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*Best wishes, A.
Edna*

Borges, Postcolonial Precursor

By EDNA AIZENBERG 1. Postmodernism holds center stage as the major critical practice of the moment. And Borges is there, of course.¹ Critics working in Latin American literature, however, have noted the discomforts of fitting Borges, along with other Latin American authors, into the postmodern mold; as one critic asked graphically, if with some gender bias: "Is the corset too tight for the fat lady?"² One place where the corset pinches is in its elision of the Latin American condition of the texts. Typically, these are subsumed into Euro-U.S. concerns. The traits that mark their "postmodernism" are employed to illustrate trends in "late capitalist, bourgeois, informational, postindustrial society" and are said to respond to Western needs: for example, the "totalizing forces" of mass culture.³ What is forgotten is the peripheric, ex-centric position. The "postmodern" characteristics of Latin American and Borgesian literature enthusiastically embraced by U.S. and European critics—self-reflexivity, indeterminacy, carnivalization, decanonization, intertextuality, pastiche, hybridity, the problematizing of time and space and of historical and fictional narration—are primarily a correlative of a colonized history and an uncohered identity, of incomplete modernity and uneven cultural development, rather than postindustrialization and mass culture. Their uncritical incorporation into a metropolitan repertoire indicates that the centering impulse of a "decentered" postmodernism is far from gone.⁴

It is at this point that postcolonialism becomes an effective heuristic tool. Like all concepts, it is a tool, and one must take care lest it too become a corset squeezing the fat lady. There are many colonialisms, diverse postcolonial situations, significant overlaps between postcolonialism and other theoretical modes, disparate and antagonistic strands of postcolonial criticism, interrogations about postcolonialism's continuing enmeshment in the colonial gaze.⁵ Nevertheless, *grosso modo*, postcolonial theory has done much in its shift of focus from the "center" to the "margins," with the core of interest on conditions and developments at the "margins"; it has made valuable contributions to a comparative approach that contests the usual North-South perspective of literary studies and connects cultures and literatures that have infrequently, if ever, spoken to each other; and it has provided important insights for "identifying and articulating the symptomatic and distinctive features" of postcolonial texts, *from* the condition of postcoloniality.⁶

This work is exceedingly relevant to Latin American writers, first and foremost Borges. Traits of Borges that have been understood (or misunderstood) within the two regnant contexts of study, Eurocentric or national-Latin American, acquire new sharpness when read from the perspective of postcolonialism. A postcolonial perspective brings into focus Borges's strengths and Borges's lacks. It allows for a renewed appreciation of Borges's role as a forerunner to what is significant in present literary-critical practice, particularly the writing of such "Third World" authors as Salman Rushdie, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Anton Shammas, and Sergio Chejfec, who see in the Argentine master a postcolonial precursor.

2. Postcolonial critics underscore the theoretical hegemony of Europe, a hegemony that has utilized the texts of the "margins" to construct itself—Latin American literature and postmodernism is a case in point—yet has frequently ignored the theoretical explorations of the "margins." These explorations, in the literary texts themselves and in essays and works of criticism, more than once prefigure issues that have since become crucial to the "center," as in the case of postmodernism; and this prefiguring results precisely from the "marginal" status, with its intense sensitivity to problems of textuality and reality, to troubling epistemological questions.

Borges illustrates the elision, despite the fact that he has attained canonical rank in Euro-U.S. critical-literary discourse. Certain Borges writings are cited to buttress, say, Genette or Bloom or Foucault, whereas others are little mentioned. "Kafka and His Precursors" and "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" fall into the first category; "The Argentine Writer and Tradition" into the second. Then too, what we might call the postcolonial implications of even the cited works are ignored; this is true of Borges's essays and his fictions.

Let us look at "El escritor argentino y la tradición." Originally delivered as a lecture in the fifties, the essay contains many of the questions that are important to postcolonial criticism and that intersect with the preoccupations of the "center." The issue of tradition itself, with the related issue of the canon, is one. Borges's purpose in the essay is to define Argentina's literary tradition in order to guide contemporary Argentine writers in their task. The title of the piece recalls Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," an essay that Borges refers to in "Kafka and His Precursor."

sors" to develop the now well-known idea that "every writer *creates* his own precursors."⁷ But to continue with tradition. Nowhere in his discussion does Eliot interrogate what tradition is for the English writer. He declares: the "historical sense compels a man to write . . . with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order."⁸ Although Borges attempts to project an analogous sense of security and order, opening his essay by calling the problem of defining Argentine literary tradition a "pseudoproblem" and concluding with what has been read as a submission to Europe, the fact is that there is a great deal more probing of the meaning of tradition, as well as heterogeneity in describing it and subversiveness in treating it.

Borges reflects upon a number of possible traditions: the tradition of gauchesque poetry, the tradition of Spanish literature, and the Western tradition as a whole. The gauchesque receives particular attention, in large measure because it has been considered Argentina's "authentic," "native" literary tradition, and its masterwork, José Hernández's *Martín Fierro*, Argentina's canonical book. Borges's pointed analysis dwells on the primary claim to authenticity of the gauchesque, its language, supposedly derived from the spontaneous oral poetry of the gauchos. His examination in effect dismantles this claim; he indicates that the gauchesque poets, city men, cultivated a "deliberately popular language never essayed by the popular poets themselves." In the constructed idiom there was a purposeful "seeking out of native words, a profusion of local color," whereas the gaucho singers tried to express themselves in nondialectal forms and to address great abstract themes. Borges's conclusion is that gauchesque poetry, which had produced admirable books, not least Hernández's "lasting work," was nevertheless a "literary genre as artificial as any other" (178–80).

The discussion is enormously suggestive. What is the relationship between orature and literature in conforming a literary tradition? Questions about the continuities and discontinuities between oral and written forms are at the heart of literary-critical discourse in Africa, for example, with the unexamined championing of the oral tradition as *the* model for contemporary African writing an area of debate. There is likewise the matter of an essentialized nativism as the basis of contemporary cultural tradition, what the Nigerian critic Chidi Amuta terms "raffia, calabash, and masquerade culture."⁹ The seeking out of a profusion of local color, including fixed "native" linguistic codes, is seen by Amuta and other critics as a retrograde maneuver that perpetuates the "exotic" view of the non-European and ignores the essence

of postcolonial cultures and their languages as dynamic, dialectical, hybridized formations.

If a limited, conversational nativism could not form the basis for Argentine literary tradition (in the essay Borges recalls that early in his career he had been a "raffia and calabash" man), neither could the literature of the former "mother country." Borges states categorically: "Argentine history can be unmistakably defined as a desire to become separated from Spain" (182). Instead of positing a smooth interface between Spanish literature and Argentine literature as one grandly unbroken master narrative (a position more than once perpetuated in the teaching of Latin American literature), Borges posits rupture. For an Argentine to write like a Spaniard is testimony to "Argentine versatility" in assuming a persona rather than indication of a natural state (183). Of course, Borges returned again and again to the masterwork of Spanish literature, the *Quixote*, as he dialogued with Spanish writers—Quevedo, Gracián—and as he rewrote the *Martín Fierro* in his fictions; but his selective manipulation of elements of these traditions can best be explicated in the framework of the third tradition he examines, Western culture.

In their studies the Australian critics Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, who are among the most prolific researchers in postcolonial theory, underscore that it "is inadequate to read" postcolonial texts "either as a reconstruction of pure traditional values or as simply foreign and intrusive."¹⁰ These texts are constituted in the shuttle space between the two illusory absolutes, "within and between two worlds." Postcolonial texts can further be conceived as an alternate reading practice whose aim is the revisionist appropriation and abrogation of the Western canon (196, 193). These thoughts are helpful in approaching Borges's approach to the Western tradition, because his posture has been construed as nothing if not "foreign and intrusive." Borges writes: "I believe our tradition is all of Western culture," but the statement does not lead to a reiteration of the authority of the "center" to "write" Borges. Instead, Borges turns the Western tradition against itself by appropriating the right to write back to the "center." "We have a right to this tradition," he asserts, "greater than that which the inhabitants of one or another Western nation might have" (184; emphasis added). The assertion is the takeoff point for a model of difference and a strategy of subversion.

Dialoguing with another essay, Thorstein Veblen's 1919 article "The Intellectual Pre-eminence of Jews in Modern Europe," Borges applies to the Argentine and Latin American circumstance the American thinker's notion of Jewish difference as the breeding ground for innovation. Long before Derrida's *différance*, Borges anchors his attitude

toward Western discourse in "not feel[ing] tied to it by any special devotion," in "feel[ing] different," like the Jews or the Irish. Difference makes for deferral. To quote Borges again: "I believe that we . . . can handle all European themes, handle them without superstition, with an irreverence which can have, and already does have fortunate consequences" (184).

There is in these statements of "The Argentine Writer and Tradition" all the creative *chutzpah* and, yes, the ambiguity—if not anxiety—of the post-colonial situation. On the one hand, the speaking back, the challenge to the metropolis, and the installation of irreverent difference as the *modus operandi* of fortunate literary labor; on the other the pervasive concern, common to postcolonial societies, with myths of identity and authenticity, with establishing a linguistic practice, with place and displacement, with canonicity and "un-canoncity." Borges's lifelong Hebraism, exemplified in the essay, correlates with this double movement. It was not merely the Jewish condition, traversed as it was with many similar complexities, that attracted Borges. It was also the Jewish textual tradition, some of whose views were displaced by the dominant Greek-Western logos as inauthentic—in Borges's words, "alien" to the Western mind.¹¹ (What the dominant logos judged "authentic" in Jewish textuality was authenticated by its appropriation, not by its Jewish roots.)

One such view was the conception of writing as inevitably *intertextual*, constituted in the bold interaction—not decorous separation—of Torah and scholia, of canon and commentary, through an ongoing process of interpretive reconstitution. Another was the idea, carried to an extreme by the mysticism of the Kabbalah, that audacious revisionism masked as faithful reproduction formed the proper stance toward tradition. Borges's exploration and radicalization of these beliefs—vindicated decades later by "Hebraist" iconoclasts at Yale and elsewhere as a way of dislodging a still-classicist criticism—was clearly an attempt to find precedents, from the edge of the world, for alternative literary models: models of strategic "marginality" with the interplay of the standard and the subversive that became Borges's stance.

It is not incidental that Bloom connects Jewish hermeticism to Borges via a secularized, parodic version of the principle of "reading old texts afresh,"¹² for in his nonsuperstitious handling of Western themes the "parodic miniaturization of a vast work of art" constituted one of Borges's favorite revisionary operations.¹³ We are now so familiar with these Borgesian manipulations that we scarcely stop to consider their implications, particularly in a postcolonial context.

The biblical urtext, whose questioning "to absurdity" by the Kabbalists Borges so admired, is

not the least of the vast parodied works;¹⁴ in Borges, Cain becomes Abel, Judas becomes Jesus, the Crucifixion of Jesus becomes the crucifixion of a medical student, Golgotha becomes an obscure Argentine ranch. The event occurs after the student "brings light" to the "heathen," in a tale audaciously entitled "The Gospel According to Mark." One cannot help but think here of works like Yambo Ouologuem's *Devoir de violence*, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, Timothy Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, and Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*—all postcolonial novels in which scripture is parodically repositioned, its orthodox presuppositions (often in the setting of the missionizing endeavor in the imperialized area) disrupted. In "The Gospel According to Mark" Borges gives narrative substance to the linguistic-interpretive relativization that necessarily occurs in new and hybridized settings: the student Baltasar Espinosa, whose name already bespeaks Judaic heresy and whose background and religious beliefs are already impure, cannot exert interpretive control either over the text—not accidentally an English Bible—or over events, and it is ultimately the even more mestizo Guthries/Gutres who have the last word at tale's end.

Other master myths and works, and systems of knowledge, are subjected to parallel carnivalesque-reductive techniques, frequently in an Argentine milieu: the ineffable godhead is viewed, flat on the back, in a Buenos Aires cellar; the sublime Dante Alighieri is the flatulent Carlos Argentino Danieri; Erik Lönnrot meets death in a spectral *porteño* Southside after a rigorous Spinozan quest; Qaphqa is a latrine in Babylon, synonym of Babel, synonym of Buenos Aires, as in the line from Borges where he sings to his "babelic" home city, "texted" out of cultural and linguistic fragments from the four corners of the earth.¹⁵ Indeed, in many of Borges's texts it is not merely the inversion of a specific writer or system that "writes back" to the "center." There is the freewheeling pastiche of authors, epochs, languages, philosophies that is equally undermining, since the very juxtaposition short-circuits metropolitan notions of linearity, epistemological security, temporal-spatial coherence, historical and fictional progression, and mimetic accuracy.

A pastiche of associations suggests itself at this point: Foucault's heterotopic reading of the signs in teacups of Western history and thought "out of a passage in Borges" from "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins" that contains the kind of juxtaposition just noted; a Chinese taxonomy of beasts, many fabulous (more shortly about post-colonialism and imaginary beings); or Homi Bhabha's positing of the lack of mimetic correspondence as a postcolonial strategy for shattering the mirror of Western representation, which

brings to mind Borges's early championing of irrealism, a frequent recourse, he points out, of non-Western writing; or even Ngũgĩ's comment about space, time, and progress in the "Third World," in Kenya, and in Argentina: "Skyscrapers versus mud walls and grass thatch . . . international casinos versus cattle-paths and gossip before sunset. Our erstwhile masters had left us a very unevenly cultivated land: the centre was swollen with fruit and water sucked from the rest, while the outer parts were progressively weaker and scragglier as one moved away from the centre."¹⁶ In Borges one finds the "unevenness," the clashing orders, the disjunctive language of narration that results in large measure from the disorder left behind by colonialization; but it is a disorder that calls to answer established rhetorics so as to fashion novel discourses out of the challenge.

It is not for nothing that in "Kafka and His Precursors," where heterogeneous pieces nudge each other, Borges fabricates a more provocative, postcolonial version of Eliot's majestic proposition that every writer's work *modifies* our conception of the past and future. According to Borges, every writer goes further: he *creates* his own forerunners.¹⁷ And appropriately so, for at the "periphery," where things have as yet to cohere, one must create a genealogy, an identity, and a place. Still, Borges experienced the incoherence of the edge at a time when the Western "center" itself could not hold, as a young man beholding the spectacle of the Western order disintegrating in the trenches of the Great War, and as a writer at the height of his powers observing, from far-off Buenos Aires, the even greater falling apart of things during World War II. The postcolonial world emerged out of these conflicts; Borges, with his outsider's antennae, foresaw and registered many of the seismic shifts in the realms of thought and literature.

At the same time, however, he registered the contradictions of an intellectual caught in the divide, one whose background and formation continued to enmesh him, at many moments, in the colonial gaze. The repeated dislocations at the Casa Rosada and at the Plaza de Mayo, messy and equivocal as some might have been, were in large measure the correlatives of what Borges was chronicling in his texts; but more often than not he did not see this. At the divide, Borges was crucial in shattering time-honored, dominant codes of recognition, clearing the ground; it remained for his postcolonial ephebes to carry on the work and build in the clearing through the very process that Borges had advocated: by realizing, transforming, and transgressing the precursor.

3. For postcolonial writers Borges is a reference point beyond his general preeminence in a European-North American repertoire of culture—al-

though there is undoubtedly that aspect as well. In a number of important recent "Third World" novels, from the most diverse regions, Argentina is part of a geography of the imagination, a territory away from the "center" that conjures up a cluster of postcolonial topoi: colonization, linguistic displacement, exile, cross-culturality. It appears in the Hebrew-language *Arabeskot* (Eng. *Arabesques*), by the Palestinian Anton Shammas, in Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, in the Moroccan Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Enfant de sable* (Eng. *The Sand Child*), and in Sergio Chejfec's, *Lenta biografía* (Slow Biography). Chejfec is an Argentine living in Venezuela, but in his book Argentina is a zone not much different from that found in the other works listed here.

Borges himself is also a presence in all these novels. He is a character, unnamed but mistakable, in Ben Jelloun, where he travels from Buenos Aires to Marrakesh to weave the final threads in the fabric of tales that is the text, including the tale of the enigmatic and androgynous Moroccan hero, who travels to visit him in Buenos Aires. He is quoted by Shammas, who closes the novel—made up of twin parts, twin narrators, and twin heroes—"with a paraphrase of Borges: 'Which of the two of us has written this book I do not know.'"¹⁸ He is acknowledged as a source in Rushdie, who thanks him for the description of the imaginary manticore, the man-tiger whom Rushdie places in a British detention center-sanatorium for all manner of monstrous "Third World" mutants.¹⁹ And he is cited as a major inspirer of Chejfec, according to a "Retroduitory Note" placed at the slow biography's end. The note says that the ambiguating narrations of Borges, and of Juan Carlos Onetti, both literary masters from the River Plate, enact the area's temporal-spatial disjunction and lack of a firm past: are we exiled Europeans, are we descendants of gauchos? These narrations likewise suggest the impossibility of ironclad mimetic reconstructions of history, and of grand canonical narratives. *Lenta biografía*, ends the "retroduction," is inserted in the space between paragraphs from Onetti and paragraphs from Borges.²⁰

To trace the visible Borges in these novels is not an exercise in the inventorying of evident markings, but an opening to the other, subterranean Borges, whose identity, to paraphrase Rushdie, is clear in the successor texts, even when he remains anonymous (549); for as the exoteric clues indicate, Borges is there in the text milieu in which the novels operate: in the sense of feeling different, in the clash of discourses, in the deferral of canons, in the undoing of hallowed representations. Each one of these books is centered in difference and hybridity. To quote Rushdie again: "An idea of the self as being (ideally) homogeneous, nonhybrid, 'pure',—an utterly fantastic notion!" (427). Like *The Satanic Verses*, the novels by Shammas, Ben

Jelloun, and Chejfec tell the story of "mestizo" heroes, whose indeterminate, usually doubled identity is the indeterminate identity of the post-colonial. Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, floating in the "most insecure and illusory of zones, illusory, discontinuous, metamorphic," changing countries, changing names, shifting languages, shifting accents, half-Indian, half-British, devilish, angelic.²¹ "For are they not conjoined opposites, these two?" writes Rushdie. "One seeking to be transformed into the foreignness he admires, the other preferring, contemptuously, to transform" (426). Both are what the author calls "chimeran grafts," the type of fantastic beasts that Chamcha, transformed into a devilish man-goat, meets in the sanatorium (406).

In *The Sand Child* the chimeran graft is Ahmed-Zahra, created Borgesianly by his father. Writes Ben Jelloun, echoing "The Circular Ruins": "His idea was a simple one, but difficult to realize, to maintain in all its strength: the child to be born was to be male, even if it was a girl!"²² The female-male, a piteous Minotaur, a circus freak, is Morocco, her birth announcement annoying to the French, his tribulations reflecting the violences of "Third World" life: abiding feudalism, particularly toward women; the murders, abuse of confidence, unstable identity, theft of inheritance (141).

Shammas's hybrid is Anton Shammas-Mich(a)el Abyad, an Israeli Arab, a Lebanese Palestinian; but he is also Anton Shammas-Yehoshua Bar-On, a Jewish Israeli writer, and Anton Shammas-"Paco," a "pure" Palestinian (168). In this novel the real "Anton Shammas" does not stand up—or perhaps he is standing up throughout—because, as the Borgesian ending of the book indicates, there is no homogeneity or oneness. The same is true of the nameless Argentine-Jewish protagonist of *Lenta biografía*, possibly the mirror image of "Anton Shammas," shuttling between his Jewish condition and his Argentine condition, struggling to conjecture an identity through his immigrant father's Yiddish stories of the Holocaust, which the son hears in Buenos Aires at the edge of the father's table—the image of the periphery is recurring—and renders in a Spanish full of verbal and iconic gaps.

Such linguistic equivocalness is reflected in all the other novels, where a variety of Englishes, "tainted" with Indian and other idioms, jostle the Queen's; where Arabic jostles French; Arabic, Hebrew; Hebrew and Yiddish, Spanish; and, maybe, through Borges, Spanish jostles everything. Borges's line about the language of the book in the Library of Babel is pertinent: "He showed his find to a wandering decoder who told him the lines were written in Portuguese; others said they were Yiddish. Within a century, the language was established: a Samoyedic Lithuanian dialect of Guaraní, with classical Arabian inflections."²³

Clearly the poetics of the pastiche is at work in these books of Borges's continuers. Borges himself is part of a collage of cultures (Western and Eastern), of times (linear, circular, arabesque), of stories (oral, written, European, Middle Eastern), of locales (skyscrapers versus mud or stone walls), of citations (Proust, Joyce, Willa Cather, Onetti, Hudson, García Márquez, Amos Oz, Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav [in Shammas], the Bible, the Koran). As in the master, the shock of discourses insinuates a postcolonial heterotopia, but one that takes Borges's undermining strategies even further, because it is more heterotopic, embracing more multifarious and more far-flung cultural ingredients. The "empire" that "writes back" to the "center" has been enlarged, as has the notion of what is the "center," which may now be not only the culture of Europe or North America, but dominant cultures within the "margin" itself. Concomitantly, there are enlarged possibilities for irreverence with fortunate consequences.

This is evident if we consider the employment of Borges's preferred maneuver, the parodic deflation of canons. The Bible continues to be questioned, in Shammas, for instance, where linguistic-interpretive relativization occurs on the very ground meant to eliminate it: Israel. Shammas, as he puts it, uses Hebrew, the language of the Bible, the language of Grace, to build his Tower of Babel, of confusion (92). Scriptural verses in Hebrew frequently employed to buttress the Jewish claim to the land are cited against themselves to relativize that claim as they are spoken, with evident irony, by an Arab, who at the same time questions the Arab-Christian piety of village life and further muddies the ground by portraying persecution by Muslims devoted to the Koran.

Indeed, when Rushdie, in *The Satanic Verses*, uses a preferred Borgesian symbol to speak of "that labyrinth of profanity," he is talking about an "anti-mosque" and an anti-Koran (383). His "satanic verses" are not only the Prophet's, wherein, manipulated by Shaitan, Mohammad allegedly entertained the heterodox possibility of other gods but Allah; they are also Rushdie's hardly superstitious handling of the holy writ, wherein the scribe, named Salman, changes the verses dictated by the Prophet. "I rewrote the Book," he audaciously says (368). Ben Jelloun is similarly not above tampering with the Koranic-Islamic tradition. His man-who-is-really-a-woman enters the hallowed, male precinct of the mosque to hear the "collective reading of the Koran." She comments: "I got great pleasure out of undermining all that fervor, mistreating the sacred text" (25).

To mistreat the sacred text, to rewrite the book—the Borgesian *modus operandi* is additionally hybridized, additionally indigenized, turned against other canons that can oppress and imperialize. But, following the Borgesian example,

these very canons, seen uncanonically, can also be liberating vis-à-vis the West. Borges's vindication of textual modes alien to the Western mind served to release the subversive potential of these modes for writers brought up in Islamic traditions, for instance, yet writing in Western languages. Borges provided a model of literary postcoloniality: a writer writing in a Western language, both within and without the West, who used the potential of non-Western elements, or elements at the edge of the West's table—Judaic notions about literature as a series of Midrashic versions, Eastern traditions of irrealism, books such as the Koran and the *Thousand and One Nights*—to undermine and enrich Western literature. In Shamma, Rushdie, Ben Jelloun, and Chejfec, versions give way to versions, dreams to dreams, tales to tales, because, thanks to authors like Borges, these previously strange esthetic-textual strategies have become the means to take apart and to rebuild. Even as the ephebes use Borges to enlarge creative opportunities, however, the very enlargement, which evidences his prophetic role, points to areas of limitation.

Faced with the genuine articles, authors who know the Koran at first hand, in Arabic; writers for whom Judaism is existential, not only bookish; intellectuals brought up in the cultures of India, North Africa, or the Middle East—faced with these, the bounds of Borges's vindications become more obvious. He advocates the Orient at a distance, filtered through the European translations of Lane and Burton, Waley and Kuhn, with inevitable elements of Orientalism. (Borges, however, is always aware of the dangers of translation; see "The Translators of the 1001 Nights" and "The Enigma of Edward FitzGerald.") Analogously, his Judaism, as he often admitted, is secondhand, marked by "an invincible ignorance" of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Yiddish, unmarked by the physical pain of "three thousand years of oppression and pogroms."²⁴

The same is true of his handling of sociopolitical issues. Rushdie takes the manticore from Borges; but whereas Borges discusses the beast's Plinian and Flaubertian sources, Rushdie anchors him squarely in a postcolonial address, a diminished yet still imperial Britain, an independent yet still colonized "Third World." "Borges and I" is the inspiration for the closing of Shamma's novel; but whereas Borges deals with the hesitation between the literary persona and the flesh-and-blood individual, Shamma delves into the tortuous and violent web of Middle Eastern identity, with the conflict of individuals a metonymy for the conflict of communities. Ben Jelloun uses "The Circular Ruins" to explore how a man dreams a man and imposed him on reality; but in Ben Jelloun the simulacrum is a man imposed on the reality of a woman, a Moroccan woman, and on an Islamic "Third World" reality of incomplete independence, especially for women.

The successors, as noted earlier, realize and transgress Borges. They create him as their postcolonial precursor by contextualizing and modifying. In their hands the Borgesian conception of the past as an open, dynamic system is applied to Borges himself. Borges is hybridized and indigenized, but as a kindred spirit: a fiction maker who decades ago helped forge the idiom in which these disciples now do their own, pointed, writing back to the "center."

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¹ For discussions of postmodernism in which Borges is central, consult Douwe Fokkema, *Literary History, Modernism and Postmodernism*, Amsterdam, 1984; Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, New York, Methuen, 1987; and John Barth, *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Nonfiction*, New York, Putnam, 1984.

² Fernando Calderón, ed., "Identidad latinoamericana, premodernidad, modernidad y postmodernidad, o . . . ¿Le queda chico el corsé a la gorda?," *David y Goliath*, 17:52 (1987).

³ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, London, Routledge, 1988, pp. 7, 6.

⁴ Critics who point this out include Jean Franco ("The Nation as Imagined Community," in *The New Historicism*, H. Aram Veiser, ed., London, Routledge, 1989), Stephen Slemon ("Modernism's Last Post," *Ariel*, 20:4 [1989], pp. 3-17), and Hutcheon ("Circling the Downspout of Empire: Post-Colonialism and Postmodernism," *Ariel*, 20:4 [1989], pp. 149-75).

⁵ Hutcheon, "Circling," p. 161.

⁶ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, London, Routledge, 1989, p. 115.

⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, eds., New York, New Directions, 1962, p. 201.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁹ Chidi Amuta, *The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism*, London, Zed, 1989, p. 2.

¹⁰ Ashcroft et al., p. 110.

¹¹ Edna Aizenberg, "Borges and the Hebraism of Contemporary Literary Theory," in *Borges and His Successors*, Edna Aizenberg, ed., Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1990, p. 250.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 255, 257.

¹³ Emir Rodríguez Monegal, *Jorge Luis Borges: A Literary Biography*, New York, Dutton, 1978, p. 416.

¹⁴ *Borges, a Reader: A Selection from the Writings of Jorge Luis Borges*, Emir Rodríguez Monegal and Alastair Reid, eds., New York, Dutton, 1981, p. 24.

¹⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, "El tamaño de mi esperanza," cited in Edna Aizenberg, *The Aleph Weaver: Biblical, Kabbalistic and Judaic Elements in Borges*, Potomac, Md., Scripta Humanistica, 1984, p. 26.

¹⁶ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood*, New York, Dutton, 1977, p. 49.

¹⁷ Emir Rodríguez Monegal, *Borges: Hacia una lectura poética*, Madrid, Guadarrama, 1976, p. 64.

¹⁸ Anton Shamma, *Arabesques*, Vivian Eden, tr., New York, Harper & Row, 1988, p. 259.

¹⁹ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, New York, Viking Penguin, 1988.

²⁰ Sergio Chejfec, *Lenta biografía*, Buenos Aires, Puntosur, 1990, p. 170.

²¹ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 5.

²² Tahar Ben Jelloun, *The Sand Child*, Alan Sheridan, tr., San Diego, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987, p. 12.

²³ Borges, *Labyrinths*, p. 54.

²⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, "Preface," *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, Norman Thomas di Giovanni with the author, tr., New York, Dutton, 1969, p. 11.