William Woof

Borges, Cervantes & Quine
Reconciling Existence Assumptions and Fictional Complexities in "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote"

> *By extending quantification definitionally we accomplish the introduction of fictions; but we may still add further definitions in order to make our fictions behave more like real entities – i.e., in order to make our fake names amenable to various contexts in which genuine names occur…*
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> *We cannot, even in our transcendent universe, allow a new entity to be determined by every formulable **condition** on entities; this is known to lead to contradiction in the case of the condition "Ů(xÒx)" and certain others. A transcendent universe transcends the controls of common sense.*
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> W. V. O. Quine,
> "A Logistical Approach to the Ontological Problem."

The converse philosophical problems of ontological commitments ("what is?") and negative existential propositions ("what isn't?") originate in Plato's *Parmenides* and centre on the question as to how we can, in any sense, understand the non–being or non–existence of an entity without contextualizing it according to the properties and characteristics of existence. W. V. O. Quine has been particularly concerned to frame the issue in terms of quantificational logic, arguing that ontological commitment must be recognized not through proper names but through the quantification of variables. This allows us to range over a large domain of real entities (to whose existence we commit) which may be instantiated as needed in particular cases.

In Quine's view, we may understand the non–existence of an entity without incurring any subsequent confusions between naming and meaning whereby we must in some sense acknowledge some element of being in a non–existent entity in order to arrive at its meaning. By

granting that the mental idea of a fictitious entity must be conceded some form of ontological status, we open the door to scenarios of possible worlds, or what Quine refers to as a "slum of possibles", which in turn "is a breeding ground for disorderly elements" ("On What" 4).[1] Meaning does not presuppose existence –and in conjunction with this assertion, we must be wary of granting ontological status to universals, properties or attributes. In short, Quine's project entails the rejection of both second order logic (which allows us to quantify over properties) and quantified modal logic (which may distort reference to actual entities through the introduction of modal or essentialist considerations). As Pascal Engel states:

> According to Quine's thesis, the notions of nominal reference, of existence, of predication, of truth and of identity are so closely tied to one another and to the notion of objectual quantification, that it is impossible to analyze any one of them without using the others. (77)

However, Quine's theory, (or, more specifically, Bertrand Russell's Theory of Descriptions, which has come to be known as "the 'no name' theory of singular terms" and which Quine stipulates as the only source of such terms) does not facilitate any meaningful analysis of empty sets that may be relevant to works of fiction. "Hamlet killed his uncle" is a false assertion (since there was no such historical personage as Hamlet) and yet it is true in the context of Shakespeare's play. We can address this problem through free logic, or logic that facilitates reference for non–denoting expressions, but Quine is reluctant to venture into deviant logics because of the fact that we lose "the rewards of staying within the bounds of standard grammar" (*Philosophy* 79), those rewards being extensionality, efficiency, completeness. But we are still left with a problem with respect to fictional works that now seem to be bereft of the stricter modes of logic for the purposes of literary analysis. What we need is a procedure for assigning truth values within fictional contexts.

This problem may be less of an issue for logic per se (whether logical form follows grammatical form) than for theories of meaning themselves. Robert Scholes notes that Plato's denunciation of poetry as "beautiful lies" would not rule out "a level of meaning" at which fic-

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[1] It can be contested whether or not Quine objects to "the mental idea of a fictitious entity" as such. His claim is likely restricted to a more modest assertion as to whether meaningful expressions can designate nonexistent entities. (I am grateful to Dr. W. Abbott for pointing this out.) This thesis will proceed on the conclusion that his essay "On Mental Entities" lumps together all mental entities as "a hindrance to science" (226).

tion could be deemed to be "true" in terms of its depicted situations and the moral truths it conveys and yet be false in the literal sense (119). Scholes then goes on to note that on the basis of such a possible level of meaning, Aristotle detected an advantage in verisimilitude and mimesis, that reconstruction of reality which posits universal forms of action applicable in all possible depictions of reality. As Scholes notes, Aristotle was interested in distinguishing poetry from history for the purposes of demonstrating the applicability of the laws of probability across all possible worlds:

> The superiority of poetry over history was its ability to represent not actuality itself but the typical. Whereas history was limited to describing events as they actually happened, poetry could present hypothetical events as they might well happen. The agents in poetic action were universal in that they said and did things one would expect from men of certain types. Their actions were consistent in that they followed laws of probability and necessity. Its consistency, its universality, and its representation not of actuality directly but of the laws governing actuality constituted the superiority of poetry over reporting. (120–121)[2]

However, the domination of postmodernism in literature over the past sixty years has resulted in the introduction of literary works that lack (or deliberately confuse) clear delineations between actual and possible worlds. Among these works is Jorge Luis Borges's short story, "Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*".

Borges's story depicts the fictitious character of Pierre Menard, a philosophical dabbler and literary dilettante who, according to the story's narrator, believes that without recourse to copying or transcription of any sort he can produce a word–for–word duplication of *Don Quixote*, the seventeenth century masterpiece of Spanish literature. Menard imagines that he can accomplish this reconstruction entirely through

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[2] Scholes notes that poetry, history and philosophy were fused in the epics of Ancient Greece, with the result that philosophers such as Metrodorus of Lampsacus, a disciple of Anaxagoras, searched great works of poetry for allegorical meanings by which "physical meanings" were assigned to the characterizations of both humans and gods (Achilles represented the sun, Helen the earth, etc.) in a massive system of symbolic representation. As Scholes notes: "This tradition of Homeric allegoresis was well established at the time of Plato's birth, and it constituted, by the time he came to write the *Republic*, an important element in Greek philosophical speculation."(118) Aristotle's attempt to separate poetry and history will be examineded later in this paper in the attempts of Cervantes to fuse them together. (Novalis attempted a similar enterprise.) The creation of vast systems of symbolic representation will be reflected in the philosophical enterprises of Raymond Lull.

his own experiences and without necessarily assuming the identity of the text's author, Miguel de Cervantes. The story is narrated by a pompous, naive admirer who lauds Menard's preposterous enterprise as praiseworthy, certainly praiseworthy to no lesser degree than other intellectual exercises, all of which are deemed useless. At the end of story, he foolishly indulges the fantasy of imagining literary works being produced by other authors in anachronistic sequence and concludes with the Platonic notion that "every man should be capable of all ideas."[3]

Into this superficially simple story, Borges has built numerous difficulties and complexities, much of which bear on our logical comprehension of fictional undertakings and most especially that text which serves as the story's source. *Don Quixote*, considered to be one of the most important precursors of the modern novel, is fraught with paradoxical constructions and violations of the principles of verisimilitude. The character, Don Quixote, transforms the stories of chivalry and knighthood he reads into absurdly caricatured and literal recreations: wind–mills become the frozen form of giants, inns become castles to be seized. At one point in the second book, Quixote even attacks the puppets in a puppet show under the delusion that the historical personages from legend represented by the puppets had come to life (Book II, 171). The character is thus deemed mad because of his inability to distinguish life from literature – or, more exactly, because he assumes the ironic ability to conflate wisdom with knowledge, sanity with insanity. (It is the wise man who appears insane because the ideals he sees as essential for civilised progress seem ludicrous to his fellows.) In modern critical evaluations, Quixote's imitations of chivalric bravery are compared to the process of verisimilitude itself: "the hero, a born imitator, defines himself by a function clearly analogous to literature, which (...) pretends only to reproduce, represent, and imitate some real aspect of life"(Robert 113).

In *Don Quixote*, Cervantes attempts to blur the distinctions between the form of the fiction and its content. Cervantes serves himself up as a character in his own work, as we discover one of his books (*Galatea*) in Quixote's library during an inspection by the local curate and the barber, the former claiming a direct acquaintance with the author within the context of his own book (I, vi, 86). The text of *Don Quixote* is found to exist within the book itself in the form of a manuscript written by a

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[3]. "Todo hombre debe ser capaz de todas las ideas…" (*OC* 1:450).

Moor, Cid Hamete. Cervantes thus denies the authorship of his own text within the very text he has written, thereby imbedding within the book a paradox of self–referentiality (and thus incurring an incidence of Russell's paradox, which, as noted by Quine, exposes us to the danger of "a transcendent universe transcending the controls of common sense"). At one point in the text, we find Don Quixote and Sancho Panza reading Cid Hamete's historical text, quizzically disputing as to how the author could have known about their actions when they were alone. If we imagine this text as projected into the infinite regress entailed by logical consequence, we would presumably discover them reading about themselves reading the text, a circumstance of self–referentiality certain to leave them even more puzzled.

Borges's story of Pierre Menard extends the modal context of Cervantes's fictional world by creating in the title character a replication of Quixote himself. Like Quixote, Menard is an imitator, one who acts out fiction in real life, but it is an "acting out" which pertains to form, to the acts of creation of the books he reads rather than to their contents. Like Quixote, he too possesses his own library, but the fantasies he acts out are authorial rather than chivalric. The explicit connections between Menard's study of metrical laws, paradoxes, symbolist logic and symbolist literature will be analyzed at greater length in the course of this paper, but for now it is important to note that Borges has taken the complexities of Cervantes's work –its blurring of modal distinctions between actual and possible worlds, its manipulations of self–referential paradoxes– and placed them in a twentieth century context that both enhances and transforms these elements. What may become apparent from a comparative study of Cervantes and Borges are the differences and even the incommensurabilities between historical periods which affect the way fictional works can be interpreted, logically analyzed or subjected to literary criticism.

The satirical thrust of *Don Quixote* was directed at the plethora of false historical writings which abounded in Cervantes's day. The book repeatedly asserts itself as a "true history", in spite of the fact that it acts out a drama already written as an historical record by a Moorish author who by virtue of his race would have been regarded in Cervantes's day as a liar (Wardhopper 80–94). Borges, aware of this satirical intent, selects the following passage from *Don Quixote*, a description of "truth" as assiduously copied by Menard, as indicative of the irony latent in two different interpretive ascriptions:

> …truth, whose mother is history, who is the rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, example and lesson to the present, and warning to the future. (*Ficciones* 36) [4]

The pompous narrator of Borges's story, oblivious to the satirical intent of *Don Quixote* and the consequent irony contained in the passage, dismisses Cervantes for his "mere rhetorical eulogy of history".[5] Menard, on the other hand, is praised for invoking William James's famous and controversial assertion: "Truth happens to be an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events."(James 201) For James, the truth of a proposition was determined from the process of its verification, the same point made by Cervantes in his attack against bogus historical accounts and thus applicable by extension to Menard's bogus re–enactment of *Don Quixote*.

But Borges is also making a more important point. Identical passages in literature can be subject to significantly different interpretations over time and this has been particularly true of *Don Quixote*. According to eighteenth century standards of verisimilitude, the central character was originally interpreted as an absurd, pathetic buffoon incapable of making distinctions between fantasy and reality, a view conducive to the increasingly scientific worldview of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. In the twentieth century, when deconstruction, fallibilism, existentialist concepts of the absurd, and Feyerabend's denial of scientific method have become the norm, Quixote is seen as a tragic rather than a comic figure, a representative of modern man. This modern view is captured by Charles Aubrun:

> He [Quixote] knows that it is necessary to practice excess in order to find his limits and know himself. By turning reason upside down, by exposing its other side, madness, Don Quixote bears witness, in his way, to the philosophic trend which would break down the extremes of logic, the sophistries ... of Aristotle's epigones, the abstract mechanical rationalism of human reality. (60)

Borges understood the sorties of madness against the "extremes of logic". His essay on paradoxes concludes with this exhortation:

> Let us admit what all idealists admit: that the nature of the world is hallucinatory. Let us do that which no idealist has done: let us look

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[4] "… la verdad, cuya madre es la historia, émula del tiempo, depósito de las acciones, testigo de lo pasado, ejemplo y aviso de la presente, advertencia de lo por venir" (*OC* 1: 449).

[5] "… un mero elogio retórico de la historia." (*OC* 1: 449)

> for the unrealities that confirm that nature. We shall find them, I be-
> lieve, in the antimonies of Kant's and in Zeno's dialectic. (*Other* 114)[6]

It must be noted that Borges is here granting these concessions in order to refute idealism, but he is also fascinated by the possibility of discovering an ancillary value in "practicing excess", in setting up within his fictional domains the opportunity to "search for unrealities". If the scientific method of the modern age is to be dominated by loss of method and uncertainty principles, then Borges finds no difficulty in developing fictional characters who pursue unprovable conjectures, especially those that relate to "unreal" or quixotic ventures. Readers and critics who accept the scientific worldview of the twentieth century are far more likely than their seventeenth and eighteenth century counterparts to take such ventures seriously and less likely to dismiss them out of hand as comic buffoonery.

In extending the boundaries of *Don Quixote* into a modern context through enhancements of traditional narrative devices which become used for blurring distinctions between fact and fiction, Borges very likely considered the possibility that his story would not only mirror the process and the content of Cervantes's masterpiece, but the history of its critical evaluation as well. His achievement in creating in Menard a character who mimics Quixote's absurd habits of imitation might be matched by a transformation in the critical evaluation of Menard from a comic to a tragic figure (a change which has not yet taken place). If such a change occurs, if we come to see Menard as a tragic figure, then we must consider the possibility of taking him seriously in the same way that literary critics now take Don Quixote seriously. We must thus come to appreciate the assault of madness on the "extremes of logic"; we must try to accept a tentative postulation of "the hallucinatory nature of the world".

Thus, the objective of this paper will be the provision of a philosophical basis for altering the current literary evaluation of Borges's story. "Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*," is not, as is usually depicted in the critical literature, the portrayal of a literary plagiarist whose visible writings constitute a pretentious dabbling or "some kind of displacement of other writings" (Borinsky 154). Rather, the story can be seen to constitute a philosophical thought experiment of considerable com-

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[6] "Admitamos lo que todos los idealistas admiten: el carácter alucinatorio del mundo. Hagamos lo que ningún idealista ha hecho: busquemos irrealidades que confirmen ese carácter. Las hallaremos, creo, en las antinomias de Kant y en la dialéctica de Zenón" (*OC* 1:258).

plexity, one that establishes Menard in Borges's pantheon of intellectually sophisticated impostors. The standard evaluation has been long established because Menard's claims to have written *Don Quixote* are *prima facie* absurd –and Borges enhances this view by using the traditional narrative device of a pompous and foolish narrator who lavishes extravagant praise on his subject and appears to ignore the more comic implications of Menard's activities (e.g., his burning of his preliminary manuscripts). Once Borges has established this mindset in the reader, a tendency is created to bypass or gloss over the visible works in Menard's oeuvre in a similar manner and thus the possibility that Menard is using these works to establish a philosophical justification for his claim to authorship of *Don Quixote* can be missed. This paper will attempt a detailed examination of these visible works not only to show the nature of the justification sought by Menard but also demonstrate (in conjunction with other works by Borges) how this justification sets up a philosophical thought experiment which is valuable in itself.

The visible works are largely focused on three areas. The first covers the history of symbolic logic: from its origins in Raymond Lull's primitive attempts to build systems of symbolic representation, through to the enhancements of this enterprise in the works of Wilkins, Leibniz and Boole, and finally to the difficulties faced by logicians in the paradoxes identified by Bertrand Russell and others. The second area covers the history of the literary movement known as Symbolism while the third presents an analysis of the classics of chess and poetry from Spanish literature. Menard's narrator does not give us sufficiently detailed abstracts for any of these visible works, so much of the work of this paper will be given over to elucidating their subject matter and the derivations from their philosophical sources. When this is done, it should be apparent that the complex of ideas that can be generated from the visible works are sufficient to give legitimate philosophical justification to Menard's enterprise, a justification constructed in terms of a thought experiment. By exploiting the historical philosophical debates between realism and idealism (debates traceable from the visible works), one can build a case for justifying Menard's absurd claims to authorship of *Don Quixote*, a case founded on establishing the novel as a set of independent concepts subject to independent discovery by different men and thus not constituting the unique invention of a particular individual. The singular weaknesses of realism and idealism to be exploited are the issues of how ideas themselves can have independent existence (the weakness of idealism) and the failure to move from certainties of common sense to certainties of epistemology (the weakness

of realism). Menard's project falls through the cracks between realism and idealism by exploiting differences in worldview and in standards of literary evaluation between different historical periods and by demonstrating that all symbolic ascriptions, whether pertaining to logic, literary movements or methods of classification, are necessarily arbitrary.

Thus, the value that Aristotle detected in the verisimilitude of fiction (i.e., its facility for representing the typical rather than just the actual) created a corresponding problem: how to establish true statements within fictional contexts, especially fictional contexts as used both by Symbolists and by Cervantes in *Don Quixote* that blur the distinctions between actual worlds and real ones and that give support to Menard's enterprise through the recognition of one's own work in the work of one's literary predecessors. This problem has a very serious historical dimension, since the standards of literary criticism that govern the understanding and application of verisimilitude have undergone transformations analogous to those in scientific worldview. As previously noted, this concept of verisimilitude has functioned as a correlative to concepts of universality and probability. In modern theory, it links together rationality and belief with assessments of states of affairs relating to the frequency of occurrence of events. In Aristotle's judgement, the quality of fiction was based on the degree of its correspondence to real life in terms of its "probability" or "necessity" (Ramsey 289–290). In Cervantes's period, the term was used to praise highly standardized characters and situations. (Shakespeare was criticized on these grounds.) In Borges's era, the term had been taken over by the "New Critics" to praise the use of paradox and irony in poetry and fiction (Ramsey 289–290). The transition to postmodernism is marked by the change from singular to multiple versions of literal truth which can co–exist simultaneously.

Here, then, we are brought back to Quine's approach to quantificational logic. In many respects, he advances the approach taken by Bertrand Russell in withholding logical consideration from fictional worlds (all propositions related to which were deemed to be false – de facto), and it is noted that both Russell and Quine take a dismissive approach to the notion of permitting quantification to modal logic. Yet the development of semantics for modal logic and the possibilities it has opened for the application of truth conditions to intensional contexts has led to serious consideration of the "reality" of possible worlds and increased questioning of Quine's standards of ontological com-

mitment. Modern logicians such as Stephen Read and Pascal Engel have taken note of the increasing interest in applying logic to what Engel describes as "alternative histories" of the real world (151), which would include those falling within a fictional domain. This would suggest that we need a method of dealing with the "as if" or the "virtual" ontologies of fictional worlds in a manner similar to that of real world ontology. All that is required are logical enhancements which allow us to distinguish true statements within fictional contexts. As Stephen Read points out, we (or at least literary critics) need to be able to talk about the activities of fictional characters in a meaningful way. We need to be able to assert that "King Lear was the father of Regan and Goneril" is a true statement within the context of Shakespeare's play. Read suggests the use of a fictional operator to clearly contextualize the fictive world as distinct from the real one, such that we could make meaningful statements about such domains. But, as Read goes on to note, such an operator presents enormous difficulties, since we would require a manifold of such operators to cover the various permutations of fictitious worlds: e.g., parodies of Hamlet, in which it might be true that Hamlet and Laertes do not kill each other (127).

Problems of this sort had been seriously considered by Quine, who harboured deep suspicions of propositions (covering all expressions of belief and desire) as bearers of meanings. But, as Pascal Engel points out, Quine's "radical rejection" of propositional meaning will cost us our ability to conduct common sense discussions "in the absence of finer differentiation of what was believed, understood or said."[7] On this basis, Engel claims that he should be able to assert the truth of Einstein's energy equation without needing to understand either its proof or its propositional construction. This is a claim of moderate realism, and one that echoes that of Menard, who also wishes to assert the truth of his absurd claim without provability; and what is fascinating about this claim is its obvious failure to pass the test of common sense while avoiding dismissal on any epistemological grounds.

The nature of Borges's thought experiment in "Pierre Menard" should now be examined in more detail, as the story provides evidence that Menard sought out (and was correct in accepting) philosophical justifi-

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[7] "... when two people say something, must we refuse to talk about the contents of what they are saying or to admit that they could be saying or believing the same thing? If propositions are only terms that are convenient to designate what is true or false, what is believed, understood or said, the notion has a theoretical interest which is not negligible" (Engel 34).

cation for his enterprise. The first indication of this attempted justification is found in the distinction made by the narrator between Menard's "visible" and "subterranean" works. While the latter consists solely of the infamous "Don Quixote" project, the former is taken up with studies of literature and philosophy that are (apparently) seriously motivated although often pedantic and imbued with unintentionally comic undertones. The alert reader will note the direct references to the writings of Leibniz and Russell and remember that it was Russell himself who was responsible for detecting that Leibniz had both an "invisible" philosophy (one he kept hidden from the public) as well as the visible one which was believed, before Russell, to have encompassed the full scope of his philosophy.[8]

According to Russell (*History* 591), it was Leibniz who discovered mathematical logic a century and a half before George Boole first brought algebraic notation to logic and successfully devised an algebra of propositions in 1847. (Leibniz had kept this secret because he didn't think his contemporaries would believe findings that contradicted Aristotelian logic, and he feared the censure that would follow if he published them). Leibniz had devised this logic to support his "*Characteristica Universalis*",[9] a scheme by which metaphysical problems could be "calculated" and solved in a manner similar to that of mathematics. The logic was based on a scheme of conceptual enumeration organized according to a set of rules paralleling those of language or grammar – and this system bore a marked resemblance to schemes already put forward by Descartes (in 1629) and John Wilkins (in 1688). Again, the alert reader will note that Menard's visible works include essays on Boole's symbolic logic, on Leibniz's *Characteristica Universalis* and on "certain affinities" between the works of Descartes, Leibniz and Wilkins. It must be concluded that in seeking to advance his project, Menard is hoping for an historical payoff in the almost certain transformation of the contemporary worldview, the hope that what would today be regarded as a patent absurdity will come to acquire a future

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[8] Russell published his results in *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (1900). Russell notes that Leibniz had communicated his esoteric philosophy to Antoine Arnauld in a series of letters, but that its significance was overlooked. This esoteric work was published by Louis Couturat in two volumes (1901, 1903).

[9] For purposes of convenience (if not for strict accuracy), this essay will use Leibniz's neologism "*characteristica universalis*" to refer both to the system of universal notation (which, strictly speaking, is what the characteristica covers) and the consequent system for formal analysis and calculation, the "calculus ratiocinator". I am presuming that Menard's monograph would cover both of these aspects.

legitimacy. It can be argued that Menard seeks a personal identification with Leibniz as much as he does with Cervantes.

The notion of "affinities" brings out the second justification for Menard's enterprise, that of simultaneous and/or independent discovery. Leibniz's discovery of infinitesimal calculus coincided with that of Newton's. Russell and Peano had independently founded logicism. Frege and Peirce had separately developed theories about quantificational logic. Such notions of "affinity" are important to Menard's thesis that he and Cervantes could "independently" discover *Don Quixote*, although the difference between the discovery of a set of theorems and the entire set of concepts that comprise a work of fiction of the length of *Quixote* is "obviously" not easy to bridge. This introduces the problem of vagueness, or that of the sorites paradox: the difficulty, that is, of drawing the line with respect to the complexity of concepts such that we could accept that one set but not another was subject to independent discovery. Both Russell and Frege believed that vagueness points out a weakness in ordinary language, a weakness that suggests the need for an ideal language of concepts (a parallel to Menard's aspiration for an ideal vocabulary of "poetic" concepts). It is also interesting that Russell believed that human mortality exerts only an artificial limitation on our ability to discover and verify knowledge –"a mere medical impossibility" (*Problems* 23)–, thus suggesting that Menard could duplicate Cervantes's achievement if granted a lifetime long enough to accumulate the necessary experiences. Or, as Menard puts it, "My undertaking is not essentially difficult, … I would only have to be immortal in order to carry it out" (*Ficciones* 33). [10]

Thus, the philosophical justification that Menard undertakes in support of his enterprise consists of a reconstruction of the history of symbolic logic which came to fruition in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a history whose roots can be traced back to the thirteenth century attempts of Raymond Lull to develop a symbolic vocabulary. His "*Ars Generalis Magnus*" was the precursor to the subsequent efforts of Wilkins and Leibniz, and elaborated a form of algebraic notation designed to create a universal language for expressing metaphysical principles. Menard then follows this theory into the later work of work of John Wilkins, who devised a methodology for developing a vocabulary such that each word would define itself through the symbolic representa-

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[10] "Mi empresa no es difícil, esencialmente (…) Me bastaría ser inmortal para llevarla a cabo" (*OC* 1:447).

tions of concepts. By constricting meaning in this way, Wilkins seems to anticipate the Grelling and other semantic paradoxes that require the stipulation of a metalanguage in which the existence of paradox is rendered impossible.[11]

Menard is also led into a lengthy consideration of the problem of paradoxes, as his one full–length book, *Les problèmes d'un problème* (a takeoff on works by both Russell and James, both of which are entitled *The Problems of Philosophy* and address the problems of paradox), deals at length with Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the tortoise and the various solutions that have been developed over the centuries. Borges himself was fascinated by this paradox and had provided a brief history of the purported solutions in his essay, "Avatars of the Tortoise" (*Other*). Aristotle's solution would have proved highly instructive from Menard's point of view, since the Aristotelian refutation entails collapsing distinctions between forms and the objects represented. Aristotle postulates that if two or more men share properties that originate in a form, then such an archetype must be a "third man", who along with all the other men represented by the archetype must be represented by a new form, and so on. As Borges notes:

> Two individuals are not actually needed: the individual and the class are enough to determine the third man postulated by Aristotle. Zeno of Elea uses infinite regression to deny movement and number; his refuter uses infinite regression to deny universal forms. (*Other* 111)[12]

The content of the chapter of his book that Menard dedicates to Russell provides an interesting topic of speculation, since Russell (at an early point in his career) used universal forms to support his own arguments in favour of realism. He had devised a response to Plato's criticism in the *Parmenides* that the one cannot be unified since it partakes of being and must therefore be plurality. Russell had argued that the concept of being as applied to numbers is vague, since numbers don't have real existence (*OC* 1: 255n).

Of greater interest is the dispute over realism that centres on the version of the Achilles/tortoise paradox put forward by Lewis Carroll in his fable, "What The Tortoise Said to Achilles" (501–504). Carroll de-

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[11] Grelling's paradox is constructed around the sort of "built–in" structure of meaning used for autological words (i.e., "short" is a short word).

[12] "En rigor no se requieren dos individuos: bastan el individuo y el género para determinar el *tercer hombre* que denuncia Aristóteles. Zenón de Elea recurre a la infinita regresión contra el movimiento y el número; su refutador, contra las formas universales" (*OC* 1: 255).

picts a conversation between the Tortoise and Achilles after their famous race in which the tortoise reconstructs one of Euclid's syllogisms, i.e., the demonstration that two sides of an equilateral triangle must equal the third. The tortoise refuses to accept the syllogism unless the logical law of validity (truth of premises guarantees truth of conclusion) is inserted as an additional premise. But the tortoise will then not accept the new syllogism unless an additional premise is inserted: i.e., the same law of validity only expanded to include three premises instead of the two previously used. The tortoise thus creates an infinitely expanding argument whose conclusion can never be accepted by inference. This new version of the paradox turns on the same category/membership distinction as the previous rendition ("the third man"), but this time with a new twist. In Carroll's story, the distinction being collapsed is that between laws (in this case the laws of logic) and the states of affairs they govern. As Pascal Engel points out, what is at stake here is the acceptance of logical necessity, of an understanding of logical truths as a "special category of non–empirical, non–natural facts bearing on an independent reality".[13] The tortoise takes the anti–realist position of refusing to accept such logical laws as self–evident and insisting that they be included as part of the proof of the very states of affairs to which they are to be applied. This point is brought out by Jerry Fodor, who makes his case for realism with respect to machine intelligence by citing Carroll's example:

> There is a point of principle here – one that is sometimes read in (or into) Lewis Carroll's dialogue between Achilles and the Tortoise: not all the rules of inference that a computational system runs can be represented just explicitly in the system; some of them have to be, as one says, "realized in the hardware". Otherwise the machine won't run at all. (23)

Thus, Menard, who makes his treatise on Carroll's paradox the one book–length item in his visible works, is right to quote Leibniz's warning against believing the tortoise. Menard's enterprise in one respect depends on a realist conception of *Don Quixote* as an abstract entity, as an independent set of integrated concepts that one "discovers" rather than "invents" –and as a discoverer, Menard can make an equal claim to authorship with Cervantes. But the realist conception will not work without clear distinctions between types of attributes, between univer-

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[13] "The propositions of logic are necessary because they are objective in the sense that they describe a universe of facts or of situations that could not fail to exist." (Engel 257)

sals and particulars, between forms and appearances, between the analytic and synthetic, between laws and the states of affairs that they govern. Menard's fascination with universal languages and the laws governing the use of such languages reflects a similar ambition on the part of Russell and Frege. The difference between Russell and Menard is the fact that the former sought out a universal language for the purposes of clarity and for avoiding the vagueness that Menard needs to justify his claims by way of the sorites paradox. Menard, on the other hand, needs *both* the realism and the paradoxes that go with them, and so his ideal vocabulary of concepts is a poetic and not scientific one. This is the heart of the thought experiment that Borges creates: if realism postulates a universe of logical truths which are applicable (in Leibniz's view) to all possible worlds, then how do the same principles of realism also justify Menard's absurd and solipsistic enterprise? Borges is interested in determining whether or not the answer to this question lies in the ideal world itself and thereby involves Menard in the same deception used by the tortoise: the failure to separate logical laws from the propositional constructs to which they apply. (Thus Menard's warning against the tortoise is ironic: the tortoise is giving away Menard's game by calling into question the same assumptions of the a priori, given nature of logical truths that underwrite all versions of realism, including Menard's.)

As a result, Menard is fascinated by the history of symbolic logic and seems to follow it from its alchemic, scholastic origins in Lull through nineteenth century attempts to establish logicism as an absolute science and finally to its ultimate failure in paradox. The period of Menard's writings as recorded in the visible works are coincidental with the period of Russell's major writings and seem to follow the philosopher's gradual turn away from realism. (By the 1930's, Russell had adopted the belief that objective knowledge is largely based on interpretation and a holistic consistency of one's belief system. Thus, Menard's narrator is justified in his assertion that "a philosophical doctrine is in the beginning a seemingly true description of the universe" (37)[14] which decays and degenerates over time.) Yet Menard's visible works not only demonstrate his fascination with symbolist logic but an equal and contemporaneous fascination with the symbolist movement in literature. Menard himself is described by his pompous narrator as a "Symbolist",

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[14] "Una doctrina filosófica es al principio una descripción verosímil del universo" (*OC* 1: 449–450)

and the visible works evidence this through his writings in Symbolist journals and his friendship with the Symbolist poet, Paul Valéry.

Symbolism, as a literary movement, advocated not the rigid designation of fixed meanings, the primary tenet of symbolic logic, but the advancement of multiple, metaphoric meanings, often with mythical or iconographic overtones.[15] The movement gives strong impetus to Menard's project since it advocates a sort of "*déjà vu*" in reading or interpreting literary works. Baudelaire, one of the founders of Symbolism, noted that reading the works of Edgar Allan Poe (one of the authors cited by Menard's narrator) for the first time triggered a "recognition" of literary works he had already imagined writing. The movement was also characterized by its confusion of the imaginary world with the real –and this conflation was at least partly due to the change in the literary assessment of *Don Quixote* that originated in Symbolism's precursor movement: German Romanticism.[16] Finally, Symbolism shared with symbolic logic the obsession for developing a universal language based on altering basic grammatical rules.[17]

No such language is, of course, possible since, as is made clear in the story of Achilles and the Tortoise, there is no way to separate the rules of a language from its meaningful content without invoking a meta-language or type theory. Quine himself accepts that there is no ultimate grounding for the rules of logic and that even the basic rules of bivalence cannot determinably eliminate such nuisances as the sorites paradox. He supports bivalence on the grounds that it is right for us "to reason as if our terms were precise,"("Bivalence" 92) and it is thus incumbent for scientists to try, as far as possible to achieve the type of precision in measurement that is normally conducive to classical logic.

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[15] Hans–Georg Gadamer was responsible for bringing this movement back into the realm of philosophy through his advocacy of multiple meanings and his perspectival, non–objective focus on interpretation.

[16] Luis Murillo notes the changes in the literary assessment of *Don Quixote* that had occurred prior to the end of the nineteenth century, addressing "the multiple antithesis discovered in the book, illusion and reality, idealism and common sense...." that ultimately centred on the complex irony latent in the text (48–49).

[17] At least one Symbolist, Francis Vielé–Griffin, shared with Menard the desire to abolish the Alexandrine, the classical verse metre of French literature. The Alexandrine was the classical form of French verse (twelve syllable line) and its use was subject to strict rules, adapted by each literary movement in French histroy. The Valery poem mentioned by Menard, "*Le Cimetiere Marin*", was deliberately written in decasyllables to achieve the same effect as the Alexandrine, so Menard's attempt to rewrite it in Alexandrines would have effectively ruined it.

But this "as if" leads to a problem pointed out by Jacques Derrida in his analysis of Kant's categorical imperative (190): i.e., the need to postulate the "as if" entails the postulation of a fictitious realm without any standard logical rules to govern such a realm. So although Quine would argue that we should be able to indicate or at least estimate an exact point along the spectrum of human concepts, a determinate threshold beyond which the complexity of idea clusters would constitute a unique and inimitable achievement of a single individual, the fact remains that we can only assert such a truth without any claim to its provability. We intuitively understand our ability to deal logically with both actual and fictitious entities while having no explanation for the paradoxes that such activities engender. We have no airtight refutation of Menard's project.

This project builds on the difficulties of understanding and analyzing fiction in a logical manner. Even classical, realistic fiction that functions in a straightforward, veridical manner requires a considerable intuitive grasp of the principles of free logic, quantification and probability theory in order to gain a Quinean precision applicable to any knowledge claims that could be made on behalf of fiction, specifically the differences between actual and fictitious entities. But as we have already noted, the Menard story exceeds the verisimilitude of classical fiction and complicates the paradoxes of the Don Quixote story it subsumes.

As previously discussed, the fundamental paradox centres on the paralleling (through the sorites paradox) of Menard's claim to independent discovery of the novel with the independent discovery of scientific concepts. But Menard's separate claim to personal identification with both Cervantes (explicitly) and Don Quixote himself (implicitly, through his "quixotic" behaviour) also extends the fictional world of *Don Quixote* into a secondary fictional realm which is continuous with the original. *Don Quixote* itself is based on a set of paradoxical structures: the first part of the novel is a written document for characters in the second part to read (although Part I was allegedly written after the events of Part II) and we find Don Quixote and Sancho Panza reading about actions that they committed while alone. (So we thus have the possibility of infinite regress through Quixote as a character in the novel he is reading coming across a passage where he would depicted as reading the novel he is reading).

The fact that Menard is extending this fictional world outward into his own world (which is exactly what the Don Quixote character does with his own library and its tales of chivalry) is captured when Borges takes

note of Menard's conviction that he can arrive at *Don Quixote* through his own experiences:

> This conviction, let it be said in passing, forced him to exclude the autobiographical prologue of the second part of *Don Quixote*. To include this prologue would have meant creating another personage – Cervantes– but it would also have meant presenting *Don Quixote* as the work of this personage and not of Menard. He naturally denied himself such an easy solution. (33) [18]

Apart from the obvious humour (Menard's denial of personal identity with Cervantes and his claim to arrive at *Don Quixote* through his own experiences means he can no longer share authorship with Cervantes but must deny Cervantes the authorship of his own work), Menard claims that he must avoid Cervantes's passages of direct self–reference (the autobiographical section in question refers to Cervantes's denunciation of a writer who wrote a fabricated version of his story under the name of *Don Quixote*), although it is clear that such an avoidance means that he will have to give up arriving at *Don Quixote* through his own experiences (on pain of excluding the passage in question and thus writing a "different" novel). Menard must revert to his first idea of sharing personal identity with Cervantes in order to participate in such passages of self–referentiality and thus extend them outwards into his own world. (Such passages are humorous in their own right solely within the context of *Don Quixote* since Cervantes had set up Cid Hamete as the author of the work. He then steps out of the fictional context to create an authorial intrusion into the text through which he claims back ownership of a text whose authorship he had already denied.) We thus have Menard extending a fictional context through an absurd "authorial intrusion" of his own that mimics the genuine authorial intrusion (thereby extending his own fictional context) inserted in *Don Quixote* by Cervantes himself.

The confusions created by these shifts of context within fictional domains are the subject of the various semantic paradoxes, which function by means of self–reference and must be eliminated in formal logic through the imposition of type restrictions, such as those introduced by Russell. This type theory entails the establishment of hierarchies of properties such that first order properties are separated (for purposes

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[18] "Esa convicción, dicho sea de paso, le hizo excluir el prólogo autobiográfico de la segunda parte del don Quijote. Incluir ese prólogo hubiera sido crear otro personaje –Cervantes– pero también hubiera significado presentar el Quijote en función de ese personaje y no de Menard. Este, naturalmente, se negó a esa facilidad." (*OC* 1:447)

of logical analysis) from second order properties, second order proper-
ties from third order, and so on. Type theory found its counterpart in
Tarski's material adequacy condition, which had the same effect of
banishing paradoxes of self–referentiality through the creation of a
"metalanguage" which, in turn, succeeds by making the paradox inex-
pressible in the metalanguage. The point driven home by Borges in
"Pierre Menard" is the fact that fictional worlds, which are difficult
enough to subject to logical analysis in their classical forms, require a
similar hierarchy of domains to protect against these same forms of
self–referential paradoxes. Frederick Copleston notes (431) that one
consequence of this structure of hierarchies is the fact that we can no
longer speak in terms of "the world" or the totality of languages, since
by definition we can no longer have a complete world or a language
which subsumes all the rest, for such a "class of all classes" cannot
(without paradox) be an entity in itself. Such hierarchies would have to
be infinite in number.[19] This notion fascinated Borges, who in his essay,
"The Total Library" (*Reader* 94–96), imagined a library of infinite con-
cepts which would include "an accurate catalog of the library" and
since such an infinite catalog would be an impossible construct, a Can-
torian power–set larger than the infinite library itself – "the proof that
the catalog is fallacious"(96) – the library itself becomes a paradox: a
self–contradictory entity whose existence is impossible and unprovably
so, since it is still a conceptually possible entity (i.e., it is possible to
imagine an infinite sequence of concepts in which each individual con-
cept can be linked isomorphically to a catalogue entry in a library).

It has been previously noted that one of the main themes of *Don Qui-
xote* centres on the nature of the conflicts between historical reality and
the idealism of fiction, and this theme is worked out structurally in the
novel through the use of paradoxical constructions that conflate real
and imagined worlds within the context of the novel itself. Don Qui-
xote extracts from his books of legends and romances a set of idealized,
chivalrous goals that are absurdly acted out in real life. It was Borges's
achievement to realize, in the construction of "Pierre Menard", that this
conflict between realism and idealism could apply not only to the col-

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[19] Saul Kripke attempted to avoid these expanding hierarchies by postulating a pro-
cedure for semantic closure. In Kripke's view, the expanding hierarchies (using
Tarski's truth predicate) would have to reach a "fixed point", at which the expan-
sion stopped. The continuing expansion would reach a point of diminishing returns,
until further reinterpretations failed to add additional semantic value (Read 164–
165).

loquial or literary meanings of these terms but to the nineteenth century philosophical movements themselves. This achievement can be made more clear if we compare "Pierre Menard" to another story of Borges, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", which also concerns the transplantation of an idealized world into the real one and deals more explicitly with the relationship between philosophical idealism and realism.

With "Pierre Menard", the understanding of realism has been developed in accord with the actual symbiosis between realism and paradox and the ways in which the former generates the latter. Menard's enterprise is prima facie absurd, but it is clear from his catalogue of visible works that he can legitimately attain genuine philosophical justification for this project. If men are capable of the independent discovery of identical scientific theories, they are also capable, through the sorites paradox, of the independent discovery of identical novels. And if such discoveries can be made synchronously, they can be made diachronically as well, as in the case of Omar Khayyam and Edward FitzGerald, wherein the spirit of the former allegedly infused the latter across a span of seven hundred years.[20] This would then justify the Platonic notion that two men with similar attributes –and thus an equal capacity for producing identical literary works– thus partake of the same eternal archetype, a notion which, according to Aristotle's theory of the third man, opens the floodgates to infinite regress paradoxes. From these ideas, we can draw the conclusion that a novel must itself be a complex, interlocking set of concepts having independent existence, a cluster which is capable of independent "discovery" by several men but cannot be "invented" by any one.

But this notion leaves us with a complication: how can ideas which are the basis of human thought and the grounding of idealism itself have independent existence? What does Menard mean when he states as his ultimate objective the notion that "every man should be capable of all

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[20] Borges was fascinated by the notion that a common man could partake of the dream or experience of a famous predecessor and thereby claim to have some association with him or to share in some way with his personal identity. Borges cites the case of Edward FitzGerald, the Victorian poet, whose translations of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam are now accounted by critics as works of English literature in spite of the fact that they are translations. (Scholars are now divided as to whether FitzGerald's work is an adaptation or translation.) Borges contemplates that "perhaps the soul of Omar lodged in FitzGerald's around 1857". According to Borges, Khayyam did believe in the transmigration of souls and it is conceivable that the two poets are, in fact, aspects of a mysterious third (cf. "The Enigma of Edward FitzGerald", *Other* 78; *OC* 2: 68).

ideas"? Does this mean that we should be capable of independent dis-
covery as per realism or that we should be capable of collective solip-
sism as per idealism? And if every man is capable of all ideas, then
how do we make discriminations among them to measure their objec-
tive value. Do we have the personal identity which Hume denies or are
we subject to the associationism of ideas which would seem to deny
any principle of discrimination (i.e., there is no "central administrator"
within the self to direct the endless sequential flow of ideas). Without
such a principle, we would be left with the nightmare of Borges's total
library; i.e., a compendium of all concepts that lacks any principle of
hierarchy or organization.

These are some of the notions Borges addresses in his story "Tlön,
Uqbar, Orbis Tertius". The story concerns a fictitious civilization, Uqbar,
which existed in Asia Minor during the twelfth century. The evidence
for its existence comes from a purported misprint in an "Anglo–
American Encyclopaedia", which is itself a reprint of the *Encyclopaedia
Britannica*. It transpires that the literature of Uqbar never made reference
to real worlds, (i.e., Uqbar has only a marginal notion of verisimilitude)
but to an imaginary world called Tlön. Further investigations by the
protagonists of the story reveal the existence of a "First Encyclopaedia of
Tlön", a multi–volumed compendium of universal, compossible knowl-
edge related to this imaginary world, including its geology, mathemat-
ics, astronomy, geometry, etc. This mythic encyclopaedia has been pre-
pared by a secret society of professionals over the course of three centu-
ries, with each generation charged with the task of handpicking the suc-
cessors who will carry on the work. A complete set of the forty–volume
work was discovered in 1944 and hailed as a major find. The work was
so popular that its fictitious knowledge and history replaced that of the
real world, or as Borges's narrator states:

> Now, in all memories, a fictitious past occupies the place of any
> other. We know nothing about it with any certainty, not even that it
> is false. (*Ficciones* 21) [21]

Our narrator is able to discover the reason for this displacement in the
human fascination for all orderly systems, even for barbarously effi-
cient systems such as National Socialism. This fascination with orderly
systems of knowledge in the real world is tempered by the fact that
such systems have a realist foundation: they are based on "divine
laws" about which we can have only a limited understanding. How-

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[21] "Ya en las memorias un pasado ficticio ocupa el sitio de otro, del que nada sabe-
mos con certidumbre - ni siquiera que es falso" (*OC* 1: 443).

ever, the Tlön system is infinitely more fascinating since "it is a laby-rinth plotted by men" (21)[22] and its idealistic foundations are thus fully comprehensible.

Borges has thus produced a story which bears striking thematic simi-larities to "Pierre Menard": i.e., a multi–hierarchical fictional domain which gradually and absurdly imposes itself on the real world, just as Don Quixote draws idealized concepts from his tales of chivalry and then acts them out in the real world, a world in which "true history" is being gradually displaced by fiction. The Tlön story has its own im-plausible events: physical artifacts from Tlön (a tiny metal cone which is extremely heavy relative to its size) turn up in the Brazilian jungle, suggesting a very sinister ease of transition across possible worlds. The transposition of such objects from a fictional world into the real one is doubly ironic, since the language of Tlön is based on a phenomenalistic denial of the existence of such objects.

Tlön's universe of compossible knowledge is founded on a language which "presupposes idealism"(10). The various dialects either dispense with nouns altogether and replace them with impersonal verbs or compounded adverbs, or else create artificial nouns constructed out of agglomerations of adjectives. This results in the replacement of object nouns such as "moon" by compounds such as "airy–clear over dark round"(11). In accordance with the idealist objective of denying the spatial existence of objects in favour of the properties and/or sensa-tions of which they are constituted, ideal entities are allowed an almost unlimited expansion[23], with the result that "poetic objects" can be arbi-trarily created "according to poetic necessity"(11).

It must be noted that this idealist program was the subject of one of Menard's visible works which, as described by Menard's narrator, con-sisted of:

> A monograph on the possibility of constructing a poetic vocabulary of concepts that would not be synonyms or periphrases of ordinary language, 'but ideal objects created by means of common agreement and destined essentially to fill poetic needs'. (30)[24]

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[22] "Tlön será un laberinto, pero es un laberinto urdido por hombres" (*OC* 1: 443).

[23] The narrator makes reference to "the lesser world of Meinong" (11).

[24] "Una monografía sobre la posibilidad de construir un vocabulario poético de con-ceptos que no fueran sinónimos o perífrasis de los que informan el lenguaje común, 'sino objetos ideales creados por una convención y esencialmente destinados a las necesidades poéticas'" (*OC* 1: 444).

Such a vocabulary would give clear support to Meinong's principle of unrestricted free assumption (granting ontological legitimacy to all describable objects, regardless as to whether or not they were fictitiously posited), which in turn has value for Menard's objective of easy transitions across fictional domains and the transposition of idealized concepts back into the real world. But more valuable still is the support Menard garners from idealism on behalf of his objective of partaking in the personal identity of Cervantes. As the Tlön narrator notes of this world:

> In literary matters too, the dominant notion is that everything is the work of one single author. Books are rarely signed. The concept of plagiarism does not exist; it has been established that all books are the work of one single writer, who is timeless and anonymous. (15) [25]

But a paradox arises from the fact that this same notion of universal authorship is also derived from the Platonistic countermovements that arise in Tlön.[26] This confusion may turn on a simple distinction between personal idealism and social idealism which is not clarified either in either the Tlön story or in "Pierre Menard." What is probably more to the point is Borges's repeated assertion that while it may be easy to understand idealism, it is notoriously difficult to think within its limitations ("New Refutation of Time" *Other* 186; *OC* 2: 149). It is thus extremely impressive that the writers of the Tlön Encyclopaedia could have achieved a completely compossible universe (fictitious though that universe might be) based strictly on idealist doctrines.[27]

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[25] "En los hábitos literarios también es todopoderosa la idea de un sujeto único. Es raro que los libros estén firmados. No existe el concepto del plagio: se ha establecido que todas las obras son obra de un solo autor, que es intemporal y es anónimo" (*OC* 1: 439).

[26] In support of this "realist" notion, Borges uses one of his favourite quotations from Schopenhauer: "All men who repeat one line of Shakespeare *are* William Shakespeare" (*Ficciones* 14n.): "Todos los hombres que repiten una línea de Shakespeare, *son* William Shakespeare" (*OC* 1: 438n).

[27] In the Tlön story, Borges notes that Johann Valentin Andreä, the real–life founder of Rosicrucians, had been among the first to mention Uqbar in his writings and was likely one of the founders of the secret society of Encyclopaedists who subsequently moved to America in the 1820's. It is interesting to note that one of Andrea's contemporaries, Johann Heinrich Alstead, published in 1630 an encyclopaedia with a Platonic bias which subsequently become popular in the thirteen colonies and is listed by Frederick Copleston as one of the first influential works of philosophy in the United States. The relocation of Borges's encyclopaedists to America in the 1820's roughly coincides with the establishment of the Transcendentalist Club in Boston in 1836 by Ralph Waldo Emerson. This society was dedicated to Emerson's

What is even more impressive is the fact that Tlön's idealism is not static, that this created world does in fact have a history of philosophy which over time evolves its own set of realist countermovements which in turn elaborate (humorously) the paradoxes to which idealism is prone. One is reminded of the remark by Menard's narrator that:

> A philosophical doctrine is in the beginning a seemingly true description of the universe; as the years pass it becomes a mere chapter –if not a paragraph or a noun– in the history of philosophy. (37) [28]

This exhaustion of idealism is made apparent in the Tlön story, wherein all disciplines of learning are subordinated to psychology. While associationism may invalidate science, this does not stop the proliferation of numerous pseudo–sciences. Borges further notes that

> The metaphysicians of Tlön are not looking for truth, nor even for an approximation of it; they are after a kind of amazement. They consider metaphysics a branch of fantastic literature. (12) [29]

Borges is fond of quoting Hume's remark about Berkeley's idealism: i.e., that Berkeley's arguments "were not only thoroughly unanswerable but thoroughly unconvincing"(10).[30] So it would seem that Borges's criticisms of idealism –and the basis of his previously cited comments: "Let us admit what all idealists admit: that the nature of the world is hallucinatory." (*Other* 114)– are double–edged. Idealism is unanswerable in the sense that we can only gain access to reality through our conceptions. But it is also unconvincing because of our intuitive suspicion that reality is independent of the mind. As Borges notes:

> We (the indivisible divinity that operates within us) have dreamed the world. We have dreamed it strong, mysterious, visible, ubiquitous in space and secure in time; but we have allowed tenuous, eter-

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idealist philosophy, utopianism and to a "renewal of the world" through the pursuit of intuited knowledge. Henry David Thoreau was among the famous individuals associated with this group (Copleston 254,265).

[28] "Una doctrina filosófica es al principio una descripción verosímil del universo; giran los años y es un mero capítulo –cuando no un párrafo o un nombre– de la historia de la filosofía" (*OC* 1:449–450).

[29] "Los metafísicos de Tlön no buscan la verdad ni siguiera la verosimilitud: buscan el asombro. Juzgan que la metafísica es una rama de la literatura fantástica" (*OC* 1: 436).

[30] "Hume notó para siempre que los argumentos de Berkeley no admiten la menor réplica y no causan la menor convicción" (OC 1: 435). The passage from Hume that Borges paraphrases reads as follows: "He [Berkeley] professes, however, in his title page (and undoubtedly with great truth) to have composed his book against the sceptics as well as against the atheists and freethinkers. But that all his arguments, though otherwise intended, are in reality merely skeptical appears from this, that they admit of no answer and produce no conviction" (154).

nal interstices of injustice in its structure so we may know that it is false. (*Other* 115) [31]

Borges would not regret this paradox that underwrites the long standing debate between realism and idealism, a paradox that creates an uneasy symbiosis between man's aspiration to assert his power over universal knowledge through idealism and the disconcerting intuitions derived from realism that such aspirations are ill–founded. After all, this paradox has been the basis of Borges's most imaginative fictions, not the least of which is Pierre Menard's project, which creates such an absorbing philosophical puzzle in the study of one man's efforts to gain access to the authorship of another and to effectively utilize philosophy itself to justify this absurd enterprise. His project seems to fall through the cracks between realism and idealism – and it does so because their mutual criticisms do not always address each other's weaknesses but seem rather to prolong the debate and create a dialectic interdependence between the two movements, one that is the basis of their joint symbiosis. Borges notes that the philosophical practices of Tlön include the Hegelian predilection for creating point/counterpoint comparisons between opposing philosophical movements:

> Works of natural philosophy invariably include thesis and antithesis, the strict pro and con of a theory. A book which does not include its opposite, or 'counter-book,' is considered incomplete. (16) [32]

This remark brings us back to Borges's problem of the total library which proliferates an infinity of ideas. If, as Menard claims, all men are capable of all ideas, then there would be no objective or automatic basis for discriminating or evaluating ideas. But, as Menard would be aware from the studies related to his visible works, realism fares little better, since it is faced with the equally difficult task of determining which objects of consciousness have independent existence and which don't.

Distinguishing between mentally generated phenomena (e.g., dreams, hallucinations), phenomena dissociated from objects (light from dying stars) and genuine, object related phenomena caused difficulties for late nineteenth century realists in determining objects of knowledge

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[31] "Nostros (la indivisa divinidad que opera en nosotros) hemos soñado resistente, misiterioso, visible, ubicuo en el espacio y firme en el tiempo; pero hemos consentido en su arquitectura tenues y eternos intersticios de sinrazón para saber que es falso" (*OC* 1: 258).

[32] "Los de naturaleza filosófica invariablemente contienen la tesis y la antítesis, el rigurosos pro y el contra de una doctrina. Un libro que no encierra su contralibro es considerado incompleto" (*OC* 1: 439).

and the extent to which objects could possess independent existence. One solution which divided realists was representationalism, an approach which avoided problems with hallucinations and light from dying stars by breaking the direct connection of subject with object. It also had the advantage of creating an inference to the existence of physical objects. But regardless of the prospective solutions considered, this brand of realism encountered difficulties in fulfilling its agenda for moving from a common sense understanding of the world to an epistemological one. As Frederick Copleston notes:

> The fact of the matter is, of course, that on the level of common sense and practical life we can get along perfectly well. And in ordinary language we have developed distinctions which are quite sufficient to cope with sticks partially immersed in water, converging railway lines, pink rats, and so on. But once we start to reflect on the epistemological problems to which such phenomena appear to give rise, there is the temptation to embrace some overall solution, whether by saying that all the objects of awareness are objective and on the same footing or by saying that they are all subjective mental states or sense–data which are somehow neither subjective or objective. (392)

Thus Menard would likely have been aware that realist solutions get bogged down in the same mire that afflicts idealist solutions (note, for example, how both a Borgesian idealist and a naive realist would both willingly abandon nouns for adverbs to avoid the spectre of mental representations) –and he certainly would have known that this common fate would guarantee the success of his own enterprise. It is common sense and not epistemology that condemns Menard.

The weaknesses of realist theories which break the direct connection between subject and object are exploited by Borges in the Tlön story, where culturally accepted norms –as in the "paradox of the coins", whose refutation by the idealist culture is based in part on "the blasphemous intention of attributing the divine category of *being* to some ordinary coins" (14) [33]– are shown to contaminate the epistemology derived from them. The realist is now exposed to the subsequent dangers of contextualism (and the incommensurability theories associated with them) which in turn are made the focus of searching criticism in the Pierre Menard story, becoming the targets of one of the narrator's more prominent *faux pas*.

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[33] "el blasfematorio propósito de atribuir la divina categoría de ser a unas simples monedas" (*OC* 1: 438).

In comparing the original text of *Don Quixote* with Menard's transcription, the narrator asserts that the latter is "infinitely richer" and despite the fact that text and transcription are identical, he insists that the two can be subjected to a meaningful comparative analysis. Selecting a passage that singles out the rigorous approach to truth as the rightful pursuit of historians, Menard's narrator elicits a complex irony that links the fictional domain of *Don Quixote* to that of the Menard story. The passage used in "Pierre Menard" reads as follows:

> … truth, whose mother is history, who is the rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, example and lesson to the present, and warning to the future. (36) [34]

In *Don Quixote*, this passage is given by the novel's "second narrator"(I: 57), the man who has discovered at the beginning of the novel evidence that there is at least a "story" about Don Quixote and, on account of the bravery and chivalry displayed by such a noble character, is convinced (rather implausibly) that there must also be a "history". Not only does this narrator claim to know the titles of the books of legends in Quixote's library (and thus that he is a real personage), but he also claims to have made the chance discovery (in a common market place) of the Arabic manuscript (written by Cid Hamete) containing Quixote's history. Engaging a Moor to do the work of translation, the narrator notes the natural proclivity to lying of the Arabic races and is certain that a historical work written by an enemy of the Spanish knights will not be accurate since it will not sufficiently embellish the praises due to such knights. Truth, which the narrator had previously castigated as "the devourer of all things"(I: 54) for allowing such tales to be lost, is now praised as "the preserver and eternizer of great actions"(I: 57). Thus, what Menard's narrator describes as "a mere rhetorical eulogy" (36) [35] is actually an ironic panegyric, one that holds up "truth" as a universal ideal to which all races should aspire but only the Spanish have achieved. But this panegyric is based on the second narrator's suspicions rather than on any historical facts:

> … yet, if we consider that they are our enemies, we should sooner imagine that the author has rather suppressed the truth than added to the real worth of our Knight; and I am the more inclinable to think so, because it is plain that where he ought to have enlarged on his praises,

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[34] "… la verdad, cuya madre es la historia, émula del tiempo, depósito de las acciones, testigo de lo pasado, ejemplo y aviso de las presente, advertencia de lo por venir" (*OC* 1: 449).

[35] "… un mero elogio retórico…" (*OC* 1: 449).

he maliciously chooses to be silent; a proceeding unworthy of an histo-
rian, who ought to be exact, sincere, and impartial… (I: 57) [36]

He finishes with the claim that such a history should be "entertaining",
and if it fails to be such, it is the mendacious author who is to blame.

Menard's narrator very likely understands the subtlety of this passage
since he claims that the eulogy was written by "the 'ingenious layman'
Cervantes" (36).[37] But then the irony of his own analysis completely
eludes him when he goes on to note how the identical passage has a
completely different meaning in a twentieth century context:

> History, *mother* of truth; the idea is astonishing. Menard, a contempo-
> rary of William James, does not define history as an investigation of
> reality, but as its origin. Historical truth, for him, is not what took
> place; it is what we think took place. The final clauses –*example and
> lesson to the present*, and *warning to the future*– are shamelessly prag-
> matic. (36) [38]

In fact, the meanings are identical, since Cervantes's second narrator
manipulates historical accounts to his own advantage as brazenly as
Menard. Menard, in fact, extends this exploitation of the text from one
fictional domain to another, for just as the second narrator stands out-
side the Cid Hamete text in order to make jingoistic evaluations of his-
torical truth on its behalf, so Menard stands outside the Cervantes nar-
rative (including both the Hamete text and the commentary of the sec-
ond narrator) in order to make his own self–serving claims. History is
no more an "investigation of reality" for Cervantes's second narrator
than it is for Menard.

Thus, we can take the passage cited by Menard's narrator and read it
as it stands independently of its context in *Don Quixote*; i.e., as a uni-
versal maxim directed against the very manipulations of history that
constitute the objective of the speaker of these words (the second narra-
tor) within the context of *Don Quixote*. So, in point of fact, one would

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[36] "… aunque, por ser tan nuestros enemigos, antes se puede entender haber queda-
do falto en ella que demasiado. Y ansí me parece a mí, pues cuando pudiera y debi-
era estender la pluma en las alabanzas de tan buen caballero, parece que de indus-
tria las pasa en silencio: cosa mal hecha y peor pensada, habiendo y debiendo ser los
historiadores puntuales, verdaderos y no nada apasionados…" (II,ix,118).

[37] "ingenio lego" (*OC* 1: 449).

[38] "La historia, *madre* de la verdad; la idea es asombrosa. Menard, contemporáneo de
William James, no define la historia como una indagación de la realidad sino como
su origen. La verdad histórica, para él, no es lo que sucedió; es lo que juzgamos que
sucedió. Las cláusulas finales –*ejemplo y aviso de lo presente, advertencia de lo por venir*–
son descaradamente pragmáticas" (*OC* 1:449).

properly heed the moral of the passage by conducting an independent appraisal of the perspective and motivations of those advancing arguments on behalf of differing claims for historical truth. In short, one takes the philosophical posture of a realist. But this, of course, is the very position that idealists and pragmatists alike deny – and their denials gain strength because of the fact that the requisite mental representations used by the realist impede the transition from common sense to epistemological certainty needed to facilitate such independent appraisals. If truth is conditional, culturally bound, and constantly subject to further revisions, then we cannot stand outside of our historical perspective. Historical truth can only be what *we think* took place. And yet it can't be what we merely think took place since by this admission we concede what Borges has already elucidated as the idealist doctrine of universal authorship. (All events and entities are allowed, by the principle of unrestricted free assumption, an unlimited ontology and the capacity to traverse across a range of possible worlds. Metaphysics is thus reducible to literature, the domain of which must be the work of a single, timeless, anonymous author.) With this admission, Menard's project becomes fully validated.[39]

Thus, to sum up the nature of the thought experiment created in "Pierre Menard", we need to return to an understanding of Menard's manipulation of the philosophical issue of personal identity and how his project for partaking of the identity of Cervantes through a duplication of *Don Quixote* runs counter to traditional notions of being, reference and identity as used in classical first order logic and as advocated by Quine. The "Pierre Menard" story underscores the traditional need for facilitating the logical analysis of fiction (apart from theories of description which declare all fictional statements to be false), one that may be found in free logic or in Meinong's principle of unrestricted free assumption. But its postmodernist premises also make possible an analy-

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[39] As a realist, Bertrand Russell was suspicious of James's attempts to distance himself from idealists such as Hegel and Bradley and to present pragmatism as an alternative to the continuing debates between Rationalists and Empiricists. Russell notes that James's "use of the phrase 'pure experience' points to a perhaps unconscious Berkeleian idealism". He also notes that pragmatism falls victim to an infinite regress condition when it attempts to evaluate a historical event based on the practical consequences it engenders. For example, if we judge that the fact that Columbus's voyage took place in 1492 is validated by the good consequences of the event, then we need an additional valuation of this judgment to determine whether our belief in the good results of the Columbus voyage itself has good consequences, and so on. (Russell "Descriptions" 813, 817)

sis of fiction that challenges classical existence assumptions or devia-
tions from the literary principles of verisimilitude. The "Pierre
Menard" story builds on a base of paradoxes established in Miguel de
Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, developing this foundation into a more chal-
lenging engagement of traditional philosophical debates between real-
ists and idealists. Such debates focus on issues of identity and historical
veracity, particularly when studied in conjunction with other Borges
stories and essays which address the impact of idealism on fictional
worlds. In all these cases, it is shown that Menard's project, which can
be defeated by common sense, fails to be refuted on epistemological
grounds because of the failure of both realism and idealism to bring
key issues to a resolution. In all such cases, Menard's project falls
through the cracks – and it turns out that there are no philosophical
grounds for exposing the falsehood of his enterprise, just as there is no
basis for demonstrating the falsehood of antiquated and incomprehen-
sible scientific theories such as those of Paracelsus.

As Borges has brought idealism to a dead end, it is left to Menard to
explore, in the studies backing his visible work, the scientific solutions
arrived at by the realists. As we have seen, realists began to rely on
mental representations to give them some epistemological basis for
sorting out real entities from fictional or hallucinatory ones. However,
this reliance ultimately cost them the epistemological basis they sought
since direct access to objects was lost. The exclusion of fictional entities
from formal logic became one of realism's foundational presupposi-
tions, one accepted on faith or as a given. Formal logic was also built
on the foundational mystery of a priori laws separated from the states
of affairs they govern, as we have seen in the fable of Achilles and the
Tortoise. Moreover, such a logic had to be built on a universal lan-
guage or symbolic notation that excluded any troublesome fictitious
entities and forged its own arbitrary links between real ones. Menard
takes his investigation of symbolic logic (so favoured by Russell and
the realists) back to its origins in the speculative logical systems of
Raymon Lull. And it turns out that Lull's symbolic associations point
to a system of scientific reasoning as detached (and therefore as inc-
ommensurable) from our modern system as that of Paracelsus.

Item "f" of Menard's visible works lists a complete monograph on the
Ars Magna Generalis of Raymon Lull.[40] As with Paracelsus and his pro-

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[40] A periodical specializing in Lullian studies, the *Revista Luliana*, was published
between 1901 and 1905. Menard's monograph was published in 1906, after the ces-
sation of this periodical.

clivity for comparing unrelated physical processes – and then finding an arbitrary or astrological symbolic function to justify the comparison – Lull sought a method for comparing physical processes related to medicine, herbalism, zoology, etc. by seeking to schematicize such processes according to various categories; i.e., similarity and difference, beginning to end, superior/inferior, etc. These in turn were plotted on a set of concentric circles which, when turned, not only facilitated a patterning of such comparative processes but traced these processes back to a common origin in a set of divine attributes. Lull did not believe that all such combinations would produce legitimate or worthwhile comparisons, but he did think that this process could form the basis for building valid, deductive arguments.

Leibniz agreed with him. Four centuries after Lull made his discoveries, Leibniz wrote on Lull's methods and devised a syllogistic table for creating all the various combinations of premises and conclusions (Gardner 18). Both men were fascinated by the possibility of applying this system to a universal compendium of knowledge by creating symbolic representation of elementary combinations that in turn could be built into more complicated ones through a logical language of symbols. Martin Gardner notes: "it is only in the dimmest sense that Leibnitz can be said to anticipate modern symbolic logic. In Lull's case, the anticipation is so remote that it scarcely deserves mention"(18). This realization would not worry Menard, whose purpose in tracing back the history of symbolic logic would seem to have more to do with demonstrating that great enterprises in science and logic share common origins with alchemists and myth makers. Gardner himself notes that if Lull's mechanistic methods can be seen as a "satire of scholasticism"(18), then we can compare the medieval fascination with Lull's spinning wheels to "the same awe in the reverence with which some philosophers view symbolic logic as a tool of philosophical analysis"(10).[41]

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[41] Another interesting point of comparison between Lull and the modern world can be found in his literary work *Blanquerna*, whose protagonist takes holy orders and works his way up the Catholic hierarchy to become Pope, only to abandon his office at the peak of his career to become a wanderer and hermit. This plot seems to have been directly adapted by Hermann Hesse in his novel *Das Glasperlenspiel* (The Glass Bead Game), which also depicts a protagonist who rises to the head of a secular order and then abandons it when he attains its highest office (Magister Ludi) in order to become a private tutor. This secular order is dedicated to the development of a game which works with a universal language and symbolic logic to combine concepts from unrelated disciplines such as music and mathematics (6). Martin Gardner also takes note of a plot–making device to be used by fiction writers and comprised

As Menard works through his history of symbolic logic, he considers "certain affinities" between the ideas of Leibniz, Descartes and John Wilkins. Borges deals with this subject in some detail in his essay "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins" (*Other* 101-115). Like Leibniz, Wilkins had considered the possibility of a universal language, the objective of which would be the classification of universal knowledge. Descartes had already proposed a version of this idea based on the decimal system of mathematics, and Wilkins adapted this program to alphabetic notation so that the letters of words would correspond to his various subdivisions of knowledge (e.g., the first two letters of each word referred to one of Wilkins's forty subdivisions of human knowledge, the third letter to a further subdivision, and so on).

The scheme proposed by Leibniz was far more ambitious than that of Lull or of his contemporary, John Wilkins. His vocabulary of concepts would cover the entire range of human knowledge (and not be limited to a poetic vocabulary, as with Menard's in his 1901 monograph), and thus would comprise a "calculus" for solving all human problems (and not just those of mathematics) with precision. Whereas Wilkins would have been satisfied with a universal language that facilitated communication and Lull with one that generated deductive reasoning, Leibniz wanted the symbolic representations of language to "mirror the order and relations of ideas" themselves (Rutherford 231). Logic had to manipulate concepts into complete descriptions of substances, which in turn had to be fully expressive of (i.e., have the power to mirror) the whole universe such that these substances had to express their past, present and future states as well as constitute a microcosm of the whole universe.[42] Borges is likely making a cryptic reference to Leibniz when he notes, "theoretically, a language in which the name of each

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of a series of concentric circles which could be manipulated to combine various plot elements. This idea recalls George Orwell's "novel–writing machines" in *Nineteen Eighty–Four* which were used to compose proletarian literature. Borges also makes use of the same concept in describing the literature of Tlön, which "are based on a single plot, which runs through every imaginable permutation" (*Ficciones* 16. "Los de ficción abarcan un solo argumento, con todas las permutaciones imaginables." *OC* 1: 439. Cf. Gardner 19).

[42] Borges had viewed the writing of the encyclopedia of Tlön as a Leibnizian project and, indeed, Leibniz himself had been excited by this notion, having both written an "Introduction to a Secret Encyclopaedia" and supported academic journals such as the *Acta Eruditorium* on the understanding that the writing of a universal encyclopedia would be a massive undertaking. Bertrand Russell once described the monadology as "a metaphysical fairy tale, coherent perhaps, wholly arbitrary" (cf. Bertrand Russell, "A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz", xiii.).

being would indicate all the details of its destiny, past and future, is not inconceivable" (*Other* 104).[43]

The highly quixotic nature of Leibniz's undertaking (known as the "*Characteristica Universalis*") was so appealing to Menard that he made it the topic of a further monograph, published a year after his comparative study of Leibniz, Wilkins and Descartes. Leibniz stopped short of Lull's notion that we are capable of tracing all knowledge back to God (at least not through an a priori demonstration), but he did believe that his system could be used to automatically calculate solutions to philosophical problems through intensional substitutions of concepts once the appropriate logical functions could be developed. "If controversies were to arise, there would be no more need of disputation between two philosophers than between two accountants" (quoted by Russell *History* 592).

As Borges notes in his essay on Wilkins, such quixotic efforts at developing a universal calculus are doomed not only by the fact that we don't have an objective theory of the universe that would support the viability of such undertakings, but also by the more common fact that no culture has ever succeeded in locating any universal system of classification.[44] Here, then, we are brought to the problem of incommensurability: we can't assign truth values to propositions which originate in alien systems of reasoning. The reasoning of Paracelsus, with its strange interrelationships of concepts from differing fields of scientific inquiry, is likely as alien to modern standards as the interrelationships attempted by Lull. But the value of Menard's historical research can be found in the fact that Lull's tinkering and arbitrary associations are the basis of modern symbolic logic – and, as Borges points out, our modern systems of classification are still frustratingly arbitrary.

Menard moves his historical study forward to the nineteenth century work of George Boole, who abandons the grandiloquence of Leibniz and develops a basic set of logical symbols and rules of operation governing their use. Intensional substitutions are eliminated in favour of strictly extensional ones and both an algebra and calculus are developed which, as C. I. Lewis notes, have provided the basis for all subse-

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[43] "Teóricamente, no es inconcebible un idioma donde el nombre de cada ser indicara todos los pormenores de su destino, pasado y venidero" (*OC* 2: 87).

[44] He cites an ancient Chinese encyclopedia that lists the following classification of pigs: a) those that belong to the emperor, b) embalmed pigs, c) trained pigs, d) suckling pigs, etc. ("Analytical" 142–143).

quent development of symbolic logic (9–12). And yet some twentieth century philosophers bristle at the notion of Boole being called "the father of modern logic", arguing that is only with Frege's development of quantification (the basis of Quine's adherence to strict conditions of identity and reference) that modern logic can be said to begin. Boole, as it turns out, still clings to certain elements of speculative thinking, holding, for example, that "nothing" could be used as a referent for the null class. More serious were his manipulations of "0" and "1" as fundamental logic symbols, since he believed [45] that "1" could be used to designate all conceivable objects whether existent or not. He thus uses four fractional expressions (1/1, 1/0, 0/1, 0/0) to represent, respectively, the universal, the impossible, the non–existent, and the indefinite, with the logical operations made to match mathematical ones.

It is only with Frege and Russell that we get a fully developed precursor of modern logic with restricted existence assumptions. However, as previously discussed in this paper, it is with Frege and Russell that paradoxes become a serious problem for realism and the symbolic logic that supports it. As noted, this fact is well known to Menard, who devotes his only book–length work to the subject of paradoxes and reserves separate chapters for both Russell and Descartes. Thus, Menard's history seems to bring symbolic logic from its speculative beginnings in "alien" reasoning to the end of its road in the constraints of paradox – and it would seem that we have to face the admonitions of Menard's narrator:

> There is no intellectual exercise which is not ultimately useless. A philosophical doctrine is in the beginning a seemingly true description of the universe; as the years pass it becomes a mere chapter – if not a paragraph or a noun – in the history of philosophy. In literature, this ultimate decay is even more notorious. (37) [46]

So history is, at least in one sense, "the mother of truth". Menard's enterprise thus seems safe, if it is true as he claims, that:

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[45] Michael Dummett notes that Boole later qualified these beliefs (67).

[46] "No hay ejercicio intelectual que no sea finalmente inútil. Una doctrina filosófica es al principio una descripción verosímil del universo; giran los años y es un mero capítulo – cuando no un párrafo o un nombre – de la historia de la filosofía. En la literatura, esa caducidad final es aun más notoria" (*OC* 1: 449–450).

> The ultimate goal of a theological or metaphysical demonstration – the external world, God, chance, universal forms – are no less anterior or common than this novel which I am now developing. (32) [47]

But it remains to be seen whether the "ultimate decay" of literature is even more pronounced than that of philosophy. To answer this question, Menard turns from symbolism in logic to symbolism in literature.

Paul Valéry, the Symbolist poet, is the subject of two of Menard's literary articles, the first related to Menard's comical efforts to rewrite literary rules. Valéry, who once compared himself with Descartes, was fascinated by the similarities between poetry, philosophy and mathematics, both in the form and content of his poems (Wilson 83). In "*Le Cimetière Marin*" ("The Graveyard by the Sea"), the subject of Menard's first article, he utilizes Zeno's paradox of the arrow in flight to stress the illusion of movement in man, the consciousness of consciousness that distorts time and distracts one from direct engagement in the world (464). Valéry would have been well aware of the decay that afflicts all intellectual efforts, both literary and philosophical.

Menard's second article on Valɛry, the "invective", is intended as comical thrust against the Symbolists' literary practice of saying the opposite of what is meant, but it is also intended to provide a counterpoint to the serious example of literary invective cited among Menard's visible works, Quevedo's "*Aguja de navegar cultos*" ("The Compass to Navigate as Pedantics"). Quevedo's target was the overblown language of the *culturanista* poets of the early seventeenth century, who made a practice of replacing nouns with adjective accumulations, exactly as Borges describes them in the linguistic practices of Tlön. The spokesman of this group was Luis de Gongora, with whom Quevedo conducted a bitter literary feud (Bleznick 131). The "*aguja*" poem provides a satiric recipe for composing poems like Gongora's in one day. Menard comically translates the poem into French as "*La Boussole des Précieux*" ("The Compass for the Pretentious"[48]) and thus ironically falls into Quevedo's satirical trap,[49] since the recipe coheres with Menard's

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[47] "El término final de una demostración teológica o metafísica – el mundo externo, Dios, la casualidad, las formas universales – no es menos anterior y común que mi divulgada novela" (*OC* 1: 447).

[48] Used as a term of reproach by Molière. The alternative translation would be "The Invaluable Compass", which would also have comic overtones.

[49] Menard's narrator will later make a similarly ironic misconstrual of Francisco de Quevedo's *La Hora de Todos* (*The Hour of All Men*), a work which, while satiric, is also a deadly serious attack against the enemies of Spain which included not only Jews

project for developing a "poetic vocabulary of concepts" (Leibniz's "*characteristica universalis*" is thus indirectly satirized as well).

Menard's penchant for altering literary rules carries over into his two visible works on the subject of chess. The first deals with an acknowledged masterpiece of chess literature, *Libro de la invención liberal y arte del juego del axedrez* (*Book of the Origins and Art of the Game of Chess*), published in 1561 by one of the great chess players and theorists of his time, the Spanish cleric Ruy López. López was among the first to establish the importance of chess theory (i.e., the strategy of the opening moves), and his development of the Spanish game (also known as the Ruy López opening) set the tone for opening theory for the next 350 years. This theory was grounded on the principle of seizing control of the centre squares as quickly as possible, a principle that wasn't challenged until the period of the hypermodern movement in the 1920's.

Menard's second (undated) work on chess anticipates the hypermodern movement by advocating the elimination of one of the rook pawns and thus attempting a contribution to the theory of opening moves. Presumably, this would mean eliminating opposite side pawns,[50] allowing the rooks to move to the fourth or fifth rank on the first move in order to follow the hypermodern principle of aiming "heavy artillery" at the centre squares rather than effecting direct occupation by pawns or knights. Menard's procedure is unsound (and is presumably rejected on this basis) for the same reason that it is bad strategy to bring the queen out too early: the rooks would be subjected to immediate attack[51] and forced to retreat, causing a serious loss of tempo and development.

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but Frenchmen, who are described as "lice that devour all parts of Spain". Don Quixote's discussion on arms and letters, on the other hand, is ironically humorous since Quixote complains about the low pay of soldiers (Quixote obviously isn't being paid because he isn't a real soldier) compared to scholars. (Menard can be seen as the unintended butt of both works.) Cervantes, although himself a former soldier, never has Don Quixote perform specific acts of war, and is thus no more a war monger than Menard, who need have no worry about incurring the ire of the pacifist Bertrand Russell (Bleznick 50). "Es sabido que D. Quijote (como Quevedo en al pasaje an<logo, y posterior, de *La hora de todos*) falla el pleito contra las letras y en favor de las armas. Cervantes era un viejo militar: su fallo se explica" (*OC* 1: 449).

[50] This means eliminating either the h2/a7 pawns or else the a2/h7 pawns. Eliminating a2/a7 or h2/h7 pawns would have the comical effect of allowing a white rook to capture its opposite number on the opening move.

[51] Rh5 for white's opening move would be met by Nf3, a standard development move for black and one that forces white to "lose" a move (tempo) by moving the white rook to a safer square. The hypermodern movement, on the other hand, is

Thus, Menard's investigation into the field of literature as evidenced by his visible works gives him no more reason to abandon his project for assuming the authorship of *Don Quixote* than did his foray into the history of symbolic logic. We discover that Menard's narrator was right: literature is subject to greater decay than philosophy because there is a greater facility (which Menard is not afraid to exercise) for altering its rules or working against its ironic meanings. The literary side of symbolism is not limited by scientific or logical constraints (Paul Valéry's investigation into the contrary position notwithstanding) and thus more subject to the "notoriety" mentioned by Menard's narrator. Menard does discover that literature can be highly supportive of his claims to personal identity with Cervantes, to the development of a universal language and to the coalescence of poetic idealism with historical realism.

Thus, in conclusion, Borges has presented a thoroughly satisfying thought experiment in "Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*". First, it has been demonstrated that there is no easy transition between common sense realism and epistemological realism, with the consequence that an absurd enterprise, such as Menard's, which is easily dismissible at the level of common sense, gains support (and not censure) from a historical study of philosophical movements such as realism and idealism. Part of the difficulty lies in theories of meaning and the existence assumptions of classical logic which do not allow us to deal with states of affairs in fictional worlds in a fully satisfactory manner. Menard's brazen self–ascription of personal identity with Cervantes, his ease of transition between possible worlds, his ability to confound intuitive, common sense reasoning, all point to a need to continue work on developing a semantics for free logics or other logics without existence assumptions (or that deal with probability assessment). Menard's enterprise is ultimately based on the research done to support his visible works, and these works demonstrate the humble beginnings of our modern scientific, mathematically sound systems of formal logic and the ways in which paradoxes (not to mention Godel's theorem and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle) constrain man's relationships with the universe and point out the arbitrary nature of our systems of classification. If we appraise the scientific work of Paracelsus as incommensurable with our own, then we must also be alert to the fact that simi-

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based on the *fianchetto*, i.e., moving the bishops along the c1–a3 or f1–h3 diagonals (after b3 or g3) to allow the bishops to control the long diagonals and thus effectively exert power against the centre squares.

larly alien systems of reasoning (i.e., that of Raymon Lull) also lie at the historical root of our modern systems of logic and it is only through gradual accretions of genuine knowledge over time that our modern science breaks free from its roots. It is then convenient for us to claim that we can no longer recognise these roots and dismiss them as "incommensurable" with a modern vision.

Borges has cleverly designed his "Pierre Menard" story to create a dichotomy between Menard's "visible" and "subterranean" work which matches that of Leibniz, who also wrote a body of visible work (related to his speculative metaphysics) but left much of his opus unpublished; i.e., "invisible" work that in the opinion of Bertrand Russell was very valuable and would have established Leibniz as the founder of mathematical logic. But there are many other impressive points of design in the story. Certainly there is much educated guessing and speculation that can be directed at the actual content of Menard's visible work and the research that went into it – and much of this paper has been given over to such guessing. But Borges has given us enough evidence to substantiate (with some reasonable assurance) that Menard was a character of considerable education, erudition and sophistication, enough to be able to exploit his historical researches for his own advantage. His story has to suffer through a certain pomposity and foolishness of its narrator, who gives a first impression of comic absurdity to Menard's project, an impression which tends to downplay its level of sophistication.

But again, this is part of the structural excellence of Borges's design: the story bears many points of similarity to *Don Quixote*, which was also written to emphasize the antic character of its protagonist and only gradually reveal the deeper, more serious nature of his enterprise. The blurring of the distinctions between poetic idealism and historical realism that Cervantes practices, the drawing out of idealized practices from the world of legend for imposition onto a jaded and etiolated world of real life: all are reflected in "Pierre Menard", which sets up the protagonist's quixotic endeavours against the narrator's excited and overwrought descriptions and against the story's background of literary dilettantes and their pretentious behaviour. Forays into the history of philosophy are contrasted with the changing evaluations of literary theory. The worlds of poetry and philosophy intersect and interact just as Novalis and Menard (for his own devious purposes) intended that they should. And underwriting it all is a foundation of

language that impales philosophy on its paradoxes as easily as it confounds literature with its ironies.

Menard's enterprise is founded on complex paradoxes: the sorites paradox gives credence to Menard's enterprise by showing us that if independent discoveries (both synchronic and diachronic) of great scientific theories are possible, then the independent "discoveries" of great literature are a question of degree and not kind ("I would only have to be immortal in order to carry it out"). The "third man" paradox by which Menard establishes personal identity with Cervantes (and which forms the subject of Menard's one book–length work) is based on a dispute over logical rules: we need rules to tell us how to use rules; i.e., how to avoid the infinite regress that results when we insert a logical rule into a syllogism as a premise of the very logical structure it's suppose to govern. The irony is not lost on Menard, who proceeds to play with rules governing chess and literature while the world of science and philosophy that forms its backdrop struggles with its own rule–governed realms and witnesses its own acceptance of permanent uncertainties and arbitrary classification.

We can and should admire W.V. Quine for fighting an impressive rear-guard action against modal and second–order logic in the noble cause of certainty, existence, identity and reference. But Borges helps us to see that in many respects, his enterprise still has difficulties to overcome – difficulties which his detractors would claim are of a quixotic nature. We must learn to live with these uncertainties while continuing to develop the logical tools that will ultimately help us to overcome them.

William Woof
York University

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