knowledge it became a prison for many scientists and for science itself. Borges's story barely summarizes a restriction that has affected knowledge for many years.

Second, the intellection of symbols and time are interdependent. This is valid not only of the interpretation of the signs but also for the study of their constitutions and interrelations, to which interpretation is subjected. With relation to this it is relevant to recall that Peirce inserted his analyses on the sign within a more global conception, his *Ideoscopy*, which is close to phenomenology but explicitly differentiated from it. Each one of the three ways of knowing included in the ideoscopy presupposes

a different conception of time. And the sign is perceptible as such only in the third one, which contradicts several of the premises related to the idea of temporal succession.

Third, in 'El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan' the future is plural. This is, at the very least, the memory that modernity's dominant conception of the future is historical, that is to say, subject to the same degree of error as any other construction. Moreover, as Borges states in the story, this notion of temporal plurality differs from other known temporal conceptions, hence it may permit access to previously forbidden knowledge.

Finally, 'In every fiction' according to the text (Borges 1989/96: 3.497) and until quite recently, in all research, 'every time a man is faced with different alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others'. Not only the temporal concept of modernity, but also the modern reading of the world as a whole is shaped in the disjunctive. This takes us back to the first four observations: we have lived under the empire of the disjunction: *a* or not-*a*, *a/not-a*, *a* vs not-*a*; these are shifts of a binary logic that twist the understanding of the sign.

These considerations could be juxtaposed with some others which will allow us to appreciate how Borges's garden is a fertile field for the ideoscopy. The four observations above coincide in one concept, disjunction, a figure of logic and linguistics (and it will be valid within the framework of these lines, the transposition from a proper name of literature to nonliterary fields, at least because the '*a* vs not-*a*' has become, at the very least '*a* vs not-*a*?'). A figure that Borges's text does not even mention, which is almost overlooked ('every time a man is faced with several alternatives, he chooses one and discards the others'), showing its mundaneness, its ubiquity, its consonance with common sense, with common prejudice.

The whole of Borges's work offers much more than a sort of denunciation of the unnoticed disjunctive error. It offers alternatives (in plural) — a demand forced upon him by a minimum of coherence with his pre-suppositions. Among these alternatives, temporal plurality, which is the attention point of our touchstone-text, will be for these lines, a permanent topic of reference, albeit not the focus of attention. The attention is centered here on a procedure construction that remains constant throughout the years in Borges's prose and poetry, through which he absorbs the alternative and inoculates it, making of the disjunction an adversative, and an affirmation of the partial negation established by every adversative conjunction.

To linger at this conjunction of conjunctions could pare the study and, apart from taking it from semiotics to the neighborhood of linguistics,

there would be a considerable risk of turning it into a delayed subscription of a Babelic omnipotence conjured by its own intrinsic logic. This excess (presently toned down) gave rise to statements like: 'Any nonlinguistic description of poetry would be a useless translation, if not impossible' (Greimas 1987 [1966]: 89). The conjunction of conjunctions that we are interested in matters here because it has other scopes. One of them becomes evident when, in the edition of the *Obras Completas* from 1989/96, 'Los Conjurados' appears as the last work of fiction by Borges. In it, and through it, the conjunction of conjunctions is combined with the 'conspiracy' (*conjura* in Spanish), a political and civic action (adjectives that the epistemological revision does not show as tautological; Benveniste 1974: 272–280) a word that amalgamates unity and division. In this conspiracy the aim of the union is the opposition, the segregation of the new unit from the original one. The word *conjura* joins two opposites to strengthen the disjunction; a disjunction which, besides all its linguistic and logic implications, is vested with Manichean moral connotations, sieged on both sides by betrayal. However, the conspiracy privileged by Borges is that of 1291 at Switzerland. The 'fact', as Borges calls it, was fostered by betrayal (as Schiller underscores); the incorporation of a *d*, the geographical distance which, in Spanish, goes from *traición* [betrayal] to *tradición* [tradition], makes of the conspiracy chosen by Borges paradigmatic (the final poem 'Los Conjurados' presupposes this, and only this, conspiracy that repeats itself ad infinitum 'all over the planet'), a synthesis in which the unity is inclusive of all forms of segregation, without denying it. It was a projection into the future operating, unlike that modernity it anticipated, a conquest not of the future but of the past, in a combination that disperses time. It was an act of individual and collective defense, of faith in tradition and in the most basic values. The symbol as convention, linked to the subordination of citizens to preestablished order, to the instituted norm, the *polis*, and the symbol as motivation, linked to a religious obligation among peers become fused in this conspiracy which congregates conjunctions.

Apart from this, the conspirators that wander along Borges's story, the characters of these fictions, as well as those of much of his fiction, object to the principle of identity: 'Fueron Winkelried, que se clava en el pecho las lanzas enemigas para que sus camaradas avancen. / Son un cirujano, un pastor o un procurador, pero también son Paracelso y Amiel, Jung y Paul Klee'. [It was Winkelried, who stabs his chest with the enemy's swords so that his comrades may advance. It is a surgeon, a clergyman or a notary, but it is also Paracelsus and Amiel, Jung, and Paul Klee.] (Borges 1989/96: 3.501)

Naturally, this implies, through a different channel, another rejection of the disjunctive. The primordial formulation *a* vs not-*a* implies a presupposition too simple to take into account: *a* does not represent an object, but rather a category; inversely, it presupposes the existence of several identical objects. This equality can only be understood insofar it can be conceived in terms of a disjunction: identical objects are those between which no differential features can be established (i.e. oppositions, within each one of the categories which constitute these characteristics). This is to say, *a* vs not-*a* allows for the world to be imagined as a sum of series, even though there might be filial or fraternal relationships between the series, which explains the clarification 'a sum of families of series'. He has been thinking of the world as an isomorphic object of the industrial assembly line. (Against the argument that the serial prototype is in Aristotle it could be said that in his writings is also the prototype, and the desire of the machine.) The negative as well as inclusive form of disjunctive seriation that Borges's texts offer is that of multiple repetitions rather than that of the plurality of objects, characters, facts, times, and spaces, a plurality which spreads without limits, in which each element is unique because it is plural; hence, from the individual and from the set we are projected toward the One. And towards conjecture, which in this context is one of the names of unity.

#### *Antecedents*

Science has attempted to be iconic for too long; everybody talks about 'maps' of every kind. There are maps of relations because the axiom of the arbitrariness of the sign prevents any other form of iconicity. Curiously (and now I am referring only to semiotics) the key to those relationships has been a zero of sorts, denouncing the ignorance of a relationship, but presenting itself as the death of all possible relationships: the disjunction. The inclusive and plural adversative of Borges unceasingly unlocks binary locks to liberate for our eyes the access to infinite conjunctions. A Janus-like face, who knows what other sees and can itself see at the same time, Borges's work enlightens, orientates, and makes some of legacies of Peirce bloom. With this aim in mind we will go from scientific iconism to ideoscopy, from ideoscopy to the disjunctive seriation of modernity and to Borges's inclusive adversative, arriving at the conspiracy to catch a glimpse of some of the possibilities of indetermination.

Binarism has predominated in occidental thought, as has one of its offshoots, the lineal conception of time. After attempts to trap Peirce's

'unlimited semiosis' inside the binary system, it has functioned as an albatross of sorts, diminished when restricted to its biped possibilities, and aim of the bitter jokes of the sailors in Baudelaire's emblematic poem. Just as this emblematic bird, however, it unfolds its potential in a tridimensional movement.

In the meantime, some subterranean currents of thought fostered other, nonlinear and nonbinary temporal conceptions: after the sixties, voices could be heard rereading Hegel and Nietzsche, the echoes of the questionings of modern schemes at the gates of modernism began to multiply: Benjamin — an original reader of the German Baroque — acquired a splendid vitality years after his physical death; Eliot had rescued John Donne, as Borges returned to Cervantes and Quevedo. Still in force, these tendencies are now at risk of suffocating themselves: one of the more famous survivors of these quests, Gianni Vattimo (1999), remarked recently that they had come to a blind spot, lacking methods to procure knowledge. At the same time, a few years earlier, at the same university, Thomas Sebeok (1996) insisted on his tireless consideration of the possibilities of semiotics as a metascience, laid out as the basis for all other sciences. The intrinsic compatibility of these currents and this metascience leads us to think in the need to link them, which is what Haroldo de Campos, the most distinguished of Brazilian semioticians, has been doing for years. In his latest collection of essays, for example, he undertakes the analysis of Kafkian clues, based on Peirce's notions, and, from this starting point, he progresses towards hermeneutic quests:

Todo símbolo verbal — toda palarra em estado de dicionário — é, na terminologia de Peirce, um LEGI-SIGNO, ou seja, um signo que tem a natureza de uma LEI, pois seu significado geral nasce de uma prévia convenção entre os usuários de uma mesma comunidade lingüística. ODRADEK é, portanto, um SIGNO-LEI. (de Campos 1997: 135)

[Every verbal sign — every word in a state of dictionary — is, in Peirce's terminology a LEGISIGN, that is, a sign which has the nature of a LAW, since its general meaning comes from a previous conviction among the users from the same linguistic community. ODRADEK is, therefore, a LEGISIGN.]

De Campos translates it as *advogadúnculo do diabo* [little devil's advocate] and interprets it as the

cifra e decifração de uma linguagem que se transforma de máquina inútil, incapaz de produzir bens para o consumo dos usuários integrados no sistema, em máquina útil, eficientíssima para análise da condição alienada desses mesmos usuários

e de suas seqüelas (ainda que apenas veleitárias) de intolerância e violência. (de Campos 1997: 137)

[cipher and deciphering of a language which, from being a useless machine, incapable of producing goods for the consumption of those users integrated to the system, becomes a useful machine, extremely efficient for the analysis of the alienated condition of those very same users and their sequels of intolerance and violence.]

And, specifically with relation to Borges, although not exclusively about him, the pioneer of semiotic studies in Uruguay, Lisa Block de Behar (1999: 141–142):

Interesa trazar, en cambio, algunas líneas comunes en el pensamiento contemporáneo, proponer una síntesis de diversidades que alcanzara la unidad, más allá de consagraciones teológicas, superando la facilidad de las oposiciones binarias o la limitación de una numeración que, triádica, sólo agregue un número a la serie. ...

Borges descubre la magnífica ironía de Dios a partir de un lenguaje de hierro, de su lenguaje blindado, que es el de un ciego, habla del rojo Adán, de otros más rojos yuxtapuestos en sus propios nombres: Red Scharlach ... Por medio de un dispositivo onomasio-semasiológico extravagante el poeta o el filósofo desafía las fronteras, impugna el rigor de una historia, parodia las propiedades lingüísticas básicas (arbitrariedad, linealidad).

[It is interesting to lay out some common lines in contemporary thought, to propose a synthesis of diversities able to reach the unity, beyond theological consecrations, overcoming the easiness of binary oppositions or the limit of a numeration that, triadic, only adds a number to the series. ...]

Borges discovers God's magnificent irony departing from a language of iron, from his blinded language, the language of a blind man, he talks about the red Adam, about others, with even more red juxtaposed in their own names: Red Scharlach. ... By means of an extravagant onomastic-semasiologic mechanism, the poet or the philosopher challenges the boundaries, opposes the rigor of a story, parodies the basic linguistic properties (arbitrariness, linearity).]

### *Conjunctions, inclusions*

To summarize, if the notions of secondness, binarism, lineal time, series, equality, equation (Paz 1969), and disjunction are interdependent, the thirdness which Peirce considered as an instance inherent in the sign demands another set of notions, equally interdependent. A reading of Borges offers — among other alternatives which are not considered here — a group which features (and what follows does not intend to be



a comprehensive list) juxtaposition as an inclusive form (laid out in such a way that the series gives the idea of a temporal juxtaposition in which the same object, event or character reappears, as a constant element, and at the same time is multiplied in various forms on each appearance). It also features the unity of the multiple and the multiplicity of the unique (including the temporal conception). Each one of these three components of the group presupposes that from each of them one can reach the others, and one can reach knowledge. They are syntheses disposed in a great number of projections. Due to limitations on the extension of this work I will deal here only with those considerations related to conjunction. It is a well-known fact that among the syntheses contained in the work of Borges some words, forcibly recurrent and necessarily inevitable, gained a place in his writings: mirrors, labyrinths, swords, to which in 'El elogio de la sombra' (Borges 1989/96: 2.395) he adds 'la vejez y la ética' [old age and ethics]. Words, insofar as they are signs, are 'sensible things' as Paz recalled some time ago. They are signs to which the closing text of the last volume dedicated to Borges's fiction in his *Obras Completas* adds the conspiracy.

Grammarians distinguish two types of conjunctions: coordinating and subordinating. Coordinating conjunctions are known with the illustrative name of 'connectors'; they are the only units of occidental languages that do not form part of any grammatical 'structure' and which do not alter them. Their function is simply to join, they only establish a relationship between components. They offer, in consequence, a significant field of analysis to observe the viability of the reading scheme of structures-relations within a language.

The division of language in two fields, one monstrative and another symbolic, restricts the analysis of coordinating conjunctions. In a binary reading of the sign, the absence of a clearly delimited 'meaning' for conjunctions determines their inclusion in the monstrative field of language (cf. Bühler 1985 [1934]). The fact that they only account for a relationship strengthens this classifications, since it makes it possible to consider connectors as deictics whose function is that of indexes within the text, as is the case of anaphora in Bühler's (1985 [1934]) now classic considerations. It must be added that, besides their statute of indexes — resulting from transposing Bühler's statements to semiotic categories — connectors also fulfil an iconic function, insofar as they represent a relationship between objects, situations or concepts, themselves represented by words of clauses joined by the connectors. This iconism through which a representation-information about a relationship of reality makes connectors relevant objects of study for this approach between Borges's writings and ideoscopy.

However, connectors have some differences with the other sets of words which fall under the category of deictics. In the first place, they are not only a sign of union between two structures of language; each one of the connectors represents (or, in a performative perspective constitutes) a type of relationship and this depends solely on the chosen connector. It is true that in different languages there is a different degree of formalization of meanings of the different connectors. In English grammars the very list of connectors changes: there is no doubt about *but*, *yet*, *and*, *nor*, *or*; some add *for*, and some other *so*, yet others keep the list open. In Spanish the formalization is much greater, and grammars have offered lists which are presented as comprehensive. In his *Gramática*, Alarcos Llorach (1994: 27–32) limits them to *y*, *ni*, *o*, *pero*, *sino* [and, nor, or, but] (noting some others, now obsolete). Besides, in English grammars there is a greater incidence of their indexal value insofar as their functions are repeatedly detailed, indicating the 'marks' these connectors carry. In Spanish connectors are grouped (Alarcos Llorach 1994: 27–32) in three functions (copulative, disjunctive and adversative) and each connector entails its own meaning (even though one of them is bisemic): *y* means a sum of affirmations; *ni* a sum of negations; *o*, opposition, and this is the bisemic meaning of equivalence of incompatibility; *pero*, restrictive contradiction; *sino*, contradiction of incompatibility. Naturally, all these meanings are relations and relations taking place at a metalinguistic level (affirmations, negations, opposition, contradictions). Nevertheless, they also represent relations which take place in the real world between mentioned objects (addition, equivalence, incompatibility). And, unlike the other deictics, these have their own denotation, and in their case the variability of denotation according to the context does not apply.

With regards to denotation, in Spanish one of the connectors adds to what has been said a feature which separates it from the others, and this is the particularity of having been nominalized by use. It is *pero* [but]. The expression *los peros* is used to refer to the set of objections which a situation, a fact, an object or a proposal deserves or could deserve. Let us limit ourselves to supposing that this indicates a particular attention of the speaker to the restrictive contradiction among the connectors; and that this attention is linked to an expectation or an intuition about the symbolic potential of this word.

Connectors, therefore, are not circumscribed to the monstrative area of language, and they present the triple condition index, icon and symbol concomitantly. This simultaneous plurality makes them especially apt for the construction of multiple uniqueness and unity of the multiple which we note as characteristic of the Borgesian cosmovision. Let us concentrate

on the connector *pero*:

Toda obra humana es deleznable, afirma Carlyle, pero su ejecución no lo es. (Borges 1989/96: 3.456)

[Every human work is negligible, states Carlyle, but not its execution]

¿Qué soñará el indescifrable futuro? ... La vida no es un sueño pero puede llegar a ser un sueño, escribe Novalis. (Borges 1989/96: 3.473)

[What will the indecipherable future dream? ... Life is not a dream, but it can be one, writes Novalis]

At first sight, the connector *pero* fulfils in both cases the typical restrictive function assigned to it by grammars. In both cases the restriction only stands if temporal lineality is accepted: the characteristics of an act previous to the 'work', to the 'execution' are opposite to those of the work. In a hypothetical future with respect to the moment of enunciation, the same object, 'life' dons the opposite feature of that established at the moment of enunciation.

If, with Peirce (1958 [1904]: 386) we think that 'great errors of metaphysics are due to looking at the future as something that will have been past', the restriction denoted by the connector *pero* annuls itself, once presented, insofar as it annuls the temporal succession which supports it. The question is whether in both cases the temporal line fades to give way to a vision of time. It may be observed that two 'past' actions — Carlyle's affirmation and Novalis's statement — have been stolen from time through the present of the verbs which refer to them and by means of its coexistence with the addresser 'Borges' (who debates with Carlyle and makes Novalis's affirmation his own), an impossible coexistence in 'factic' terms. On the other hand, the reference to Novalis's affirmation closes a poem constituted by a series of conjectures in which blended facts of fiction and reality, 'past' facts mutate, reiterating themselves in a different time from that assigned to them by 'history', denying themselves in their difference and denying history by losing their condition of 'unique' events. The fictional debate with Carlyle constitutes an argument for the validity of all the texts which form part of *Los Conjurados* in 'la dicha de escribir' (Borges 1989/96: 3.456); a joy he confesses to a reader, with whom he establishes a complicity. Joy and confession that become meaningful for the reader-accomplice only if he is being invited to participate somehow of this joy, which necessarily is the joy of reading. It is as if the text were but a support which kept, uncontaminated, the joy of the act of writing so that it may — saved by the magic of its eternal vessel — infect the reader with the force of

this joy. Another annulment of the temporal line, in which reading and writing fuse in a secret meeting, an intimate co-presence. In this way, the adversative form points to a restriction and, in annulling it, constitutes itself in an inclusion of what it affirms and of what it partially denies.

Thus Borges laid out all through his endless texts the pieces which make the disjunctive conception of the world burst, making real the alternative which Peirce announced and Paz (1969: 134) synthesized:

Las revueltas y rebeliones del siglo XX han revelado que el personaje de la historia es plural y que es irreductible a la noción de lucha de clases tanto como a la sucesión progresiva y lineal de civilizaciones (los egipcios, los griegos, los romanos, etc.). La pluralidad de protagonistas ha demostrado que la trama de la historia también es plural: no es una línea única sino muchas y no todas ellas rectas. Pluralidad de personajes y pluralidad de tiempos en marcha hacia muchos dondes, no todos situados en un futuro que se desvanece apenas lo tocamos.

[The revolts and rebellions of the twentieth century have revealed that the character of history is plural and cannot be reduced to the notion of class struggle nor to the progressive and lineal succession of civilizations (the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, etc.). The plurality of protagonists has demonstrated that the plot of history is also plural: it is not a single line but several ones and not all of them are straight. Plurality of characters and plurality of times headed toward many *wheres*, not all of them situated in a future which vanishes as soon as we touch it.]

Some years later (like Borges many years before), Paz (1991: 30–31) concentrates all those pluralities in one, the human plurality, considering it the highest example of the principle of 'indeterminacy' which has shocked the thought of the past few decades:

Pour terminer ce tableau succinct, il convient de souligner l'échec de toutes les hypothèses philosophiques et historiques qui prétendaient connaître les lois du développement. ... Est-ce la fin des utopies? Non, plutôt la fin de l'idée de l'histoire comme un phénomène dont le développement est connu d'avance. Le déterminisme historique a été une fantaisie extrêmement coûteuse et sanglante. L'histoire est imprévisible parce que son protagoniste, l'homme, est l'indétermination personnifiée.

The only difference is the all-inclusive Borges: all pluralities, all multiplicities are, at the same time, a unity, and even the unity.

#### *'Inconfidência' and conspiracy*

The conspiracy is the unity. But conspiracies have generally meant division, they are constituted against something and they have a civic

statute, which according to the etymologies of 'symbol' would link them to arbitrariness and therefore would return to rational Western thought and the whole of the disjunctive and serial system. But Borges chooses a peculiar conspiracy, that of 1291, the one which founded the Helvetic League. It was at once civic and transcendental; it was, at least in Schiller's (1970) famous recreation (to which Borges does not allude), an act of individual and collective defense, an act of faith in the most basic values and in tradition. Unlike the whole of modernity (which was about to be born) this conspiracy, perhaps the first premodern conspiracy, was not a conquest of the future but rather a conquest of the past, in a combination which annuls time. Something not at all 'Occidental'. It unites both etymological faces of the sign: it is the counterpart of American conspiracies, among which the '*inconfidência mineira*' (1789) is, from its very name, the most explicit: an act of betrayal caused by individual interests that romanticism turned heroic.

We have thought of history as a bunch of leaps, something which is motivated and fueled by the slogan of one or another revolution, something which fades in the absence of these strikes, and that as a result of so many leaps and bounds barely offers us the sad map of a memory scattered with holes. Thought as a disjunctive series, History is the history of the cuts humanity has inflicted on itself, and its study is the search, as tireless as it is useless, of the uncountable 'bridges' that would allow us to join all the pieces.

Borges, a great demystifier of heroes and of the very notion of 'heroic' is, at the same time, the maker of the Hispanic-American epic, scattered in poems, stories and essays, disordered and fragmentary, like the legacy of the ancient epics. The same Borges who looked for the keys to his heroes in their deaths and the sense of their rebellions in the instant of losing or giving their lives chose, for his own death, a fatherland he brought to posterity in that inclusive conspiracy, a form of rebellion which both denies and encompasses rebellion by diluting its disjunctive basis. To this fatherland he consecrated several of his last texts and dedicated his last book. After so many heroes and so many revolutions Borges reaches the conviction that bridges are not necessary because nothing is broken.

We imagine ruptures, the same way we imagine heroes and disjunctions. His invention of a Winkelried who constantly returns (because he never left in the first place) under the shape of Paracelsus, or Amiel, or so many others is, probably, more real than our suppositions.

The etymology of 'symbol' passed down to us the double possibility of arbitrariness and motivation, the promise of the disjunction and the eternal disjunctive, of the prolific discussion which, finally, aims not only at solving a scientific problem but also at providing a reason to our naked

rationality or to the unfounded (by definition) religious faith. Both etymologies of 'symbol', so dissimilar and always in confrontation, have much more in common than otherwise: they are born of a partition. By believing so much in it we have acted out the logic of partition so often that we have made it into a reality.

### Secret links

The long metaphor of the garden weaves such dissimilar texts as the Genesis, the uncountable stories of 1001 nights, Columbus's paradisiacal dreams, Candide's daily utopia, some of the wonders lost East of the Mediterranean or North of the Gulf of Mexico, Alice's wonders turned into sleight of hands, croquet and chess at the same time, in Baudelaire's flowers, Coleridge's, Milton's, Paracelsus's and Borges's roses. This long metaphor, not quite metaphorical considering the stubborn fixation with which the Garden supports itself, synthesizes the four elements and as many temporal and spatial conception we care to imagine, in a garden whose paths scare us, but through which we must walk, tentatively, half-hearing many echoes which death makes louder, revealing something by rebelling against our disjunctive laziness because ... 'all things are joined by secret links'.

Translated by Cecilia Rennie

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## Partial approaches to truth through 'legitimization' and 'sight'

JORGE MEDINA VIDAL

Semiotics, like some other disciplines, may present us with seemingly nonsensical investigations which, as Sterne remarked in his *Tristram Shandy*, 'when they are once set a-going, whether right or wrong ... away they go cluttering like hey-go-mad; and by treading the same steps over and over again, they presently make a road of it, as plain and as smooth as a garden-walk' (1760: 3). In the study of the works of Jorge Luis Borges, one such nonsensical investigation is related to the idea of 'truth'. We could pose, for instance, that no one has ever read the 'true' Borges, not even Borges himself. Borges read by a modern reader, Borges read by one of his contemporaries, Borges read by Borges: none of them is the 'true' Borges, yet none can be dismissed as 'false'. This is because the sign and all its forms must be actualized by a user, a being who exists in spatial and temporal dimensions. These actualizations, each user's individual reading, his 'truth', is as valid as the abstract truth of that secret entity, the so-called 'literary work'.

Borges himself gives us an insight into certain aspects of 'truth' in his literary works by establishing the boundaries separating his 'real' person and his 'persona', the producer of literary texts: 'el otro, el mismo', his distant 'I am another', inherited, among others, from Arthur Rimbaud's 'Je est un autre'.<sup>1</sup> Another nonsensical investigation, some readers might think, since it poses the complete separation of an organization of 'signs' — the literary work — and the 'internalization' of this organization — each reading, actualized by each individual user of the system. On closer analysis, however, this separation allows us to consider the literary work from two different points of view leading to two strikingly dissimilar conclusions.

On the one hand, we could postulate the sacredness of the author and his work. In so doing, however, the whole process of approaching intention — both explicit and tacit — could be reduced to a merely mechanical investigation. When one starts to investigate, detective-like, what Borges was thinking when he wrote, for instance, 'La espera'

(Borges 1989/96: 3.192), one arrives at a barely anecdotal conclusion; what is more, one realizes that in the end one has been investigating Borges instead of his poem — which is an illusion anyway, since one will never find out this 'truth' either. Perhaps this point is best illustrated by the well-known anecdote about Lamartine being asked what was the meaning of his poem 'The shepherd's hut'. He replied: 'There was a time when only God and myself knew; now only God knows'.

On the other hand, we could look at the work from the point of view of the reader, which would allow us to witness the creative co-participation of the acts of diction and of internalization — the work as an abstract entity and the work actualized by the reader. The concept of 'truth' becomes meaningless once we stop looking at a literary work as an abstract concept and we focus on it as an interaction.

When organized signs overcome the temporal barrier of 'speech acts', they may come to signify themselves. This is a historical development, since each reading causes changes in two senses. In the first place, each reader causes a change in T. S. Eliot's (1933) generic sense that each book that is published changes all the books that were published before it. Secondly, in an individual or historical sense, since meaning changes as the work is read by chains of individual readers from different generations. Semiotics, insofar as 'the study of the life of signs within the life of society' (de Saussure 1983: 80) draws from traditional discourse. 'Society', unlike an individual, is not a historical moment; it becomes meaningful only when understood as a collective and macro-temporal development. Hence we should consider, with regard to the 'truth' of texts, a third ingredient, a generational ingredient, added to the impact of the author, in this case Jorge Luis Borges, and of the reader, who can act in several historic stages of 'social life'. As historical circumstances change so does the environment of the work of art; this brings about a change in the user's appreciation of the work. This generational element allows us to perceive Borges's truth as another reader's truth, not unlike the truth of the other users of the text, who actualize in time the repertoire of organized 'signs' proposed as the work of a historical being, namely Jorge Luis Borges. The true 'work' of Borges is but an entelechy, actualized through certain channels: the truth, recognized in a series of social movements, influences the occasional reader and is influenced by them, and to some extent the reader recreates the work, or re-semantises it. Borges was the first privileged reader of his own work, and the chain of narrative proposals which continued his production record the mutations of that first privileged reader, who would later admit a series of other readers — privileged or otherwise — who appear after the publication of his works. But Borges was also a being

in time, someone who had received extremely complex significations from other sources, be they social meta-discourses or the contact with other readers. We could go as far as saying that Jorge Luis Borges is not the author of his works. What we call 'Borges's works' is in fact the work of a 'society' made up by Jorge Luis Borges plus the innumerable influences he received, influences that not only filter through his works but that also enabled him to write 'Borges's works'. Hence it is only fair to propose the semiotic investigation not just of what his narrative production 'is', but also the syntactic, semiotic, semantic, and pragmatic process of certain texts which could aspire to projecting into the future basic elements and mutating components, valid for several generations. This 'process' of organized signs could be considered, in an extravagant 'metaphor', the investigation into the cultural 'genes' of a certain society and in a considerable period of time.

### Legitimization

The reader's quest for the 'truth' of a literary work is, to some extent, fostered by the author's efforts to invest his discourse with credibility, efforts which can be perceived from the very beginning of the work, from the beginnings of the so-called 'aesthetic discourse'. It is possible to trace back the legitimacy and legitimization of the so-called aesthetic discourse to the first hexameters of the *Iliad*. Everything in the semantics of 'Sing, O Goddess' seems to point to the ambiguity between the legitimate and the legitimized.

Legitimacy can only be justified by the profound difference between man and his gods: Homer informs his audience that the determining Power does not come from Homer the Man, but from a superior entity: the Muse.

Even common speech comes from a nebulous source, namely the Power that exists at the root of all legitimacy and legitimization, basically because there must be a positive linguistic ability to be able to talk effectively. Hence the legitimacy of speech becomes perceptible when the supra-human Power condescends to express itself in a language suitable for descriptions, narratives and behaviors. For a modern reader, however, there is no legitimacy here: claims such as Homer's are considered an attempt to legitimize his work by appealing to a higher source than himself. This is the main difference between legitimacy and legitimization; the former is granted, the latter has to be claimed.

Nowadays legitimacy — understood in its primary sense of a supra-human Power speaking through a mortal — is acknowledged only in the case of sacred texts. The legitimacy of the aesthetic discourse, on the other hand, rests exclusively on the intrinsic Power of the linguistic system, hence some writers feel the need to seek legitimization. Cervantes (1911), for instance, presents his work as a story written by someone else, Cide Hamete Benengeli. San Juan de la Cruz (1965) resorts to an extensive collection of quotations from the Bible to legitimize his propositions, and shows his awareness of the inadequacy of human discourse by his repeated use of phrases like 'One does not know ...', 'One just stutters ...'. José Hernández (1979) is a particularly interesting case, because he starts by requesting illumination from the saints, but then he goes on to say 'aquí me pongo a cantar', showing that it is he who is in charge of transmitting the story. It is common among contemporary writers to try and legitimize their work by taking up historical subjects. Two well-known examples are Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980), where the narrator tells us that he is describing real events that took place in the Middle Ages, and García Márquez's *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* [Chronicle of a death foretold] (1981), in which the narrator claims to be retelling a true story just as it was told to him.

Borges generally secularizes his discourse: he writes almost obsessed by a connotative bias; he accumulates quotations, he appears aware of the possible aporias of language. In 'The Aleph' (1989/96: 1.617–630), for example, the narrator sets the scene not just on a hot day in February, but he adds that it was the day Beatriz Viterbo died, and he goes on to describe the agony of her last days, his feelings about it and then gives the reader some details about her life. He mentions innumerable names and places: Carlos Argentino Daneri, Delia San Marco Porcel, Roberto Alessandri and so many others; the Club Hípico, Calle Garay, Biblioteca Juan Crisóstomo Lafinur, among so many others. He mentions literary works and authors, he quotes from real and fictional literary works. There comes a point in the story, however, in which he breaks down: 'Arribo, ahora, al inefable centro de mi relato; empieza, aquí, mi desesperación de escritor'. [I arrive, now, to the indescribable center of my story; here is where my desperation as a writer begins.]

Even though authors follow different paths in this search for legitimization, they all start from one basic request: May I demand the attention of the reader with my texts, as long as I admit the limitations of language and its system?

Different authors seek different ways of legitimizing the potential for behavior in their social environments. However, a literary work becomes

a classic — always renewed and meaningful — when its author sets himself apart from the rest; he legitimizes his discourse when he surprises us with the unexpected — which is also a way of legitimizing all of the above.

### The act of looking

Another way in which the author attempts to persuade the readers that there is 'truth' in his narration is by playing with what is 'seen' in the text. The 'act of looking' and its consequence, 'what is looked at', become separated when they are transposed to a 'discourse'. In other words, when 'the act of looking' is repeatedly mentioned in a written discourse, it is invested with a much wider, quasi communitarian intention; what is looked at becomes charged with connotative elements that the speaker may wish to highlight for various reasons. Jorge Luis Borges privileged the act of looking in his narrative so as to further legitimize his narration.

In the highly class-conscious societies Borges so often describes in his stories, the 'look' tends to be vertical, either ascending or descending. A case in point: 'La gente me miraba por encima del hombro' [People looked down on me] in 'El indiano' (Borges 1989/96: 2.407). In 'Funes el memorioso' (Borges 1989/96: 1.485–490), sight is playing a role of even greater importance. The first time the narrator visits Ireneo he is lying on his cot, staring at a fig tree or perhaps at a cobweb. On his second visit some time later, Ireneo is lying in the dark, since the slightest visual stimulus would trigger overwhelming sensations. In 'La espera' (Borges 1989/96: 1.608–611), the references to the 'act of looking' are even more extensive. In this story, the act of looking is also associated with Alejandro Villari's social surroundings, since he describes in detail his visual sensations: the trees, the small square of soil in which they had been planted, the houses, everything he 'noticed' in the neighborhood and in his lodgings. Sight is so important that the narrator even describes what he had seen in a film, in the cinema that he sometimes visited: 'vio trágicas historias del hampa' [he saw tragic stories of the underworld] (Borges 1989/96: 1.609).

In 'Emma Zunz' (Borges 1989/96: 1.564–568), almost everything is related to sight: a logical look makes reference to what Emma observes, and at the same time it becomes confused with what the omniscient narrator emphasises in his discourse. In the verticality of these looks, the social background against which the action takes place is hinted at, whereas profound personal hatred substitutes the verticality of the social



strata. When Emma walks along Paseo de Julio, she is stared at by 'hungry eyes'; she forces herself to watch the other women's behavior in order to learn the routine of sexual relations. Later, at Loewenthal's factory, Aarón sees Emma arrive: 'La vio empujar la verja (que él había entornado a propósito) ...' [he saw her push the gate (which he had left ajar on purpose) ...] (Borges 1989/96: 1.567). Afterwards, when Emma kills Aarón, 'la miró con asombro y cólera' [he looked at her with surprise and anger] (Borges 1989/96: 1.567). The eye and its look are almost always intentional, since they are the development of a 'semiosis' which involves several social elements. The 'photographic' record can become an act of 'social semiosis' when the author, in the 'montage' of the text, determines, minute by minute, the development of the action. Nevertheless we should not forget that the eye that 'looks' — tacitly or explicitly — signifies (in its present or later register) the fulfilment of a 'semiosis', transformed in an object which proposes meanings and demands answers if it is posed as a problem. The 'look', in the light of these approaches, intensifies the emotions conveyed by the 'discourse', be it visual or linguistic. The addressee is easily drawn into the atmosphere the author intended, while the relationships within the narrative discourse, between the signifier and the signified, may follow an erratic or even contradictory development. Jorge Luis Borges seems to create a very personal framework of reality with his 'look', which plays at being objective. This look, however, is almost always at odds with the structured reality of the others, in conflict with a social reality which, by means of an inverse process, is filled with strong emotional connotations, separating what is 'said' from what is perceived. Let us consider two stories in particular: 'Emma Zunz' (1989/96: 1.564–568) and 'El indiano' (1989/96: 2.407–411). In both cases, what the narrator 'sees' and 'develops' belongs to a pattern of observation, sometimes intensified with quotations from other observers of the same actions, in an attempt to legitimize what has been said and to insist on its 'objectivity'. In both stories, the actions and the emotive component the receptor receives belong to the vast territory of Morality. This Morality, recorded by the absolute 'look' which systematizes the story, is organized through the code of police work or the law, which does not involve the world of so-called personal conscience. It is the objectivity of an external, social law, at the service of the absolute concealment of psychological intimacy, either to deny it or to conceive the reality of the human being as a tiring exercise in behaviors that, in fact, have no transcendental meaning. The inherited rubble of morality must be destroyed, as shows the closing sentence of 'La intrusa' (Borges 1989/96: 2.406) or the indifference with which 'Emma Zunz' (Borges 1989/96: 1.567–578) leaves the police and the judges at the end of her journey of revenge. In all

these examples of human behavior and semiosis, the characters answer to a linear pattern of cause and effect; it breaks a possible law of compensations which would destroy the entropy of pleasure, without major complications and regardless of the methods used to achieve it.

This pattern could be as follows: the eye sees and the look re-presents. What is seen is an environment which determines 'de-compensations' and therefore means 'dis-pleasure'. The acts of 'the Other' proposes the acts of the personal 'I', achieved through more or less complex acts, to recover the serenity of the 'look' that judges society and empties the individual.

### Note

1. C'est faux de dire: Je pense: on devrait dire: On me pense. — Pardon du jeu de mots. — Je est un autre. Tant pis pour le bois qui se trouve violon, et nargue aux inconscients, qui ergotent sur ce qu'ils ignorent tout à fait! (Letter to Georges Izambard, May, 1871) <http://www.imagnet.fr/rimbaud/LetIzambar5-71.html>

Les romantiques, qui prouvent si bien que la chanson est si peu souvent l'oeuvre, c'est-à-dire la pensée chantée et comprise du chanteur?

Car JE est un autre. Si le cuivre s'éveille clairon, il n'y a rien de sa faute. Cela m'est évident: j'assiste à l'éclosion de ma pensée: je la regarde, je l'écoute: je lance un coup d'archet: la symphonie fait son remuement dans les profondeurs, ou vient d'un bond sur la scène. (Letter to Paul Demeny, 15 May 1871) <http://www.ac-grenoble.fr/rimbaud/demeny1.htm>

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## Borges's realities and Peirce's semiosis: Our world as factfablefiction

FLOYD MERRELL

This quite modest meditation focuses somewhat indirectly on Peirce's semiotics and on Borges's prose. In the long run, it more directly bears on what it is to be human sign makers and takers by addressing the work of Peirce and Borges along with some strains of postanalytic philosophy in such a manner that the message is, hopefully, more sensed than conceptualized, more intuited than cognized. Whether or not I succeed in my endeavor up to the reader, for the best I can do is suggest, not demonstrate or prove by rigorously constructive argumentation.<sup>1</sup>

### Peirce

Peirce's 'semiotics' is a silent answer to Saussure's 'semiology'. The North American semiotician's concept of the sign is trinary with a vengeance; it depends upon a continuity of interrelations between signs. As such, it is process, it is *semiosis*. We are always caught in the flow of this process, because thought itself is inextricably bound up with and is of the very nature of signs (CP 5.421).

The most fundamental of Peirce's sign types consists of the trichotomy of *icons*, *indices*, and *symbols*. *Icons* resemble the objects to which they relate (a circle, as a sign of the sun).<sup>2</sup> Borges's 'Aleph' (1970: 15–30), a small spherical object in which Carlos Argentino Daneri experienced the entire universe from beginning to end, is for practical purposes not an icon. It cannot really be an icon, because, as a self-contained, self-sufficient whole, it *is* the whole universe. Yet it is contained within the universe, so in a sense it *is* an icon of the purest sort. It is an icon of the universe and hence an icon of itself. *Indices* relate to their objects by some natural connection (smoke as an indication of fire). The magician of Borges's 'The Circular Ruins' (1962: 45–50) thought he created an icon, a dreamt son, and then he thought he interpolated his dreamt image into the world to render him 'real'. But the magician was mistaken, for in the end

he discovered he was the figment of yet another dream by another dreamer. Hence his dreamt image, in addition to its iconic qualities, was also an index, an indication, of his own condition. The relation between Peirce's *symbols* and their objects entails sign use according to cultural convention (a national flag, evincing hardly any similarity with and no natural connection to its object, or the word 'horse' in relation to a certain species of quadrupeds). Symbols of the best and most common sort are those of natural language. Lönnrot, the detective of Borges's 'Death and the Compass' (1962: 76–87), that supreme ratiocinator, believed the symbolic linguistic, logical, and geometrical signs he constructed were irrefutable proof that would lead him to the assassin, Scharlach. But in the final analysis he realized they were signs of his own making, partly arbitrary and with no necessary correlation to the 'real' world. As Don Quixote magnificently implied long before Richard Rorty's (1979) destruction of the 'mind-as-mirror-of-nature' metaphor, symbols are not necessarily any faithful 'representation' of the 'real'.

According to Peirce, the meaning of signs, and especially linguistic signs, is found in their interrelations with and dependency upon other signs. An *interpretant* gives purpose, direction, meaning to a sign. But this *interpretant*, upon becoming an *interpretant* charged with meaning, becomes in the process another sign (*representamen*) — the sign of meaning — which comes into relation with the first sign in its relation to its *object*. It can then take on its own *object* — which can be the same *object*, now slightly modified — and in its turn it engenders its own *interpretant*. This *interpretant* then becomes yet another sign (*representamen*), and so on. This ongoing sign process has been dubbed by Umberto Eco (1976: 69) 'unlimited semiosis'. The succession of signs along the *semiotic* stream becomes a network of glosses, or commentaries, of signs on the signs preceding them. Or perhaps better put, signs are *translations* of their immediately antecedent signs. The process of signs *translated into* other signs is endless. For, everything is incessantly becoming something *other than* what it is. Consequently, for Peirce there is no ultimate meaning (*interpretant*). The meaning of a given sign is itself a sign of that sign, which must be endowed with its own meaning, such meaning becoming another sign. So there is no final *translation*. A given *translation* of a sign calls up another sign upon its being endowed with meaning, that meaning being different from that of the sign being *translated*, and that second meaning becoming yet another sign to be *translated* and given meaning (Peirce does in fact write of a 'final' or 'ultimate *interpretant*', but it is inaccessible for us as finite, fallible semiotic agents).

In view of Peirce's triadic concept of the sign, just as we are indelibly inside *semiosis*, so also both you and me are at this 'moment' suspended

'inside' the story I am in the process of telling. That is, we are suspended 'inside' the context within which we happen to find ourselves, and we must try to make heads or tails of the whole concoction. On so doing, we must cope with a nonlinear, back and forth, spiraling, self-enclosing, semiotic situation and context in the making, which gives us pieces from a jigsaw puzzle rather than a linear *A-B-C* development. Since this essay — and both you and me and our contexts besides — are inside *semiosis*, why should I, how could I, expect to render it of a nature any different from *semiosis*? The very idea would be presumptuous. Furthermore, if according to Peirce, the universe is an ongoing 'perfusion' of signs, how could my words hope to give a linear account of that very process of *semiosis*?<sup>3</sup> The best I can do is provide a certain *feel* for, and if I am lucky maybe even a *sense* of, what this essay is about.

Like this essay, the universe, as I have tentatively implied above, is not that deterministic linear, cause-and-effect parade of events envisioned by classical science. It is complex, not simple; it is more chaotic than orderly; it by and large favors asymmetry over symmetry. But actually, we need both our well-reasoned linearity and our 'chaos' principle, in order effectively to negotiate the now placid, now elusive, now winding and heaving, stream of *semiosis*. By the same token, if we construed *semiosis* as we would a map we could study with the presumed detachment of a classical scientist studying bacteria under the microscope, we would be destined to deluded hopes and unfulfilled dreams. For, unlike the traditional concept of knowledge as a map or mirror of nature, we are squarely *within* the map, and we must find our way about by groping in the dark, by a certain element of intuition, premonition, inclination, educated guesses, and even sheer chance, as well as by using our customary faculties of reason as best we know how.

Consequently, there is little use trying by linear methods to 'get the picture' of things, for there is no 'picture', no 'picture' that we are capable of 'seeing' from some imperious outside vantage point at least. We are, ourselves, like Niels Bohr once remarked with respect to the world of quantum theory, both spectators and actors in the great drama of existence. The traditional Western idea of a neutral spectator surveying her/his world and cramming it into her/his cognitive image, that mirrors the world in all its brilliance, is rapidly becoming defunct: may it rest in peace. So if the Peircean terms, *representamen*, *semiotic object*, and *interpretant* at this stage remain to a large extent foreign, I would expect that at least they have etched some trace or other on your mind. Perhaps the most I can suggest that we let the Peircean sign components grow on us, and we on them, as we attempt to proceed through the remainder of this labyrinthine journey.



## Borges

Borges reconstructs a couple of apparently diametrically opposed concepts, *nominalism* and *realism*, condensed in two strange objects, the *Zahir* and the *Aleph*, in two stories by the same names (1962: 156–164, 1970: 15–30). This pair of concepts actually embodies the Argentine fabulist's intellectual leanings: Borges is a fox who nurtures nostalgia for the simplicity and certainty of the hedgehog (Wheelock 1969: 24). The fox is a wily nominalist who slips in and out of the numbing *complexity* of language particulars, while the hedgehog is a realist who desires to see everything through the same tinted goggles in terms of their relatively *simple* universal properties. The conflict is essentially between a plurality of *simples* and the complex *singularity* of a 'universal vision', that is, between the *Zahir* and the *Aleph*.

The *Zahir* is an ordinary coin worth twenty centavos. It is *per se* insignificant; its function could have been provided by one of any number of objects: it has been a tiger, a blind man, an astrolabe, a small compass, a vein in the marble of a mosque in Cordoba. Once an object is chosen to function like the *Zahir*, however, it becomes a particular perspective that potentially reaches out to all perspectives. Potentially, that is, because one who knows not how to avail oneself of the strange powers of the *Zahir* becomes ensnared by it: one cannot forget it. This inability to ignore the coin becomes the narrator's plight. He finds himself obsessed with the small round object, sensing that it must somehow signify in *linear* fashion, like language, each and every thing that it *is not* until by a process of elimination — a sort of *via negativa* — it has signified what the entire universe *is*. But that project, of course, would be out of the question for we finite humans. In good nominalist fashion, then, the *Zahir* can arbitrarily be anything that stands for something else. We thus enter the arena of language. It is not mere coincidence that the vast majority of all considerations of cybernetics, information theory, and AI research, insofar as they bear on concerns in the social sciences and the humanities, focus obsessively on language. In our recent 'linguistic turn', we have all but disappeared in the digitized staccato of Saussurean *signifiers*, of distinctive features, of textuality, and above all, of the *arbitrariness* of it all, which presumably allows signs to liberate themselves from the furniture of the world euphorically to do their own thing, whether we like it or not.

This notion of *arbitrariness*, quite significantly, was also the observation of Mr. Palomar in a novel by Italo Calvino (1985) by the same name. While in Mexico and visiting the ruins of Tula, ancient capital of the Toltecs, Palomar contemplates the various representations of

Quetzalcoatl as the Morning Star, the monolithic columns known as 'Atlases', a butterfly, and the Plumed Serpent. He realizes that all these signs must be taken on faith that they represent something else, and if the signs are rejected, such rejection must be taken on faith also, the faith that they do not represent something else. In other words, according to Peirce's conception, signs of the 'real' and of the 'nonreal' are equally 'real' signs, hence they can be as 'real' or as 'nonreal' as either the 'real' or the 'nonreal' itself. Signs in this sense are of the very stuff of which our world and the world of our imagination are made: whether 'in here' or 'out there', all that is, insofar as we perceive and conceive it, consists of signs of one sort or another. But Palomar bears witness to something other than that *logocentric* bias within which Western thought is caught. The ancient art he is witnessing is hardly in any form or fashion linguistic; apparently like the *Zahir*, it is visual, iconic through and through. In the Aztec world, seeing in the most concrete sense predominates, which means that saying takes on a role of diminished importance, at least in comparison to Indo-European languages:

In Mexican archeology every statue, every object, every detail of a bas-relief stands for something that stands for something else that stands, in turn, for yet another something. An animal stands for a god who stands for a star that stands for an element or a human quality, and so on. We are in the world of pictographic writing; the ancient Mexicans, to write, drew pictures, and even when they were drawing it was as if they were writing: every picture seems a rebus to be deciphered. (Calvino 1985: 95–96)

Where is meaning in this scheme of multiply interlinked, interdependent, nonlinear series? The only possible answer, it seems, is: *everywhere* and *nowhere*. Every sign represents another sign, and that another one, potentially without end. Every sign defers the responsibility of its act of representation to other signs. Every such deferral is a translation of one sign into another one, which requires another translation in order that it emerge into the diaphanous light of comprehension, though it never stands a chance of actually arriving at the pristine plenitude of meaning perfectly wrought and crystallized for all time.

We read further that a 'stone, a figure, a sign, a word reaching us isolated from its context is only that stone, figure, sign, or word: we can try to define them, to describe them as they are, and no more than that; whether, beside the face they show us, they also have a hidden face, is not for us to know' (Calvino 1985: 97). Now, it appears, Palomar has gravitated from *Zahir*-like pictorial images toward contemplation of language, and with language, linear writing, we would suppose, in addition to his reference to nonlinguistic signs. Palomar realizes that each

linguistic sign requires another sign, requires all signs, from concrete figures to words, from language to language, from culture to culture. The need to glide along the surf of signs interrelated to all other signs is in a way frightening, yet compelling. There actually seems to be hardly any alternative, for that is the message we seem to get from language: it becomes relatively disconnected from the furniture of the world, and it sort of takes on a life of its own, it becomes a self-organizing whole. Or at least so we are told by those high priests of the 'linguistic turn'.

However, language also brings with it the need of its users to reweave and unite it into this continuous and well-nigh seamless whole of culture, which, as we shall observe, is aggressively translinguistic. Consequently, the monstrous aggregate of linguistic signs cannot really remain aloof and autonomous at all, for language's very use demands some relation with something other than what it is; it demands translation and interpretation, that is, translation and interaction with some interpreter and within some cultural context. If interpreters and interdependent contexts are included in the equation, then interpretation there will always be. For: 'Not to interpret is impossible, as refraining from thinking is impossible' (Calvino 1985: 98).

### Language's Imperialism

However, we are not yet free of the overpowering force of language. Interpretation, it hardly needs saying, is most effectively conveyed through language, though not exclusively through language, since other signs can serve as helpful adjuncts. Yet, one almost inevitably gravitates toward language and toward *linguicentrism*.<sup>4</sup> The problem with *linguicentrism* is that it places undue priority on language, the Saussurean *signifier*, the Peircean *symbol*, while shoving the crucially important functions of *iconicity* and *indexicality* aside.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps this move toward *linguicentrism* is hardly avoidable. The idea that language is what makes us most distinctly human pushes us toward the imperious attitude that, as proud owners of 'minds', we are above and beyond the nitty-gritty world of instinct the dumb brutes inhabit. As articulate mammals, we are also writing and reading mammals.

In *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1981), Calvino tells us that reading — and writing as well — are no more than combinatorial play. But we also read that if what is written and read is false to itself, the product of language's incapacity to represent something other than itself, then ultimately, reading and writing are like a country where everything that can be falsified has been falsified. The result is that nobody can be

sure what is true and what false, what is 'simulation' and what is 'real' (Calvino 1981: 212). Calvino's allusion to 'simulation' evokes shades of Jean Baudrillard's (1981, 1983) 'simulacra', commodities and their respective signs incessantly repeating themselves until the commodities have been relegated to the dust bin of forgetfulness, and all that remains is signs of signs. It is also reminiscent of Umberto Eco's (1990: 172–202) 'fakes and forgeries', simulacra or iconic models that are hardly worthy of being called signs. Eco the *linguicentrist* has a pretty low opinion of icons. Completely iconic signs, he writes, would be *identical* to and a *simulation* of that to which they refer, and would therefore have no genuine semiotic function: they would in essence be tantamount to the 'real' thing, and in no need of the things to which they might have referred — i.e., shades once again of Baudrillard's 'simulacra'.<sup>6</sup>

To be sure, our world is a semiotic world through and through; it is a world chiefly of signs, of a 'perfusion of signs'. However, linguistic signs are actually no more than a small minority of the entire sphere of signs making up our world. Borges's narrator who came into possession of the linearly developing signs emerging from the Zahir discovers this important aspect of *semiosis*. The Zahir at the outset appears to be nothing but a mere *icon*, a visual object that evokes any and all signs other than itself. But it also indicates something *other*, so it has an *indexical function* as well. Moreover, since it is capable of bringing about the emergence of whatever sign, it is also to a degree *arbitrary*, hence it is also of *symbolic character*. The Zahir is prelinguistic, and at the same time it is of the nature of language. It is of the world of physical objects, yet it is a sign, it is part and parcel of the *semiotic* process. Signs are prelinguistic before they gain entry into the venerable empire of language: they are icons and indices of sight, sound, touch, taste, and scent before they become arbitrary phonemes exemplified in sounds and marks. Yet, as mentioned above, it appears that symbolicity inevitably comes to pervade the minds and hearts of human articulate animals. So, just as Palomar gravitated from iconic pictorial images to *linguicentricity*, so also the Zahir, even though it is at heart iconic, through symbolicity — its narrator's prime medium of expression — it cannot help but become saturated with *linguicentricity* as well.

The Zahir, nonetheless, is a relatively benign sign. Lying in linear contiguity with all other objects of the world, it is, or it can be, or at least we would like to make it, a representation of all that *is*, quite clearly and simply. But it can hardly do more than function as an oxymoron, the narrator tells us, insofar as it is not that which would ordinarily represent the represented. Consequently, it is capable of all possible perspectives, perhaps in the order of Calvino's *ars combinatoria*. But, since the Zahir

nervously flits from one perspective to another, and from one linguistic label to another, the sum of these perspectives can be no more than sequential in nature, an apparently rather disconnected collection of 'series' something like that envisioned by Gilles Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense* (1990). Given their sequentiality, and in light of the infinite stretch of all series the prime metaphor of which is the line (a mathematical continuum) they can never reach the end of the road. Like language itself, the Zahir apparently affords successive perceptual grasps of fragments of the universe, though none of them as an individual can be all-embracing. Hence, given human finitude, the incapacity to hold more than a few items of thought mentally in check for more than a fleeting instant ensues: the Zahir is ultimately a helpless sign. The narrator, finally realizing this limitation, ends his story with a futile hope: 'In order to lose themselves, in God, the Sufis recite their own names, or the ninety-nine divine names, until they become meaningless. I long to travel that path. Perhaps I shall conclude by wearing away the Zahir simply through thinking of it again and again. Perhaps behind the coin I shall find God' (Borges 1962: 164). Thus the narrator's destiny is hardly any less undesirable than that of our curious seeker of knowledge, Mr. Palomar.

If the Zahir is not itself a legitimate word — a Peircean symbolic sign — it is still a sign, to be sure, an iconic and indexical sign. As such, it is 'real', 'real' as a sign, though as a thing it is 'nonreal', yet it is a 'real' thing, for it is a sign. The Zahir, then, is of the physical world and of the world of signs, though it is a chiefly nonlinguistic sign. Hence given its myriad array of exemplifications, there is no *disconnectedness* of series at all but a *conjunctive synthesis* of series (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 — to be discussed below). In this sense, any attempt to interpolate the Zahir into an exclusive linguistic framework would render it *linear* and relatively *simple*; but it is not *simply linear*, for its interdependent interconnectedness with all things in terms of its iconicity and indexicality renders it *nonlinear*, and as such it enters full force into *complexity*. Each instantiation of the Zahir as a 'nonreal' sign for something else, which is either a 'real' or a 'nonreal' sign, is a part among parts, the sum of which make up the whole of *semiosis*. But that whole remains outside the reach of any given Zahir instantiation, even of any given serial collection of Zahir instantiations. With this broader, more general, concept of *semiosis* in mind, we are now a far cry from the gutless bits and codes of fleshless information channels of the sort usually handed down to us by information theory and media theory. *Semiosis*, properly conceived, is *nonlinguicentric* through and through.

Borges's tale, 'The Aleph', corroborates this *nonlinguicentrism* and takes it to a shrill pitch of intensity. Daneri tells the narrator (that is,

Borges) of the Aleph's existence in the home of his parents and grandparents, explaining that it is a point in space that is interconnected with and contains all points. Borges visits the house, descends the stairway leading down to the basement where it is located, and he experiences it, a sphere about one inch in diameter, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference nowhere, a beginning without terminus, paradoxically both finite and infinite, the only place where all places are seen from every possible angle: it is the whole of wholes. The narrator then petitions the gods that they might grant him the appropriate metaphors with which to describe this miraculous vision, but he knows it is impossible:

for any listing of an endless series is doomed to be infinitesimal. In that single gigantic instant I saw millions of acts both delightful and awful; not one of them amazed me more than the fact that all of them occupied the same point in space, without overlapping or transparency. What my eyes beheld was simultaneous but what I shall now write down will be successive, because language is successive. Nonetheless, I'll try to recollect what I can. (Borges 1970: 26)

The narrator's feat is impossible, because the whole cannot but be timeless, while he as a pathetic mortal is inextricably time-bound. And for the purpose of human communication, he is bound to linear language processes. What he knows, he knows now. But to say what he knows is to say what he has known, which is not exactly the same as what he knows at each moment of the saying, hence the saying takes what he knows a bit further down the road, or it retrogresses, perhaps, depending upon the way of the saying. In other words, to say is to know anew, yet to know is to know what cannot be said now.

Linear language engenderment is like a Zahir series: hopelessly inadequate for articulating what timelessly *is* — knowledge, perceiving, sensing, conceiving — whether in the *now*, in memory of the *past*, or in expectations regarding the *future*. The Aleph's timeless *complexity* consequently eludes the articulating animal, tied to linear language, just as it eludes the Zahir's multiple time-bound, relatively *simple*, series. In yet another way of putting the matter, the Aleph affords a *realist* image as opposed to the Zahir's *nominalism*. The one entails an impossible transcendental revelation, the other a potentially interminable series of relatively insignificant perceptual grasps. The one is *synchrony*, the other *diachrony*; the one is a *nonlinear* intertwining of all objects, acts, and events in *complex* simultaneity, the other a serial collection of relatively *simple* particulars with no necessary or determinate links.

According to Borges, today we almost instinctively favor nominalism, but in spite of ourselves, we implacably gravitate toward the opposite pole in an effort to discover the whole of 'reality' in those hopeful eternal forms



(Christ 1967). And since this search is ultimately futile, we find ourselves fleeing back to the secure *minutiae*, the particulars, of our everyday empirical world.<sup>7</sup>

Let us take these concepts a step further.

### Signs that talk past themselves: Postanalytic philosophy

Hilary Putnam (1983: 1–25) tells a story about how minds can be the same though their signs are entirely different, or conversely, how signs can be the same but minds different. In either case, an entirely distinct 'semiotic reality' is yielded. It has to do with ordinary notions of reference apparently gone mad. In Putnam's example, I talk about cats and mats but you take me to mean cherries and trees, and you talk about cherries and trees but I think cats and mats. If we keep things honest, at the level of first-order predicates it is entirely possible that we will get along fine with the belief that we are communicating groovily. I am confident I know what you are talking about and you have the same confidence regarding my talk. But here, as in all forms of communication, there is no determinable knowing we are on the same frequency at all. In fact, there always exists the possibility that we are talking about different things altogether.<sup>8</sup>

To be specific, Putnam shows that 'A cat is on the mat' can be reinterpreted in such a manner that 'Cat' for one interlocutor relates to *cherries* for another, and 'Mat' for the one relates to *trees* for the other, without affecting the truth-value of 'A cat is on the mat'. Putnam then designates 'Cat' and 'Mat' for some *cat* and some *mat*, and 'Cat\*' and 'Mat\*' for some *cherries* and some *trees*. When I say 'A cat is on the mat' I mean that there is some *cat* such that it is on some *mat*, but you construe my sentence to mean that there is (are) some *Cat\** (*cherries*) such that it is (they are) on some *Mat\** (*trees*). I don't know what you take my words to mean and you don't know what I mean by my words. In this manner, if you reinterpret my sign 'Cat' by assigning it the 'intensional' framework I would ordinarily assign to 'Cherries' (and you to 'Cat\*') and in the same semiotic act you reinterpret 'Mat' in terms of what I would ordinarily assign to 'Trees' (and you to 'Mat\*'), then we have translated two signs into two radically distinct signs. Yet phonemically and orthographically, 'Cat' is the same as 'Cat\*' and 'Mat' is the same as 'Mat\*'. Although we believe our communication has us flowing along the same channel, our meanings are at cross current with one another: ordinary lines of communication have suffered a meltdown.

Supposing I utter 'Cat' and 'Mat' and you construe my signs as, 'Cat\*' and 'Mat\*', then structurally 'A cat is on a mat' would for me *mean*

virtually the same as 'A cat\* is on a mat\*' for you. The only difference is in what is taken to be the object of 'reference' of our respective signs and what interpretation they are given — a difference that makes a crucial difference. And this, Putnam swears, would fall in step with our well regimented habit of assigning 'truth' to 'A cat is on a mat', or any other string of signs for that matter, in every possible world. As Peirce might be prone to put it, when semiotic *vagueness* rules the roost, faith in the *principle of noncontradiction* can at times become a futile enterprise. 'Cat' and 'Cat\*' can live in blissful coexistence as long as their interpreters do not catch onto their ontological and semantic confusion. And insofar as the contradiction remains merely possible, the interlocutors may continue to swim along in blissful ignorance, oblivious as to the communication chasm between them. The upshot is that 'The cat is on the mat' or 'The cat\* is on the mat\*' can be taken either as intensional or extensional. There is hardly any difference, for, since in the long run of things, and much in the order to Peirce, thought-signs (of the mind) can come to be construed as sign-events (of the world), and vice versa.

This conclusion entails, Putnam tells us, an application of what is known as the Löwenheim-Skolem theorem to any domain of language and individual items of experience, whether *cats* and *cherries*, *mats* and *trees*, or any nonexperiential domain for that matter — 'Unicorns' and unicorn pictures, 'Quarks' and quark equations, or 'Square circles' and square circle talk. Regarding any of these items, all of which come in signs of one sort or another, in spite of whatever we may conceive as meaning or 'truth', unintended (unexpected) situations can always stand a chance of emerging from Peirce's Firstness to taunt us and throw our confidence-building programs, beliefs, conceptual schemes, and general views from within the arena of Thirdness in disarray.<sup>9</sup> I intended 'Cat' to be *cat* and you took it to be *cherries* ('Cat\*'). Or one person takes 'Lightning bolts' to be *spears thrown by Jove* and another sees them as nothing but *electrical discharges*. Or the 'Earth' as *static* becomes the 'Earth' as *revolving about the sun*. And so on. The total range of possibilities is virtually beyond imagination, I would expect.

This observation, I might add, is also relevant to malapropisms and other rhetorical figures, as outlined by Davidson (1986), but not exactly in the manner intended by Davidson. 'Shrewd awakening' in place of 'Rude awakening' could be the case of: (1) the speaker's being unaware that he uses one word to mean another, or (2) his awareness of the inappropriate uses of words in order to make his listener aware of the malapropism. The listener can either: (1) take the word at face value, unaware that it is used improperly, in which event confusion ensues, or (2) take the word at face value, knowing it is meant as a malapropism — stemming from

Davidson's contention that there are only literal meanings — and interpret it accordingly (see Pradhan 1993). Regarding Putnam's context of conversation, 'Cat' is taken either as 'Cat' or 'Cat\*', and endowed with its rightful meaning, each interlocutor believing her meaning to be quite in line with that of her counterpart. Both of them believe they know what they are doing, though miscommunication runs rampant. The upshot is that there is simply no guarantee of good intentions coupled with cognizance of what's going on regarding one's own mind, the mind of the other, and the surroundings in which both are found, as ideally would be the case of Davidsonian dialogue.

'Now let's get serious', one might wish to retort. "'Cats" and "Cats\*" are radically distinct, one "referring to" *cats* and the other to *cherries*. So even though "There is a cat on the mat" and "There is a cat\* on the mat\*" are logically equivalent, it is impossible to conceive of their being fused together in such a way that their divergent "referents" will not immediately become apparent'.

Putnam counteracts this charge, however. He reminds us that if the number of *cats* and the number of *cherries* available to a given pair of interlocutors happen to be equal — an unlikely affair one must admit — then it follows that 'Cats' in relation to *cats* and 'Cats\*' in relation to *cherries* demands a shift of the entire set of lexical items in 'Cat' language and in 'Cat\*' language such that, as wholes, the two languages become radically distinct. The sentences of each language remain unchanged regarding their truth-value while at the same time the extension of 'Cats' and 'Cherries' (i.e., 'Cats\*') is drastically altered.<sup>10</sup>

So from within one 'language' I speak past you and from within another 'language' you speak past me, yet as far as our respective languages go, our 'semiotic world' appears as normal as can be. What is more, from within the range of all possible spatio-temporal contexts, 'Cats' for *cats* and 'Cats\*' for *cherries* are equally permissible, as are 'Cats' for 'Bats', 'Rats', 'Blatz', 'Quacks', 'Quarks', 'Sharks', 'Aardvarks', or virtually anything else for that matter. Each and every interpretation is distinct, yet all are equally admissible from some perspective or other. In fact, 'there are always infinitely many different interpretations of the predicates of a language that assign the 'correct' truth-values to the sentences in all possible worlds, *no matter how these "correct" truth-values are singled out*' (Putnam 1981: 35). Putnam's conclusion: nature does not single out any one 'correspondence' between signs and the furniture of the world; rather, nature 'gets us to process words and thought signs in such a way that sufficiently many of our directive beliefs will be true, and so that sufficiently many of our actions will contribute to our 'inclusive genetic fitness'; but this leaves reference largely indeterminate' (Putnam 1981: 41).

This perturbing radical indeterminacy of 'reference' and of interpretation might remind us of the strange case of Borges's Pierre Menard, of 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote' (1962: 36–44). After a failed attempt, Menard wrote a few passages identical to part of *Don Quixote* without previously having read Cervantes's masterpiece. Ironically, Menard's critics totally recontextualized his text, claiming the replica was actually a great improvement of the original. It was the product of creative endeavors not of a Golden-Age Spaniard but of a twentieth century Frenchman ignorant of the time of which he wrote. They considered Menard to have:

enriched, by means of a new technique, the halting and rudimentary art of reading; this new technique is that of the deliberate anachronism and the erroneous attribution. The technique whose applications are infinite, prompts us to go through the *Odyssey* as if it were posterior to the *Aenid*. ... This technique fills the most placid works with adventure. (Borges 1962: 44)

Placing Borges's 'thought-experiment' within the context of Putnam's quandary, Menard's fragments could be taken by one reader as Menard's text and by another reader as Quixote's text, or vice versa, and virtually incommensurable interpretations would ensue. In one interpretation, the Menard text might contain allusions to Nietzsche, William James, Russell, Proust, Dickens, and others, while the Cervantes text would be relatively impoverished. And in another interpretation the Cervantes text might be rich in the cultural lore of early seventeenth-century Spain, which would be diluted considerably in the Menard text. What is virtually a 'Cat' for one mind can be a 'Cat\*' for another: nothing is either 'Cat' or 'Cat\*', but mind can serve to make it so. Whether we are in first order sentences or sentences of greater complexity, as long as minds do not or cannot meet at some point or other, there is little hope of effective communication. Menard's text or Cervantes's text, or 'Cat' or 'Cat\*', consist of the same signs in terms of their pure possibilities (of Firstness). But upon their being actualized (into Secondness) and endowed with interpretants (Thirdness), they relate to different 'semiotic objects' whose respective interpretants are radically distinct, even well-nigh incommensurable.<sup>11</sup>

Now for a turn to another language conundrum.

#### And a sign's equally elusive attributes

Nelson Goodman's (1965) 'New Riddle of Induction', that complements Carl Hempel's (1945) inductivity paradox, goes something like this. Any upstanding English speaker ordinarily believes the statement 'Emeralds

are green' to be eternally and invariably 'true'. Supposing that all the emeralds he has examined before a given time are 'Green', he is quite naturally confident that 'Emeralds are green' will always be confirmed, for according to his observations, emerald *a* on examination was 'Green', emerald *b* was 'Green', and so on. Now suppose he meets someone from Netherworld and discovers that her perception of things appears to him apparently unstable and that her language is radically distinct from his own. Among other oddities, Netherworlder's language contains the following two terms that Ourworlder has learned to translate into his language thus:

Grue = examined before the temporal 'reference point'  $t_0$  and is reported to be 'Green' or is not examined before  $t_0$  and reported to be 'Blue' ( $t_0$  is apparently an otherwise arbitrary moment of time that is not in the past).

Bleen = examined before the temporal 'reference point'  $t_0$  and is reported to be 'Blue' or not examined before  $t_0$  and is reported to be 'Green'.

Before time  $t_0$  for each of Ourworlder's statements asserting an emerald is 'Green', Netherworlder has a parallel statement asserting that it is 'Grue', and as far as she is concerned her observations that emerald *a* on examination is 'Grue', that emerald *b* is 'Grue', and so on, adequately confirm her own hypothesis. It will obviously appear to Ourworlder from the standpoint of his language and his normal color taxonomy that Netherworlder's sensory images change radically after  $t_0$ . But, from Netherworlder's perspective, the glove is turned inside out, for it is Ourworlder's taxonomy that appears to her to be time dependent. That is, Netherworlder's translation of Ourworlder's color scheme would result in the following report:

Green = examined before  $t_0$  and is reported to be 'Grue', or not and is reported to be 'Bleen'.

Blue = examined before  $t_0$  and is reported to be 'Bleen', or is not and is reported to be 'Grue'.

From the perspective of each translator, then, the inductive expectations of the other's perspective are twisted. On the other hand, the two perspectives, if taken together as an atemporal whole, are apparently quite symmetrical (Gärdenfors 1994). However, since atemporality from within

one system becomes temporality within the other, each perspective is conceived to be time dependent from the grasp of the other, complementary perspective. Hence when taken separately as self-sufficient wholes, they are asymmetrical with respect to one another (Rescher 1978). In a manner of speaking, Ourworlder and Netherworlder possess their own 'metaphysics of presence' with respect to their conception of their own world, though, from the other's complementary world, this 'metaphysics of presence' is easily demythified.<sup>12</sup>

### Coping in Tlönlandia

The conjunction of Putnam's dilemma and Goodman's 'New Riddle of Induction' bears on the concept of Borges's citizens of the planet Tlön of 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (1962: 3–18) for whom there is neither science nor reason, and where any and all acts of classification imply falsification. On Tlön, sciences and modes of reason and systems of classification do exist, 'in almost uncountable' numbers. In order to include the existence and nonexistence of such sciences, modes of reason, and systems of classification within the whole package that goes by the name of Tlön, there is an iron-clad necessity that throws our own need for stable bearings into vertiginous loops: every theory must include its countertheory, every proof its refutation, every metaphysical doctrine its blasphemous opposite, every text its own countertext (intertextuality). Indeed, for the Tlönians, 'metaphysics is a branch of fantastic literature', for they know 'that a system is nothing more than the subordination of all aspects of the universe to any one such aspect' (Borges 1962: 10).

Now this is Karl Popper's (1963) falsification with a vengeance!<sup>13</sup> Yet, when we come to think about it, contemplate it, and sense it, truly sense it, we must somehow acknowledge that in good Tlönian fashion, dualism should not be treated as such in the ordinary sense but as unity, that is, as complementary pairs ultimately forming unity. Opposites, *differences* that make a radical *difference*, exist solely in the constructive eye of their beholder, whereas the process of the *becoming of the beingness* of all us believers of order and progress is no more than the process of the *beingness of our becoming*. We, all things that enjoy some fleeting form of existence, in the manner of that most fundamental and at the same time the most metaphysical of sciences, quantum theory — according to John Archibald Wheeler following Niels Bohr — organize ourselves in a process that is codependent with the self-organization of everything else: *the universe, ourselves included, lifts itself up by its own bootstraps* (Wheeler 1996).



Consequently, the Tlönians would be able to make the switch from 'Cat' to 'Cat\*' or from 'Green emeralds' to 'Grue emeralds' in the blink of an eye. No problem. Their world is as fleeting or as permanent as their constructive hearts and minds wish. In other words, they impose Thirdness on their world of Firstness and Secondness, a world that was, is, and will have been, of their own making. Their world is, in Goodman's (1978) conception, a world fashioned and fabricated rather than found.

### Linearity again, but this time with its own form of vengeance

If this were not the case, the world might be hardly more than that of poor Funes the Memorious from Borges's (1962: 59–66) tale whose title bears the same label.

Funes's world is not quite simply that of his immediate experience along the one-dimensional knife-edge of time and in three-dimensional space. Funes is capable of seeing only *particulars*, and he virtually sees them all. He can at a glance take in all the leaves, branches, contours on the trunk, etc., of a tree, and years later recall them to memory perfectly. The problem is that his memory is a garbage heap. It contains an indefinite number of *individuals*, yet Funes is incapable of 'ideas of a general, Platonic sort'. It seems strange to him that a dog seen at 3:14 P.M. from the side is considered to be the same dog seen at 3:15 P.M. from the front. Conceiving number as an ordered series is for him impossible. He has simply memorized each number without establishing the necessary serial relations between them. In fact, he once developed his own alternative number system consisting of arbitrary names in place of every number, which for him was just as effective. Funes, in short, is unable to think, for to think 'is to forget differences, generalize, make abstractions. In the teeming world of Funes, there were only details almost immediate in their presence' (Borges 1962: 66).

Funes, it appears, either sees all or nothing at all; he remembers aggregates of particulars without being able to isolate any of them. He is the consummate nominalist, a superempiricist. A hypothesis, theory, conjecture, even a beginning, would be for him virtually impossible. For us, before there can be any-*thing* at all, even before there can be no-*thing*, there must be some-*thing*, and this some-*thing* must be a selection, an abstraction, of some part from the whole. Our collection of selective abstractions makes up the world, *our* world. On the other hand, if, like Funes we would expect, we were able to perceive the world as an unselected continuous stream in terms of pristine objects and events, that world would be a teeming jungle, a myriad array of clearly differentiable

differences. Every-*thing* would be clearly and distinctly here now and gone in the next instant, but indelibly committed to memory. Since we would be incapable of abstracting any-*thing*, every-*thing* would be reduced to essentially the same level. We would take in one perceptual snapshot of the world 'out there', then another, then another, and so on. With each snapshot we would see a slightly different collection of particulars before us. But the question is: How would it be possible for us to detect any movement at all? In other words, if we saw every-*thing* at once as an aggregate of particulars, and if we could not abstract any-*thing*, then we would be incapable of seeing one particular against the background of the whole, and hence we could not detect a change in that particular while holding the whole in check as an unchanging entity. What we would perceive, and the only thing we could perceive, is, so to speak, a succession of static 'slices', a crisp series rather than a virtual continuum. But there could be for us no change, no time in the conventional sense — for which Borges has a special affinity and which has resisted complete resolution over the centuries.

Consequently, Zeno's arrow paradox would prevail. In other words, if the arrow is where it is at each instant and displaces a space equal to itself and no more, then it cannot move to another space at another instant, so it can't move, and therefore time can't exist. Or at best, instead of Funes's perception of his world as a unifying whole, there is no more than a set of static, discrete particulars, without any unifying thread. Moreover, since each of these particulars occupies no more than a split second, the differences between them are minuscule, perhaps well-nigh infinitesimal. In the face of these myriad *differences*, quite surprisingly, Funes is *indifferent* toward his world. The narrator describes him as a:

face belonging to the voice that had spoken all night long. [Funes] Ireneo was nineteen years old; he had been born in 1868; he seemed to me as monumental as bronze, more ancient than Egypt, older than the prophecies and the pyramids. I thought that each of my words (that each of my movements) would persist in his implacable memory; I was benumbed by the fear of multiplying useless gestures. (Borges 1962: 66)

Funes somehow triumphed over Zeno's arrow and created time; as a consequence he had fused discrete *differences* into the flux of his experience ultimately to breed *indifference*.

Funes's life is incessantly, perpetually new. He never knows from one moment to the next what will happen to pop up. His past consists of a static, digital series of objects, acts, and events, and his future is devoid of expectations, hopes and dreams, and possible surprises and unavoidable delusions. Everything for him is always already different. The differences

are not differences that make a difference, for there is no gauge with which to measure the difference between one object, act, and event and another one. In order that there may be such differences, Funes must be capable of abstractions of the general sort. But he is not. For him there is no Jacques Derrida (1973) *différance*: neither spatial differentials, displacements, and dissemination nor temporal deferrals and diffusions. Each decision to name or qualify some object, act, or event is no more than a shot in the dark. Funes is privy to no rules by means of which to classify his world into thises and thats, thises instead of thats, now thises and now thats. Every qualification the furniture of his world is brought about by an arbitrary choice. His number-words are arbitrary, his labeling this-thing-here-now 'Dog<sub>1</sub>' and this-thing-here-now 'Dog<sub>2</sub>' — which is actually the same *dog* seen at a later moment and from another angle — is a matter of choices that are up for grabs at each and every moment. His labeling this-emerald-here-now 'Green<sub>1</sub>' and at a later moment labeling this-emerald-here-now 'Green<sub>2</sub>' — which is the same *emerald* — allows him no way of knowing whether or not what is for him at one moment the same 'Green' as it is at another moment or whether or not 'Green' at some moment in the long series of attaching color attributes to an emerald had not at some indeterminate point become 'Grue'. Neither would there be any way for him to know, with absolute certainty, whether at some point what is for him 'Cat' might have become 'Cat\*'.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, Funes's world is tantamount to Ludwig Wittgenstein's 'following a rule', where rule following is at every juncture subject to deviations, tangential shifts, and radical transformations. It is as if we were to follow Saul Kripke's (1982) interpretation of what he considers the core of the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) known as 'Wittgenstein's paradox' which is: 'This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here' (Wittgenstein 1953: 201) — and consequently the *excluded-middle principle* has been violated.<sup>14</sup> To the rule 'Add 1' proclaimed by Jane with respect to the series '1, 2, 3', ... there is no knowing whether or not John will not use rule 'Bad 1' and after the number 1,000 continue with '1,000, 1,004, 1,006'. ... So skepticism about applying a sign in accord with what one means by that sign leads Kripke to the conclusion that there can be no meaning at all and that language is thus impossible. Wittgenstein provides a Humean skeptical solution to his skeptical problem on the assumption that there are no facts-of-the-matter in the world capable of dictating a set of rules for connecting words to objects, acts, and events that is fixed for all time.

In other words, Funes's world is devoid of Thirdness. It consists only of a desert populated by disconnected, alienated, autonomous signs of Firstness and Secondness. This would be comparable to the Zahir if each of its instantiations were absolutely divorced from each and every other instantiation. It would be the case of the frantic library rats, those pathetic human would-be knows, of Borges's library of Babel (1962: 51–58) for whom there is apparently no possibility of making any necessary connect between a given book and any other book with the infinite (or is it finite?) presumably unordered array of books. It would be like the helpless and hopeless anguish-ridden lottery players of the lottery of Babylon (1962: 30–35) who are incapable of deciphering the workings of what for them is for all intents and purposes an infinite and hence absolutely unpredictable and indeterminable lottery. Funes's world would be dire indeed.

But things could be even worse, as we shall soon note.

### The whole truth and nothing but the truth?

A picture of the world contrary to that of Funes would be holistic. The so-called 'Quine-Duhem thesis' is one of the more radical interpretations of holism. Willard v. O. Quine's (1969) epistemological holism says that our big cosmological beliefs form a field or network of interrelationships between little beliefs. A big belief is at the core of the entire network, and as the subsidiary beliefs become smaller and smaller, they find themselves at the periphery. All positioning of beliefs within the network is a relative matter. Beliefs at the periphery are more loosely connected, and beliefs toward the core are more stringently connected, hence they suffer from a certain loss of freedom. Yet, with respect to the whole, everything is relative — interdependently, interrelatedly — to everything else. Moreover, the network is constantly changing, as new beliefs are acquired and others tossed, which goes to make the network even more indecipherable. Whatever differences there are that can be specified are so specified solely by a loose comparison of the use of signs that depict the perceived and conceived world's objects, acts, and events as those signs are used and abused within their respective contexts. In this view, the world becomes indeed uncertain.

As a matter of fact, how could a given network of beliefs be specified and made intelligible? It couldn't. That is, it couldn't, outside the specification and intelligibility of this-network-here-now in its interrelationship with any and all other networks-there-then. So it couldn't. That is, it couldn't, except for those rare privileged souls such as Daneri of

'The Aleph', or that Aztec priest, Tzinacán of 'The God's Script' (1962: 169–173). Daneri experienced the entire universe, past, present, and future, in a golf-ball size apparition. Tzinacán, after innumerable trials and errors, deciphered a spot on a jaguar's hide to experience that same universe in a marvelous mystical moment.

In other words, Daneri and Tzinacán experienced both Cat and Cat\* and the signs 'Cat' and 'Cat\*' and Green emeralds and Grue emeralds and the signs 'Green emeralds' and 'Grue emeralds'. They also experienced all possible combinations, compatible and incompatible and complementary and contradictory and similar and distinct in all sorts of ways. Nothing was truly separable from anything else. Everything was intimately interdependent, interrelated, interlinked and interactive. As a matter of fact, both Daneri and Tzinacán could not play the role of detached, objective spectators, for they were at the moment of their experience included within the whole as parts inseparable from any and all other parts of that whole. There could be no Secondness, for nothing 'here' was detachable from anything else 'there'. There was only *That*. There was no body and mind, subject and object, knower and known. There was only *One*, *Oneness*. It is as if we were to begin with the number one, which is just one: one apple, one orange, or whatever. The one begets two, and two three, and so on, to infinity. And what is that entire collection of numbers? Why, it is *One*, no more, no less. This is called the arithmetic paradox, as illustrated by Erwin Schrödinger (1967) in his strange, quasi-mystical account of the universe of twentieth-century science.

If the experience of Daneri and Tzinacán can hold no Secondness, neither can it bear any vestige of Thirdness, for, after their experience, they confessed that they stood nary a chance of being able to describe, let alone explain, their marvelous moment of enlightenment. Particular words were simply inadequate to the task. Each word, when used, became so overbearingly bloated with generality that instead of saying something in particular it said everything in general. It said it all. Which is to say that as far as we helpless finite souls are concerned, it said virtually nothing at all. It was at the same time all-intelligible and un-intelligible. This situation is tantamount to Borges's 'Everything and Nothing' (1962: 248–249) where Shakespeare (or God?), after having become an indeterminate number of selves, discovered that he no longer knew his own self. He had become all selves and hence one self and at the same time no self in the sense of a determinate particularity as Secondness or Thirdness. In other words, there is only Firstness, no more, no less. It is everything, and nothing, depending on the perspective. It contains both one thing and another, and another, and another, without end — hence

there is a rape of the *principle of noncontradiction* here — and so it is, as far as our human practical purposes are concerned, really nothing at all. Thus, the quandary of holism. As a theory it is a beauty to behold, but it can be neither effectively conceptualized nor articulated.

We have seen the imposition of Thirdness on Firstness and Secondness from Goodman and Putnam, the absence of Thirdness altogether in Funes's world of Firstness and Secondness as authors of haecceities and nothing but haecceities, and Daneri's and Tzinacán's pure Firstness and the impossibility of any modicum of Secondness or Thirdness. So the perhaps anguished question now becomes ...

### How, really, does one cope?

Regarding Borges's characters, contexts, and quandaries we have discussed, I would venture to suggest that we as living and breathing semiotic animals experience a little of all of them and at the same time we experience none of them. We experience at one and the same time both the one thing and the other thing and we experience neither the one thing nor the other thing. In this manner, we are just what we are: semiotic animals trying to cope, and as human semiotic animals we are trying to understand how we are perpetually trying to cope and what it is that makes up the focus of our coping process.

So we try to cope, and I reckon we will continue trying to cope to the end. What more can be said? What more should be said? The Thirdness in us thinks it knows what it knows and says what it knows it knows. But it is deluded, for it is incapable of articulating that incessant outpouring of Secondness. It is also deluded, for the whole, the absolute whole, of Firstness, lies eternally beyond its capacity regarding surveyability, specifiability, and articulability. All this is, perhaps, our boon and our bane, our promise and our pathos, an indication of our fickleness and our fortitude, our fortune and our fate. Borges, of course, knew the story well. ...

### Notes

1. For more on the relationship between Borges and Peirce, see Merrell (1998), where I give numerous examples of Peirce's semiotics found throughout Borges's opus.
2. For a general outline of Peirce on icons, indices, and symbols, see *CP* (2.227–308).
3. Here I follow Peirce's (*CP*: 5.448n) notion that the universe is a 'perfusion of signs', if it does not consist exclusively of signs. And when Peirce writes 'signs', he means to include linguistic as well as nonlinguistic or extralinguistic signs.



4. I use the term 'linguicentrism' in Merrell (1996, 1997) as a wedge with which to get a critical hold on 'logocentric' and many presumably 'nonlogocentric' practices insofar as they share an overriding prioritization of, and occasionally an obsession with, language as the chief — and it even appears at times the exclusive — source of all that makes for genuine understanding.
5. 'Icons' and 'indices' make up two of the legs of Peirce's basic sign tripod, including also 'symbols', whose most effective medium consists of linguistic signs and the signs of artificial languages.
6. In fact, in *Simulations* (1983), Baudrillard comes quite close to Eco's views on 'fakes and forgeries'.
7. Perhaps Borges himself is a 'realist' temperament disguised as a 'nominalist', then. In this light, judging from his frequent intellectual excursions into mysticism, it should come as no surprise that he often longed for a view *sub specie aeternitatis*, such as that afforded by the Aleph, for example. On the other hand, Borges once remarked that all perspectives, all classifications of the world, are nothing more than convenient intellections (Borges 1953: 18–19).
8. Ian Hacking (1982, 1983), for one, is critical of Putnam's hypothesis. The hypothesis is based on the Löwenheim-Skolem paradox for first-order logic, that, is not applicable, Hacking asserts, to the language of everyday talk.
9. I allude here to Peirce's three categories of sign processes, Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. For a concise definition, see Almeder (1980).
10. In this respect, see also Lakoff's (1987) defense of Putnam vis-à-vis David Lewis's (1984) attack on the Putnam hypothesis.
11. While sticking with Putnam's rather 'linguicentric' example, I have, of course, almost entirely ignored the iconic and indexical dimension of *semiosis*, both of which are remarkably presented in Cervantes's text: the image of a windmill viewed simply as a 'windmill' or a 'menacing enemy of the crown', with the moving parts either as indices of 'windmill blades' or 'threatening appendages engaged in battle tactics'.
12. Hesse (1969) argues quite effectively that when Goodman's puzzle operates by symmetry relation, it is insoluble (i.e., incommensurability holds). But in our actual practices by use of our natural languages, it is rarely to never the case that meanings, concepts, and theories are radically incommensurable. Relations are more often than not asymmetrical, due to the element of temporality, or irreversibility, present. In this sense, conditions are usually qualifiable in terms of disequilibrium rather than equilibrium, nonlinearity rather than linearity.
13. In this vein, Stove (1982) argues that the philosophy of Karl Popper, just as much as that of philosophers and historians the likes of Thomas Kuhn, Imre Lakatos, and Paul Feyerabend, when taken at face value, is irrational through and through.
14. Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein is generally respected though not universally accepted. For a critical view, see Baker and Hacker (1984).

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## Pure line: An essay in Borgermeneutics

CĂLIN-ANDREI MIHĂILESCU

Para la otra vez que lo mate — replicó Scharlach — le prometo ese laberinto, que consta de una sola línea recta y que es invisible, incesante.

— Borges, 'La muerte y la brújula'

'What are the underpinnings of Borges's interpretation?' is the double question to which the lines below attempt to provide side-effective answers. The question is pressing because all of Borges's prose texts are largely interpretative essays. They are so in two senses, of which the first appears to be false at least in part, and the second entirely debatable. It stands to conventional reason to consider that texts such as 'The *Biathanatos*', 'Chesterton and the Labyrinths of the Detective Story', 'The Translators of *The 1001 Nights*', or 'New Refutation of Time' are, by and large, essays, while 'The *Zahir*', 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', and 'The South' certainly count as fictions. That certain Borgean proses, of which 'Pierre Menard, author of the *Quixote*' is a much invoked example, dwell on the border between the two established genres, does not seem to unsettle the genre establishment of the republic of letters. In this sense, it is false to claim that Borges's prose and his essays are one and the same thing. However, the other sense of 'essay' concerns us here.

While blasting the likes of Apollinaire for trying to be only modern, even at the price of betraying themselves, Borges always took good care to present himself as *un vecchio* (yet not as old as to be postmodern).<sup>1</sup> His essays turn — unfailingly, one would believe — to Montaigne's inaugural work with an engaging respect filtered through the grand tradition from those he never tired of quoting: De Quincey, Pater, Wilde, Chesterton. The essay, the genre of the emerging modern subject's

heterogeneity of experience, appeared in Montaigne's work as a tentative form of securing a habitat for the said subject's perplexities. Neither surprisingly nor merrily, Montaigne is charged with having been the last Westerner whose writing was rooted in experience. As *Don Quixote* counts as the nonoriginary but first articulated novel and metanovel, Montaigne's *Essais* contain the consciousness of their unprecedented genre form: they are interpretations, thus interpretations of other interpretations. The essay delivers the past to a consciousness that does not shun experience. Each past age's solitude of an untimeliness that Montaigne recognized as 'its own', was let to repeat itself in essayistic writing, and thus engender a difference unfathomable from without the limits of this consciousness.

Borges's essays are fragmentary, shortcut crises, rather than well-rounded processes-as-products of a Romantic 'organismism' that our author was certainly not keen on. For him the fragmentary was the expression of an incisive resistance to that inclusion of experience into knowledge which is the ideological resorption of the lived into the mastered. Not once does he, at the outset of a number of his essays, in partially humble exercises of *captatio benevolentiae*, acknowledge that this or that text is just the recapitulatory ruin of a 'history I will never write'.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Borges's essays usually end in turns of phrase that match the closing ceremonies of punch lines and of twisted moralities. So that the often violent endings<sup>3</sup> of his paratactic<sup>4</sup> essences detailed act as sphincters for both the terror of enigmatic monsters and for the texts themselves. The latter are thus prevented from further spillage into the babbling of the 'everything', and delivered to the same exhaustion that the reader is seduced to experience.<sup>5</sup>

Montaigne's generic castle of essays is one notable abode among those that Borges's oeuvre inhabits uninhibitedly. The essay is 'on' something but 'up to' something else: while essays conventionally circumscribe objects of knowledge (*Gegenstände*): love, suicide, memory, books, time, and so forth, they tend to — finally and more profoundly — become objective correlates of the heterogeneity of the subject's experience of those objects of knowledge. In other terms, the essay's aboutness is the indispensable somersault for its leap of faith from faith rigid into the heterogeneous. This Montaignian legacy has often been obliterated by a contrary, hermeneutical tradition, that, over the last two centuries or so, has manifested itself as biblical and literary criticism, history of literature, theory of interpretation, semiotics, and 'hermeneutics' itself.

Hermeneutical precepts allow for a cohesion between unitary experience and totality of life: this link, as Gadamer points out, is provided

by intention: 'the unity of experience determined by its intentional content stands in an immediate relationship to the whole, to the totality of life' (1975 [1960]: 62).<sup>6</sup>

For Gadamer (and the same goes for Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and partially, Ricoeur), an 'organic' relationship grants a principle of discourse and reading organization. The relationship is presumed existent, in the sense that it can be neither organized any further nor deconstructed beyond the bedrock of the organic. Mainstream hermeneutics thus abides by the beliefs of Romantic organismism that, in its hands, becomes a game with wholes, empathies, and asymptotic constructions: no less a game with a world united by intention than Renaissance magic's was by love.

Hermeneutics reduces the art of polemics to a filling out of the blanks of war with peaceful intentions. The dream of nonpolemical, un-Heraclitean hermeneutics appears to be the attainment of the abstract peace of logicians, while translating feasts of words from the sacred into the secular, from hierarchy into higher/archy. From Schleiermacher to Gadamer and Ricoeur, all representatives of this not so laid back peace of mind have not moved even a bit away from that desire to be at peace that has periodically vacuumed nothingness out. Hermeneutics has lived and has died, lives and dies reasonably, for the avoidance of conflicts, ingrained in it, grounds the activity of the white-collar workers of meaning. Hermeneutical secularization is only justificatory: meaning is made public and thrown against the forgotten and thus obscure workings of the sacred. If Schleiermacher is the first theorist of hermeneutics, Luther is its first practitioner who has considerably contributed to opening, between the sacred's ecstasy and its fury, the abyss where morality dwells. Hermeneutics' business is, second handedly, and therefore historically, that of providing band aids for this abyssal wound that stigmatizes modernity this side of redemption. Unlike the essay, which knows too well that meaning is a bait, hermeneutics, which has historically replaced enigmas with intentions, remains to be the 'too little' of its taken-for-granted world's 'too much': a dance of wholes where parts take part, and nothing is left outside, for everything is processed.<sup>7</sup>

Like Kafka, Robert Walser, Artaud, and — to mention only one more of these difficult magnificents with whom the twentieth century goes down to the hell of history — Beckett, Borges has written in the proximity of animal and material anonymity and impersonality: beyond the vice of versatility, he was a writer of the inorganic (book).<sup>8</sup> The dangers of this proximity to these sites of resistance-to-understanding are to be first



perceived as the unsettling of familiar grounds: individuality (including the proper name), historical givenness, chronology, universal sympathy (underlying the possibility of limitless rhetorical comparison), clear-cut differences between the actual and the fictional — all of which are relativized by the slow poisons of his cunning writing — come to disappear. The conditions of familiar experience are underlined as they are erased. A wasteland, no more, seems to be left after the dark and witty brilliance of his deconstructions. But like Góngora's and Quevedo's, the baroque masters Borges much admired, his risky business does not stop here, and the dangers he assumes do not lie in empty lands, where they are scarecrows for the weak.

It is on a different level of reading that dangers become more strict and require something more from readers than an encyclopedically overcooked cultural background, good for coping with the Borgesian heavy artillery of cultural references; they require intellectual discipline to both face the dangers and be redeemed through them. This second reading, one suspects, emerges as the other of the first, as a procedure that can occur only after the first has exhausted all interpretative potentialities. The critical relation of mutual alteration between the two readings cannot be but a nightmare for hermeneutics' unitary experience. Like all other writers of the impersonal, anonymous resistance of inorganic matter, Borges sees in the appeals to transcendental solutions only self-righteous forms of weakness. He is a writer of unfailing immanence. He is also an essayist whose literature embodies the Montaignian heterogeneity of experience in a proper, moral sense: the second reading of his texts offers a realm of otherness that is not lured by the irresponsible automatism of the *différance* unto transcendence.

Another circle, neither the one of enthusiastic presupposers like Dilthey nor that which viciously perpetuates guilt, appears in Heidegger's — excessively called 'hermeneutical' — early writings. Here a new line of thought, germane to Borges's, emerges, with the major difference that for the latter the abandonment of the fore-known is not effected in the sense of an overcoming.<sup>9</sup> Rather, Borges inscribes the fore-known in an eternal return in which names and social roles, memories and entire civilizations disappear only to have their disappearance come around once more, and then again. It is within this circularity that a second reading of Borges's 'essays' imposes itself with the playful necessity of fate; and it is here that the abandonment of binary logic opens itself to a realm of otherness ruled by silence, simplicity, and linearity.<sup>10</sup>

One of the privileged texts where the jump from a first level of reading to a second one can be expressed is 'La muerte y la brújula'

[The death and the compass]<sup>11</sup> a text that usually elicits retelling by the critic, as if the reader were compelled to take up the detective's procedure and better it. Let it be said now that its second reading — as any Borgesian second reading — can be understood not as improved detective work, but rather as entrance into what Peirce has called — and Deleuze has reanalyzed pertinently in *Mouvement-Image* — Firstness.<sup>12</sup> In other terms, the second reading is the entrance into *ekstasis*. Hermeneutics' going round finds here no longer grounds in the excuses provided by dialectical procedures.

'The Death and the Compass', a text played by names (Erik Lönnrot, Red Scharlach) whose reddishness evokes Babylonian-whorish geometries of doom, is a detective story of over-interpretation.<sup>13</sup> The enthusiastic Lönnrot applies the principle of 'Greek' logic to a Hebraic affair; in the process, he misses both the part that the accident can play in taming logical necessity, and the Hebraic sanctification of the letter. 'Writing is holy because it is God's instrument' ... It is, Borges says, 'an end in itself, not a means to an end' (1989/96: 2.118). This is the notion that must shock the West of our minds, and empty out the Tetragrammaton. The Kabbalah, which appears as a supplement to Greek deductive thinking, promises to offer synthetic (i.e., a posteriori) knowledge: it is the bait of meaning that magnetizes Lönnrot's impressionable mental instrument *messmerized* by numbers. The *brújula* plays the ironic double role of a misplaced tool and of a fantastic 'aport', an object whose presence can be explained only through a fantastic origin that it perpetuates in a deterministic world.<sup>14</sup> Why does Lönnrot use the *brújula* to find the fourth point on the map as is much beyond him and beyond us as is 'death', the word which pairs off with *brújula* in the title. The over-orientation provided by this silly supplement splits the text into two instances of Firstness that cannot be tied together in any unitary experience. This is the heterogeneity inscribed in Borges's 'essays' and in what goes by the name of the fantastic in them.<sup>15</sup>

At the very end of 'The Death and the Compass', and after getting the whole picture, Lönnrot suggest to Scharlach to kill him once more in a future avatar. He wants the dandy to find him in an aporetic labyrinth, in a *D* point, that is the middle of an *A-C* distance (*C* being the middle of an initial *A-B* distance): the unreachable middle of a Zeno tract. The two exchange punch lines rather than punches: in a zero-sum game, like the eternal return, in Zeno spaces, there is only zero movement. A Zeno space is, like a reversed Hamiltonian space, one of absolute friction. Like the Kantian dynamical sublime, the Zeno space is conducive to chaotomic dismeasurement. Here the minimal unit is negative: Every/thing gets lost in the middle of the distance; everything passes

through the condition of its physical nonexistence. The real triviality (a single step is enough to prove Zeno's nonsense) and the ideal one (a single thought suffices to prove his detractors' nonsense) are infinitely distant from one another. And this distance is the irreducible, ironic, and frightening 'middle' of time. This time does not need to return to fuel our fears — it simply is, it just happens, and the distinction between once and many times disappears in its eventness.<sup>16</sup> The existence of movement is *ekstatic* there where measure precedes movement. Beyond the polemical response — movement makes measurement impossible — there is nothing one can contemplate, except for the fulfillment of language that is the nothingness of contemplation. At which point, one has to — on aesthetic and ethical grounds — fall silent.<sup>17</sup>

The relations between Firstnesses are linear, and the line is the last line of visibility, the collapse of form into the point that marks its disappearance. Two eyes are not enough to see it, but one and another one. Borges's style arrests confident perspectivalism — the Firstnesses are anamorphic to one another, and vision's blind spot is contained at the very core of his writing (yet, not of any writing, as Blanchot will say later). Rather than a contour that grants germinations of shapes and lends legitimacy to geometricians (who, since Plato and Euclid, should be better called *géomâtres*), the pure line is a demarcation between form and its disappearance, between the circle and the point. The pure line is a limit: stylized to the point of blindness, its empirical visibility has almost no consequence. I call the Borgesian second reading 'linear' in that it goes on on a 'line' that links the Peircean 'First entities'. At the same time, the pure line is the limit between them and the sign of the disappearance of shapes. Once effected, the latter's effect is to throw the reader back into a premythical time, where the shaping function of myth were there not yet — to systematize mankind unto guilt and fear. It is never too early yet always too late to recognize in Borges un *molto vecchio*.

With Cathars of lost gestures like Borges, in whose 'essays' we do not see those who have seen God's luminously lethal face, where we unlearn to fear apocalypses of sulphur, it is the solid silence of rocks that gives us some strength; at least, the strength to locate the underpinnings of his interpretation in a rebellious, abstract model that contradicts inherited common sense models of hermeneutics and temporality.

The distinction between 'cold' and 'hot' (Lévi-Strauss), or 'mythical' and 'secular' (Eliade) civilizations, by now informing other truisms in cultures popular or not, are based on two ways of geometrically spatializing time, or 'chronometries'. The circularity of mythical time

(of 'cold' societies) is enforced by the periodical, ritual repetition of myth; the linearity of historical time, by dominant change that retains ritual traces only in the secular ideology of 'progress'.

Circular hermeneutics has emerged only after the simple form of an 'arrow-shaped' history had already unsettled the Christian *Heilsgeschichte* and crystallized in a chronology to which the modern subject could always turn for assurance or comfortable sparing partnership. Chronology emerged as both the backbone and the blackmail of history. It also emerged as the essentially dis/quivering ground for hermeneutics' ornamental addenda, even for its more extreme pronouncement, Dilthey's 'the foundation for the study of history is hermeneutics'.<sup>18</sup> If we superimpose a circular interpretation (where circularity exists both between parts and wholes, and between reader and text) over a linear history, it stands to analogical reason to invert the relationship, and contemplate the superimposition of a linear hermeneutics over a circular, 'cold' civilization.

Let us leave things at this: Borges provides elements of a 'linear hermeneutics' for myth, and thus a deconstruction of myth that does not follow the trodden path of stubborn reason. The *ekstasis* of Firstnesses that make up his 'second readings' leave us to confront his texts as distant others, rather than myths to identify with in rituals of reading. Borges's ritual is — maddening or illuminating — play: after his century, literature is no longer fair game.

## Notes

1. At odds with both the style and the repeated confessions of Borges *il vecchio*, the postmodern mechanics of dis/illusioned self-consciousness effortlessly found in him one of its masterful precursors. Not to say that sassier falsehoods have not been voiced about the Argentinian writer — who would rather smile at the celebration of his centenary — but this one is not entirely devoid of a certain legitimating and sanitary nefariousness either. Most of Borges's confessions given in interview form can be found in *Dos palabras antes de morir y otras entrevistas* (Mateo 1994); *Borges, el memorioso: conversaciones de Jorge Luis Borges con Antonio Carrizo* (Carrizo 1982); *Borges — imágenes, memorias, diálogos* (Vázquez 1980); *Borges — Bioy: confesiones, confesiones* (Braceli 1997); *Diálogos últimos* (Borges and Ferrari 1987); and *Jorge Luis Borges: Conversations* (Burgin 1998).
2. A not atypical example opens the 'Avatars of the Tortoise': 'There is one concept that corrupts and perplexes all others. I am not speaking of evil, whose limited empire is that of ethics; I am speaking of the infinite. I once wished to compile its mobile history ... Five, seven years of metaphysical, theological, and mathematical apprenticeship would enable me to plan such a book properly. It is unnecessary to add that life denies me that hope, and even that adverb' (Borges 1981: 105).

3. 'Borges has been always the celebrator of things-in-their-farewell, always a poet of loss', writes Harold Bloom in the introduction to the collection he edited (1986: 2). While 'his stories are about the style in which they are written', writes Paul de Man 'God appears on the scene as the power of reality itself, in the form of a death that demonstrates the failure of poetry. This is the deeper reason for the violence that pervades all Borges's stories. God is on the side of chaotic reality and style is powerless to conquer him' (1986 [1964]: 23, 27).
4. 'This style in Borges, becomes the ordering but dissolving act that transforms the unity of experience into the enumeration of its discontinuous parts. Hence his rejection of *style lié* and his preference for what grammarians call parataxis, the mere placing of events side by side without conjunctions; hence also his definition of his own style as baroque, "the style that deliberately exhausts (or tries to exhaust) all its possibilities"' (de Man 1986 [1964]: 26).
5. 'Being exhausted is much more than being tired ... The tired person no longer has any (subjective) possibility at his disposal; he therefore cannot realize the slightest (objective) possibility ... The tired person has merely exhausted the realization, whereas the exhausted person exhausts the whole of the possible ... There is no longer any possible: a relentless Spinozism' (Deleuze 1995: 3–4). Borges's image of Spinoza's 'exhausted sameness' appears in one of his two sonnets dedicated to the philosopher: 'Las traslúcidas manos del judío/Labran en la penumbra los cristales/ Y la tarde que muere es miedo y frío/(Las tardes a las tardes son iguales)' (1989/96: 2.308). ['The Jew's hands, translucent in the dusk,/ Polish the lenses time and again./ The dying afternoon is fear, is/Cold, and all afternoons are the same'] (for the translation see Borges 1972: 193).
6. Gadamer invokes as examples porting his definition Bergson's insistence on the 'representation of the whole', Natorp's discussion of the organic relationship of part to whole, and Simmel's pronouncements about lived experience (*Erlebnis*). 'Intention' means here either 'meaning' or 'intention', or both.
7. 'The circular relation between the whole and the parts (scripture understandable through its parts). Classical rhetoric compares perfect speech with the organic body, with the relationships between head and limbs. Luther and his successors applied this image, familiar from classical rhetoric, to the process of understanding and developed the universal principle of textual interpretation that all the details of a text were to be understood from the *contextus* (context) and from the *scopus*, the unified sense at which the whole aims' (Gadamer 1975 [1960]: 154).
8. Symbol and perception of the last animal that the dying sight of the blind can hope to 'see', the tiger is suspected of carrying God's magic writ. In 'La escritura de Dios' [The handwriting of God], Tzinacán, the 'magician of the pyramid of Quaholom, which Pedro de Alvarado devastated by fire', considered 'that we were now, as always, at the end of time and that my destiny as the last priest of the god would give me access to the privilege of intuiting the script. ... I imagined that net of tigers, that teeming labyrinth of tigers, inflicting horror upon pastures and flock in order to perpetuate a design. In the next cell there was a jaguar; in his vicinity I perceived a confirmation of my conjecture and a secret favor' (Borges 1989/96: 1.596–599).  
In 'El inmortal' [The immortal] the name of Homer becomes the name of everyone, one becomes everyone and everyone — one, and immortal life, closer to animality than to the divine, happens in the universal graveyard of the City of the Immortals. In eternity nothing *has* meaning, for eternity is the materiality of time elevated — or lowered — to absolute resistance. The loss of temporal and individual differences remain carved in undecipherable stone. See also Ronald J. Christ (1986: 49–77).
9. 'In the circle (which is neither vicious nor merely tolerated) is hidden the positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. To be sure, we genuinely take hold of this possibility only when, in our interpretation, we have understood that our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conception, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves'. (Heidegger 1962 [1927]: 153).
10. The emotional austerity that, to one point, Borges shared with Flaubert, translated for both into a great variety of *horror pleni*. For an analysis of Borges's rhetorics of silence, see Block de Behar (1994 [1984]).  
The multifold Hydra (that has become the prefiguration or emblem of geometric progressions) would lend a becoming horror to its portal which would be crowned by the sordid nightmares of Kafka', Borges wrote in 'Avatars of the Tortoise' (Borges 1989/96: 1.254). However, the Borgesian de-Hydrated form encounters Kafka's nightmares: the monsters they both unleashed are guarding the extremes of our imaginary world. The Cusan's infinite line '[which] could be a straight line, a triangle, a circle and a sphere' (Nicholas of Cusa 1981: 13) is the opposite of the 'pure line' in which the universe of forms is absorbed. And then, the God of Cusanus (of Pascal after him and of Alanus de Insulis before both), whose center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere, is the point of nothingness, the point that marks the disappearance of everything and its transformation into itself (no-thing), that is, into a void that neither is nor is not. In all of these three 'relations of otherness', the intensity of immanence unsettles the relevance of the binary and the faint hopes of redemption it carries with it *more geometrico*.
11. 'La muerte y la brújula' (1989/96: 1.499–507), translated in *Fictions* (Borges 1962).
12. In 'Trichotomy', the first chapter of the never-finished volume 'A Guess at the Riddle', Peirce defines the 'First', 'Second', and 'Third' as 'ideas so broad that they may be looked upon rather as modes or tones of thought, than as definite notions. ... The First is that whose being is simply in itself, not referring to anything or lying behind anything. The second is that which is what it is by force of something to which it is second. The third is that which is what it is owing to things between which it mediates and which brings into relation to each other. The First must ... be present and immediate, so as not to be second to a representation. It must be fresh and new, for if old it is second to its former state. ... It is also something vivid and conscious; so only it avoids being the object of some sensation. ... It precedes all synthesis and all differentiation; it has no unity and no parts (not to be articulated in thought, for it would lose its innocence. ... What the world was to Adam on the first day he opened his eyes to it, before he had drawn any distinctions, or has become conscious of his own existence — that is first, present, immediate, fresh, new, initiative, original, spontaneous, free, vivid, conscious, and evanescent. Only, remember that every description of it must be false to it' (Peirce 1999: 188–189). See also his 'theological' considerations of Firstness in 'A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God' (Peirce 1999: 260–278).  
Deleuze reads in Peirce's Firstness an 'image' (Peirce had initially called it an 'idea') or a 'category'. 'It is the category of the Possible: it gives proper consistency to the possible, it expresses the possible without actualising it [and one reads in the Peircean Firstness a precursor of both Deleuze's "virtual" and "affection-image"]', whilst making it a complete mode ... Maine de Biran had already spoken of pure affections, unplaceable because they have no relation to a determinate space, present in the sole form of a 'there is' ... because they have no relation to an ego



(the pains of a hemiplegic, the floating images of falling asleep, the visions of madness)'. Secondness, by contrary, is the category of the Real, in which these qualities have become 'forces' that are related to each other (exertion-resistance, action-reaction, excitation-response) and are actualized in determinate space-times, geographical or historical milieus, and individual people (Deleuze 1991 [1983]: 98).

13. Paradigmatically, 'The Death and the Compass' is treated as a game of intelligence; see for instance de Lailhacar (1990: 155–179).

Erik Lönnrot, a Buenos Aires detective who thought himself a pure 'raisonneur', like Poe's Auguste Dupin, but who, unlike Dupin, was, rather than a poet, an adventurer and a gambler, has to solve a rigorously strange problem: three murders committed in three different locations on the third day of December, January, and February. As the first victim was a renowned Talmudist in whose typewriter a sheet was found with the script, 'The first letter of the name has been articulated' written on it, the detective instinctively takes a 'Cabalistic' line of interpretation to solve the murders' mystery. At the locations of the second and third murders, Lönnrot finds messages according to which the 'second', and the 'last' letters of the name have been articulated. The research he does during the investigation leads him — through half-digested popularized versions of the Kaballah — to the conclusion that the third murder was not the last, but a fourth was supposed to occur: after all, the Greek index for the Jewish God's secret name is 'Tetragrammaton', that which has four, rather than three letters. 'All of a sudden, he felt that he was about to decipher the mystery. A compass (*compás*) and a compass (*brújula*) completed this sudden intuition. He smiled, uttered the word 'Tetragrammaton (a recent acquisition) ...' and left for the location he had calculated for the fourth murder, an isolated spot in Southern Buenos Aires, the quinta 'Triste-le-Roy'. But, instead of catching the murderer, he is caught in turn by dandy Red Scharlach, 'el más ilustre de los pistoleros del Sur', and Lönnrot's unknown arch-enemy. Disarmed by Scharlach's men, Lönnrot asks, 'Scharlach, is it you who is looking for the Secret Name?' 'No, answers Scharlach, in whose voice Lönnrot hears a weary victory, I am looking for something far more ephemeral and fragile, I'm looking for Erik Lönnrot'. And then proceeds to explain to the detective how he — bitter after a previous and almost lethal encounter with the detective, and betting that both the semidoct and the gambler in Lönnrot will take the 'Kabalistic' bait — had planted all the signs that led Lönnrot to his chronotope of doom. A few more words are exchanged, then Scharlach carefully opens fire.

14. Spanish distinguishes between *brújula* and *compás*, whereas English uses 'compass' for both instruments (in one Spanglish episode of this work's history, Borges's piece got the second prize in a contest of detective fiction in San Francisco). By way of popular etymology, *brújula*, (which is probably derived, after a contorted history, from the Greek 'píxis') is 'made' into the family of magical tools (*brujá/brujería*: witch/witchcraft). John Irwin, an author who has devoted a great deal of time to Borges's detective pieces, 'The Death and the Compass' in particular, never tackles the bizarre presence and misuse of the *brújula* in his diligent *The Mystery to a Solution. Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story* (1994). Neither Jaime Alazraki (1988) nor Luis Murillo (1986 [1968]: 29–48) tackles the motif of the compass. Borges's poem 'Una brújula' (1989/96: 2.253), first published in 1964 in *El otro, el mismo*, suggests a principle of 'dis-orientation', or mystical loss in the namelessness that dwells behind God's name akin to the function of this tool in 'Death and the Compass'.
15. The phantasm and the real meet in the point of their common vanishing. In Peirce's terms, the fantastic would be the withdrawal of Thirdness, logically followed by the

collapse of the Secondness. For Borges, the fantastic is the theater of Firstness, and 'aletheia' lies in the shining forth of this truth: the truth of fiction is fiction. The theater of Firstness is grounded in freshness, and grounds it in turn: 'every writer creates his precursors', and also every truth is partial, and thus has the potentiality of becoming as impartial as the one just uttered.

16. 'Nietzsche never spoke of mnemonic confirmation of the return', wrote Borges in 'Doctrine of the cycles' (see Rodríguez Monegal and Reid 1981: 70).
17. 'The angel of death, who in some legends is called Samael and with whom it is said even Moses had to struggle, is language. Language announces death — what else does it do? But precisely this announcement makes it so hard for us to die' (Agamben 1997 [1985]: 129).
18. 'I do not believe in history', wrote Borges in 'On the Origins of the Detective Story' (see Rodríguez Monegal and Reid 1981: 147).

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## Text metempsychosis and the racing tortoise: Borges and translation

SUSAN PETRILLI

Borges insistently returns to the question of translation, which he considers of great importance on the level of experience. Direct writing does not enable us to perceive that mystery of the text which, on the contrary, is indistinctly revealed by translation.

Borges in 'Las versiones homéricas' (Borges 1932b), included in the collection entitled *Discusión*, recalls Bertrand Russell's definition of the 'external object' as the point of irradiation of possible impressions. The same thing can be said about the text, says Borges. And it is translation that permits familiarity with all the vicissitudes of the word of which the text is a continual manifestation more than a result. According to Borges in 'Paul Valéry: *El cementerio marino*', the text will only appear definitive when viewed in the light of some dogmatic conception or for reasons of fatigue (Borges 1932d). Only if the text is considered as invariable and definitive will translation seem an exercise of an inferior order lending itself to the Italian proverb 'traduttore traditore'. But that a text should be considered as definitive and unmodifiable is the consequence of prejudice or mental indolence, and not only this. Borges describes the process through which a text comes to be considered as such.

Just as repetition of a sequence leads one to believe, as observed by David Hume, that what comes first is the cause of what comes after and that the two terms are connected by a relation of necessity, familiarity with a text leads us to believe that its order is necessary and unchangeable. In this way any modification of the text ends up being considered a sacrilege. The text cannot be but *that* text, and its translation seems a fake.

This occurs for the reader accustomed to reading *Don Quijote* in Spanish, for example, or the *Divina Commedia* in Italian. For the latter, the *Inferno* can only begin with the line 'Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita', and any kind of variation, not only the transposition from one language to another, but even any form of paraphrase, is not tolerable.

Similarly, a reader exercised in Spanish, like Borges himself, will tolerate no other variant in *Don Quijote* beyond those — if these even — introduced by the publisher or typographer.

On the contrary, for anyone unfamiliar with ancient Greek the *Odyssey* may exist in numerous and diverse variants. However, though a question of translations none of them refer us to an original expected to act as the measure of the variant's fidelity. Nor does it make any difference whether these variants are in prose or in verse. The *Odyssey*, as Borges says speaking for himself, is a sort of international library of works in prose and verse.

In any case, as much as all translations of the *Odyssey* may seem at once sincere, genuine and divergent, Borges betrays his preference for versions and transpositions into the English language, which are the ones he cites. He in fact sympathizes with the association between the *Odyssey* and English literature, which has always had an intimate relation to this particular epic of the sea.

All the same, developing Borges's thoughts, we may conclude that relations no different from those between the original text and the translated text are created when a question of a text known only in translation, given that the original remains inaccessible through linguistic ignorance. For example, concerning the Homeric texts, Vincenzo Monti's translation of the *Iliad* has taken over the role of the original text in Italy, especially for those who encountered his text during early school years and have continued to read it, to the point that any other version taking its distances from Monti's will not be tolerated. And yet on Foscolo's account, Monti was not worth much as a scholar of Greek. Indeed, it would seem that his translation derives from other translations that he had at his disposal more than from the original. Foscolo apostrophizes Monti as the 'Traduttore dei traduttori d'Omero'.

In his reflections on the question of the translation of Homeric poems, Borges deals with the problem of distinguishing between that which belongs to the poet and that which belongs to linguistic usage and in the last analysis to language. Such Homeric epithets as 'swift-footed' Achilles, 'divine Patroclus', and so forth, are renowned. Some scholars believe they belong to the poet, others that they are idiomatic expressions. Alexander Pope thought they were liturgical in flavor. On the contrary, Remy de Gourmont believed they were worn out stylistic expedients that were slowly losing their original effectiveness. According to Borges, such epithets were not part of the Homeric style, but compulsory formulae imposed by usage that obliged one to say 'the divine Patroclus' just as in Italian one says 'andare a piedi' and not 'per piedi' or in English 'to go on foot', and not 'by foot'. It is a

question of such expressions as 'the whole blessed day', where there is nothing 'blessed' about the day, or 'good morning', when in fact there is nothing good about the morning.

Borges examines various translations of the Homeric poems referring in particular, by way of exemplification, to the episode where Ulysses narrates the facts about the night when Troy was burnt to the ground to Achilles's spectre in the underworld. In this passage Ulysses informs Achilles about his son Neoptolemus. Borges evokes, among others, the 'literal' translations by Butcher and Lang, the spectacular translation by Pope, the lyrical translation by George Chapman, the purely descriptive and informative translation by Samuel Butler, and then asks which of these numerous translations is faithful? To which he responds, none or all. In a way this reply is similar to that given by Jacques Derrida when, in an essay entitled 'Qu'est-ce que c'est une traduction relevante?' (Derrida 2000), he claims at once the possibility and the impossibility of translation.

No translation can be faithful to Homer's imagination due to distances in epochs. But for what concerns the possibility of rendering sense, many translations are doubtlessly faithful, unless they are literal translations, says Borges, which lose in sense because they are too close to Homer's times and too distant from our own. And if we must say which translation is the most faithful, we cannot exclude the most descriptive and informative, such as that by Butler.

That the text first cited at the beginning of this paper, 'Las versiones homéricas' is followed by another two, both dedicated to the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise, may or may not be incidental: their titles are 'La perpetua carrera de Aquiles y la tortuga' and 'Avatares de la tortuga' (cf. Borges 1932c and 1939a). The paradox plays a fundamental role in Borges's intellectual formation. In 'Autobiographical Essay' (1970), Borges narrates how it was his father who, using a chessboard, explained this particular paradox and others still, through which Zeno of Elea denied movement. The question we must ask ourselves is whether swift-footed Achilles, who pursues the slow but unreachable tortoise, is similar to a skillful and relevant translation, to the 'relevant' translation (Derrida). Similarly to the tortoise the original only has a small advantage, that of having taken off first, of having moved first and the translation attempts to reach it. But similarly to the tortoise the original, too, seems unreachable because of its advantage.

In any case, it must be remembered that the *logoi* or arguments developed by Zeno of Elea to the end of denying movement and becoming (such as the story about Achilles and the tortoise or the one about the arrow) were intended, in the last analysis, to support the



Parmenidian thesis concerning the unchanging *one* against the appearance of the *multiple* (On Zeno's paradoxes, see Colli 1998). This confutation of the existence of the many to the end of affirming the possibility of the one is also connected, in a way, to the issue of translation, of the relation between the *unique* original text and its *many* translations. And from this point of view, it is interesting that confutation of the multiplicity by Zeno of Elea, as reported by Plato in *Parmenides* (1998: 3) is based on the notion of *similarity*, which is the same notion generally invoked to explain the relation between the text and its translations.

A translation is obviously not identical to the original (not even Menard's *Quijote* with respect to Cervantes's *Quijote* as we shall soon see), even though the former is 'rewritten' in the same language (cf. Borges 1939b, 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote'). If a translation were completely similar to its original it would be identical to it, simply another copy of the same text. A translation must be at once similar and dissimilar. This is the paradox of translation, which is the same as that of the multiplicity.

To admit the possibility of translation is to admit, contradicting oneself, that something may be at once similar and dissimilar. We could use Zeno's argument against admitting the existence of the many, at once similar and dissimilar, reported in *Parmenides* (Plato 1998: 3.127d–128e), to demonstrate the absurdity of admitting that the text may exist at once as the original text and as the translated text: given that it is impossible for the nonsimilar to be similar and for the similar to be nonsimilar, it is also impossible for translations to exist, for they would have to submit to impossible conditions. Instead, expressed in terms of the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise, the 'paradox of translation' may be identified by the fact that in order to reach the text to be translated the translation must catch up with the former, which is at an advantage simply because it started out first.

The argument maintained by Achilles and the tortoise, as reported in *Physica* (1983: 239b: 14–20) by Aristotle, is that the slowest will never be reached in the race by the fastest. In fact the pursuer should be the first to reach the point where the fugitive started, but the slowest will always be slightly ahead with respect to the fastest. This argument is identical to the paradox of the arrow: in fact the arrow will never reach its objective because it must move across a sequence of infinite halves in a route whose segments are divisible *ad infinitum*. But in Achilles's argument the distance that remains to be covered each time Achilles attempts to reach the tortoise is not progressively divided into half.

Borges's formulation of this argument is slightly different: Achilles is ten times faster than the tortoise. For this reason when he races against the tortoise he gives it a ten-meter advantage. But if, as we started by saying, Achilles runs ten times faster than the tortoise, it follows that while Achilles runs a meter, the tortoise runs a decimeter; while Achilles runs a decimeter, the tortoise runs a centimeter; while Achilles runs a centimeter, the tortoise runs a millimeter, and so forth *ad infinitum*. Therefore, swift-footed Achilles will never reach the slow tortoise.

Borges reports and examines various attempts at confuting Zeno of Elea's unquestionable paradox: the attempt made by Thomas Hobbes, Stuart Mill (*System of Logic*), Henri Bergson ('Essay upon the immediate data of consciousness'), William James, who maintained that Zeno's paradox is an attack not only on the reality of space, but also on the more invulnerable and subtle reality of time (*Some Problems of Philosophy*), and lastly by Bertrand Russell (*Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy: Our Knowledge of the External World*). The latter was the only one considered by Borges to be worthy of the "original" from the viewpoint of argumentative force. The 'original' is in double quotes because all successive confutations competing with Zeno's paradox and attempting to equal it in argumentative ability may be considered variants or *translations* of the primary text.

As Borges informs us in his equally paradoxical story in *Ficciones*, dedicated to Pierre Menard, author of *Quijote*, the latter also takes an interest in the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise. The book in question, listed among works by Pierre Menard, is *Les problèmes d'un problème*, dated 1917 (Paris), where the author discusses the various solutions to the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise in chronological order and cites, in the second edition, the following advice from Leibniz: 'Ne craignez pas, monsieur, la tortue'.

Why should we fear the slow tortoise? Because of his advantage, because of the time-lapse separating it like an abyss, in space and time, from swift Achilles. To fear the tortoise is to fear the original in translation, with its advantage of being first. The text that translates it inevitably comes second. To fear and faithfully respect the original: to the point of deciding, as did Menard, not to compose another *Quijote*, but *the Quijote*, the unique, original *Quijote*. Of course, it is not a question of imitating or copying, for this would mean to repropose the advantage of the original, to transform *Quijote* composed by Menard into a second text.

Menard had a sacred fear of the original, but at the same time he did not fear the possibility of the ambition of producing pages that

coincided word by word with those of Miguel de Cervantes. Menard succeeded in composing chapters 9 and 38 from the first part of *Quijote*. What was the expedient he used? After having excluded the idea of competing with Cervantes (who was decidedly at an advantage simply because he was able to undertake the same artwork in a previous epoch) by identifying with his life, times, biographical context, and reaching *Quijote* having become in a manner Cervantes, it appeared to Menard that the greatest challenge was that of remaining Menard and of reaching *Quijote* through his own experience.

Menard's *Quijote* (a fragmentary work, to complete it one must be immortal) is only verbally identical to Cervantes's *Quijote*. To evidence the difference, Borges refers to a passage from *Quijote* by Cervantes (Part I, chapter 9) and to the corresponding passage from *Quijote* by Menard. Even though the two passages coincide by the letter, that by Menard, a contemporary of William James, sounds clearly pragmatic. And differently from Cervantes, Menard's historical truth, discussed in exactly the same terms in both passages, is not what happened but what we judge happened. Achilles can recover the tortoise's advantage and supersede it simply because it was Achilles who gave it the advantage, who allowed it to start first, to be first, so that in the last analysis it is the tortoise that depends on Achilles who, with the generosity of his gesture, precedes and surpasses the tortoise. Time plays its part as well. The style of Menard's *Quijote* inevitably tends to be archaic and affected, while Cervantes's *Quijote* is unconstrained and actual with respect to the Spanish of his times.

Another case in which the text that comes after claims its place before the original, indeed claims to be the very original, though in this case questioning it, asserting its difference with respect to the original, and disputing not only the prescribed text but also the language into which it is translated, overturning the logic and order of the discourse of representation, is that by Antonin Artaud (1989) translator of Lewis Carroll. In *L'arve et l'aume*, translation of the chapter on Humpty Dumpty in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Artaud's crossing through the text by Carroll (to read is 'to read across', 'to read through') becomes a cruel antigrammatical enterprise against Carroll himself and the French language. Similarly to the theater of cruelty, 'existence' and 'flesh', body and life are all at stake in this translation.

Carroll's wordplay does not go beyond a caricature of the exchange between *signifié* and *signifiant*. He does not succeed in denouncing hypocrisies, removals, suppressions on which that exchange is based, nor does he alter social structures, the mechanisms of production, the ideological

assumptions to which exchange is functional. Carroll glimpses at the looking glass, but he knows how to keep away the double he indistinctly catches sight of — the shadow. An infinity of heartless, psychic trickeries. An affected language. The battle of the deep, its monsters, mix-up of bodies, turmoil, subversion of order, encounter between the bottom-most and the elevated, food and excrement, eating words, *Alice's Adventures Underground* (the original title of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*), all this is supplanted, as observed by Deleuze, by a play of surfaces: rather than collapse, lateral sliding movements (cf. Deleuze 1996: 37–38).

Therefore with respect to Artaud's antigrammatical enterprise, the text by Carroll is a bad imitation, a vulgar reproduction. The presumed original is no more than the expression of adulterated plagiarism, devoid of the punch and vigor of a work written by Artaud first. And Artaud wants a postscriptum added to the publication of *L'arve et l'aume* notifying his sensation that the poem on fish, being, obedience, the 'principle' of the sea, and God, in his translation of Carroll, revelation of a blinding truth, had in fact been conceived and written by himself, Antonin Artaud, in other centuries, and then rediscovered in the hands of Carroll (cf. Ponzio 1997 and 1998; Petrilli 1999).

A case of metempsychosis, the original text is reincarnated in a bloodless and weak body and frees itself by returning, in Artaud's writing, to being what it was. It is not only a question of transmigration from one author to another, but also from one language to another. It is a question of freeing the text from the body of language, including the language into which it is translated. Is this an extreme case? Or is every translation — every translation of a literary text — the transmigration of a text that wants to get free of its own language, its own author, its own contemporaneity? But isn't every text a prisoner of its own times and the very fact of reading it, an attempt at freeing it? And once it has been read or translated doesn't it become prisoner yet again in the new text that interprets it? Every reading, every translation, is a transmigration. An infinite transmigration. The question itself of translation is a paradox. The text withdraws from both the reading-text and the translation-text because it is unreachable, but because of this it remains a prisoner in endless transmigrations.

Borges calls all the arguments and reasonings that reproduce Zeno's paradox 'avatares de la tortuga'. This paradox and all its metempsychoses deal with the concept that corrupts and drives others mad, the concept of the *infinite*. The idea of the infinite is present in the expression itself, 'la perpetua carrera de Aquiles y la tortuga', which, as we know, is the title of one of the two texts by Borges dedicated to the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise.

This is the infinite of 'nothing new under the sun' in *Ecclesiastes*, in *Qohélet*. 'Havèl havalím' 'Un infinito vuoto', as translated into Italian by Ceronetti (1970) and subsequently, in his continual revisitation of the same text, 'Fumo di fumi'. This is Saint Jerome's 'vanitas vanitatum', he too a translator who reflects upon the paradox of translation (*Liber de optimo interpretandi*). His motto was 'non verbum e verbo reddere, sed sensum exprimere de sensu', even though, as observed by Derrida (2000: 30), he had attempted to make an exception for the mysterious word order in the Bible (*verborum ordo mysterium*).

This is the infinite of Achilles's perpetual pursuit of the tortoise, of the translation's pursuit of the text.

Andare e girare il vento / Da Sud a Settentrione / Girare girare andare / Del vento nel suo girare / Tutti i fiumi senza riempirlo / Si gettano nel mare / Sempre alla stessa foce / Si vanno i fiumi a gettare / Si stanca qualsiasi parola / Di più non puoi farle dire. (*Qohélet*, It. trans. in Ceronetti 1970)

Andato a Sud gira a Nord / Il vento nel suo andare / Dopo giri su giri / Il vento ricomincia il suo girare / Si versano nel mare tutti i fiumi / Senza riempire il mare / E là dove si versano / Seguiranno ad andare / Stancabile è ogni parola / Oltre il dire non può. (*Qohélet*, in Ceronetti 1988)

Borges knows of the *infinite*, he knows of the tortoise's perpetual race and of the tortoise's metempsychoses, but not as a philosopher who wishes to solve paradoxes. He knows as a writer and translator, because of his experience of texts, of his practice in reading-rewriting. He knows of the *infinite*, like 'our' Leopardi, he too a translator-writer: 'lo chiamerei *Ecclesiastes noster*, se *noster* non ponesse limiti, a Leopardi e a Qohélet, come se fosse meno nostro il Vecchio di Gerusalemme perché nato e morto in Giudea, e meno nato in Giudea, e vivente dappertutto, un poeta di Recanati' (Ceronetti 1970: 94).

Borges, in 'Ecclesiastés, 1-9', included in *La cifra* (Borges 1981), expresses the idea of the infinite in the qohéletic terms of a perpetual restarting, a perpetual tending towards, a perpetual running under the sun. With its slow indifferent restarting the sun advances beyond such movements making them appear static, as though they were blocked in their pose outstretched towards something, but destined to remain without satisfaction, without gratification, without conclusion.

No puedo ejecutar un acto nuevo, / tejo y torno a tejer la misma fábula, / repito un repetido endecasílabo, / digo lo que los otros me dijeron, / siento la mismas cosas en la misma / hora del día o de la abstracta noche. (Borges 1981, in Borges 1985: 1166)

Through his paradoxes Zeno posed the problem of the infinite, but not with the presumption of solving it, like other philosophers. Indeed, we could say that if philosophy consists in questioning the ethics of accumulation and productivity and in evidencing the nonfunctional character of what is properly human (cf. Ponzio 1997), the philosopher is he who, like Zeno of Elea, rediscovers the (qohéletic) truth of the paradox of swift-footed Achilles who was defeated by the slow tortoise, even when, as in the case of Alexander the Great, he was indoctrinated by one of the most important philosophers ever, Aristotle (cf. Ponzio 1990), and not by the centaur Cheiron.

Borges could have compiled a 'mobile story' of the idea of the infinite, which like 'numerous Idra' reappears always again in man's meditation: an 'illusory' biography of the infinite starting from Zeno's paradoxes: more exactly, registration of the metempsychoses of Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the tortoise, the metempsychoses of the tortoise.

'Metempsychosis of the tortoise' is the 'argument of the third man' used by Aristotle against the Platonic doctrine of ideas. In simplified form, this argument may be expressed by saying that beyond the empirical man and the man of ideas, there exists the relation between these two terms and therefore there should also exist the idea of this relation, and accordingly the relation with this idea, and consequently the idea of this relation, and so forth ad infinitum. To demonstrate that the one is in reality many, Plato himself had already used an analogous argument in *Parmenides*, in a clearly Zenonian style, maintaining that if one exists, then being and one exist, and accordingly there exist two terms; if each of these two is one, it includes being and one, therefore the terms are four, and so forth, in geometrical progression. Another one of the tortoise's metempsychoses is the argument held by Sextus Empiricus concerning the vanity of definition, for all terms used in the definition should also be defined as well as the definition itself, in a process that is potentially infinite. Analogously, on dedicating his book *Don Juan* to Coleridge, Byron writes the following: 'I wish he would explain His Explanation'. Among the various cases of 'avatares de la tortuga', cited by Borges, he counts William James (*Some Problems of Philosophy*) who denies that ten minutes can pass, because first of all seven must pass, and before seven, three and-a-half, and before three and-a-half, a minute and three-quarters, and so forth, through the tenuous labyrinths of time (cf. Borges 1939a, 'Avatares de la tortuga', in Borges 1984: 398).

Among the tortoise's metempsychoses we believe that the metempsychosis of the text in its readings and in its translations should doubtlessly be counted. Not only is the existence of the translation-text



a paradox, but also that of the reading-text. The text is one and cannot be many, for the many would be contradictorily similar and dissimilar by comparison. At the same time, however, from one the text becomes two because of the very fact of existing, and from two it becomes three, and so forth ad infinitum. The text itself is an infinite metempsychosis. This is so because of its very nature as a sign.

As clearly demonstrated by Charles S. Peirce, meaning is not in the sign but in the relation among signs. Reference is not only to the signs of a defined and closed system, those forming a code, *langue*, but also to signs as they are encountered in the interpretive process that knows no boundaries or impediments in moving across different sign types and different sign systems. And such a process is so much more capable of rendering the meaning of a sign the more interpretation is not just mere repetition, literal translation, synonymic substitution, but re-elaboration and explicative reformulation: interpretation that is risky in the sense that no guarantee is offered by the possibility of appeal to a unique and preestablished code that is exempt from the risks of interpretation.

Identity of the sign calls for its continuous displacement, so that each time the sign is interpreted it becomes other, it is in fact another sign that acts as an interpretant. The sign's identity is achieved in its metempsychoses, in its transmigrations from one sign to another. Identification of the sign is not possible if not by exhibiting another sign. The sign can only be captured as the reflection in the mirror of another sign, and is made of all the deformations involved in such a play of mirrors (cf. Ponzio, Calefato, and Petrilli 1999; Petrilli 1998). The text itself is a paradox; one of the 'tortoise's metempsychoses'.

It is clear that the paradox of translation is the paradox itself of the text and of the sign.

On the other hand, if the question of similarity is central to translation, it is not less important for the text, itself an interpretant before becoming an interpreted sign of other interpretants in the processes of reading and translating.

Even the relation between the text and what it deals with appears in terms of similarity. And that which characterizes the literary text, and the artistic text generally, as Bakhtin in particular has contributed in demonstrating (Ponzio 1999), is that similarity presents itself in terms of 'rendering', and not as the copy, as imitation, representation, nor in terms of identification, unification.

To say it with Paul Klee, the text — literary, pictorial, artistic in general — does not render the visible — as does the theater text in the world of representation — but renders visible. *Per invisibilia visibilia*, according to an ancient formula of the Fathers of the Church and the

II Nicene Council. Therefore, the literary and in general artistic text may be characterized in terms of the *icon* and not of the *idol* (Ponzio 1998–99).

The literary text too, is originally an interpretant. It renders itself before being rendered in turn, made visible, in another language, through translation. Similarly, the literary text in translation is turned to *rendering visible*; it too relates to the other and not to the identical. The artistic work as such, as shown by Lévinas in 'La réalité et son ombre' (Lévinas 1994: 123–148), renders the alterity that any identity carries like its own shadow and does not succeed in cancelling. First of all the identity of self.

At a certain point in the text by Lévinas the name of Zeno of Elea appears, and reference is made to his first paradox, that of the arrow: 'Zénon, cruel Zénon ... Cette flèche ...' (Lévinas 1994: 142). Lévinas does not tell us, but this is a citation from *Le cimetière marin* by Valéry, where reference is also made to Zeno's second paradox concerning the tortoise, and where Achilles who does not succeed in catching up with the slow tortoise is the identity of self which does not succeed in standing up to its own alterity, in leaving its own shadow. To say it with Peirce, the self, the subject, is also a sign and therefore it is continuously displaced, rendered other, in a process of deferrals from one interpretant to another, without ever being able to coincide with itself.

Before reference to Zeno (strophe 21), in *Le cimetière marin* (strophe 13), the only change with respect to the sun hanging motionless in the sky at midday is represented by the self ('Midi là-haut, Midi sans mouvement / ... Je suis en toi le secret changement'). In strophe 21, the situation is overturned: despite the self's struggles, nothing new under the sun, shadow of the tortoise for the self, which, by comparison, like Achilles, though running fast seems motionless.

Zénon! Cruel Zénon! Zénon d'Élée! / M'as-tu percé de cette flèche ailée / Qui vibre, vole, et qui ne vole pas! / Le son m'enfante et la flèche me tue! / Ah! Le soleil ... Quelle ombre de tortue / Pour l'âme, Achille immobile à grands pas! (Valéry 1995)

Zenon! Crudele! Zenone eleata / M' hai tu trafitto con la freccia alata, / Che vibra, vola, eppure in vol non è! / Mi dà il suon vita che la freccia fuga, / Ah! Questo sole ... Ombra di tartaruga / Per l'io, l'immoto Achille lesto piè! (Valéry 1999–2000: 245)

Let us now return to the paradox of the text and its translation. Insofar as it is identical and other, similar and dissimilar, not only is the artwork

a living image of the tortoise's metempsychosis, but it also renders visible, qohéletically, how any identity is a living image of the tortoise's metempsychosis, how reality itself is such. As says Lévinas, in the case of the artwork similarity appears 'non pas comme le résultat d'une comparaison entre l'image et l'original, mais comme le mouvement même qui engendre l'image. La réalité ne serait pas seulement ce qu'elle est, ce qu'elle se dévoile dans la vérité, mais aussi son double, son ombre, son image' (Lévinas 1994: 133; cf. also Ponzio 1996: 127–142).

This is what Peirce in his typology of signs describes as the 'icon', which is characterized by similarity, alongside the 'symbol' characterized by conventionality, and the 'index' characterized by contingency and causality. An icon, says Peirce, is the sign that possesses the character that renders it significant independently from what it relates to through similarity, it is the sign that signifies even when that to which it refers does not belong to the world of visible, empirical objects, as occurs in the case of a streak of chalk considered as the icon of a geometrical line. 'An *icon* is a sign that would possess the character that renders it significant, even though its object had no existence; such as a lead-pencil streak as representing a geometrical line' (CP 2.304).

The literary text itself, and not only its translation, possesses the character of 'icon', that is, it is in a relation of similarity with the invisible, with the other of the identical, with the shadow of reality, which it renders visible in its very invisibility, in its irreducible alterity through the movement itself of its making as a sign through similarity. This is the sense in which we may say that the 'original text' has the character of 'icon' and not of 'idol'. The text becomes an idol when it expects to be exhausted in its identity and its alterity is denied.

*Image-icon versus image-idol.* In *Le Cimetière marin* by Valéry, we find the word 'idol' in the line 'De mille et mille idoles du soleil'. In the Spanish translation by Néstor Ibarra, published in 1932, with a preface by Borges (1932d), 'idoles' is incorrectly translated with 'images', even though *images* is, as maintained by Borges, 'the etymological equivalent of *idoles*'. In spite of the etymology, historically, beginning from the defense of the cult of icons (eighth century), the image is not only an idol, but it is also an icon.

However, precisely because the original text, in this case *Le Cimetière marin*, is also an icon just as its translation is an icon, the translation, as in the case of the translation by Néstor Ibarra, may in fact surpass the original in iconicity. Borges registers this appropriately with a line by

Ibarra: 'La pérdida del rumor de la ribera', with respect to which the line by Valéry: 'Le changement des rives en rumeur', seems an imitation given that by comparison with the former, says Borges, it does not succeed in integrally restoring the whole Latin 'savor'. To blindly maintain the opposite only because the line by Valéry is the original, means to privilege Valéry, the author-man who only comes first on a temporal level, with respect to Valéry, the author-creator who instead, for that which concerns this line, would seem to come second on the level of iconic rendering, on the level of picturing or portrayal, given that the line by Valéry would seem to be the bad copy of the Castilian text. Artaud maintains exactly the same thing with respect to Carroll, when he claims that his translation is the original text. This is possible because between two texts both icons, that by the author and that by the translator, that by the translator may well surpass the first in iconicity, rendering far better that which it intends to render.

To be the first among texts does not stop the second from surpassing the first, for not only is the second an interpretant sign and an icon, but first as well; indeed, there is no first text but only a succession of interpretants, and each overtaking is succeeded by a new overtaking: the text is another of the tortoise's metempsychoses; the text flourishes in its transmutations from one text to another. This does not only happen among texts written in different languages, in translation, but also in the same language and in the same body of literature. To assume that a new combination of elements (says Borges in the first page of his text on *Le Cimetière marin* by Valéry, which is almost the same as the first page of his text on the 'las versiones homéricas') is necessarily inferior to the original text means to assume that a subsequent draft is necessarily inferior to the antecedent, given that there exist nothing else but drafts. In other words, we could state that there exists nothing else but a succession of interpretant texts, all icons. To believe that the 'original text' and the 'definitive text' are excluded from this succession of icons is idolatry.

The relation of iconic similarity distinguishes translation from dubbing. Dubbing produces 'phonetic-visual anomalies', says Borges, the arbitrary grafting onto a person's body, onto his or her features, gestures and movements, of another voice, in another language. A kind of praise of translation runs through the whole corpus of Borges's writings, but Borges takes a stand against dubbing (cf. Borges 1945, 'Sobre el doblaje', It. trans. in Borges 1984: 434–455). Dubbing is a substitution. Translation would also seem to be a substitution, but only as the result of idolatry of the 'original'.

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## Reading and translation in Borges's *Autobiographical Essay*

AUGUSTO PONZIO

### Un lector

Que otros se jacten de las páginas que han escrito;  
a mí me enorgullecen las que he leído.  
No habré sido un filólogo,  
no habré inquirido las declinaciones, los modos, la laboriosa  
mutación de las letras,  
la *de* que se endurece en *te*,  
la equivalencia de la *ge* y de la *ka*,  
pero a lo largo de mis años he profesado  
la pasión del lenguaje.  
Mis noches están llenas de Virgilio;  
haber sabido y haber olvidado el latín  
es una posesión, porque el olvido  
es una de las formas de la memoria, su vago sótano,  
la otra cara secreta de la moneda.  
Cuando en mis ojos se borraron  
las vanas apariencias queridas,  
los rostros y la página,  
me di al estudio del lenguaje de hierro  
que usaron mis mayores para cantar  
espadas y soledades,  
y ahora, a través de siete siglos,  
desde la Última Thule,  
tu voz me llega, Snorri Sturluson.  
El joven, ante el libro, se impone una disciplina precisa  
y lo hace en pos de un conocimiento preciso;  
a mis años, toda empresa es una aventura  
que linda con la noche.  
No acabaré de descifrar las antiguas lenguas del Norte,  
no hundiré las manos ansiosas en el oro de Sigurd;  
la tarea que emprendo es ilimitada  
y ha de acompañarme hasta el fin,  
no menos misteriosa que el universo  
y que yo, el aprendiz.

— Jorge Luis Borges

In the Jorge Luis Borges household the languages commonly spoken were English and Spanish, a fact that was to play a significant role in his intellectual development. Subsequently, Borges was also to learn French, Latin and German. Another determining factor, the most important, was his father's library which contained several thousands of volumes.

Multiple languages and multiple writings: an advantage for the development of the mind. Even more so, however, if these languages and writings talk to each other, look at each other through the gaze of the other, enter into dialogue with each other. Translation is this dialogue. And Borges's development took place in the context of such a dialogue. Translation was an experience of central importance in his reading and writing.

The first books he read were in English, *Don Quixote* included. His first readings counted the writings of Poe, Dickens, Lewis Carroll, as well as Grimm's fairy tales and Burton's *The Arabian Nights*.

In his writings, including his *Autobiographical Essay* (Borges 1970) (the main source of information for our present reflections), Borges repeatedly returns to the question of the real *Don Quixote*: in relation to his experience as reader. Borges read *Don Quixote* for the first time in English, so that when he read it in the original the effect was like reading a bad translation. Consequently, what counts as the original ends up being the first in the order of a succession, where the fact that this succession may only concern one's personal experience is of no importance.

This means to privilege not only the language of the text in which it was first encountered (independently from whether it is the original or a translation), but also its typographical format. Reading *Don Quixote* in a different edition from the red volumes and gold letters of the Garnier edition in his father's library (which at a certain point was lost) gave Borges the impression that it wasn't the real *Don Quixote*. The 'real *Don Quixote*' was returned to him years later by a friend who found the Garnier edition with the same illustrations, notes, even the same misprints, all of which for Borges were part of the text.

He began writing at the age of six or seven. He compiled an English handbook in Greek mythology. He imitated Miguel de Cervantes. And in the same style he wrote his first novel, *La visera fatal*. At the age of nine he translated *The Happy Prince* by Oscar Wilde into Spanish. This was published in *El País*, a daily newspaper in Buenos Aires, and given that it was signed Jorge Borges, people thought that the translation was by his father.

Writing in the language of the other (but language is always the other's!) and in the style of another, playing on ambiguity, signing with

the name of another and being taken for another: all these expedients are used by Borges as he searches for his 'own' writing position which, in fact, is the position of the other. The writer as I cannot say anything.

Among these expedients, expedients of the *apprentice* (the writer is an apprentice through to the very end, forever), translation occupies a place of first importance. Writing is always rewriting, the reading-text become writing-text, in love with the text it rewrites like Menard, author of *Quixote*. Translation avoids such paradoxical and extreme cases of rewriting as is Menard's, simply because in the case of translating the text is certainly rewritten, but in another language.

However, one's very relation to the world passes through reading. For Borges who was a writer from the very beginning, his relation to the world ensued from an originary reading position. In this case too, the original is a text, more exactly a translation: the world said in the language of a text. I would take an interest in things, said Borges, after having found them in books, translated, transposed into signs, in verbal signs, but more precisely in written signs, and specifically the signs of literary writing.

Borges the writer knew that not only his relation to the world originated from the discourse of others but also his very vocation as a writer. That he was to become a writer was 'established tacitly' from very childhood, that is from the moment his father became blind.

'Established tacitly': at the beginning of writing there can only be that which is writing, that is, taciturnity. The writer, says Bakhtin, is he who clothes himself in silence, he who uses language while standing outside it, he who has the gift of indirect speaking.

To speak of one's vocation as a writer, like speaking of one's birth, is to pass from one's own discourse to the discourse of others, to reported discourse. But in the case of one's birth as a writer, reported discourse is not in the direct form because it is not direct, explicit, but expressed tacitly. The destiny of the writer is established tacitly by others.

Nor does one necessarily become a writer; the destiny of writer is not said: it is established tacitly and by others. One would have expected me to become a writer, says Borges. And similarly to the silence of literary writing, this tacit expectation is far more capable of inciting, provoking, defying than any other linguistic act whatsoever: you are a writer but this is not said. Similar unsaid things, says Borges, are far more important than those which are only spoken about.

Even the way Borges, as writer, felt the language on which and with which he worked depended on his relation to the language of others, to a language that was foreign. The writer is he who uses language while standing outside it, in a relation of extralocality with language.

This is foreseen even by a single language, by its internal plurilinguism, by virtue of which an internal language can be considered from the viewpoint of another internal language; all the same the relation of extralocality is chiefly achieved through knowledge of a foreign language.

As an Argentinian writer Borges necessarily used Spanish and therefore he perceived its defects — for example, Spanish words he said were long and cumbersome. Similarly, Goethe complained about German as the worst language in the world, while on the contrary, Borges considered it an extremely beautiful language. I imagine, observed Borges, that most writers think the same of the language they must *struggle* with. But the same thing is true for translators. Experience as translator, as in the case of Borges, sharpens the sense of extraneousness towards one's own language, the sense of its resistance, of its hostility.

On criticizing the Saussurean concept of language as a system that imposes itself on the speaker, Bakhtin observes that when the relation between the language and speaker is conceived in terms of imposition and passive acceptance, the model referred to is the foreign language and even more so dead languages. The study of foreign languages and especially dead languages, philologism, subtends Saussurean linguistics. It is not exact to say that the speaker suffers or passively accepts his own language. We do not have the speaking subject, the individual, on one side, and language on the other, which as a social fact is not considered as a function of the speaking subject, but as a product that the individual registers passively. We do not 'accept' our own mother tongue, observes Bakhtin; it is inside one's own language that we reach consciousness for the first time. Language does not impose itself on the person who speaks it: it is the place where consciousness is awakened for the first time.

Only in the foreign language is a relation of opposition established between speech and language that imposes itself as a system of norms and must be accepted. But it is precisely this relation with the foreign language that permits distancing, extralocality with respect to one's own language, the mother tongue, the language where consciousness is originally formed. The condition for becoming a writer is his participation in such an extralocalized relation to language.

To perceive the extraneousness of one's own language as though it were a foreign language, or better to *recognize* it as belonging to others, as other, is to realize that we are not the owners of our own language and places the writer in the same position as translator. Borges's *Autobiographical Essay* testifies to this intimate relation between writer and translator, more precisely between reading, translating, and rewriting: Borges reader-translator-writer.

What the translator and writer have in common is the fact that neither of them use language directly, neither speak in their own name.

Whoever presents himself with his own, direct word is a journalist, literary critic, expert in a given discipline, or whatever, but not a *writer*. A writer cannot say anything in his own name.

The *other* is the starting point of literary writing. The artwork characterizes itself as *other* with respect to its author. Its otherness, its irreducibility to the subject that produced it, its disengagement in relation to a project that responds to the economy of the subject, with respect to which, as Bakhtin says, it appears *transcendent* or *transgredient*, confers literary validity upon the artwork.

As author-man, the writer says nothing. In the literary work, the author-writer speaks through the various forms of silence including parody, irony, allegory, etc. Silence eludes the *order of discourse* (Foucault 1996). It is endowed with the characteristics that Blanchot attributes to the *other night*, that which *does not serve the productivity of the day*.

Similarly to the translator, the writer, finds himself in the position of having to 'struggle', says Borges, with his own language, feeling all its materiality, objectivity, extraneousness. For the writer-translator the verbal presents itself in the terms described by Roland Barthes in *Lezione* (1981), language is a legislation and *langue* its code.

The writer-translator is he who directly experiences the power of language, he who clearly perceives that the characteristic of language is not so much that it enables us to say, but that it obliges us to say. Servility and power indissolubly merge in language. It is not possible to get free of language. However, it is possible to get free of one's own language, for it can be used while standing outside it, it can be 'cheated', as Barthes says, by exerting a 'displacement' action on it (1981); literary writing is this 'healthy fraud', this defiance of language, this possibility for he who uses it from the outside of withdrawing from servility and power. But it is the foreign language that creates a solid external position in the light of which the writer (who because of this is always to an extent a writer-translator) can gain consciousness of the predetermination inherent in the use of language, and therefore exert a displacement action on it — this being the task of the writer. To use language standing outside it, this *antigrammatical enterprise* (Artaud 1989) towards language and its ontology, confers a subversive character upon literary writing: *non suspect subversion* (Jabès 1984).

Literary writing dupes verbal language, it cheats the discourse of identity, difference, roles. To make fun of language, to play with signs, cheating them, is irony achieved by literary writing. Bakhtin describes this mechanism in terms of reduced laughter, a way of defending oneself,



by keeping silent, from the deafening noise of ordinary communication that covers the multiplicity of voices and channels them into monological discourse, uniting them into a single individual and collective identity, forcing them into a single sense, a single story. Literary writing puts into crisis the right to ownership over the word as well as the category itself of subject. It appears as a sort of disarranging, breakdown of the self, especially in certain genres and certain works, as a form of self-distancing, disengagement with respect to the authoritative, unilaterally ideological word. And even when literature attempts to forget its character of nonfunctionality by engaging in political and social action, such engagement takes the form of disengagement and action becomes literary if, as Blanchot observes, the character of artwork is to endure.

Of some interest are considerations made by Kierkegaard (1989, 1995), theoretician of the indirect word — *doctor in irony*, as he said of himself ironically, having written a thesis on irony in Socrates. The direct, objective word, he says, is not concerned with otherness, with otherness from self and of self, if not to overcome it, englobe it, assimilate it. The direct word is uniquely attentive to itself, therefore it does not constitute communication proper but contributes solely to maintaining the noise of communication. The silence, the *taciturnity* of literary writing is subversive as regards the order of dominant communication. Indirect discourse is hospitality towards otherness, listening, so that what the self communicates is communicated not as master but as attentive disciple, not with the authority of the author-writer but with the disposability of the reader-writer, translator-writer. As writer Borges boasts especially about his qualification as 'reader', for this is what connotes him best in his practice as 'apprentice': 'Que otros se jacten de las páginas que han escrito; / a mí me enorgullecen las que he leído'.

Literary language places the subject in relation to that which is other with respect to his identity, his objective word, the horizon of Being, the horizon of the possibility of the Same and of the Totality, as Lévinas would say: an otherness beyond ontology, knowledge, truth, utility, the economy of equal exchange, of the power of speaking. As says Blanchot evoking Mallarmé, the artwork is achieved as from the disappearance of the author, as from the absence of the writer-man, as from the omission of self, a sort of death created by writing as regards the subject who speaks in order to have and to can, to know and to possess, to judge and to teach.

Not only does the writer, similarly to the translator, not answer for contents or ideas that belong to different subjects, points of view, to the character, the narrator, the self of the lyrical composition; but even more

than this the style of writing is not his own. The writer speaks in different styles according to literary genre, personages, how he imagines the narrator would speak, etc. The writer does not have a style of his own. He stages styles and discourses, he renders them without identifying with any of them. The subjects who speak thanks to the writer have their own style and their own situation, they are situated; on the contrary, the writer is without a style or situation.

For Blanchot as well, the only possible perspective for the writer is the 'outside'. Writing, understood as the practice of the writer, 'intransitive' writing as described by Barthes (1981), requires a break in the relation to the world of normal life. This separation, this being on the outside is what characterizes the writer's point of view as he places his personages in the indefinite time of dying. All this is connected with the theme of the disappearance of the author in the artwork, of the writer as the place of absence, which Blanchot takes up from Mallarmé.

The relation between writing and death saves us from death that is nothing else but death, the consequence of a vision of life which when lived and exploited productivistically tends to be nothing else but life. Such an attitude, which forgets nonfunctionality inscribed in the 'incurable deviance' (Baudrillard 1976) that is death, nonfunctionality that makes of every human being an end in itself, a value in itself, ends up transforming life into something that is not life. Such a vision of life silences (and this is the silence which literature vindicates and redeems) the carnival-like view of the 'grotesque body' (described by Bakhtin in his study on Rabelais) in which death and life are indissolubly connected.

The deception of language (in the dual sense that it deceives itself and deceives us) consists in the illusion, says Blanchot, of enclosing absence in a presence firmly and definitively. Sense is obtained at the price of a void in existence and presence. On giving us the idea of a thing, the sense of a word denies its being as a thing. The use of things involves their negation, their death which makes them present to us; the illusory presence of an absence that tells of their otherness, their materiality. The being of things is only apparently negated in their tacit and faithful compliance towards us; they last and survive, indifferent to their 'owners'. This is claimed in a poem by Borges:

Las cosas

El bastón, las monedas, el llavero,  
La dócil cerradura, las tardías  
Notas que no leerán los pocos días

Que me quedan, los naipes y el tablero,  
 Un libro y en sus páginas la ajada  
 Violeta, monumento de una tarde  
 Sin duda inolvidable y ya olvidada,  
 El rojo espejo occidental en que arde  
 Una ilusoria aurora. ¡Cuántas cosas,  
 Limas, umbrales, atlas, copas, clavos,  
 Nos sirven como tácitos esclavos,  
 Ciegas y extrañamente sigilosas!  
 Durarán más allá de nuestro olvido;  
 No sabrán nunca que nos hemos ido.

(Borges 1989/96: 2.370)

However, language is also plurivocality, misunderstanding, contradiction. Beyond the word that tends towards stability and unequivocity, to the fullness of sense (and in which misunderstanding, emptiness, and absence are badly hidden) we have a word whose sense is imprecise, ambiguous, deferred, made of references to other words, in a never-ending play of *renvois*. A diseased word, as Blanchot would say, sick with a disease that is the word's health: a word that is fundamentally a lack, a request, a question, and which consequently expresses negation, emptiness, absence in which language is grounded.

Writing knows of the death that language confers upon things when it says them. The language of writing becomes ambiguous and says the absence of things, their interdicted presence. Literary language defies the kind of language that, on the contrary, intends to reveal things and determine them, it says their nothingness with respect to what direct language makes them by denying them.

Praise of plurivocality, of ambiguity, of the indirect word, of a word without power, outside the dialectics of the relation between master and slave, is praise of literary writing. It is also 'praise of the shadow', as understood by Borges in his collection of poems, *Elogio de la sombra*, and as understood also by Lévinas in his essay 'Reality and It's Shadow' (Lévinas 1976), dedicated to literary writing.

To gaze on things from the outside, from an extralocalized position, by no means implies an indifferent and objective gaze. As an effect of distancing, the extralocality of literary writing reinforces proximity, nonindifference: not only does the writer participate in life but he also loves it from the outside, with a love that we all recognize as true love for it is turned to life in its nonfunctionality. As a writer Borges was well aware of all this, just as he knew why his native city inspired his first published book of poems, *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. In fact, he perceived

Buenos Aires with an interest and a thrill he had never felt before, thanks to a relation of extralocalization and a distance achieved with respect to that city after having spent a long period of time abroad.

Writing and translation share a love for what is distant.

Literary writing and translation also resemble each other because they both involve oblivion of self, they both request a great sense of hospitality from language, one's own or the other's, not for self but for others — the *other-author* in the case of the translator, the *other-hero* in the case of the writer.

This disposability for hospitality and reception is also the basis of literary writing, according to Borges, when created in collaboration. Borges wrote thrillers with Adolfo Bioy Casares, and when asked how they collaborated in writing, Borges replied that the first requisite was the capacity to abandon one's ego, one's vanity combined with a good dose of common courtesy.

Translation carries out a role of no small importance for literary writing, that of rendering the writer visible, the writer who as writer chooses to make himself invisible through silence; and, paradoxically, translation does this through another who has also chosen invisibility given that he does not speak in his own name, the translator.

Similarly, to sacred images the iconic character of literary translation renders the invisible visible, in fact we have seen that the author of a literary text (differently to the author of a text in literary criticism) puts himself aside. And this iconic character of literary translation is an aspect which must not be ignored for a full understanding of the all but simple relation between translation icon and original archetype.

The 'mundane' or 'prosaic' side of the relation between translation and writing in the case we are discussing consists in the fact that, until he was published in French, the writer Jorge Luis Borges (and from this point of view he is neither unique nor rare) was, as he declared himself with the subtle irony of the writer, practically 'invisible' — not only abroad but also at home, in Buenos Aires.

Translated by Susan Petrilli

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## Dissenting mildly: A teacher as a popular journalist

LUZ RODRÍGUEZ CARRANZA

Of Borges during the 1930s, we know that he is the author of *Historia universal de la infamia*, and a man who, looking back twenty years later, described himself as 'bashful, undecided as to whether to write short stories, someone who amused himself (sometimes without aesthetic justification) by faking and twisting other people's tales' (Borges 1989/96: 1). We know from John King that he collaborated on *Sur* and translated intensively (King 1986: 92). However, of Borges the journalist, who wrote for the magazine *El Hogar (Ilustración semanal argentina)* every two weeks, we know rather little. The aim of this article is to analyze the texts recovered by Enrique Sacerio Garí and Emir Rodríguez Monegal (Borges 1986), and to attempt to understand how the author of *El Otro, el Mismo* adapted his style and concerns to the requirements of a mass-market family magazine, to the predetermined structure of the section concerned, and, above all, to the deadlines that left him no time to reflect, to rewrite, to consult the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The hypothesis that I wish to develop here is that Borges used popular genres known to the magazine's readership without altering his ground rules, which he applied strictly in order to achieve the most challenging transformation — that of his readers' way of thinking.

The 1930s began with a world economic crisis and a military coup in Argentina. At that time, King informs us, *Sur* was above all a magazine of ideas, not yet the 'forum for literary experimentation' that it would later become.<sup>1</sup> The ideas were politically pan-Americanism, and philosophically the pacifism of Huxley and the personalism of Mounier and Maritain. The pacifism soon changed into a political position that opposed fascism.<sup>2</sup> The Spanish Civil War forced intellectuals at the PEN Club congress held in Buenos Aires in August 1936 to take an uncompromising stand.<sup>3</sup>

*Sur* attacked fascism in all its guises and denounced its 'doctrine of hatred' (King 1986: 68). As of 1936 it openly espoused the Republican

cause. This position, says King, was unpopular

with a government and Catholic Church that subscribed to a romantic doctrine of 'Hispanidad' and looked to the triumph of the Church and the sword in Spain. The main newspapers, *La Nación*, *La Razón* and *La Prensa*, were all hostile to the Republic, if not totally committed to the pro-insurgent forces. (King 1986: 66)

At the outbreak of World War II, *Sur* declared its unconditional support for the Allies and denounced Nazi persecution of the Jews. These intellectuals were swimming against the tide of public opinion, which was emotionally roused by pro-Franco propaganda and by the burgeoning presence of Nazi elements in the Argentinian military and government. Yet *Sur* was read solely by an elite and posed no immediate subversive threat.

In October 1936, Jorge Luis Borges took over the 'Foreign books and authors' section of *El Hogar* — to make a living, as he confessed in 1970.<sup>4</sup> For over three years this section coexisted uneventfully alongside articles for housewives, fashion columns, children's stories, and the sports pages. Borges was responsible for providing a Reader's Guide (the original rubric, and one much used in other sections of the magazine) indicating 'what one should know' of the literature of other countries and languages. The first question that these texts raised in my mind was whether Borges set out his own ideas — and those of *Sur*, if he shared them — or if he wrote what was expected of him, eluding burning issues. The answer soon became clear: it was enough to note the authors and texts reviewed and cited — Masters, Woolf, Joyce, Faulkner, Valéry, O'Neill, T. S. Eliot, Döblin, Kafka, Poe, Chesterton, Zenón de Elea, Schopenhauer — to ascertain that Borges was writing about what interested him, and that he commented in detail on the pacifist and antifascist thinkers of the period — Huxley, Barbusse, Benda, Rolland. An answer was not so readily forthcoming to the second pressing question: How did Borges adapt to a readership more familiar with radio soap operas and cinema than literature, that is, with a population more familiar with popular genres than with philosophy, and especially with the nationalistic myths extolled by the public education of the time?

### The genres

In fiction and essays, Borgesian reasoning draws upon and develops a dialogue with classical and modern literature, or with philosophy.

Borges discusses the works of his favorite authors, creates a pastiche of what interests him, and, above all, experiments briefly with the genres he is discussing. He employs the same strategy in *El Hogar*, although here the genres chosen are popular — those that were familiar to the people of Buenos Aires during the thirties: epideictic or didactic articles, biographies, anthologies, crime stories, and science fiction. This task was by no means simpler than that of using 'cultured' genres. At the time Borges reflected deeply on the classical genres. The more classical the genre the more rigid are its conventions, and the harder it is to use its mold to convey something different. Achieving greater freedom within rigorously applied bounds was the task Borges set for himself throughout his opus, and his section in *El Hogar* constituted, in my view, one of his most ambitious challenges. Popular genres are the most classical and least malleable: their norms are fixed and readers do not readily accept changes. Borges employed and discussed them every two weeks, apparently drawing comparisons without generating any hostile response.

I restrict myself here to an analysis of Borges's practice in just two of these genres — the epideictic and biographical — as these are the most rigorous and referentially controlled. The epideictic or didactic genre is the basis of all *El Hogar* texts. It blends with other genres, gradually altering an argument's structure, using, for instance, the conjecture of crime novels and the juxtaposition of anthologies. As for biography, it had its own place in the 'thumbnail biographies' of the writers. Its analysis turns out to be simpler to delineate, although the techniques of the four other genres imperceptibly alter its rules.

### The epideictic genre

The various sections of *El Hogar* were didactic. They corresponded to the genre defined in the *Traité de l'argumentation* by Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (1992) as an epideictic discourse — one that 'intends to enhance the degree of adherence to certain values ... recognized by the audience' (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1992: 67). Borges used the epideictic genre as the principle vehicle in his section of *El Hogar*, and this could once again be seen as confirming his conservative ideology, since, according to the *Traité*, it is the choice of those who 'within society, defend traditional values, accepted values, educational rather than revolutionary values, new values that spark debate and controversy' (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1992: 67). Borges, however, used all his energy and talent to attack the opinions

that were prevalent in the Buenos Aires of his time. His strategy was subtle: use the epideictic genre to weaken — not strengthen — his readers' adherence to hegemonic values.

The first requirement was to find common ground for discussion with the readers — that which Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca call 'an intellectual contact': the consensus regarding the *value* of discussing a given subject (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1992: 18). Points of contact between writer and reader can be readily established when they share the same set of values, which just needs to be reinforced didactically. Other strategies are needed when the aim is to challenge assumptions: propaganda, which attacks head on, or fiction, which establishes a tacit agreement to suspend beliefs for the duration of the game.<sup>5</sup> Borges discarded the first genre: his texts contain no apostrophes, comminations, exclamations, or hyperbole. Propaganda is unhelpful in *El Hogar*, because the risk of irritating the editors or of losing readers is too great. The second strategy — which Borges used in the forties, when his epistemological proposals were called *Ficciones* — is also unproductive. Borges's task at the magazine was to explain literary texts and authors didactically, and the first intellectual contact had to be established within this framework.

At first glance there is nothing startling in Borges's *El Hogar* column. The structure was determined in advance, which, as I indicated above included a thumbnail biography and two reviews of foreign works and authors. The layout and typography are the same as in the rest of the magazine, and the illustrations are conventional portraits of the writers. Borges respected this setup for three years, the only change being the inclusion every month and a half of an essay on a subject, a few exceptions aside, that touched upon Argentinian national culture. Each text begins reassuringly, with the enunciation of a norm that prefigures the deductive reasoning and didactic demonstration characteristic of the epideictic genre. Nonetheless, during the first year there was an almost imperceptible shift from one issue to the next. The norms are not presented as unquestionable truths but rather as somewhat unfounded and vague opinions with which it would be possible to take issue. In the early months, Borges used innumerable formulas of rhetorical humility to confront these assertions with certain strictly personal reservations that compromise no one, such as 'Frankly, we do not believe' or 'I dare, however, to suggest to the reader'.<sup>6</sup> At the outset, a humorous incident or a personal experience entertains and surprises, thus favorably disposing the reader to stop trusting the norm — already reduced to a belief or simple opinion — and to look forward with interest to the reasoning, as in the following example:

1. Countless times I hear it said: 'Nobody can abide *María* by Jorge Isaacs any more; nobody is that romantic, that naive'. This vague opinion (or series of vague opinions) can be divided into two parts: the first declares that this novel is unreadable nowadays; the second — audaciously speculative — puts forwards a reason, an explanation. First the fact, then the probable reason. Nothing more convincing, more honest. I can make but two objections to this weighty charge: a) *María* is not unreadable; b) Jorge Isaacs was no more romantic than we are. I hope to demonstrate the second. As for the first, I can merely give my word that yesterday I effortlessly read the book's three hundred and seventy pages, alleviated by 'zinc plates'. Yesterday, the twenty-fourth of April 1937, from two fifteen in the afternoon to ten to nine at night, *María* was highly readable. (Borges 1986: 127)

Here two objections are raised, but the first — the readability of *María* — only serves the purpose of humorously suspending credulity. What interests Borges is to discuss the second opinion, by comparing several known interpretations that are at odds with those of romanticism, or by referring to everyday experiences that he shares with his readers, and shifting from the first person singular to the first person plural:

2. I have asserted that Isaacs was no more romantic than we are. It is no coincidence that we know him to be Creole and Jewish, the son of two skeptical blood lines. ... The Hispano-American pages of a certain encyclopedia say that he was 'an industrious servant of his country'. That is to say, a politician; that is to say, disillusioned. ... The plot of *María* is romantic. This means that Jorge Isaacs was capable of deploring that the love of two beautiful, impassioned beings should remain unsatisfied. It is enough to go to the cinema to confirm that we all share this capacity, boundlessly (Shakespeare shared it too). (Borges 1986: 127–128)

It is utterly impossible to deny these arguments after the norm has been ridiculed, because the first-person plural has drawn us in, as discerning, and then intelligent, interlocutors. The very fact of arguing implies 'that one values the adherence of the interlocutor, achieved with the help of reasoned persuasion, that one does not treat him as an object, but rather appeals to his freedom of judgment' (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1992: 73). Never — not even when thoroughly analyzing the rhetoric of these texts — does a reader feel that he is being manipulated, because Borges shares with him his own strategy, and by the end of 1937 he was already showing his hand:

3. Schopenhauer reduces all ludicrous situations to the paradoxical and unexpected inclusion of an object in a category that is alien to it, and to our



sudden perception of this incongruity between the conceptual and the real. (Borges 1986: 188)

The sudden perception of the inapplicability of the norm replaces the fictional and emotional techniques of propaganda, and enhances the intellectual contact. Reasoning then uncovers what must be borne in mind when elaborating a new interpretive hypothesis of the case in question. During the weeks that follow, the cases multiply and the argument becomes inductive: but the rule or norm used to explain them is the imaginative hypothesis of the first case, which is repeated each time less playfully and more forcefully. Repetition — a technique characteristic of the epideictic genre — thus converts the conjecture into a new norm that no longer surprises anyone.

Borges's aim though is not to replace one norm with another, but rather to transform the public into readers who think for themselves and cease to be a soft touch for propagandists. The repetitions are never identical, but adopt the rhetorical form of amplification: concessions, gradations, enumerations, corrections, and anaphoras.<sup>7</sup> The new norm, which has already become questionable, is confronted with a surprising new case, and the edifice rapidly collapses: all that remains is the rejection of reductive definitions and the incitement to critical and creative reading.

#### *The thumbnail biographies*

The laws of the genre of biography, as pointed out by Group  $\mu$  (1994: 160–161), demand a hero and a theme that guides the selection of the features of the narrated life — or biographemes — through deletion, addition, substitution or permutation. The classical features of the popular biography are as follows:

1. The hero: exceptional being.
2. Origins: place and date of birth, family.
3. Path through life (up to the main action that transforms him into a hero): education, first acts, early life events.
4. Stimulus (meeting) or Revelation (decisive event).
5. Main action.
6. Summary of his life between 5 (main action) and 1 (exceptional being).

Borges was perfectly aware that his readers were familiar with this genre, through their schooling and everyday life — all Argentinian

textbooks used it, as did popular magazines — and through what was offered by publishers. In the first year of the section, a third of its reviews dealt with biographies. Exasperated, Borges announced in September 1937 that:

Biographies continue to abound. With people in short supply, authors are turning to rivers and symbols. Emil Ludwig published a torrential biography of the Nile. And, to celebrate the first centenary of the death of Claude Rouget de Lisle, Hermann Wendel has published *La Marsellesa. Biografía de un himno*. (Borges 1986: 153)

In his thumbnail biographies, Borges strictly included the conventional biographical facts, but refused to link them causally. So, from the first issue the heroes are presented through their names and nationalities, in application of Schopenhauer's rule, as can be seen in examples 4, 5 and 6, which humorously invalidate the relation between the first two facts. The critique is already perfectly clear in example 7:

4. October 16, 1936: Carl Sandburg — perhaps the leading poet of North America and certainly the most North American — was born in Galesburg, in the state of Illinois, on January 6, 1878. His father was a Swedish blacksmith, August Jonsson, an employee of the workshops of the Chicago railroad company. As there were many Jonssons, Johnsons, Jensens, Johnstons, Johnstones, Jasons, Janssens and Jansens in the workshops, his father changed his name for an unmistakable one and opted for Sandburg. (Borges 1986: 33)

5. October 30, 1936: Virginia Woolf has been considered 'the leading novelist of England'. (Borges 1986: 38)

6. December 11, 1936: Edgar Lee Masters has been in America for many generations. (Borges 1986: 56)

7. April 2, 1937: Eden Phillpotts, 'the most English of English writers' is of obvious Jewish stock and was born in India. (Borges 1986: 112)

In these examples there is a subtle dismantling of the patriotism that presents writers as incarnations of their country. So, in the first thumbnail biography, that of Sandburg, the conventional norm is stated and then ridiculed with the change in name. Example 5 places the name of the female writer just before the cliché enunciated in the masculine form (*el novelista*) and in quotation marks. In example 6, the detail is in the use of *estar*, 'to be' (somewhere — America), instead of *ser*, 'to be' (somebody — an American). Lastly, in example 7 — by now it is already April 1937 — Borges finally moves away from the absurd norm by presenting it directly in quotation marks and comparing it paradoxically with something alien to it: a Jewish writer who was

born in India. Example 8 is particularly interesting as an illustration of the conjectural pirouettes of Borges:

8. November 13, 1936: The phrase 'a German novelist' is almost a contradiction in terms, since Germany, so rich in organizers of metaphysics, in lyric poets, scholars, prophets and translators, is notoriously lacking in novels. The work of Lion Feuchtwanger is a violation of this norm. (Borges 1986: 42)

Here the commonplace 'a German novelist', which must have presented the writer, is refuted, and we then discover that Feuchtwanger, *because he is a German novelist, is therefore* an exception. The readers encounter even fuller and more demanding reasoning in example 9, but by then they have already had a year of practice:

9. September 17, 1937: Of all the nations that fought in 1914, none has produced such a diverse and essential antiwar literature as was seen in Germany. Of the many German poets who execrated the war ... none was more psychologically interesting than Fritz von Unruh. Other loathers of war — here I am also thinking of Barbusse, of Remarque ... were civilians suddenly flung into the bewildering hell of the trenches; Fritz von Unruh was a soldier of heroic vocation. ...

Son, grandson and great-grandson of military men, Unruh was born in Silesia, in 1885. (Borges 1986: 166)

The argument tends to demonstrate that there may be a cause-and-effect relation between two apparently opposing concepts, war and pacifism, in other words, not all pacifists are civilians who know nothing of war. Moreover, those who know war well are those who become pacifists. Hence Germany fought, but produced the most essential antiwar literature: there were German poets who loathed war. Unruh was the most interesting pacifist, because he was from a military family, was educated for war, and had become a soldier with a heroic calling. This line of reasoning is later taken up again more unequivocally in a review, where the most sacred values of nationalism are demolished through the ferocious words of a British army general (Borges 1986: 207–208).

The writers who interested Borges were those who distanced themselves from patriotism, such as Feuchtwanger in example 10:

10. November 13, 1936: Feuchtwanger was born in Munich, in early 1884. It cannot be said that he loved his birthplace. (Borges 1986: 42)

In this first appearance of the topic, the litotes tempers the declaration. In his reviews, Borges persists with the theme,<sup>8</sup> and after two and a half years of habituating his readers, a first biographeme devoid of understatement is then possible:

11. May 27, 1938: Van Wijk Brooks is one of those American writers whose customary and advantageous exercise is the denigration of America. (Borges 1986: 238)

Patriotism and nationalism permeated the climate of opinion in the Buenos Aires of those years, but Borges did not limit himself to the undermining of abstract concepts. The biographeme of the writer's origins also allowed him to allude directly to the real and burning ideological controversies of the moment. The exceptional character of Benedetto Croce called for a harsher irony:

12. November 27, 1936: Benedetto Croce, one of the few important writers of contemporary Italy — the other is Luigi Pirandello — was born in the hamlet of Pescasseroli, in the province of Aquila, on the 25 February 1866. (Borges 1986: 50)

The fact that Borges suggested there were only two important writers in the Italy at the time may seem to us now to be a literary and innocent joke, but in the Buenos Aires of November 1936 this was far from the case. It provocatively excluded Ungaretti, whose fascist stance at the PEN Club congress was unambiguous (King 1986: 65).

The third biographeme — the path through life — follows naturally from the first two, and should be the nexus between these and the writer's Great Work. But it is precisely here that causality suffers the greatest blow. The bald facts about the lives of the writers are meaningless; they do not enable us to know them, or to foresee that they will become writers, as can be seen in the gradation of examples 13 to 16, leading to the extreme case of Ernest Bramah in example 17:

13. January 22, 1937: To enumerate the facts of Valéry's life is to ignore Valéry, is not even to allude to Paul Valéry. (Borges 1986: 75)

14. September 3, 1937: The statistical facts of the life of poet Edward Estlin Cummings run to just a few lines. (Borges 1986: 162)

15. October 1, 1937: The facts of the life of Countée Cullen require few lines (the facts, the mere statistical facts). (Borges 1986: 171)

16. October 29, 1937: The facts of the life of this author suggest no mystery other than that of their unelucidated relation to the extraordinary work. (Borges 1986: 182)

17. This biography runs the risk of being no less pointless and encyclopedic than a history of the world according to Adam. We know nothing of Ernest Bramah, except that his name is not Ernest Bramah. (Borges 1986: 206)

In many cases, education must also have hindered the writer's work. Hauptmann 'at school ... was assiduously the most idle pupil'

(Borges 1986: 158), Will James was raised on horseback (Borges 1986: 195), and Virginia Woolf was never sent to school, although 'one of her domestic disciplines was the study of Greek' (Borges 1986: 38). The greatest paradox is that of the unfortunate David Garnett, born into a family of intellectuals:

18. March 5, 1937: In 1892, David Garnett, renovator of the imaginative tale, was born in a place in England whose name the biographical dictionary does not wish to remember. His mother, Constance, has impressively translated the entire works of Dostoevsky, Chekhov, and Tolstoy into English. On his father's side, he is the son, grandson and great-grandson of men of letters. Richard Garnett, his grandfather, was a librarian at the British Museum and author of a famous *History of Italian Literature*. The age-old handling of books by so many generations had wearied the Garnetts: one of the first things that they forbade David was the practice of prose and verse. (Borges 1986: 101)

The significant events in the life of Garnett in no way presage the title of 'renovator of the imaginative tale' that the biography bestowed upon him:

19. Garnett's first studies were of botany. He devoted five years to this peaceful and roving passion, and was the discoverer of an extremely rare subclass of toadstool: the immortalized and poisonous *Fungus garnetticus*. This happened around 1914. In 1919, he opened a bookshop on Gerrard Street, in the Hispano-Italian neighborhood of Soho. His friend Francis Birrell taught him how to make packages: an art whose principles he mastered around 1924, the year in which they closed the bookshop. (Borges 1986: 101)

Clumsy David took five years to learn how to wrap books, and the man who taught him was the only one who could act as his Stimulator. Borges's fourth biographeme does not abound in Stimulators, but the Revelation is still the same: war. The effects of this revelation, though, never seem clear. In the case of Unruh — the antiwar soldier in example 9 — we know that he wrote the dramatic poem *Vor der Entscheidung*. But all expectations remain frustrated, because at no time are we told that the work speaks of war (even though it denigrates it), but just that it is unreal. Of *Opfergang*, composed before the fortress of Verdun, we are told:

20. This grave and short tale — perhaps the most intense of those motivated by war — does not seek in any line to be a transcription of reality. What is singular is that an experience is immediately transformed into a symbol. (Borges 1986: 167)

The fifth biographeme is by far the most important: the appearance of the Great Work that justifies the inclusion of the writer in this

anthology of heroes constituted by the thumbnail biographies. Thus, Masters 'is by antonomasia the author of *Anthology of Spoon River*' (Borges 1986: 57). Borges employs various means to frustrate our expectations, but the result is always the same: the Work in no way identifies the writer.<sup>9</sup> Equally, the various books by a given author do not allow any cumulative interpretation of his identity:

21. The work of Döblin is curious ... it consists of exactly five novels. Each one of them corresponds to a distinct, isolated world. 'The personality is nothing but a conceited limitation' declared Alfred Döblin in 1928. 'If my novels survive, I hope that the future attributes them to four different people.' (When he formulated this modest or ambitious wish, he had not yet published *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.) (Borges 1986: 179)

Garnett was dispatching poorly wrapped books in his Soho bookshop when he published his first story, which is 'a total renovation of the fantastic genre', although we do not understand why. Borges limits himself to explaining to us what this story is *not*:

22. March 5, 1937: Unlike Voltaire and Swift, Garnett avoids all satirical intentions. He also eludes Edgar Allan Poe's promotion of horror; H. G. Wells's rational justifications and hypotheses; Franz Kafka's and May Sinclair's contact with the peculiar climate of nightmares; the surrealists' disorder. Success followed almost immediately: Garnett dispatched countless copies on the counter. In 1924 he published: *A Man in the Zoo*. In 1925, *The Sailor's Return*. (His books are magical, but absolutely peaceful and, sometimes, cruel) (Borges 1986: 101–102)

It is absolutely impossible to find any causal logic linking the facts in Garnett's biography: family, education, clumsiness, book sales, commercial success and simultaneously the oddness and the poison of the toadstools, magic, the tranquility and cruelty of books that are like nothing we know. But the essence of the reflection on the genre lies in this very impossibility. As a good pedagogue, Borges never leaves his reader helpless. In one of the first thumbnail biographies, he clearly defined what their canonical value is. Virginia Woolf,

23. is the daughter of Mr. Leslie Stephen, compiler of biographies, books whose value resides in the quality of the prose and in the accuracy of the information, and which rarely attempt analysis and never invention. (Borges 1986: 38)

On the same page of the October 30, 1936 issue, a review asserts however that 'the selection of facts is in itself an art. "The biographer's art"', Maurois has said, "is, above all, to forget". These two brief meta-textual reflections are the key to the Borgesian method. André Maurois's



book, *Aspects de la biographie* — cited by Group  $\mu$  in 1994 — dates from 1930, and in 1936 it was the most recently published work on the subject. Borges is in perfect command of the poetics and rhetoric of the genre he employs. By impeding the causal narrative between the biographemes, Borges is denouncing the fallacy seemingly subscribed to by literary biographies that 'invent' a causality pointing to the Great Work as an explanation of the writer's identity. The Borgesian method, then, applies the norm much more strictly.

Once more, however, what Borges is suggesting goes further, and aims to question this rule by applying it to actual texts. Maurois does not analyze what the biographies should be, but what they are, and emphasizes that the very selection of the facts is an art: something intentional. Borges's insistence on the lack of direct causal importance of the selected facts points to a causality of another order, since he has *chosen* these, and not other, events. The facts can be selected not just in accordance with *one* causality, which stereotypes the genre. By selecting other events, it is possible to compile countless different biographies of the same person; the same writer can be interpreted differently according to each of his books, as in the case of Döblin. The same events can also be interrelated multiply and randomly, like the concepts of the thinking machine put forward by Raimundo Lulio in an essay of October 1937:<sup>10</sup> Magic, Borges had said a few years before, 'is the crowning or nightmare of what is causal, not its contradiction' (Borges 1989/96: 1.231).

If we return now to the style and figures, we will discover with astonishment that the rhetorical veneer mysteriously forms part of the tactical reasoning. These texts contain not a single synecdoche, and we now understand why: nothing is more impossible for this reasoning than the figures that seek to reduce the whole to any one of its component parts. Once again, the writers and their works are described with enumerations (see above). There are also semantic figures that weaken the contradiction of the oxymoron: litotes, a great Borgesian specialty, irony, hypallage and, above all, antithesis.

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For Borges there were no minor genres — he employed them all with the same rigor and interest — and he took his job as journalist-educator very seriously. It was no coincidence that he wrote in his own biographical note, which he prepared for publication in the *Enciclopedia Sudamericana* in Santiago, Chile in the year 2074, that periodicals were the *literary* genre of the period (Borges 1989/96: 3.505, my italics). Like Sarmiento and many Latin American thinkers, Borges was perfectly aware of the

importance of the press. By using the familiar — popular genres in the press — and in the space at his disposal, Borges sought to change his readers' way of thinking. Implicitly addressing the reader with *tú*, the familiar form, the strategy was to distance his readers from generalized irrationality, from the impersonal 'it is said', which Borges transmutes into 'they say', they, that is, who simply parrot opinions without troubling to scrutinize them in the harsh glare of reality. For this he developed a highly flexible combination of argumentation techniques for the five genres that he employed in his magazine section. Through deduction (didactic), Borges discovers the inapplicability of a norm to a particular case that requires a conjectural interpretation (detective-like hypothesis or abduction). As the cases multiply (the amplifying juxtaposition of anthology), he proceeds by induction, but the rule applied to elucidate these cases is now the first interpretive hypothesis. Each one of these cases is unique and unclassifiable and demands new hypotheses, which in turn gradually invalidate the first. Like science fiction novels, each text is a mystery that obeys its own laws. In brief, it is a question of demonstrating the absurdity and impracticability of generalizations.

Borges's thumbnail biographies without a doubt afforded the most direct attack upon the hegemonic values of the period, because they thwarted any attempt at univocal and definitive interpretation of the personality of a human being. In other terms, the aim was to stymie all attempts at reductive identification, the preferred mechanism of nationalist and fascist discourse. Using the popular aesthetic, Borges subverted the reader's way of thinking, and pointed to the unreliability of established norms and the need for critical reading. I suspect though, that Borges subtly convinces us of something much more valuable, which is that racial and national determinisms do not exist, that the passions they arouse are delusional, and, above all, that identity is something so ineffable and kaleidoscopic that it can never be used as a concept without running the risk of fundamentalism: it can only bear enumeration ... or metaphor.

Translation (including the quotations from Borges) by David Marsh

## Notes

1. 'The emphasis on imaginative literature came only at the end of the period, mainly as a result of Borges's development from poet and prolific essayist into the writer of short stories ("Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" was published in *Sur* 56, May 1939), and also as a result of the different emphasis that gradually appeared in the magazine with the arrival of José Bianco as jefe de redacción in August 1939' (King 1986: 58).

2. 'Pacifism was one form of intellectual and, by extension, social commitment. However anxiously writers tried to maintain the independence and purity of their position, they were being forced by the times into facing up to serious questions' (King 1986: 60).
3. The Argentine delegation was headed by Carlos Ibarguren, an eminent right-wing nationalist historian and fascist sympathizer, and by Victoria Ocampo. 'The PEN Club meeting was explosive. It included leading fascists like the former Futurist Filippo Marinetti and the poet Giuseppe Ungaretti; victims of German racist policies, like the Austrian Stefan Zweig and the German Emil Ludwig (who would later be published in *Sur*) and liberal French writers such as Maritain, Jules Romains and Benjamin Crémieux, who was of Jewish origin. Marinetti publicly attacked Ocampo and there were many confused and heated debates' (King 1986: 65).
4. In Borges's own words, 'small paying job' (Borges and di Giovanni 1970: 82).
5. Pragmatics is used to analyze the fictional strategy, thus allowing safe presentation of possible worlds that do not tally with the readers' ideas. The 'belief-building game' suspends disbelief during the game, and establishes agreement regarding a 'possible world' in which not only the rules of verification of the 'real world' apply (Adams 1985; Pavel 1996).
6. 'Frankly, we do not believe ... I dare to dissent mildly' (13 November 1936) (Borges 1986: 45); 'Perhaps ... perhaps ... perhaps — and this is the last solution that I offer the reader (25 December 1936) (Borges 1986: 64–65); 'I dare, however, to suggest ... I don't know if' (8 January 1937) (Borges 1986: 70–71); 'I suspect' (29 January 1937) (Borges 1986: 79); 'I dare suspect' (12 February 1937) (Borges 1986: 88); 'I suspect, however' (19 February 1937) (Borges 1986: 96); 'I usually ask and ask myself ... I don't think so' (19 March 1937) (Borges 1986: 106).
7. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca show that repetition is important in argumentation, but contributes nothing to demonstration and scientific reasoning: 'But most figures that rhetoricians classify under the names of figures of repetition ... appear to have a much more complex argumentative effect than that of heightening presence. In the form of repetition they aim above all at suggesting distinctions ... through repetition, the second wording of the term seems to change value' (1992: 236–237).
8. February 19, 1937: 'Is an H. L. Mencken conceivable in this country, an acclaimed specialist in the art of calumniating and vituperating the country? I think not. Patriotism, Argentinian pseudopatriotism, is a poor, terrified thing' (Borges 1986: 106–107).
9. A much more subversive affirmation is found in an essay on Unamuno: 'It is said that we should seek an author in his best works. One could reply (in a paradox that Unamuno would not have dismissed) that if we truly wish to know him, we would be best advised to consult the less felicitous ones, since the author is more present in them — in the unjustifiable, in the unpardonable — than in those other works that no one would hesitate to sign' (Borges 1986: 79–80).
10. 'It is a scheme or diagram of the attributes of God ... each of these nine letters is equidistant from the center and is joined to all the others by cords or by diagonals. The first means that all the attributes are inherent; the second, that they are joined to each other ... such that it is not heterodox to assert that glory is eternal, that eternity is glorious, that power is truthful, glorious, good, great, eternal ... etcetera. I want my readers to grasp fully the magnitude of this etcetera. It comprises, for the present, a number of combinations far beyond what this page can contain ... This motionless diagram ... is already a thought machine. It is natural that its inventor — a thirteenth-century man, let us not forget — fed it subject matter which now seems to us unrewarding. ... We (at heart no less ingenuous than Lulio) would load it differently' (Borges 1986: 175–176).

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Now that critical works on Borges fill more shelves than his *oeuvre*, and reference guides map most authors, words, and allusions he ever mentioned, it seems rather surprising how little space is dedicated to his relation to Unamuno. Balderston (1986: 154) lists only five references in *Obras completas*, but neither the Fishburn-Hughes dictionary of Borges (1990) nor the Isbiter-Standish concordance (1991) mentions Unamuno; in recent criticism we find only a handful of essays<sup>1</sup> with very different approaches and one chapter in Echevarren's book (1992: 37–46). Yet if our intuition is more than willing to accept Kerrigan's statement ('No man comes from Nowhere, and Borges came from Unamuno, among other places and worlds', [Unamuno 1984: 4.xxi]) why has Borges's relation to Unamuno not been treated like his debt with Stevenson, Cervantes, or Kafka? My hypothetical answer is that this shadow is not accidental, it is due, on the one hand, to Borges's intentional downplaying of Unamuno's relevance in his life and work, and on the other, to using several literary devices, among others, intricate forms of intertextuality, that permit him to adopt the Spanish master's aesthetic views without naming him.

The visible part of Borges's relation to Unamuno follows one basic pattern: Borges reads and absorbs all major and minor works of Unamuno, develops quite a high esteem towards him, but speaks on more than one occasion very negatively about him. In his youth Borges undoubtedly idolized Unamuno: He discussed his writings, he wrote and sent his first texts to him, and according to Chaves's account (1970: 372) he even memorized *El médico*, an unpublished drama of Don Miguel. Yet when he refers to Spanish philosophy as seen from Argentina, quotes Macedonio Fernández (Borges 1961: 13) saying 'Unamuno y los otros españoles se habían puesto a pensar, y muchas veces a pensar bien, porque sabían que serían leídos en Buenos Aires' (... Unamuno and other Spanish thinkers set to think, and in many cases, to think well because they knew they would be read in Buenos Aires)<sup>2</sup>. Adding a foreword in



1969 to the 1923 volume of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, he recalls his evident attachment this way: 'Yo, por ejemplo, me propuse demasiados fines: remedar ciertas fealdades (que me gustaban) de Miguel de Unamuno ...' (I, for example, set for myself too many goals: to imitate certain ugly features — I found pleasing — of Miguel de Unamuno) (1989/96: 1.13). In the 1920s Borges makes several positive references to Unamuno's poetry: among others publishes an article in *Nosotros*,<sup>3</sup> quotes a few lines from the famous Sonnet 88 of *Rosario de sonetos líricos* (fragment that will appear years later at the beginning of *Historia de la eternidad*), as well as mentions Unamuno's virtues as a metaphysical poet in *El tamaño de mi esperanza* and in *El idioma de los argentinos*.<sup>4</sup> But one decade later when it comes time to say goodbye to the Spanish master, Borges expresses some very negative comments in the two obituaries<sup>5</sup> published in January 1937 and uses evidently out-of-place adjectives. In *Sur* he quotes Cassou's description: 'Miguel de Unamuno, un luchador que lucha consigo mismo, por su pueblo y contra su pueblo; un hombre de guerra, hostil, fraticida, tribuno sin partidarios, predicador en el desierto, vanidoso, pesimista, paradójal, despedazado por la vida y la muerte, invencible y siempre vencido'<sup>6</sup> [Miguel de Unamuno, a fighter that fights with himself, for and against his people; a man of war, hostile, fraticide, tribune without any followers, a prophet in the desert, conceited, pessimist, paradoxical, dashed to pieces by life and death, unconquerable and always conquered] (Borges 1999: 143–144). In *El Hogar* he does not hesitate to make a list of the most unpoetic lines of *Rosario de sonetos líricos*. From the 1940s on, Borges writes no more on Unamuno, he just mentions him in interviews among many other authors, he quotes him in a few texts, for example in 'Magias parciales del Quijote', *Prólogos*, 'La inmortalidad', but the Spanish author is evidently left in the background as if he were of no particular importance to Borges.<sup>7</sup>

These visible signs of Unamuno's presence may coincide with some of the symptoms of the 'life cycle' that Bloom describes as the psychological development of the poet (1973: 10–16) but one finds hard to confirm such a sequence even on the basis of Monegal's 1970 findings. The use of literary techniques, on the contrary, seems to be more revealing. Let us examine three cases from *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* to see how Borges, as he would say, creates his 'precursor'.

In Chapter 1 of *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*, which Borges always considered Unamuno's most important work (see Borges 1982: 150–151), we read the following sentence (Unamuno 1958: 2.734): 'cada cosa, en cuanto es en sí, se esfuerza por perseverar en su ser ... el esfuerzo con el cual cada cosa se esfuerza por perseverar en su ser, no implica tiempo finito, sino indefinido' [everything, in so far as it is in itself, strives to

persevere in its own being ... the strife with which everything strives to persevere in its own being does not imply finite but indefinite time]. Both sentences are literal translations of Spinoza's famous arguments ('unaquaeque res, quatenus in se est, in suo esse perseverare conatur; conatus, quo unaquaeque res in suo esse perseverare conatur, nullum tempus finitum, sed indefinitum involvit') (1933: 3.6, 3.8). In 'Borges y yo' (1989/96: 2.186) this is quoted as 'todas las cosas quieren perseverar en su ser; la piedra eternamente quiere ser piedra y el tigre un tigre' [all things wish to go on being what they are — stone wishes eternally to be stone, and tiger, to be tiger]. Unamuno names Spinoza and interprets the Latin original in his own way; Borges names Spinoza, presents his own interpretation, but makes no reference to Unamuno.

His silence can be and has been explained in different ways. One solution is that Borges does not want to connect his literary text to the philosophical-religious context in which Unamuno analyzes all mortals' desire for immortality.<sup>8</sup> Another explanation is that the sentence in question underlines, and in a certain sense illustrates the actual meaning of survival. The literary 'I' of 'Borges y yo' is persevering in his being right in the text where it appears; mentioning the name of Unamuno, Borges would risk derailing this autoreflexive process. Or perhaps there is no reference made to Unamuno because Borges intends to give an ironical overtone to the citation saying that individual immortality is impossible, at the most, the verbalization of that desire may survive, so he just quotes words from the Spanish author, and ignores his person.

There is some truth to each of these interpretations but there is also a common mechanism in them that I think is more important. I find that the citation in 'Borges y yo' behaves as an interpretant as specified by Riffaterre (1978: 81–114), and as such establishes a series of intertextual relations in the Borges-Unamuno-Spinoza triangle. The first of which is intended to go beyond a simple regressus that would imply the sequence of text-intertext<sub>1</sub>-intertext<sub>2</sub>. Borges does not name Unamuno because with him he would suggest a time scale or a linear structure; he prefers exploiting the dynamics of the mediating text leaving more space for the reader to move freely among the three texts (Morgan 1989: 264). This is not only a clear intention of spatializing narrative but also an ironical way of looking at the time factor in mortality/immortality as understood by Unamuno. The second layer of the intertextual relations is equally ironical and indirect: in *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* Unamuno used Spinoza's arguments just for the opposite goal that the pantheistic master had intended; Borges uses in 'Borges y yo' Unamuno's wording among others to show its absurdity. Now rejecting Unamuno's interpretation Borges could arrive at confirming Spinoza's truth but he wants more than

that, he avoids naming Unamuno in this cycle to be able to widen the scope of absurdity: his irony does go beyond the simple oppositions of Unamuno/Spinoza and Borges/Unamuno, reaching a level where opposing views do not lead to a new assertion or negation but to unresolved paradoxes. Absurdity is reinforced both intertextually and intratextually: the chiasmus-like relation included in Borges's citation of Unamuno/Spinoza is repeated in the self-contradiction produced between the quotation and the rest of the text of 'Borges y yo'. And there is also a third element in Borges's intertextual strategy: he places the adopted citations into an aesthetic frame; thus instead of elaborating philosophical judgments, he shifts towards aesthetic procedures. This is nothing new in the light of his *ars poetica*<sup>9</sup> and, that is our point here, this is nothing new in comparison with Unamuno either, as he had been aesthetizing ideas<sup>10</sup> in all his works, and not only in novels, poems, and dramas but also in essays like *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*.

In Chapter 2 we find a less elaborate but equally revealing example when Unamuno displays a series of arguments against Descartes (1958: 2.759–762). Among others he considers Descartes' scepticism as mere artifice ('artificio'), he condemns this separation of life and thought, and passes on to discuss the famous argument of *cogito ergo sum*. His conclusion is that 'Pienso, luego soy', no puede querer decir sino 'pienso, luego soy pensante' ['I think, therefore I am' cannot mean but 'I think, therefore I am a thinker']. In 'La encrucijada de Berkeley' (1993: 117–127) Borges examines categories like space, time and ego, and declares their 'absoluta nadería' [absolute nothingness]. As far as the ego is concerned, he argues that if *cogito ergo sum* meant '*Pienso, luego existe un pensar*' [I think, therefore there is a thinking] which is the only conclusion that the premise logically permits, its truth would be both indisputable and useless; if it meant '*Pienso, luego hay un pensador*' [I think, therefore there is a thinker], it is precise in the sense that every act implies an actor, and it is false for suggesting individualization and continuity. Unamuno quotes St. Augustine, Borges mentions, as one would expect, Schopenhauer but remains silent about Unamuno. What is really striking is seeing how closely he follows Unamuno's technique of exploiting intertextuality. In case of the pages on Descartes Unamuno's solution is a spectacular paragraph starting with the usual *chiasmus*, 'La verdad es *sum, ergo cogito*, soy, luego pienso, aunque no todo lo que es, piense' [The truth is *sum, ergo cogito*, I am, therefore I think, although not everything that is, thinks], and continuing with no less than nine rhetorical questions. The closing sentences do not arrive at any unambiguous statement but rather connect to what he calls a 'vehemente sospecha' [a vehement conjecture], which turns out to be Spinoza's thesis, the one we saw in the first example.

Borges jumps from Descartes to Schopenhauer and Spencer. First he blames the auxiliary verb *to be* for the misunderstanding, then attributes some mythical meaning to Spencer's term, *conciencia* (conscience), and arrives at the following conclusion: 'La Realidad es como esa imagen nuestra que surge en todos los espejos, simulacro que por nosotros existe, que con nosotros viene, gesticula, y se va, pero en cuya busca basta ir, para dar siempre con él' [Reality is similar to our image that appears in every mirror, a simulacrum that exists for us, that comes, gesticulates and departs with us yet if you want to find it, you just have to go after it.] (Berkeley 1993: 117–127).

In Chapter 3 of *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (1958: 773) we come across two lines of the *Odyssey* that say the gods weave and accomplish the destruction of mortals in order that their posterity may have something to sing. Unamuno does not leave any doubt about his interpretation when he says, 'Rasgo maravilloso, que nos pinta a qué habían venido a parar los que aprendieron en la *Odisea* ...' [An incisive characterization that depicts for us the position reached by those who had learned from the *Odyssey* ...], meaning that the Greeks may seem to be very refined and open, but when it comes to resurrection and immortality, they cease to be tolerant. The argument sounds very passionate, which is surprising because Unamuno is rejecting the very idea that he had considered for years as a guiding principle for his life and art. He himself tells us in *Diario íntimo* that for a long time he had in his study two pictures, a portrait of Spencer and his own drawing of Homer, beneath which he had copied the above-mentioned verses from the *Odyssey*, and that he considers them the 'Quintaesencia del vano espíritu pagano, del estéril esteticismo, que mata toda sustancia espiritual y toda belleza' [Quintessence of the vain spirit of paganism, of the sterile aestheticism that kills all spiritual substance and all beauty] (1970: 16). He uses even harsher terms in the second part of the same diary when he comes back to the quotation<sup>11</sup> and connects the above two statements: 'El literaturismo y el esteticismo mismo son flor venenosa del espíritu pagano.' [Literatizing and aestheticizing are the poisonous flowers of the pagan spirit], adding that Homer is blasphemous because he confuses the gods, — who are demons, with God (1970: 90). His conclusive remark about life and art is based on the rejection of art for art's sake (and life for life's sake) and he unites them in a typical *chiasmus*: 'No, la vida por la muerte, la vida por la vida eterna; y el arte por el arte eterno, por la religión' [No, life for death's sake, life for the sake of eternal life, and art for the sake of eternal life, for religion] (1970: 90).

Whether Homer's lines were idolized or rejected by Unamuno, they were undoubtedly central elements of his thought, and as such, could not have been ignored by Borges. They were not. They appear several times

and always without reference to Unamuno. In 'Nota sobre Walt Whitman' Borges raises the issue of a book of books or the absolute book; he mentions Apollonius of Rhodes, Lucan, Camoëns, Donne, Milton, Góngora, Gracián, then while speaking about possible negative themes for such a book, he jumps to Mallarmé, and with him back to Unamuno's favorite citation from Homer: 'su decorosa profesión de fe *Tout aboutit à un livre* parece compendiar la sentencia homérica de que los dioses tejen desdichas para que a las futuras generaciones no les falte algo que cantar' [his decorous profession of faith *Tout aboutit à un livre* seems to summarize the Homeric axiom that the gods fabricate misfortunes so that future generations will have something to sing about] (1989/96: 1.249–253). The statement is very reserved and could well pass unnoticed as an intertextual reference to Unamuno, but the sentence immediately preceding it is an overt inversion of what Unamuno meant in his *Diary* by the Homeric citation. According to Borges Mallarmé felt like Pater that 'todas las artes propenden a la música, el arte en que la forma es el fondo' [all arts gravitate toward music, the art that has form as its substance]. In another writing of the same period, 'Del culto de los libros' we find a very similar procedure: Borges connects once again Unamuno with Homer through Mallarmé, first quoting in prose the two Greek lines in question, then paraphrasing Mallarmé's statement in Spanish, and arriving at a statement of an undoubtedly Unamunian inspiration: 'parece repetir, unos treinta siglos después, el mismo concepto de una justificación estética de los males' [seems to repeat, some thirty centuries later, the same concept of an aesthetic justification for evils] (1989/96: 2.91). The continuation apparently draws on the difference between song (Homer) and book (Mallarmé), the examples include Pythagoras, Plato, Clement of Alexandria, the sacred books of the Moslems, Jews and Christians, Bacon, and Sir Thomas Browne. But when we are about to forget the initial allusion to Unamuno, we return to him through Mallarmé and Bloy to learn that sacred books do not lead necessarily to God and their meaning is rather undeterminable and profoundly hidden. Finally Borges gives a last turn of the screw with Bloy transforming the original subject/object relation: 'somos versículos o palabras o letras de un libro mágico, y ese libro incesante es la única cosa que hay en el mundo: es, mejor dicho, el mundo.' [we are the versicles or words or letters of a magic book, and that incessant book is the only thing in the world: or, rather, it is the world] (1989/96: 2.94).

In both texts Borges uses the same procedure that we have seen above with the difference that the intertextual triangle is now duplicated as Mallarmé does not only 'substitute' Unamuno because references made to him function on their own right and form another interpretant

between Borges and Homer. The duplication and the arising relations in and between the two triangles create a vast intertextual web where it is hard if not impossible to account for all viable connections. Why does Borges avoid naming Unamuno in this process? Not repeating the hypothetical possibilities we mentioned above, one cannot help noticing again the striking similarity between Unamuno's and Borges's technique. Unamuno accepts, then rejects Homer to arrive at a paradoxical artistic *credo*. Borges copies Unamuno/Homer, then replaces and confronts him with Mallarmé/Homer/Bloy to arrive at a concept of art which is not less paradoxical than Unamuno's conclusion. Just to give one example, Borges states in 'La muralla y los libros' — once again with reference to Mallarmé and Pater and Croce — that 'esta inminencia de una revelación, que no se produce, es, quizá, el hecho estético' [this imminence of a revelation that is not produced, is perhaps, the aesthetic event] (1989/96: 2.11–13).

We could present more examples<sup>12</sup> from *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* but perhaps the above three would suffice to point out a relevant aspect of intertextuality as used by Unamuno and Borges. Borges, as we have seen, copies many citations used by Unamuno, then he transforms and uses them for his own purpose but he also goes far beyond a simple adoption of citations. Borges copies Unamuno as interpretant, as mediator who not only feels free to move without constraints in the intertextual triangles and sophisticated citation webs but he feels also determined to generate overtly contradictory solutions shifting constantly from the realm of philosophy to aesthetics. In other words, Borges's intertextuality does not connect to Unamuno metonymically but metaphorically as the results of his intertextual findings are also embedded in his texts the same way. Borges follows Unamuno very closely but avoids naming him because he does not want to establish metonymical relations and because he too battles with the same problem as his 'precursor', with that of finding his real name. The Augustinian<sup>13</sup> *Mihi quaestio factus sum* defines for both of them the very essence of life and art (Saint Augustine 1961: 239). Freud's thesis on artists as murderers may explain some aspects of the Borges-Unamuno relation, yet we find that the decisive artifice is the one mentioned by Boudreau: 'The act of covering your traces is the act of creation, for that act is *you*' (1996: 38).

## Notes

1. See Cro (1967), Kerrigan (1972), Koch (1984), Shaw (1986), Juaristi (1993), Palenzuela (1997), Zubizarreta (1998).
2. I often modify the available English translations.



3. The title is 'Acerca de Unamuno, poeta', and later was included in *Inquisiciones* (Borges 1993: 109–116).
4. Cf. recent editions: Borges (1993: 75; 1994: 148).
5. See 'Inmortalidad de Unamuno', published in *Sur* (1999: 6.28) and 'Presencia de Miguel de Unamuno' in *El Hogar* (29 January); both are reprinted in Borges (1982: 147–151).
6. Cassou's sentence is even harsher: 'Tal es la agonía de don Miguel de Unamuno, hombre en lucha, en lucha consigo mismo, con su pueblo y contra su pueblo, hombre hostil, hombre de guerra civil, tribuno sin partidarios, hombre solitario, desterrado, salvaje, orador en el desierto, provocador, irreconciliable, enemigo de la nada y a quien la nada atrae y devora, desgarrado entre la vida y la muerte, muerto y resucitado a la vez, invencible y siempre vencido' (Unamuno 1966: 94).
7. Seeing this relationship from the other side, Borges was of no real importance to Unamuno: among Unamuno's forty-thousand letters only one is written to Borges (in *Nosotros*, April 1927: 126–127) and two others contain references to him (García Blanco 1964: 49; Robles 1996: 536, 562). Though there is one passage that suggests a lasting presence of Borges in Unamuno's mind and also a latent willingness to enter in dialogue with him: 'Y dígame a éste que en estar pensando escribirle se me han ido los meses y aun los años. Es lo que ocurre cuando uno siente mucho que tener que decir. ¡Las veces que me he detenido en frases de sus escritos y hasta en alguna alusión a mí! Y más de una vez he pensado escribir algún comentario comentando dichos — por escrito — suyos. De todos modos le conste, que no pocas veces cuando escribo algo para el público y hablo del "lector" pienso individual y concretamente en él.' (And please tell Borges that in all the while that I think of writing him, months and even years have slipped by. That's what happens when one feels that there is so much to say. How many times have I paused over one of his phrases, and at some allusion to me! And more than once I have thought to compose some gloss on his sayings-in-writing. In any case I would like him to know that quite often when I address the public but speak of my "readers", I am thinking concretely and individually of him (Unamuno 1984: 2.256).
8. I am relying here on the argumentation of A. F. Zubizarreta's two recent articles (1998 and in press).
9. Cf. e.g., his statement in the epilogue of *Otras inquisiciones* (1989/96: 2.153).
10. Mermall is right considering Unamuno's use of the chiasmus as master trope. See his brilliant analysis in *PMLA* (1990).
11. Unamuno quotes the same lines again and again (Turienzo 1966: 64).
12. See among others the motives of similarity of human faces, the pistol/knife left lying idle and especially letters printed at random composing the *Don Quixote*. (Unamuno 1984).
13. Unamuno uses it as the motto of *Cómo se hace una novela* (1966).

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## Poems written to poets

NOEMÍ ULLA

### The poet and his language

Chroniclers and writers, philosophers and poets have been celebrated by Borges in a series of connected poems the diversity through which Borges perhaps emphasized his own genealogy, and in secret the language of each recipients which he wished to pay homage to. In diverse instances Borges has revealed that Spanish is not a language in which he moves comfortably; on other occasions he has confessed that Spanish was perhaps not the most appropriate vehicle for his writing. Furthermore constant observations about the Spanish language have accompanied many of the essays written during his youth, which was observed by the essayist and critic Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot (1998). And yet in the beautiful poem 'Al idioma Alemán' [To the German language] (Borges 1989/96: 2.494) Borges establishes the priority of Spanish as the destiny that stamped him into shape and distinguished him: 'Mi destino es la lengua castellana / El bronce de Francisco de Quevedo' [My destiny is the Castilian language / Francisco de Quevedo's bronze]. In the same poem where he acknowledges English as being his blood inheritance, and without particularly mentioning any other languages, he declares German to be the chosen one, the one he had looked for and learned in solitude.

A través de vigiliass y gramáticas,  
De la jungla de las declinaciones,  
Del diccionario, que no acierta nunca  
Con el matiz preciso, fui acercándome.

[Amid vigils and grammars  
Through the jungle of declinations  
Through the dictionary that never finds  
The precise hue, I slowly gained proximity.]

Nevertheless Borges also exalted his literary past by means of the Spanish writers that moved him most. Likewise, he also praised Argentine writers and poets who were his friends or to whom he felt intellectually close.

Yet when in 'All our yesterdays' (Borges 1989/96: 3.106) Borges questions himself so personally about his identity, about the period of time during his childhood and adolescence, which he spent alternately in Geneva and in Buenos Aires, he reveals remarkable emotional hesitation:

Quiero saber de quién es mi pasado  
¿De cuál de los que fui? ¿Del ginebrino ...

[I want to know who my past belongs to  
To which of those selves I once was? To the Genevan ...?]

When the time comes to bestow a title to his poem, he does so in English, as though he wished to emphasize his constant dialogue with English culture.

### Proximity and distance

In most of the celebrations what is evident is the greater or lesser proximity that Borges creates between himself and the author he is praising. For the sake of methodological clarity the material has been organized in four series, according to the greater or lesser emotional distance that the poetic voice creates with the other poet, taking the communicative criterion into consideration. Starting from these series we will analyze how Borges suppresses the enunciative distance and bestows greater density to sentiment. Fundamentally what we shall study is the semiotic point of view while isotopy is being considered, as from Greimas.

Browning's monologues have inspired him to identify with the poem's subject, that modality which conveys such intimacy and provides intensity as the singularity of the person evoked is discovered. In 'Browning resuelve ser poeta' [Browning resolves to become a poet] (Borges 1989/96: 3.82), 'James Joyce' (Borges 1989/96: 2.361), 'Poema conjetural' [Conjectural poem] (Borges 1989/96: 2.245) which at the same time are far from all Narcissistic unfolding, or in that most beautiful sonnet dedicated to 'Alexander Selkirk' (Borges 1989/96: 2.274), included in the same book, that follows the same procedure: the protagonist's voice resounds.

Cervantes, on the other hand, is presented following an objective treatment of apparent distance, though it has happily been impossible to elude its emotion, in 'Un soldado de Urbina' [A soldier of Urbina] (Borges 1989/96: 2.256) with Cervantes he not only shares the language but the creative process as well, which, in Borges's case is always like a dream. It places him in that unfortunate age in which the soldier of Urbina is forced to wander through the hardened Spain of the Renaissance, when 'solo y pobre' [alone and poor] he had not yet glimpsed that Don Quijote and Sancho have already kindled his fantasy.

Sospechándose indigno de otra hazaña  
Como aquella en el mar, este soldado  
A sórdidos oficios resignado  
Erraba oscuro por su dura España.

(Borges 1989/96: 2.256)

[Suspecting himself unworthy of another feat  
Such as the one accomplished at sea  
The soldier became resigned to sordid tasks  
While wandering obscurely through his hardened Spain.]

This is the first quatrain of the sonnet where Borges has recovered not the personage in his social representation, but the anonymous humanized character who still ignores his literary destiny and searches for oblivion — another Borgean preferred subject — far from the real world, immersed in the illusory epics of Roland and of Brittany. The same emotion one discovers in his poem in honor of Cervantes, as he followed his steps before *Don Quijote de la Mancha* was written, discloses the measure of his judgment appearing in the prologue to the 'Novelas ejemplares' [exemplary novels] (Borges 1975). After extensively considering Chesterton's, Quevedo's and Virgil's style, he comes round to Cervantes. He acknowledges the fact that his style includes repetitions, hiatus, mistakes in construction, useless epithets. At length he declares: 'there isn't one of his sentences that would not bare correction ...; and yet, thus incriminated, the text is nevertheless most efficacious, though we do not know why this is. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra belongs to that category of writers that reason cannot explain' (Borges 1975: 45).

Here we have the statement of the essayist that not only accompanies the measure of consideration in which he holds the poets he admires, but also discloses the tone that makes him and his poetry vibrate: emotion. It is with emotion itself and no other feeling that he sets the



tone used in writing 'Una rosa y Milton' [A rose and Milton] (Borges 1989/96: 2.269), a sonnet evoking the English poet. Milton's silhouette is intimately bound to the rose he carries to his face, in spite of already being blind. A kind of reciprocity here unites both poets: blindness and love for the flower after which Borges named one of his books of poetry: *La rosa profunda* (Borges 1989/96: 3.77-117).

An object, which is almost magic because of its beauty, is what our poet wishes to save from oblivion, also feeling that this purpose was a part of his literary destiny: to name Milton's rose for the first time, when Milton who is already blind, draws it to his face, as he would have done, in spite of being unable to see it. That 'invisible' condition attributed to the rose because of Milton's blindness, is transformed because of the accent on the final part of the line, into an adjective which is just as valid as 'bermeja, amarilla y blanca' [bright red, yellow, white], 'tenebrosa' [gloomy] because it is the last one; and by that same quality that Borges the poet bestows onto words, by displacing the play of his senses, the nouns 'oro, sangre, marfil' [gold, blood, and ivory] in this case have the value of adjectives. He who pays homage to the rose and to Milton, demands preemptorily and by means of poetic language that the final dark rose shall shine in the alluded line, lighting up the whole poem. The conceptual play of opposites displaced by Borges has been able to make Milton's invisible rose shine, while both poets could have pressed it to their faces.<sup>1</sup>

In other instances, the motive for the poem is someone who Borges addresses in the first person establishing the 'thou' treatment annulling distance, whether of time or of language, as in the sonnet dedicated to the Icelandic poet and historian of the thirteenth century, Snorri Sturluson, first compiler of the kenningars. In the sonnet the 'thou' anaphoras annuls the linguistic, historic, and geographic distance between reader and the person invoked:

Tú, que legaste una mitología de  
hielo y fuego a la filial memoria,  
tú, que fijaste la violenta gloria de  
tu estirpe pirática y bravía.

(Borges 1989/96: 2.285)

[Thou hast bequeathed a mythology  
Of ice and fire to the filial memory  
Thou hast established the violent glory  
Of thy lineage of piracy and bravery.]

A poem devoted to the memory of Francisco López Merino, who disappeared when he was twenty-three years old, author of *Las tardes y Tono menor*, is included in *Cuaderno San Martín* (Borges 1989/96: 1.93). This young poet from La Plata City, whose work Borges never ceased to evoke,<sup>2</sup> chose suicide. This tragic event compels Borges to pay homage to one of the ethical questions that had always worried him, that is to say, death by one's own hand, and the need to pay silent respect toward the final decision of another. It is useless, says the young Borges, to contradict the desires of he who is now absent, so he begins his poem with two conditionals that start with the word 'if'. Here he tries to penetrate the death-wish of Francisco López Merino, mistrusting the efficacy of his words 'es inútil que palabras rechazadas te soliciten / predestinadas a imposibilidad y a derrota' (It is useless that rejected words should importune you / words predestined to impossibility and defeat). Death as a dream, as 'olvido del mundo' [oblivion of the world] can justify the desire to disappear and those who demand the presence of the 'amigo escondido' [hidden friend] (take notice of the tender, felicitous and respectful way he mentioned the dead poet) should not desecrate his memory, the darkness into whose folds he supposedly has wrapped himself.

To another poet who disappeared in the very midst of his youth Borges dedicates the sonnet 'A John Keats (1796-1821)' [to John Keats (1796-1821)] in *El oro de los tigres* (Borges 1989/96: 2.473). The poet who writes in English (a language that is 'my blood heritage' Borges says of himself) is remembered in the streets of London, where beauty awakens in 'El arrebatado Keats' [the rapturous Keats] the odes to a nightingale (Keats in the suburban garden in Hampstead heard the eternal nightingale celebrated by Ovid and Shakespeare). He felt his own mortality and opposed it to 'the tenuous ever lasting voice of the bird', Borges had declared in 1952 in 'El ruiseñor de Keats' [Keats' nightingale] in *Otras inquisiciones* (Borges 1989/96: 2.95) and to a Greek urn which has been mentioned as often as the beloved Fanny Brawne. Perhaps Borges did not consider passion to be one of the lesser aspects to be noticed in this English poet. He concludes:

El alto ruiseñor y la urna griega  
Serán tu eternidad, oh fugitivo.  
Fuiste el fuego. En la pánica memoria  
No eres hoy la ceniza. Eres la gloria.

[The high flying nightingale and the Greek urn  
Shall be thy eternity, Oh fugitive.]

Thou hast been fire. In the panic memory  
Cinders thou are not. Thou art glory.]

'A un viejo poeta' [To an aged poet] (Borges 1989/96: 2.201) where the figure of Quevedo rises from one of his own rhymes 'y su epitafio la sangrienta luna' [And his epitaph the bloody moon] perhaps earned a slight reproach because of the reference to the symbol of the Turks 'eclipsed by some piracy or other committed by don Pedro Tellez Girón', Borges will say in *Otras inquisiciones* (Borges 1989/96: 2.38), although he admitted the splendid efficacy of the distic ('Su tumba son de Flandes las Campañas / y su Epitafio la sangrienta Luna') [His grave the campaigns in Flanders / His epitaph the bloody moon], in the sonnet 'Immortal Memory of Don Pedro Girón, Duke of Osuna, who died in prison' (Quevedo 1981: 103).

As in the sonnet to the Icelandic poet Snorri Sturluson, the chosen treatment is 'thou', though it is still more vivid than the formerly mentioned. Quevedo is seen by a careful look that seems to provide him with life, and with an aureole, by the thought of poetic creation that guides him and distracts him from his surroundings:

Caminas por el campo de Castilla  
Y casi no lo ves. Un intrincado  
Versículo de Juan es tu cuidado  
Y apenas reparaste en la amarilla  
Puesta de sol. La vaga luz delira ...

(Borges 1989/96: 2.201)

[You walk through the Castilian countryside  
Almost unseen.  
John's verse is your care  
And the yellow sundown went almost unnoticed  
Sunset. The vague light is delirious ...]

In 'Ricardo Güiraldes' (Borges 1989/96: 2.366) Borges emphasizes the most conspicuous aspects of the personality of this Argentine writer, with whom he kept up a discontinuous and difficult friendship. As Borges evokes Güiraldes, calling him 'un alma clara como el día' [a soul as bright as day], praising his courteousness, serenity, even his guitar (remarked as emphatic characteristics belonging unequivocally to Güiraldes) he does so warmly and tenderly, using the first person. The proximity that is established shows the friendship bond: 'No he de olvidar ...' [I shall never forget ...], 'Te veo conversando con nosotros / en Quintana'

[I see you conversing with us in Quintana]. And in a synthesis that is clearly literary, which includes the novel that made him famous, Borges exalts the mythic Gaucho past that the novel supports:

Tuyo, Ricardo, ahora es el abierto  
Campo de ayer, el alba de los potros.

[Yours now, Ricardo, is the open  
Countryside of yesterdays, a sunrise of colts.]

In the spirit of an authorized quotation, Borges reminds us at the beginning of his poem 'A Manuel Mujica Lainez' [to Manuel Mujica Lainez] (Borges 1989/96: 3.133) of the different meanings that scripture has for the reader, for the book as such and when it is being read, according to Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534–1572). In this singularly appraising manner, he begins his homage to the Argentine poet and novelist, written by a Borges that thus recognizes one of the poets who has been most constant in singing the praise of Argentine tradition and history. Upon comparing Mujica Lainez' work with his own, as far as it concerns the celebration of the fatherland, he defines the poverty of his own outlook 'una nostalgia de ignorantes cuchillos / y de viejo coraje' [a nostalgia of ignorant knives / and ancient courage] while the poet he celebrates has written in another spirit, according to Borges:

Tu versión de la patria, con sus fastos y brillos,  
entra en mi vaga sombra como si entrara el día.

[Your version of homeland, with its pageantry and splendor  
Enters my wavering dusk as if the day had entered.]

Much more insistently than he did for Güiraldes, Borges augurs a secure place in history for Mujica Lainez, whose memory he shall possess at last, and in the first person plural, he shares the disillusion of having been present when the homeland that had once been theirs, was lost:

Manuel Mujica Lainez alguna vez tuvimos  
una patria — ¿recuerdas? — y los dos la perdimos

[Manuel Mujica Lainez, we once had  
A homeland, remember? we both lost]

The same emotional and intellectual proximity even deeper perhaps, he seems to declare in his work written in praise of another poet of

the English tongue, born in the USA, Ralph Waldo Emerson (Borges 1989/96: 2.289). Borges imagines 'ese alto caballero americano' [this tall American gentleman] reading a book by Montaigne, until sundown on the plain captures his senses and he abandons his reading to walk through the fields in the setting sun's light. The two central rhymes of the sonnet, two endecasylabic verses — one heroic the other sapphic — together create a harmony of composition because of their respective accentuation and rest upon each other's meaning, placing the poet who is being praised nearer the one who is paying homage, joining them both in a same thought. These rhymes — the third and fourth of the second quatrain — establish the displacement of one poet towards the other, in a moment that happens physically and in memory at once, as if in specular conjuration:

Camina por los campos como ahora  
Por la memoria de quien esto escribe.

[Walks through the fields as now  
He walks through the memory of him who writes.]

Emerson's reflection becomes coincident with Borges's own, present in other of his poems: the writer's work, reading and writing, tend to conserve memory, challenging 'oscuro olvido' [dark oblivion]. Fame and the belief that a god has given possible knowledge to mortals are recognizable motives to feel blissful, yet at the same time a conviction of not having really lived and a desire to be somebody else escorts both poets, like a deep wound: 'Por todo el continente anda mi nombre; / no he vivido. Quisiera ser otro hombre' [throughout the whole continent my name travels; / I have not lived I wish I were another man] Borges's voice following Emerson's fantasy perhaps resembles Emerson's rhythm following Borges's fantasy.

Another American poet, Edgar Allan Poe (Borges 1989/96: 2.290) is also someone Borges seems to feel near to. In his sonnet he describes with great clarity the remarkable particulars of the storyteller who celebrated darkness. Very gently, also in two lines (as in the sonnet in Emerson's honor) the approach that creates proximity and identification as well, is ventured: 'Temía la otra sombra, la amorosa, / las comunes venturas de la gente' [He feared the other shadow, the dusk of loving, / the common hazard run by people]. Once again true to himself, the rose reappears, more powerful than ever in its fragility, more powerful than marble or metal. Between the ordinary oppositions he here shows the contrast between the hardness of metal and marble when faced by the rose's fragility, to reunite in this play of opposites, the fortitude and power

of that which is fragile against the weakness of the apparently hard and strong.

No lo cegó el metal resplandeciente  
Ni el mármol sepulcral sino la rosa.

[He was not blinded by the shining metal  
Nor by sepulchral marble, only by the rose.]

The last stanzas of the sonnet that are a reminder of the act of creation, or perhaps of the kind of life the writer chooses to be near his art, also show the shared Borgean vibration when faced by the mystery of poetry. Not like the too-witty Spanish conceptist poet Baltasar Gracián, whom he imagines as splurging in his plays among words even in his afterlife (laberintos, retruécanos, emblemas) [labyrinths, word plays, and emblems], he also imagines that Poe perhaps:

Siga erigiendo solitario y fuerte  
Espléndidas y atroces maravillas.

[Keeps erecting, strong and alone,  
Splendid and atrocious marvels.]

The third American (following the order of this selection) celebrated by Borges is Walt Whitman. The sonnet titled 'Camden, 1892' (Borges 1989/96: 2.291) refers to the place in New Jersey where Whitman spent the last years of his life. Another Borges, with a greater proximity to daily life, shows himself as he evokes the intimate scene: the coffee, the newspapers, Sunday mornings, the vane poetry written by another poet in the newspapers. The great poet, who is already old, presents himself portraying his poverty and his empty gestures like a scene contemplated in a mirror. The barrier between the past and the present suffering, also shows admiringly the resigned understanding the poet has of his old age and how he judges his art with true knowledge:

Casi no soy, pero mis versos ritman  
La vida y su esplendor. Yo fui Walt Whitman.

[I almost am no more but my rhymes keep the rhythm  
Of life and its splendor. I was Walt Whitman.]

'Camden, 1892' is almost an inversion to the sonnet dedicated to Cervantes ('Un soldado de Urbina') [A soldier of Urbina] (Borges



1989/96: 2.256), where the author of *Don Quijote* ignores or imagines mistily the novel he will write. In this case Borges summons the end of Walt Whitman's life, where the poet can already evoke his task as accomplished 'la peculiar poesía de la arbitrariedad y la privación' [the peculiar poetry of arbitrariness and want], Borges had written in 'El otro Whitman' [The other Whitman] (Borges 1989/96: 1.208). It is the end of the life of one of the poets that Borges most admired in his youth, as María Luisa Bastos has acutely observed in the study, 'Whitman, signo visible y marca secreta en la poesía de Borges' [1989/96: 109–121].<sup>3</sup>

In the sonnet 'Rafael Cansinos-Asséns (Borges 1989/96: 2.293) — in *Luna de enfrente*, 1935, a homonymous poem exists — the image of the Spanish poet, critic and novelist appears, exalted because of having read 'Los Psalmos y el Cantar de la Escritura' [The Psalms, and the Songs in Scripture]. Cansinos-Asséns had loved Hebrew voices as much as he loved God's own. Movingly, in the two last rhymes of the sonnet, Borges expresses almost as a prayer, the fervor he felt for his poet:

Acompáñeme siempre su memoria;  
Las otras cosas las dirá la gloria.

[Let me always keep his memory  
The other things shall be said by glory.]

Borges felt admiration for Cansinos-Asséns and he kept unfading memories to the days of his youth when he resided in Spain and embraced ultraism. 'The most important event for me was Rafael Cansinos-Asséns's friendship. I still feel happy to call myself his disciple' we read in 'Las memorias de Borges' (Borges 1974). The assimilation of this poet with the Hebrew people is not a mere referred accident. It is instead the central motive of the development that makes this evocation show Borges's intimate attachment, as he so often has demonstrated in the poem 'Baruch Spinoza' (Borges 1989/96: 3.151), for example.

Nine endecasyllabic quatrains have been dedicated by Borges to Baltasar Gracián, whose distant, faraway figure the poet takes up after his death, differing in this with his treatment of Quevedo and Cervantes. The great distance and a kind of mocking pity compose a portrait where Gracián is evoked because of the light tricks of his style and his many conceptist word play, which places him in an area that is almost nonpoetic. It is a circular text that Borges opens and closes with the repetition of the same rhyme. In opposition to the poems celebrating other Spanish writers, this poem reveals less emotion and seems to have been written with the same practice of poetic knowledge which Gracián doesn't lack and that Borges acknowledges, even after learning about the disdain in

which this conceptist poet held voices such as Homer's or Virgil's and of the indifference shown towards passions that often sustain art.

### First series

Of all these poems 'Un soldado de Urbina' [A soldier from Urbina] seen from a distance, still movingly portrayed and 'Una rosa y Milton' [A rose and Milton], both centered on Borges himself, are surely those who offer the greater semantic density and at the same time an insistent conditional proposition (verbs such as 'I would contemplate' in the first, the repetition of alternate adverse conjunctions such as 'or' in the second). There is no final evaluation in these poems as they end with open possibilities, and they may be considered in their paradigmatic dimension, or in their greater loveliness when compared to other poems revealing aesthetic and emotional uncertainty: it is the uncertainty of the poet that celebrates with a certain amount of shyness the highly respected words of another. Of this first series we shall analyze 'Un soldado de Urbina' [A soldier from Urbina] at the end of this work.

### Second series

Following the discursive method of organization and meaning that lead to the collection of the second series, impels us to gather 'Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241)', 'A Francisco López Merino', 'A John Keats (1795–1821)', 'A un viejo poeta', 'Ricardo Güiraldes', 'A Manuel Mujica Lainez' and even 'A Luis de Camoens' (Borges 1989/96: 2.210) (who has not been included in this text), a dialogistic dimension and a proximity is observed, which Borges the poet establishes with those he celebrates. Doubtlessly, communication is established with these poets, in perhaps a more human and close manner, showing less admiration than that shown to those in the first series, but plainer and strictly limited to the shared literary work as in an open invitation to convivial amity (I remember the well-chosen designation of Giovanni Pascoli). The exception is Francisco López Merino, to whom he also feels attached by the persistent phantom of suicide.

### Third series

A third series is composed of 'Emerson' and 'Camden 1892', which keeps the figure of the poet in a kind of fixed image. Here the poet is addressed

with a most plastic verbalism, as if he were a painting, and the address closes in the first person. This same group could include those authors who are not present in this textual corpus: 'Sarmiento', 'Swedenborg', 'Spinoza' (all included in Borges 1989/96: 2.277, 287, and 308) and 'Susana Bombal' (Borges 1989/96: 2.472).

#### Fourth series

More intellectual homages could be collected in a fourth series, composed of 'Edgar Allan Poe', 'Rafael Cansino-Asséns', and 'Baltasar Gracián'. All of these authors are placed in the past, and the preferred form used is the simple past, like in 'Elvira de Alvear' and 'Susana Soca' (Borges 1989/96: 2.194 and 2.195), which have not been included in this text, and an abundance of negatives are conspicuous: 'no lo cegó el metal resplandeciente / Ni el mármol sepulcral sino la rosa' [He was not blinded by the shining metal, / or the sepulchral marble, but by the rose] in 'Edgar Allan Poe' (Borges 1989/96: 2.290); 'No hubo música en su alma ... / No lo movió la antigua voz de Homero ... / no vio al fatal Edipo en el exilio. / Ni a Cristo que se muere en un madero' [There was no music in his soul ... / Homer's ancient voice did not move him ... / He didn't see fatal Edipus in exile / Nor did he see Christ dying on the cross] in 'Baltasar Gracián' (Borges 1989/96: 2.259). We here perceive an evaluation performed by the poet's interpretation. Only a most negative treatment is observable in the poem dedicated to Gracián because Borges disagrees with his aesthetics.

The different dimensions and the diverse web of relations that Borges establishes emotionally from a dialogic point of view, or in order to communicate or for intellectual reasons, shall culminate in the moving lines of the poem quoted at the beginning of this work, which is included in 'All our yesterdays' (Borges 1989/96: 3.106). An underlying dynamic — I dare say — seems to gather, as was the case in the recollective schemes of classical sonnets, the poets of the past thus honoring the figure of 'the poet'. This produces a confusion and mingling of emotions, loyalties, and destinies that go far beyond languages and nationalities.

In the universe of poetry that this corpus trims to size, we are able to read a search for identity, 'Quiero saber de quién es mi pasado' [I wish to know who my past belongs to] ('All our yesterdays'). The web shows the construction of the poet's identity. The celebrations addressed to writers are mostly in honor of poets and this web is able to show Borges's

identity as writer, in 'All our yesterdays',

Soy los que ya no son. Inútilmente  
Soy en la tarde esa perdida gente.

[I am those that no longer are. Uselessly  
I am those lost people in the afternoon.]

The poem establishes an equivalence with the other poets in life's different stages. Borges seems to declare that if an identity exists, it is that which is formed by the plural articulate utterances of different voices that together constitute the identity, like Kristeva's discursive alter-junctions (1978: 69).

#### 'Un soldado de Urbina' [A soldier of Urbina]

In order to preserve disciplinary order we will adopt the definition of 'isotopy' as proposed by A. J. Greimas (1966), which in turn, was also used by François Rastier (1972) as the repetition of a linguistic unit. As Rastier acknowledges in his analysis of the isotopies of the contents, we will stop in order to point out the syntagmatic development of 'Un soldado de Urbina' [A soldier of Urbina]:

Sospechándose indigno de otra hazaña  
Como aquella en el mar, este soldado,  
A sórdidos oficios resignado,  
Erraba oscuro por su dura España.  
Para borrar o mitigar la saña  
De lo real buscaba lo soñado  
Y le dieron un mágico pasado  
Los ciclos de Rolando y de Bretaña.

Contemplaría, hundido el sol, el ancho  
Campo en que dura un resplandor de cobre;  
Se creía acabado, solo y pobre,

Sin saber de qué música era dueño;  
Atravesando el fondo de algún sueño,  
Por él ya andaban Don Quijote y Sancho.

(Borges 1989/96: 2.256)

[Suspecting himself unworthy of another feat  
Such as the one accomplished at sea,

The soldier became resigned to sordid tasks,  
 While wandering obscurely through his hardened Spain.  
 To efface or appease the fury  
 Of that which is real, he searched past dreams  
 And was given a magic past  
 The cycles of Roland and Brittany.

He would contemplate, once the sun was sunk  
 The wide countryside where a copper radiance perdures;  
 Feeling finished, alone and poor,

Without knowing what music he owned;  
 Crossing the depth of some dream,  
 Where already Don Quijote and Sancho roamed.]

We find two isotopies that rest upon each other. The name of the semantic field of the first is *arms*.

Soldier	=Feat.
Unworthy	=This line implies the impossibility of being acclaimed once more for showing skill at arms.
Crafts	=The mere mention of this semema is bound to the traditional contempt Spaniards in Cervantes' times held for manual labor.
Darkness	=In shadow.
That which is real	=Designates the darkness of sordid tasks.
Past dreams	=The cycles of Roland and Brittany, the world of chivalry.
The past	=The magic time in which his own figure grows larger because of the heroic deeds of fiction.
Radiance	=Implies sunshine reflecting the deeds of the past, during the cycles of Roland and Brittany.
Finished	=Implies the same perspective as unworthy, despicable.
Music	=A way of designating the capacity to create.
Dream	=The impulse of creativity.
Don Quijote and Sancho	=In praise of the greatest novel written in the Spanish Language.

The semantic field of the second isotopy designates the *literary work*.

Soldier	=In the same way a soldier practices the use of his arms, the practitioner or militant writer.
Unworthy	=Not given proper recognition for his previous work.
Crafts	=The job of writing.
Dark	=The work of the writer bound to a late recognition.
That which is real	=The name given to what Cervantes takes from the novels about Chivalry in order to fight against it.
What has been dreamed	=The fantastic world of Don Quijote.
past	=The universe of Chivalry.
Glow	=That which under another name, vertigo, is revealed in writing.
Finished	=The novel concluded to perfection.
Music	=The greatest art of arts that Cervantes' novel deserves as description.

These semic nuclei, opposed where meaning is concerned, refer to that old question, arms versus letters. In this respect in many of Borges's poems, interviews, essays, lectures, our author has disclosed the contradiction existing within himself between what he considered to be the mandate of his ancestors: 'Al Coronel Francisco Borges (1833-1874)' [To Colonel Francisco Borges (1833-1874)] (Borges 1989/96: 2.206) that is to say the fulfillment of a military destiny, and the choice made by him of becoming a writer.

From this perspective the tension of two opposing semes breaches two identities like Cervantes's own refract in Borges, which provides semantic thickness, subjective depth, and plural meanings to the poem. In choosing Cervantes as the center of his reflection, Borges perhaps secretly agrees about how he himself thought when it came to the construction of his own life as a poet.

### Conclusion

In this study we have taken into consideration poets who write in Spanish and others who write in foreign languages that Borges has admired. We have observed the distance or the emotional proximity that the



poet establishes with them, and we have attempted to analyze the poem Borges dedicated to Cervantes according to a semiotic perspective — one in which the theme of identity is approached and the symmetrical relationship between Borges the writer and Cervantes the writer, is revealed.

Translated by Teodelina Carabassa

## Notes

*Author's note:* I wish to thank Elvira Arnoux and Marta Camuffo for their critical reading of the draft of this work.

1. As in that page whose title is 'Una rosa amarilla' [A yellow rose] (Borges 1989/96: 2.173) where Borges imagines a scene where Giambattista Marino, the day before his death, sees (Borges's boldface) the yellow rose. A woman has placed a yellow rose in a cup. He, Marino, by an act of 'illumination' distinguishes it from the books in his library — which up to that time he had considered to be a mirror of the world. This makes the poet appear more human. Homer and Dante, perhaps as well, which had been the conceited Baltasar Gracián's reading material ('Baltasar Gracián' also written by Borges): 'Tan ignorante del amor divino / como del otro que en las bocas arde, / lo sorprendió la Pálida una tarde / leyendo las estrofas del Marino' [As ignorant of divine love / as he is of that other love that burns people's mouths / he was surprised by Pale Death one afternoon / while reading Marinos's stanzas] (Borges 1989/96: 2.259). He also had a revelation that taught him the real thickness of his words.
2. Borges often celebrated the young poet Francisco Lopez Merino, during the dialogues we held between 1980 and 1985.
3. Walt Whitman was one of the American poets that exerted most influence in modern poetry written in Spanish by the poets of South America. It is impossible not to perceive that Pablo Neruda, Silvina Ocampo, and Sara de Ibáñez from Uruguay have read his work, together with a host of others.

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