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Pierre Menard in Context

I. An Infinite Number of Quixotes

According to Hans Robert Jauss, Borges, with "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," anticipated (in 1939) the shift from the classical aesthetic production to the modern aesthetic reception which took place in the 1960s ("The Theory of Reception" 67). Jauss rejects the thesis of an atemporal, universal, absolute meaning of a literary text; for him, a literary work is not "an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period. It is not a monument which reveals its timeless essence in a monologue" ("Literary History" 14). Concerned precisely with the issue of how differences of reading in different historical periods can be accounted for, Jauss postulates the reader's historical *horizon of expectations*, which sets the criteria according to which people read and evaluate literary works in each historical period. Drawing extensively on the hermeneutic theory of Hans Gadamer, Jauss regards the literary text as participating in an endless dialogue between past and present, since the present cultural horizon of the reader will always influence the way a past literary work is understood. Indeed, as Jauss claims, Pierre Menard's discovery of consciously anachronistic reading opens the way for a rehabilitation of the reader ("Theory" 67-68), including Jauss' own theory. Like Jauss, Pierre Menard rejects the thesis of an atemporal, universal, absolute meaning of a literary text and stresses the role of the reader. Yet Menard's attitude is more radical than that of Jauss. Thus, while Jauss argues for a *fusion of horizons* where the text's historical and cultural horizon is embraced by the reader's horizon (*Literaturgeschichte* 132), Menard, by attributing a text to different writers and by placing it in

different contexts, opens the way to an *infinite* number of *Quixotes* (Hayles 139).

In line with Jauss and Gadamer, Daniel Balderston's reading of "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" aims at reconstructing the *hidden context* of this story through attention to its literary and historical references. Like Jauss and Gadamer, Balderston knows that he would never be able to faithfully reconstruct this hidden context, for Balderston's own reconstruction will always be *contaminated* by his own cultural horizon. Yet, fully aware of this limitation, (although he does not mention the name of Jauss or that of Gadamer), Balderston brillantly examines the references to Valéry, Julien Benda, Bertrand Russell, and Cervantes present in "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," while intending to reproduce the debate on pacifism and militarism as it was carried on in the period from 1914 to 1939 primarily in France. Balderston is interested not only in recovering Borges's knowledge of his historical subjects but also in everything that Borges could have read at the time of the composition of his stories.

Because I am also interested in the references present in Borges's stories, particularly in those that lead us to Fritz Mauthner's critique of language,[1] I shall explore here the different notions of meaning underlying the two interpretative positions (the pursuit of the author's and the reader's intentions) introduced in Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" and argue that Borges might have been acquainted with these notions of meaning through Mauthner's *Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Moreover, I shall discuss the motive of the catalogue present in this story, its function in terms of the issue of interpretation raised by Pierre Menard, and show that this fruitful motive can also be traced back to Mauthner's work.

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[1] Fritz Mauthner (1849-1923) was probably the first modern philosopher who argued that philosophical problems are ultimately linguistic problems. His chief merit consists in discovering and developing a hidden tradition of using critique of language as an instrument of philosophical analysis. Posterity, however, has, for the most part, relegated him to obscurity. Yet Borges acknowledged Mauthner's philosophy and often referred with admiration to Mauthner's work. Thus, in 1940, Borges asserted that Mauthner's *Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (*Dictionary of Philosophy*) was one of the five books which he had "reread the most and covered with handwritten notes" (*Obras completas* 276).

II. Establishing a Point of View: The Reader's or the Author's Privilege?

Menard's goal was to write Cervantes's *Quixote*. However, he did not intend to write a contemporary *Quixote* by, for example, transfering Don Quixote to Wall Street or by combining knight and squire as Daudet had done in *Tartarin de Tarascon*. Menard's intention was to undertake a word-by-word repetition of Cervantes's work. For this purpose, he decided to identify himself with Cervantes, learn Spanish well, reembrace the Catholic faith, fight against Moors and Turks, and, ultimately, forget European history between 1602 and 1918. Later, however, after arriving "at a rather faithful handling of seventeenth-century Spanish" (*Reader* 100)[2], Menard rejected this procedure. Thus, through Menard's undertaking, Borges opposes two positions in regard to the interpretation of a literary text, namely, the pursuit of the author's intention and that of the reader's intention. According to the first method, Menard intended to arrive at the *Quixote* by identifying with Cervantes; according to the second, Menard would continue being Pierre Menard and arrive at the *Quixote* through his own experiences.

In Borges's story, the narrator intends to account for both Cervantes's and Menard's intentions. He examines, for example, the expression "truth, whose mother is history" (102). In the narrator's view, Cervantes, by using this expression in the seventeenth century, means only "a mere rhetorical eulogy of history" (102), while Menard, writing in the twentieth century and being a contemporary of William James, means something completely different. According to the narrator's interpretation, Menard is implicitly denying here the correspondence theory of truth; for Menard, truth is not what happened but what we think happened. Furthermore, the narrator also provides us with different interpretations of Menard's possible intention at other places of this story. Thus, he also discusses Menard's intention when pronouncing himself against letters and in favor of arms (in the well known Chapter 38 of Part One of the *Quixote*). The narrator believes that Menard, in his pronouncement in favor of arms, might have subordinated himself to the psychology of the hero or, perhaps, merely intended to transcribe Cervantes's *Quixote*. Moreover, according to the narrator, it is also likely that Menard might have written it under the influence of Nietzsche's philosophy. Ultimately, he also considers the possibility that Menard was simply responding to his "habit of propounding ideas

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[2] English quotations of "Pierre Menard" are cited from Rodríguez Monegal and Reyd's anthology *Borges. A Reader*.

pounding ideas which were the strict reverse of those he preferred"
(101). Whatever interpretation we adhere to, it seems undeniable, how-
ever, that the narrator's account of what Cervantes and Menard might
have meant when using a certain expression or solving an episode in a
certain way, is still *the narrator's* account of it. In other words, the narra-
tor's explanation of Cervantes's and Menard's intentions is the result of
his own reconstruction of both Cervantes's and Menard's frames of
meaning, carried out by someone who is positioned in his own histori-
cally, socially, and culturally conditioned frame of perception. Were the
narrator positioned in a different frame of perception, obviously he
would have arrived at different conclusions regarding both Cervantes's
and Menard's intentions. Borges himself acknowledges the importance
of the frame of reference within which the reader is positioned when
interpretating a literary work. Elsewhere, for example, Borges claims:
"If I were able to read any contemporary page ... as it would be read in
the year 2000, I would know what literature would be like in the year
2000" (*Other Inquisitions* 164).

Therefore, even the author's intention does not prove to be something
fixed and frozen but subjected to debate and interpretation. For his
part, Menard does not seem to find any convincing reason for choosing
to pursue the author's intention instead of taking into account the
reader's intention. Instead of reconstructing exclusively the author's
frame of meaning, he will encourage the reading of a text according to
different frameworks:

> This technique, with its infinite applications, urges us to run through
> the *Odyssey* as if it were written after the *Aeneid*, and to read *Le jardin
> du Centaure* by Madame Henri Bachelier as if it were by Madame
> Henri Bachelier. This technique would fill the dullest books with ad-
> venture. Would not the attributing of *The Imitation of Christ* to Louis
> Céline or James Joyce be a sufficient renovation of its tenuous spiri-
> tual counsels? (103)

Certainly, the meaning of *The Imitation of Christ* -as that of any text
whatsoever- will largely depend on the framework within which we
place it, be it the Christian medieval encyclopedia or -as the narrator
suggests (103) and Umberto Eco claims having applied (Eco 46)-
Ferdinand Céline's frame of meaning. For when we read a text we do
not *discover* in the text something *hidden* but, on the contrary, we *cover*
the text with a multiplicity of discourses, which vary according to time,
place, and the individual reader. Borges shows in "Pierre Menard, Au-
thor of the *Quixote*" (in the context of our reading of it) that there is no
fixed, frozen single meaning to be discovered but diverse meanings

covering the literary text, depending on the context or framework in which the text is read.

III. From Context to Meaning

Let us consider again the expression "truth, whose mother is history" (102). In this example there are at least three things that can be identified with the word *meaning*.[3] First, there is whatever it was that initially Cervantes and then Menard actually meant or intended to say when writing this expression. Second, since this expression belongs to a language, which is a social practice, there is the meaning that the rules of English (of Spanish, in the original) convey to it, preventing us from confusing this expression with, for example, the expression "the girl, whose mother is an historian." Third, there is the meaning that this socially constrained expression acquires in a particular context or frame of reference. Therefore, the expression "truth, whose mother is history," read within the frame of meaning of the seventeenth century results in a mere rhetorical praise of history; within the frame of meaning of Hayden White's discussion of the nature of historical writing, in turn, this expression results in a corroboration of the concept of history as "verbal fictions" (White 82). Because Fritz Mauthner's *Wörterbuch der Philosophie* may be one of the sources through which Borges became acquainted with the three conceptions of meaning mentioned above, I shall examine now those conceptions as they appeared in Mauthner's writings.

As opposed to the dominant view at Mauthner's time, endorsed by logicians like Husserl, according to which there are such things as universal, transcendent meanings which stand to individual acts of meaning as type to token, Mauthner claims that there is no meaning whatsoever apart from the meaning that a word has in use (*Wörterbuch* 1: 147). Furthermore, Mauthner maintains that "in the living language a word cannot be separated from its meaning, just as a living organism cannot be separated from its soul" (*Wörterbuch* 1: 146).[4] "Meaning," Mauthner argues, "belongs always inseparably to the word, and it is impossible

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[3] For a discussion of meaning see Barwise.

[4] "In der lebendigen Sprache ist das Wort von seiner Bedeutung so wenig zu trennen, wie ein lebender Organismus von seiner **Seele** zu trennen ist."

to separate it in the real psychology of thinking" (*Wörterbuch* 1: 148).[5] And he concludes, "meaning is a pure psychological concept" (1: 148).[6]

As we have already pointed out, for Mauthner language is not a thing but its use. By highlighting the psychological dimension of meaning, Mauthner is narrowing the scope of the term *use* to the dimension of the individual's use, emphasizing the role of the subject in the process of meaning. Due to Mauthner's emphasis on the psychological aspect of meaning, the question arises as to whether a word uttered on a particular occasion bears whatever meaning it does because the speaker confers that meaning upon it. However, although Mauthner acknowledges the psychological dimension of meaning (*Wörterbuch* 1: 147), he also recognizes that individual acts of meaning must be understood only against the background of linguistic conventions of usage. Accordingly, a word cannot mean whatever we choose it to mean because language is a social game (*Gesellschaftspiel*), with particular rules that have to be respected in order to ensure communication. Mauthner asserts, "language is only a pseudo-value, like the rule of a game: the more participants, the more compelling it will be" (*Beiträge* 1: 25).[7]

Moreover, Mauthner repeatedly emphasizes the role of context in relation to the meaning of a given expression: "the word is understandable only through the sentence, the sentence only through the situation, the situation only through the whole personality of the speaker, through his whole development" (*Beiträge* 3: 117). In Mauthner's view, language develops and changes through a process of new contextualizations (*Beiträge* 2: 458). He illustrates his point by analyzing the verb *to fly* (*fliegen*) as applied to the motion of an arrow. According to Mauthner, there might have been first a conscious comparison between the motion of an arrow and that of a bird, but gradually the use of the metaphor became unconscious and the verb to *fly* (*fliegen*) came to be applied to any object moving through space (*Beiträge* 2: 461). Conceiving of the change of meaning as an ongoing process, never leading to a goal or closure, Mauthner points out that "'In the beginning was the Word';

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[5] "Immer gehört die Bedeutung unablöslich zum Worte und ist in der wirklichen Psychologie des Denkens nicht von ihm zu trennen."

[6] "Die Bedeutung ist ein rein psychologischer Begriff."

[7] "Die Sprache ist nur ein Scheinwert wie eine Spielregel, die auch umso zwingender wird, je mehr Mitspieler sich ihr unterwerfen."

here, while I am uttering the sixth word, the initial phrase 'in the be-ginning' has already changed its meaning" (*Beiträge* 1: 2).[8]

Not surprisingly, these three types of meaning are at the base of three conceptions of a literary text. Just as there is a crucial difference be-tween the social aspect, the psychological aspect, and the contextual aspect of meaning, so too there is a crucial difference between a literary text—let's say the *Quixote*—as a linguistic object, the *Quixote* according to the author's intention, and the *Quixote* positioned within a particular framework. As a linguistic object the *Quixote* written by Cervantes would have had the same meaning as an actual *Quixote* written by Menard—if Menard had achieved his goal and we had had now a *Qui-xote* written by him—for a text as a linguistic object is shaped by the social conventions of the particular language in which it is written. But we can also attempt to consider the *Quixote* according to the author's intention, that is to say, according to whatever it was that Cervantes actually meant when he wrote the *Quixote*. Further, we can consider the *Quixote* within a particular framework such as the frame of reference of the seventeenth century reader, for whom the text immediately evokes and parodies earlier tales of knighthood, or that of the so-called post-modern reader of the twentieth century who is acquainted with diverse theories of parody. In other words, the meaning of a text is the result of its reconstruction carried out by a reader positioned in her own histori-cally, socially, and culturally conditioned frame of perception. And just as for Mauthner language develops and changes through an endless process of new contextualizations (*Beiträge* 3: 117), so for Borges litera-ture develops and changes when the texts are positioned in different frameworks. And this is the basic point made by Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*"—at least, within the frame of reference of my interpretation.

Indeed, Borges's story (1939) stresses the importance of the framework or context in the process of conveying meaning to a literary text in the same way as Marcel Duchamp (1913)'s ready-made objects emphasize the significance of context in the process of conveying meaning to an artwork. The different possibilities of interpretation arising from plac-ing Cervantes's text in the twentieth century imply that Cervantes's and Menard's texts are not the same text: "The text of Cervantes and that of Menard are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer. (More ambiguous, his detractors will say; but ambiguity is rich-

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[8] For a discussion of affinities between Peirce's and Mauthner's notions of meaning see Dapía, "Body and Mind."

ness)" (101). Similarly, using industrially produced objects, Duchamp demonstrated that changing the context of an object could enable the object to be seen from a different perspective and thus change its meaning. In other words, an object considered in its original industrial context and this object placed in an aesthetic context are not the same object, just as Cervantes's text and Menard's text are not the same text. Thus, Duchamp and Borges are using a similar strategy: the *return* of an object (or of a text) in a different context, which allows the creation of *different* meanings.[9] Similarly, by placing Borges's story in the context of Mauthner's critique of language, I intend to allow the generation of a much more complex literary reality than the one made explicit to the reader of this story.

From a semiotic perspective, Floyd Merrell too identifies "the tension between sameness and difference" in Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author of *Quixote*" ("Prose" 184-185). According to Merrell, in "Pierre Menard," "signs are both identical to themselves and different: they provide for their own *otherness*. That is to say, the entire sphere of signs is One, yet, from the vantage of a given semiotic agent, it is radically pluralistic" ("Prose" 184). Interestingly, the works of postmodernist artists such as Sherrie Levine recall the issues of sameness and difference raised both by "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" and by Duchamp's readymades. Photographing famous artworks and signing her own name to them, as she has done with works of artists such as Rodchenko and Walker Evans, Levine raises again the paradox of the non-identity of what is repeated.[10] Furthermore, the idea that repetition inevitably introduces a *difference* of meaning has been pointed out by Deleuze, who also illustrated his claim with "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote." Deleuze argues that Borges's story shows how "the most exact, the most strict repetition has as its correlate the maximum of difference" (*Différence* 5).[11] With Postmodernism, Borges's ideas about the reader's appropriation of a text, the copy and the original, and the

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[9] On the issue of contextualization raised by Duchamp's ready-made objects see Merrell, *Unthinking Thinking* 217-218.

[10] Also Hans Robert Jauss points out that the paradox of "the non-identity of what is repeated in the temporal distance of repetition" is raised by Borges's "Pierre Menard" as well as by Reception Theory ("The Theory of Reception" 67).

[11] For a study on Deleuze's discussion of the relations between repetition and the production of difference in modern art see Patton 141-156.

changing meaning of a text within different frameworks have gained fresh impetus.[12]

IV. Is a Universal Language Possible ?

A look at Menard's "visible" work may help us make sense of Menard's proposal regarding the interpretation of a literary text, just as don Quixote's library helps us characterize don Quixote. Therefore, from the nineteen "visible" works written by Menard I shall highlight three: a monograph on certain connections or affinities among the ideas of Descartes, Leibniz, and John Wilkins; a monograph on the *characteristica universalis* of Leibniz; and a monograph on the *ars magna generalis* of Raymond Lull. Because Borges devoted his essay "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins" (1952) to Wilkins' universal language and declares Mauthner's *Wörterbuch der Philosophie* as one of his sources, I shall examine Bishop Wilkins' work through Mauthner's account of Wilkins' real script and universal language.

According to Mauthner, the Bishop's main task was to invent a means of communication for the scholars of all nations at a time when Latin ceased to serve as the international scholarly language. Actually, Mauthner claims that the Bishop's goal was to invent if not a universal language at least a real script, namely, "signs that directly correspond to things" (*Wörterbuch* 3: 322).[13] Mauthner compares Wilkins' goal of such a script with "an old Chinese language whose literary monuments Chinese scholars can objectively understand from their written signs although the language itself is no longer known" (*Wörterbuch* 3: 322).[14] According to Mauthner, the Bishop proceded on the assumption that we already had dozens of signs that directly correspond to things, such as mathematical signs (plus sign [+], minus sign [-]) and some signs used in astronomy (for example, the signs used for the sun, the moon, and the planets), which were understood by the scholars of all countries and expressed everywhere in different languages (*Wörterbuch* 3: 322).

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[12] On the similarities between Duchamp's readymades and Sherrie Levine's works in terms of the ideas about appropriation of an art work, the copy and the original, and the value of the object reproduced see Lovejoy 91-93.

[13] "unmittelbare Zeichen für die Dinge."

[14] "eine altchinesische Sprache …, deren literarische Denkmäler von den chinesischen Gelehrten aus den Schriftzeichen sachlich verstanden werden, trozdem die Sprache selbst nicht mehr bekannt ist."

Based on Mauthner, Borges discusses how Wilkins intended to formalize a real script. Borges claims that Wilkins created first a world-catalogue. Wilkins' world-catalogue, Borges states, divides the world into six categories[15] and these categories into forty classes, which are expanded into subdivisions, and these subdivisions are in turn divided into subsubdivisions. Borges describes further—always following Mauthner—how the Bishop arrives from his world-catalogue to a universal language by assigning arbitrary vowels and consonants to each class, subdivision, and subsubdivision of his world-catalogue. As Mauthner ironically points out, the student who attempts to learn Wilkins' universal language only has to keep in mind the immensely difficult world-catalogue, and if he learns by heart the arbitrary vowels and consonants assigned to each class, subdivision and subsubdivision, then he will achieve an enviable basis of knowledge (*Wörterbuch* 3: 325).

Mauthner questions the Bishop's faith in the immutability of the knowledge of his day. Bishop Wilkins, Mauthner claims, could not conceive of knowledge as product of a temporal development. He assumed, according to Mauthner, that the knowledge of his day was changeless and, therefore, regarded the world-catalogue on which his real script and universal language was based as an unchangeable and faithful representation of the order of the world. "Each expansion," Mauthner argues," indeed each fundamental modification of knowledge (and each new generation looks at the world differently) would throw out his system and, with it, the value of his artificial language" (*Wörterbuch* 3: 326).[16] "Just imagine," Mauthner concludes, "trying to use today in chemistry a system of classification of the year 1668" (*Wörterbuch* 3: 326).[17] Mauthner takes the demonstration of the historical transitivity of knowledge to undermine the validity of any form of knowledge. Like any natural language, Wilkins' universal language proves to be, in Mauthner's view, a mere mental construction incapable of reflecting the order of the world.

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[15] The second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth categories corresponded, respectively, to the Aristotelian categories of substance, quantity, quality, action, and relationship. In addition, Bishop Wilkins created a category for those concepts that failed to correspond to real objects; thus, the first category of his world-catalogue encompassed transcendental categories (*Wörterbuch* 3: 324).

[16] "Jede Erweiterung, namentlich jede grundsätzliche Umformung der Welterkenntnis (und jedes Geschlecht erkennt die Welt anders) müßte das System und damit den Wert seiner künstlichen Sprache über den Haufen werfen."

[17] "Man stelle sich einmal die Klasse der chemischen Begriffe vor, wenn heute nach einem System von 1668 gebraucht werden müßte."

Borges, too, questions Wilkins' classification of the world. He claims that Bishop Wilkins' world-catalogue reminds him of an encyclopedia entitled *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*:

> On those remote pages it is written that animals are divided into (a) those that belong to the emperor, (b) embalmed ones, (c) those that are trained, (d) suckling pigs, (e) mermaids, (f) fabulous ones, (g) stray dogs, (h) those that are included in this classification, (i) those that tremble as if they were mad, (j) innumerable ones, (k) those drawn with a very fine camel's hair brush, (l) others, (m) those that have just broken a flower vase, (n) those that resemble flies from a distance. (*Other Inquisitions* 103)

In Borges's example of the Chinese encyclopedia, heterogeneous elements are ordered in different categories according to the reassuring alphabetic organizing principle. As Sylvia Molloy points out, while the lack of common ground for these categories may be disturbing, no less disturbing, within this enumeration, is one of the categories themselves, the (h) or "those that are included in this classification" (121). The inclusion of this category, that represents the whole, in the whole itself results in a paradox: the whole that both contains and is contained by the part. Moreover, this paradox implies that the sequence closes back on itself, so that the diverse elements that we initially take to be separate and distinct collapse into identity.[18] This self-referential field serves Borges to draw our attention to the artificiality of the Chinese encyclopedia itself. The arbitrary nature of the Chinese taxonomy, in turn, brings out the arbitrariness of Wilkins' classification and, ultimately, of any classification, for, in Borges's view, "there is no classification of the universe that is not arbitrary and conjectural" (*Other Inquisitions* 104).

Yet Wilkins was not the only one who was concerned with the idea of a universal language: Descartes and Leibniz were also attracted by this idea. As both Mauthner (*Wörterbuch* 3: 318) and Borges (*OC II* 85) point out, Descartes proposed the invention of a language, easy to learn, pronounce and write, without the logical imperfections of natural languages. Descartes believed that if it were possible to arrive at the entire set of simple ideas from which all complex ideas could be generated and assign a character to each of them, a perfect language could be built. However, according to Mauthner, "Descartes seems to have only played with this idea; for him its realization was possible in idea, not in

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[18] For a study on Borges's appropiations of Cantor's idea of the set that contains itself see Merrell, *Unthinking Thinking* 60-82; Hayles 139-151.

reality. Before that, the world would have had to be transformed into a paradise" (*Wörterbuch* 3: 318).[19] Inspired by Descartes, Leibniz—who, in Mauthner's view, might have known about Bishop Wilkins' work— hoped to accomplish a universal language or *characteristica universalis.* Not surprisingly Mauthner provides us thus with one of the connections that Menard might have encountered between Descartes, Leibniz, and Wilkins: while Descartes awakened the dream of a universal language and Leibniz failed in his attempt of creating one, Wilkins in turn achieved the goal. Moreover, the three of them believed that the world-catalogue serving as a basis for their universal languages reproduced the "true" order of the world. Neither of them seems to have wondered whether the world could be classified in a different way. Never did they consider that any modification of the knowledge of their time might imply a different conception of the world (Mauthner *Wörterbuch* 3: 326).

Furthermore, Mauthner connects the work of Leibniz and that of Wilkins with Lull's *ars magna,* to whom Menard also devoted a monograph. According to Mauthner, four centuries before Leibniz, Raymond Lull constructed a logic machine in his *ars magna.* Moreover, Mauthner claims that Bishop Wilkins' universal language is nothing but an attempt to transform Lull's logic machine into a world-catalogue (*Wörterbuch* 1: 286). Regarding Lull's *ars magna,* Mauthner explains:

> Nine letters represent nine arbitrary categories in a first auxiliary circle (...) and nine equally arbitrary characteristics in a second circle. When two of these letters meet together as a consequence of the rotation of the circles, a kind of word emerges. This word stands symbolically for a sentence of extreme banality. For example, "the goodness is a great concordance or a great difference, be it between God and a carnal human being or between two carnal human beings." *Naturally, the pompous abstraction has to be translated into a human language,* even if only a tautological banality is going to emerge. (*Wörterbuch* 1: 399; italics are mine)[20]

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[19] "Descartes scheint aber mit diesem Gedanken nur gespielt zu haben; er hielt seine Ausführung in der Idee für möglich, nicht aber in der Wirklichkeit. Die Welt hätte denn vorher in ein Paradies verwandelt werden müssen."

[20] "Die gewählten 9 Buchstaben konnten in dem einen Hilfskreise die willkürlichen 9 Kategorien (...), in dem zweiten Hilfskreise 9 ebenso willkürlich gewählte Eigenschaften ausdrücken. Trafen nun bei der Drehung der Hilfskreise zwei soche Buchstaben zusammen, so ergaben sie eine Art Wort, welches symbolisch irgend einen Satz von äußerster Banalität ausdrückte, z. B.:'Die Güte ist eine große Übereinstimmung oder ein großer Unterschied, sei es zwischen Gott und dem sinnlichen Menschen, sei es zwischen den sinnlichen Menschen untereinander.' Wobei natürlich die

Interestingly, a similar reference to Lull's *ars magna* is found also in Borges's *El idioma de los argentinos*:

> It is said that Lull, inspired by Jesus, invented the logic machine, a kind of glorified roulette-wheel (*bolillero*), though with a different mechanism... As we can see, (...) *Lull with his alphabet, which was able to be translated into words and these words, in turn, into sentences [did not] succeed in avoiding language.* (26; italics are mine)

Consequently, Borges rejects Lull's *ars magna* for the same reason that Mauthner rejects it. Lull, Descartes, Wilkins, and Leibniz searched for the world-catalogue; they believed in creating a system that would faithfully represent the order of the world. However, they did not realize that *the* world-catalogue is unattainable, for the simple reason that no system can avoid language and its particular ordering of our sense-experiences.[21] Similarly, Menard —who knew about the search for the world-catalogue undertaken by Lull, Descartes, Wilkins, and Leibniz— intended to arrive at *The Quixote* of Cervantes, as if there were a single, timeless, and absolute meaning of a text. But Menard, as we have seen, will displace the center from the author to the context, implicitly acknowledging the fact that there is no single representation of a thing but many descriptions of it, depending on the framework in which we place it.

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geschwollenen Abstraktionen erst in eine Menschensprache übersetzt werden muß-ten, wenn auch nur eine tautologische Banalität herauskommen sollte."

[21] For a discussion of Borges's use of Mauthner's notion of a "world-catalogue" see Dapía, *Die Rezeption der Sprachkritik Fritz Mauthners* 140-147.

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