

## The Warring Brothers: Borges Reads Kafka and Flaubert

Daniel Balderston<sup>1</sup>

This article examines the preparatory materials that Borges used to teach courses at the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores in Buenos Aires, on Kafka in 1951 and on Flaubert in 1952. Though several well known essays emerged from these courses – “Kafka y sus precursors”, “Flaubert y su destino ejemplar” and “Vindicación de Bouvard et Pécuchet” – the manuscripts reveal far more of Borges’s research and thinking about the two authors. Key concepts that he develops in these essays include his unusual (and influential) idea of the “precursor” that is only revealed through reading later works and heterodox ideas about realism and verisimilitude. [Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: [journal@transformativestudies.org](mailto:journal@transformativestudies.org) Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2020 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

**KEYWORDS:** Borges, Flaubert, Kafka, Verisimilitude, Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores, Courses, 1951, 1952, Manuscripts.

In the early 1950s Borges taught a series of courses, and gave talks, at the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores, an institution that had been founded in 1930 just before the coup d’état against Hipólito Yrigoyen and that during what is usually called “el primer peronismo,” the presidential terms of Juan Domingo Perón from 1946 to 1955, served as a sort of open university. Three of his talks there were published at the time in the Colegio’s magazine, *Cursos y Conferencias*, while some were

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included in *Otras inquisiciones* in 1952 and in the second edition of *Discusión* in 1957. The three that were published more or less as wholes were “Nathaniel Hawthorne” (in *Otras inquisiciones*), “El escritor argentino y la tradición” (in *Cursos y Conferencias* in 1953, then in *Sur* in 1955, then in the second edition of *Discusión* in 1957), and “La literatura alemana en la época de Bach” (published in *Cursos y Conferencias*); curiously, these were published from shorthand transcriptions from the oral versions (although in the cases of “El escritor argentino” and “Hawthorne” Borges’s notes survive), and were then included by him in the series of individual book volumes of Borges’s works that Emecé published in the 1950s and that later became the single-volume *Obras completas* in 1974: curious because these shorthand transcriptions apparently were never corrected by Borges, and the versions of them that are familiar to his readers have problems of syntax and punctuation. But there are a series of other lectures and courses that were not published as such, but were later mined for such books as *El “Martín Fierro,” Introducción a la literatura inglesa, Introducción a la literatura norteamericana* and *Qué es el budismo*, or for brief essays like “Kafka y sus precursores,” “Flaubert y su destino ejemplar” and “Vindicación de *Bouvard et Pécuchet*.” Here I will discuss the very detailed notes that Borges wrote in preparation for the courses on Kafka (1951) and Flaubert (1952), which are now preserved in Special Collections at Michigan State University and the University of Virginia. The Borges Center has recently published an edition of five Borges essays with facsimiles of the manuscripts, typographical transcriptions and commentaries, and the Flaubert course was included there with an extensive commentary and more than two hundred notes (done in collaboration with Mariana Di Ció); the Kafka course has never been published, although a subsequent manuscript of the fragment we know as “Kafka y sus precursores” was published by Borges’s nephew Miguel de Torre Borges in his *Borges, fotografías y manuscritos* (second edition retitled *Borges, fotos y manuscritos*).

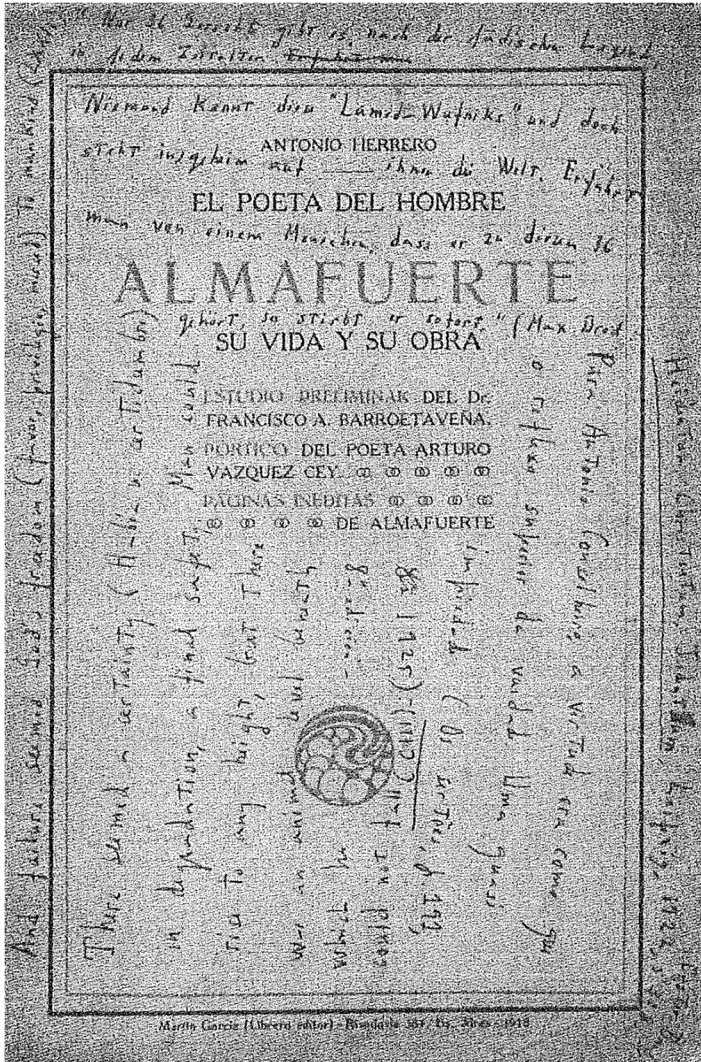
Borges’s lecture notes show a side of his work that is not easily seen elsewhere: his careful research, his honing of tentative ideas about his subject, his desire to educate his audience about aspects of a famous writer, or an important issue, that were less known, his consultation of a wide variety of sources in several languages. The course notes on Kafka, for instance, include references to editions of Kafka published after his death, the famous biography of Kafka by his friend and executor Max Brod, Ángel Flores’s compilation *The Kafka Problem* (1946), Herbert Tauber’s *Franz Kafka: An Interpretation of His Works* (1948) and others;

the course notes on Flaubert are, as we will see, full of notes in the left margin that give brief bibliographical sources for the materials quoted in the notes, in the original or in translation (or, in the Flaubert case, in a mixture of both, since here Borges quotes in French but also jots down possible Spanish versions of the French quotations). As I show in the first chapter of *How Borges Wrote*, the book I published in April 2018 with the University of Virginia Press (published in 2019 in French in the *Manuscrits modernes* series at the Presses Universitaires de Vincennes and forthcoming in Spanish with Ediciones Ampersand), the notes in the left margin can sometimes be shown to have a tight relation with the notes that Borges usually located at the end of the books he read, on the inside back cover. So, for instance, to give an example that is not in *How Borges Wrote*, his copy of the *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* includes notes on the fact that the day in the Jewish calendar begins at sundown (with cross-references to De Quincey, Leusden's *Philologus Hebraeo-Graecus generalis*—mentioned also in “La muerte y la brújula”—and “perhaps” the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*), information that he will use on several occasions, most notably in the story “La muerte y la brújula.” Similarly, George Sale's translation of the *Koran*, first published by Frederick Warne in London about 1900 but republished in 1930 (in the edition that I believe is the one reproduced in the recent book *La biblioteca de Borges*) includes an annotation “Al Mokanna 141” which reveals that it is one of the sources of “El tintorero enmascarado Hákim de Merv,” a story first published in the *Revista Multicolor de los Sábados* in 1934 and included in *Historia universal de la infamia* in 1935. Or, to take an example from the same book, Borges's copy of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* by T. E. Lawrence includes a note “una vindicación del fracaso – 421 (cf. *Almafuerte*)” and another that reads “Había una certidumbre en la degradación – 581.” That phrase by Lawrence is quoted in the original English as the epigraph of “Tres versiones de Judas”: “There seemed a certainty in degradation” (*Obras completas* 514). The connection that Borges establishes in the notes in Lawrence with the Argentine poet Almafuerte's interest in failed religious ideas reappears in notes on the cover of Antonio Herrero's book on Almafuerte (which also includes some notes in German, a quotation from a text by Martin Buber on the “Lamed-Wufniks”).

He makes the same association of ideas in “Teoría de Almafuerte,” first published in *La Nación* in 1942; the manuscript I have been able to consult includes a fascinating footnote which reads:

Euclides da Cunha ("Os sertões," 1902) narra que para Conselheiro, profeta de los "sertanejos del Norte," la virtud "era un reflejo superior de la vanidad, casi una impiedad". Almafuerte hubiera compartido ese parecer. En la víspera de una desesperada batalla T. E. Lawrence (Seven Pillars of Wisdom, LXXIV) predicó a la tribu de los sarahim una vindicación del fracaso, idéntica a la premeditada por Almafuerte.

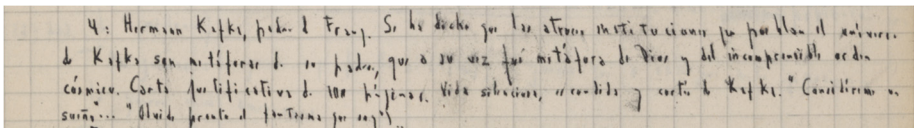
Fig. 1



This note appears in revised form in "Tres versiones de Judas," which is to say that Borges associates Almafuerite and Lawrence on several occasions (making a note on Almafuerite in a book by Lawrence and a note on Lawrence in a book about Almafuerite), and develops this association on several occasions (though only here does he tie it to his reading in Portuguese of Euclides da Cunha's great book *Os Sertões*). That is to say, the constellation of references forms an internal system for Borges, a notable reader but also someone who had worked as a cataloguer in a public library, connecting his reading with his subsequent writing. There is plenty of evidence that Borges checked his references before publishing the texts in which he used them; Bioy Casares in a comic aside complains that when he was working with Borges on collaborative projects Borges would constantly send him off to pull down books from his library (Bioy's vast library, not Borges's much more modest one).

Borges's course on Kafka was presented in three Friday sessions, on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, 1951 at the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores, which was using a space belonging to the Sociedad Científica Argentina on Avenida Santa Fe between Cerrito and Libertad. (I am taking this precise information from an important new resource, the website on Borges's lectures and courses from 1949 to 1955, developed by a team at the Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata led by Mariela Blanco; it is available on the webpage of the Centro Borges de Documentación of the Argentine National library.) We know from the *Boletín* of the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores that the three classes concerned: "1. Oscura vida y póstuma gloria de Kafka. 2 Las narraciones, los fragmentos, los aforismos. 3. Las novelas. El juicio de Thomas Mann. Supuestos precursores de Kafka" <http://centroborges.bn.gov.ar/node/53>. A contemporaneous newspaper clipping, which I believe came from *La Prensa* but which was unfortunately not identified in the photocopy I was able to consult, confirms that the first class focused on Kafka's life. It is then no particular surprise to see in the lecture notes in the notebook in Michigan State that Borges made notes on Kafka's difficult relations with his father

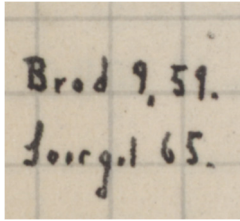
Fig. 2



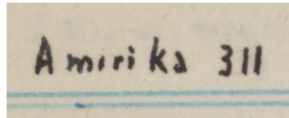
Daniel Balderston

or that he consulted Brod's biography among other sources:

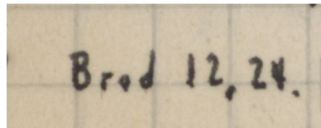
Fig. 3 a, b, c, d, e



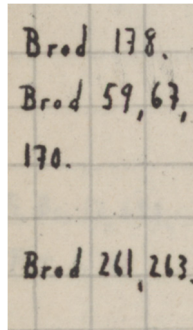
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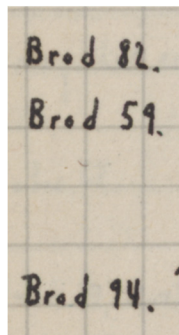
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Brod 12, 24.



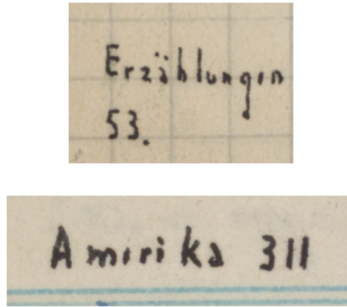
Brod 178.  
Brod 59, 67,  
170.  
Brod 261, 263.



Brod 82.  
Brod 59.  
Brod 94.

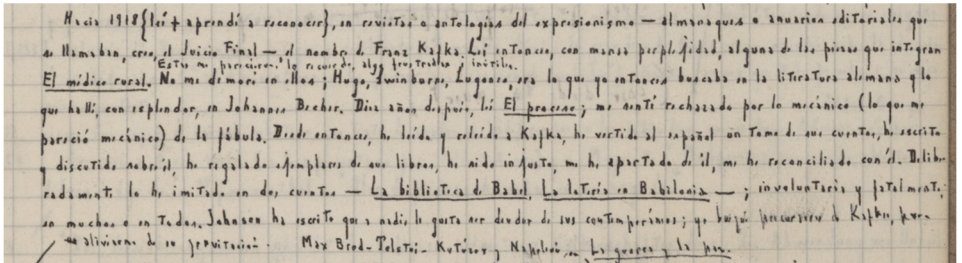
including of course editions of Kafka's works:

Fig. 4 a, b



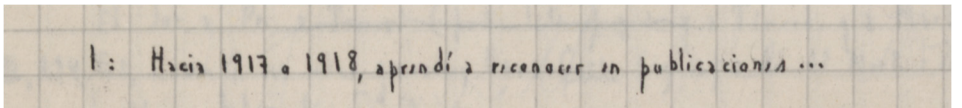
He also tells of his first readings of Kafka, in Geneva, while Kafka was still alive:

Fig. 5



here stating that he first encountered Kafka in expressionist magazines in 1918, but then correcting the date in a note:

Fig. 6



The autobiographical note about the first reading of Kafka states first “Hacia 1918 {léí + aprendí a reconocer}” (I read, I learned to recognize), to then be corrected to “Hacia 1917 o 1918, aprendí a reconocer en publicaciones . . .”: what matters to Borges, as he recalls his first

**Daniel Balderston**

readings, was a recognition. (That early reading leaves its marks in his first writings, which include several “Parábolas” including two that show strong relations with Kafka, “La lucha” and “Liberación,” both collected in *Textos recobrados 1919-1929*). In about 1920 Borges thought of publishing a book of “Poemas en prosa” and even drew a possible cover illustration, one that bears the strong mark of German expressionism:

**Fig. 7**

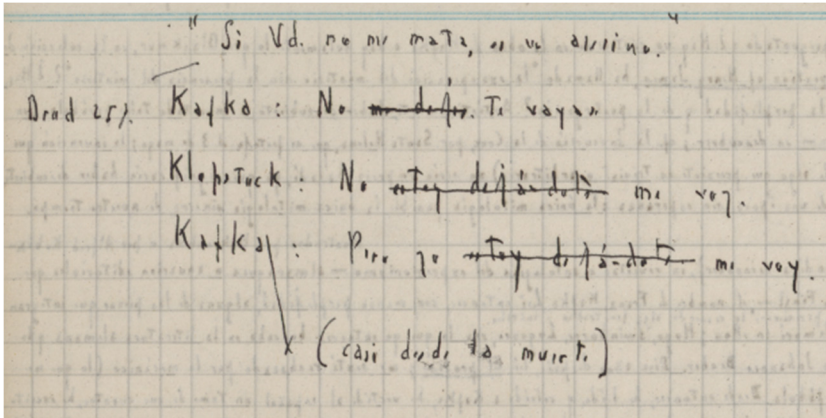


And he would translate *Die Verwandlung* in 1926, publishing it first in the *Revista de Occidente*, and then subsequently as a volume published in Buenos Aires by Losada in 1938, would also translate several other stories, as he notes in a bio-bibliographical note he sent to Victoria Ocampo for some publication (that letter is in *Diálogo con Borges*, and the original is in the Houghton Library at Harvard; I reproduce it in *How Borges Wrote* 33).

The course notes at Michigan State also show how Borges translates a dialogue between Kafka and Dr. Robert Klopstock, who attended Kafka on his deathbed (from the Brod biography, page 257 in Borges’s edition, 259-60 in the 1954 edition):



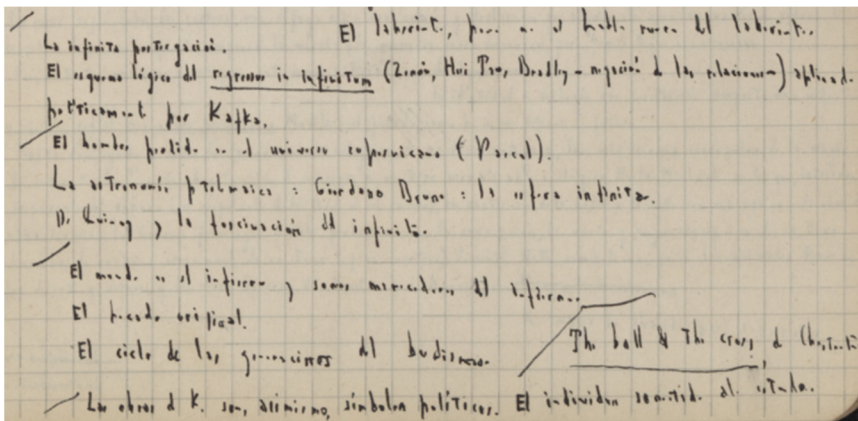
Fig. 8



which he translates as: “Si Vd. no me mata, es un asesino”. [Kafka]: “No me dejes te vayas”. [Klopstock]: “No estoy dejándote me voy”. [Kafka (casi desde la muerte)]: “Pero yo estoy dejándote me voy.” [In the edition I consulted of Brod’s *Franz Kafka: eine Biographie*, this goes like this: “Kafka: ‘Töten Sie mich, sonst sind Sie ein Mörder.’ . . . Als Klopstock sich vom Bett entfernte, um etwas an der Spritze zu reinigen, sagte Franz: ‘Gehen Sie nicht fort.’ Der Freund erwiderte: ‘Ich gehe ja nicht fort.’ Franz erwiderte mit tiefer Stimme: ‘Aber ich gehe fort’” (258-59).]

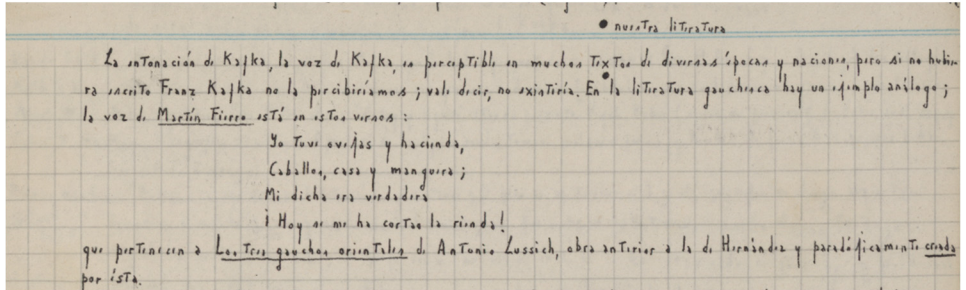
The notes are vague at some points, with lists of possible topics, though these include elements of other talks from the period, on De Quincey, Pascal, Buddhism:

Fig. 9



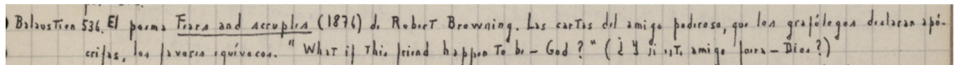
This crucially includes a reference to the logical program of the regressus in infinitum, with a parenthetical reference to Zeno, Han Tsu [Han Yu?] and F. H. Bradley), and a reference on the function of a precursor, though here the example is not the “precursors” of Kafka but the relations between Antonio Lussich’s *Los tres gauchos orientales* and José Hernández’s *El gaucho Martín Fierro*:

Fig. 10



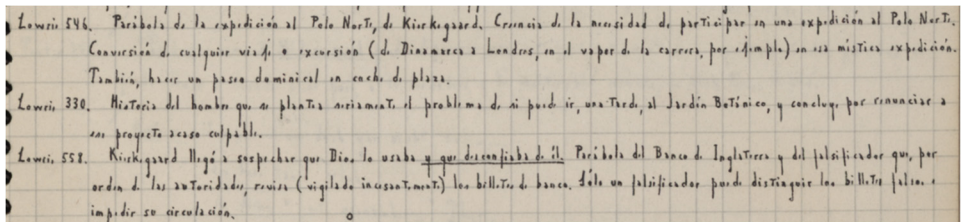
and then, a half page of notes on Kafka’s “precursors,” with bibliographical references:  
Browning:

Fig. 11



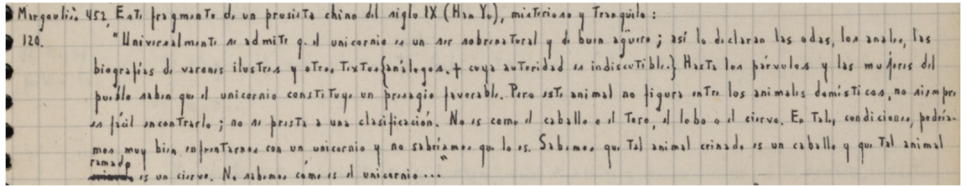
Kierkegaard:

Fig. 12



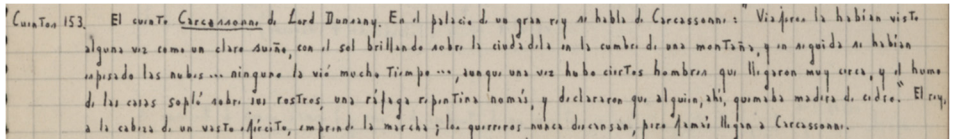
Han Yu:

Fig. 13



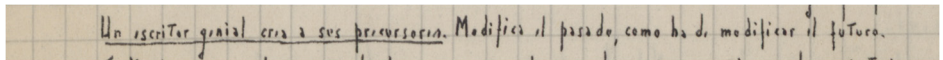
and Lord Dunsany:

Fig. 14



And then, underlined for greater emphasis:

Fig. 15

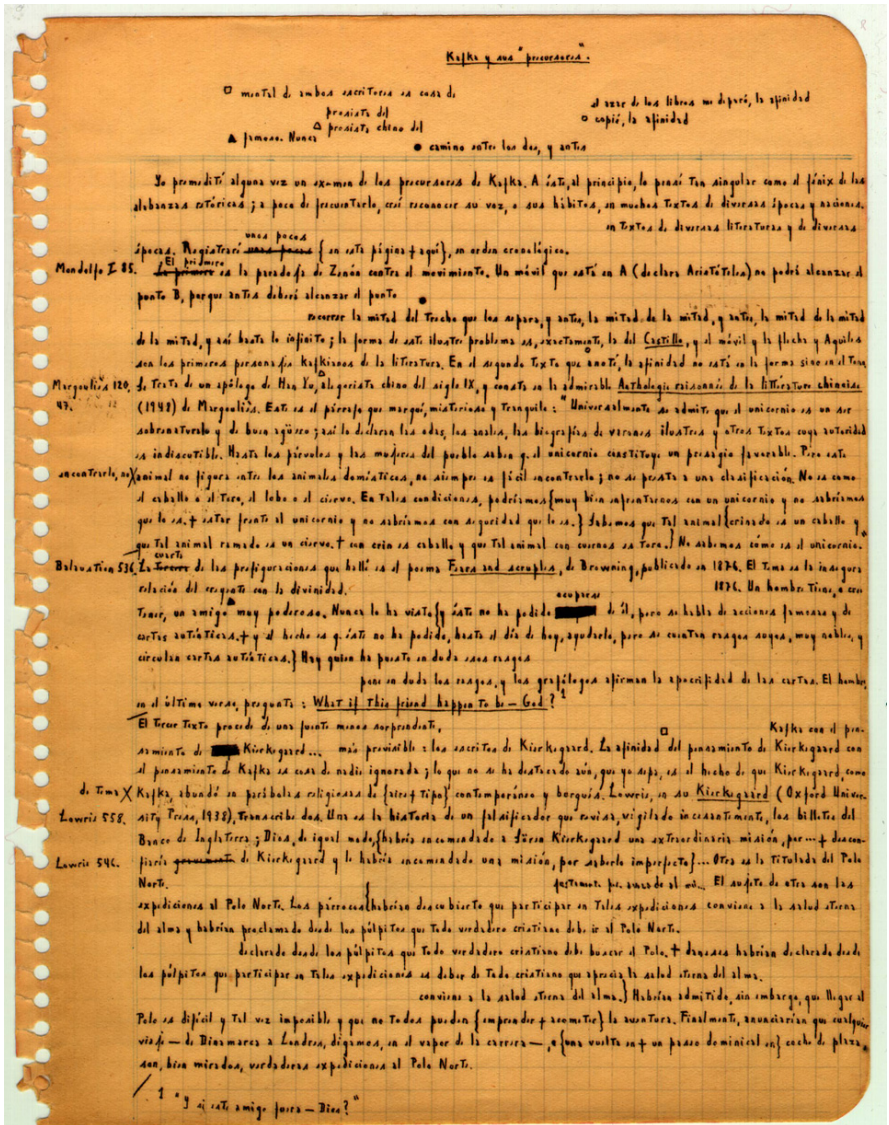


This is not yet the full repertory of the list of Kafka's "precursors" in the famous 1951 essay (Zeno and Léon Bloy are missing, and there is a tentative reference to David Garnett), but the central ideas of that essay are there. The notes for the classes don't end there, however, continuing for a couple of additional pages. The notes for the third class in 1951, then, include (as the *Boletín* said they would) some thoughts on Kafka's "precursors." Borges develops those into the essay we all know in the manuscript that was published by his nephew, which is just a page and a half of his tiny handwriting:

Not yet a fair copy, this is entitled "Kafka y sus 'precursores,'" showing Borges's playfulness with the concept of the literary precursor. Note that it includes in the left margin the same bibliographical references that are in the Michigan State notebook (Browning, Lowrie's study of Kierkegaard, Lord Dunsany), but now with the additions at the beginning of the essay of Zeno and Han Yu (taken from Georges

Margouliès's history of Chinese literature). He has fleshed out the ideas briefly noted in the course notes, but we can see in this manuscript that he is still quite tentative about his own prose, and even about the order of the paragraphs; the famous footnote to T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" makes its first appearance here.

Fig. 16 a, b





relation between the planning of the course and the subsequent writing of the essay is clear. The lapse of time is fairly typical of Borges, who tended to publish his texts in newspapers and magazines fairly soon after writing them; the essay as published in *La Nación* was deemed sufficiently important to be included in *Otras inquisiciones* in 1952 when that book was organized for Borges by José Bianco, and published by Editorial Sur.

The Flaubert course is considerably more complicated, and the manuscript is much more extensive. According to some sources it consisted of five classes, taught on Mondays from May 26<sup>th</sup> to July 7<sup>th</sup>, while other sources speak of six classes (which, as I will explain shortly, strikes me as more likely); Bioy Casares mentions it in his diary entry for May 30, 1952.<sup>2</sup> Virginia owns a manuscript of sixteen pages, covered with tiny handwriting, that includes densely packed marginal notes, almost all in the left margin (as was Borges's custom in this period). For the book of essays that we published in 2019, it proved necessary to consult numerous editions of Flaubert's works and of his correspondence, as well as countless other works; the edition of the essay includes more than two hundred footnotes, some quite extensive, showing the original sources that Borges consulted. We have also been able to reconstruct the classes that are publicized in the *Boletín* of the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores:

1. La religión de la literatura; Flaubert como símbolo. Tasso, Milton, Flaubert. *Madame Bovary*
2. *Salammbô* y sus problemas.
3. *La educación sentimental* y los cuentos.
4. *La tentación de San Antonio*, el influjo de Goethe.
5. *Bouvard y Pécuchet*, su obra capital. El juicio de Rémy de Gourmant.

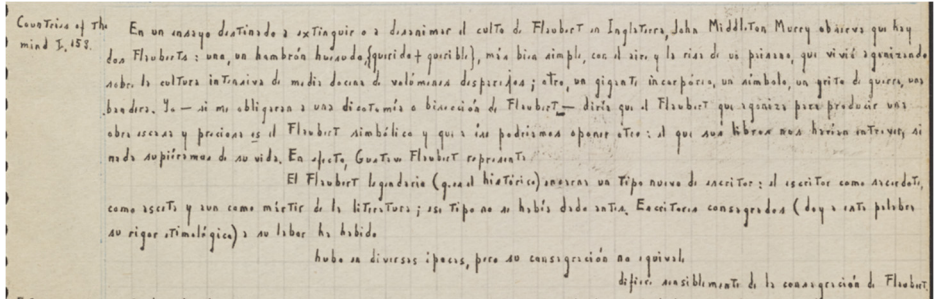
What is already remarkable about this skeletal outline is the short shrift given to Flaubert's most famous book *Madame Bovary*, and the declaration that his masterwork is *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. In fact, in the notes *Madame Bovary* is mentioned very briefly and in passing; Borges decides to focus in great detail on other parts of Flaubert's work.

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<sup>2</sup> Information about the course is available on Mariela Blanco's website on Borges's lectures: <http://centroborges.bn.gov.ar/node/68>. If the course truly met every Monday from May 26<sup>th</sup> to July 7<sup>th</sup> that would have been seven classes. No Argentine holidays fell on those seven Mondays.

The notebook begins with a reference to John Middleton Murry's essay on Flaubert, published in 1924 in *Countries of the Mind*:

Fig. 17



As in the Kafka classes, this permits an opening reference to Flaubert the man, divided between the somewhat simple lovable man with a large bone structure, but then passing almost immediately to the “gigante incorpóreo,” the heroic figure of a legendary writer. Middleton Murry had written: “There are two Flauberts. . . . One was a broad, big-boned, lovable, rather simple-minded man, with the look and the laugh of a farmer, who spent his life in agonies over the intensive culture of half a dozen curiously assorted volumes; the other was an incorporeal giant, a symbol, a war-cry, a banner under which a youthful army marched and marches still to the rout of the bourgeois and the revolution of literature.” Borges associates the legendary Flaubert with an interesting series of antecedents—Pindar, Torquato Tasso, John Milton—the latter two of whom struggled to write epic poems in the early modern period. Flaubert’s example will be taken as a belated version of this struggle, now displaced from the genre of the epic to that of the novel. In what remains of the first class, there is no trace of what Borges announced he would say about *Madame Bovary*, but instead an interesting meditation on the writer’s vocation; this would be published two years later as “Flaubert y su destino ejemplar,” in *La Nación*, and included in the second edition of *Discusión* in 1957, with the same opening reference to John Middleton Murry and the same discussions of Tasso and Milton, and with only a brief mention of *Madame Bovary*. Borges defines his topic in the 1954 essay as a consideration of Flaubert as “el primer Adán de una especie nueva: la del hombre de letras como sacerdote, como asceta y casi como mártir” (*Obras completas* 263). Borges concludes his first class with the words he closes with in 1954:

pensar en la obra de Flaubert es pensar en Flaubert, en el ansioso y laborioso trabajador de las muchas consultas y de los borradores inextricables. Quijote y Sancho son más reales que el soldado español que los inventó, pero ninguna criatura de Flaubert es real como Flaubert. Quienes dicen que su obra capital es la *Correspondencia* pueden argüir que en esos varoniles volúmenes está el rostro de su destino.

Ese destino sigue siendo ejemplar, como lo fue para los románticos el de Byron. A la imitación de la técnica de Flaubert debemos *The Old Wives Tale* y *O primo Basilio*; su destino se ha repetido, con misteriosas magnificaciones y variaciones, en el [de] Mallarmé (cuyo epigrama *El propósito del mundo es un libro* fija una convicción de Flaubert), en el de Moore, en el de Henry James y en el del intrincado y casi infinito irlandés que tejió el *Ulises*. (*Obras completas* 265-66)

There is very little concretely about Flaubert in “Flaubert y su destino ejemplar”, just as there is very little concretely about Kafka in “Kafka y sus precursores”; if it were not for the rest of the Virginia manuscript we would perhaps have to agree with Juan José Saer, in the polemical essay “Borges francófono,” that Borges has only a paltry interest in French literature in general, or in Flaubert in particular. It is a revelation, then, to discover in the remaining classes that Borges wrote in great detail about *Salammbô*, *L'Éducation sentimentale*, the *Trois contes*, the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* and *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. He would recycle a bit of the last class in another 1954 essay, “Vindicación de *Bouvard et Pécuchet*,” which contains the provocative statement “El hombre que con *Madame Bovary* forjó la novela realista fue también el primero en romperla” (*Obras completas* 262), a statement that is not yet in the notes for the final class in 1952. As is the final epigrammatic sentence of that essay, “Evidentemente, si la historia universal es la historia de Bouvard y de Pécuchet, todo lo que la integra es ridículo y deleznable” (*Obras completas* 262).

Already in the second class, on *Salammbô*, we see Borges at work preparing a class. He is not interested just in reading the Flaubert novel: he wants to verify detail by detail the representation of Carthage in that text, looking at some of the same sources that Flaubert used, including Renan, and Pliny, and Gautier,<sup>3</sup> but also some later sources on

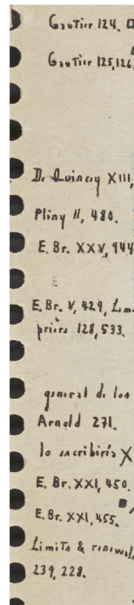
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<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere in the manuscript Borges mentions a book consulted by Flaubert, Edward Lane's 1836 *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*. It is also mentioned in a



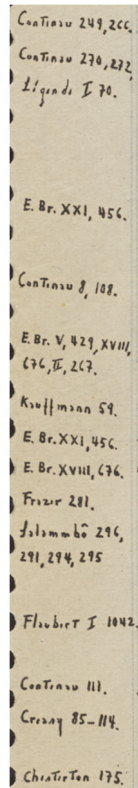
knowledge of Carthage and Phoenician culture, notably Georges Contenau's *La civilisation phénicienne*, cited several times, Yezekhel Kaufmann, a historian of the ancient Middle East whose works had yet to be translated from Hebrew to English but about whom Borges was apparently able to consult summaries in English or German, Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man*, with its reflection on the disappearance of Carthage from the modern imaginary, Max Nordau (for his discussion of realism in *Entartung*) and Creasy's *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World* for its discussion of the battle of the Metaurus; there are also numerous references to entries in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* on Arabia, Moloch, Phoenicia, Ashtarte, Michelet and of course Carthage.

Fig. 18 a, b



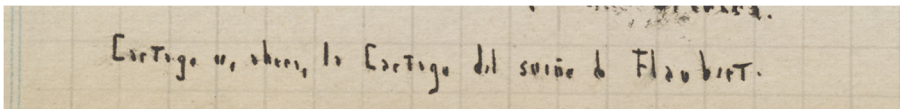

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marginal note in the manuscript of "El hombre en el umbral" (see *How Borges Wrote* 47-48).



The class develops the hypothesis that Flaubert read obsessively in order to reimagine Carthage, since the historical and archeological sources available to him gave little idea of the life of the city, and Borges concludes: “Cartago es, ahora, la Cartago del sueño de Flaubert.”

Fig. 19

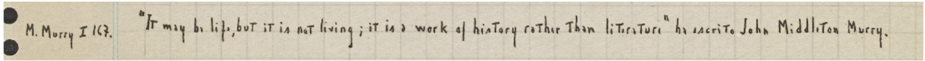


As Borges had written in “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” the imaginative work imposed itself on reality; for Borges, here, it is a total replacement, a substitution.

The essay on *L'Éducation sentimentale* is just as detailed, with a plethora of references to Flaubert's personal experience of the revolution of 1848 (and of love), as well as references to many of the letters he

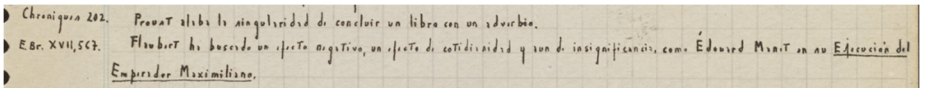
wrote to his friends during the composition of the novel (in its several stages, as Borges notes). The summary in the *Boletín* announced a discussion of Flaubert's interest in Goethe, which is developed in the essay with references to *Wilhelm Meister*, the Bildungsroman genre, and several Goethe scholars. The class ends with another quotation from John Middleton Murry, this time one that calls into question the value of Flaubert's novel: "It may be life, but it is not living; it is a work of history rather than literature."

Fig. 20



The fourth class focuses on *Trois contes*, which are taken up in the order in which they appear in the book, though Borges notes that that is a reverse chronological order: "Un coeur simple" is set in the nineteenth century, "La Légende de Saint Julien L'Hospitalier" in the early Christian period, and "Hérodiades" in the time of John the Baptist. Again, Borges has read exhaustively, from Flaubert's letters to the most important of his critics in 1952: Claude Digeon, René Dumesnil and Albert Thibaudet. At the same time, he brings in Coleridge, Johnson, Yeats and Proust, remembering Proust's celebration of the fact that "Hérodiades" ends with an adverb. The final note in this section of the manuscript is tantalizing: "Flaubert ha buscado un efecto negativo, un efecto de cotidianidad y aun de insignificancia, como Édouard Manet en su Ejecución del Emperador Maximiliano," with a reference to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article on Manet, which recalls that "Only one important picture was absent," having been prohibited by the authorities (presumably because of the theme of regicide).

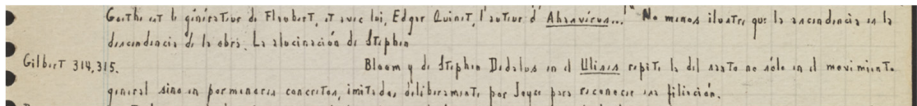
Fig. 21



The fifth class centers on *La tentation de Saint Antoine*. Borges begins by telling the story of the origin of the first desert monks, relating their history to that of the Pratyeka Buddhas, and citing Pliny, "Gens sola, et in toto orbe praeter ceteras mira, sine ulla femina," a passage that he notes is also cited by Gibbon. There are references to Bettenson's

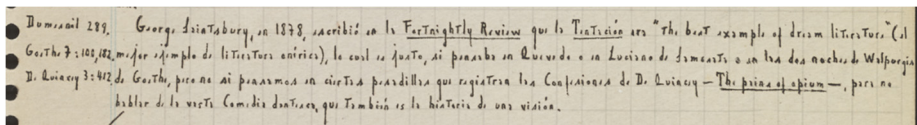
*Documents of the Christian Church* on a variety of early heresies and to Draguet's *Les pères du désert*, and of course a multitude of other references to the periods that are represented in the three stories. There is also a notable allusion to the scene in Joyce's *Ulysses* in which Stephen Dedalus dreams of a melon and a street of harlots, perhaps recalling a detail of the *Tentation*; Borges comments: "No menos ilustre que la ascendencia es la descendencia de la obra. La alucinación de [Leopold] Bloom y de Stephen Dedalus en el *Ulises* repite la del santo no sólo en el movimiento general sino en pormenores concretos, imitados deliberadamente por Joyce para reconocer su filiación."

Fig. 22



He discusses Flaubert's interest in Spinoza, Schopenhauer and Spencer, and quotes with approval George Saintsbury's 1878 judgment, in the *Fortnightly Review*, that the *Tentation* was "the best example of dream literature," comparing it favorably to examples from Quevedo, Lucian and Goethe, though he states that perhaps De Quincey's dreams in the *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* and Dante's in the *Divina Commedia* surpass Flaubert's in their imagination.

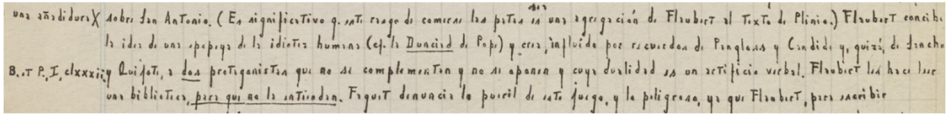
Fig. 23



The final class is on *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. I have already mentioned that it does not include the stark contrast between the Flaubert who creates the realist novel in *Madame Bovary* and the Flaubert who destroys realism in his final unfinished novel. Instead, he begins with the idea that Flaubert embodied the struggle between "dos hermanos enemigos," his romantic self and his realist self: "el realista tiene la culpa de *Bouvard et Pécuchet*." He discusses the paired main characters as follows, partly translating some ideas of Émile Faguet:

Flaubert concibe la idea de una epopeya de la idiotez humana (cf. la Dunciad de Pope) y crea, influido por recuerdos de Pangloss y Candide y, quizá, de Sancho y Quijote, a dos protagonistas que no se complementan y no se oponen y cuya dualidad es un artificio verbal. Flaubert les hace leer una biblioteca, para que no la entiendan.

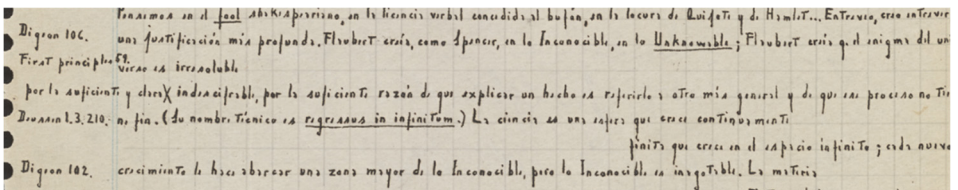
Fig. 24



And of course he recalls the famous anecdote that Flaubert read one thousand five hundred books in the composition of this novel, encompassing as it does the most diverse fields of human knowledge and endeavor. The phrase that the *Boletín* announced as the conclusion of the essay, “para Remy de Gourmont, Bouvard et Pécuchet no sólo es la obra maestra de Flaubert sino de la literatura francesa, y casi de la literatura,” appears here in the middle of the notes. And the discussion of the relations between science and wisdom, with frequent reference to Herbert Spencer, recalls a moment of the notes for the Kafka essay:

Flaubert creía, como Spencer, en lo Inconocible, en lo Unknowable; Flaubert creía que el enigma del universo es indescifrable, por la suficiente y clara razón de que explicar un hecho es referirlo a otro más general y de que ese proceso no tiene fin. (Su nombre técnico es regressus in infinitum.) La ciencia es una esfera finita que crece en el espacio infinito; cada nuevo crecimiento le hace abarcar una zona mayor de lo Inconocible, pero lo Inconocible es inagotable.

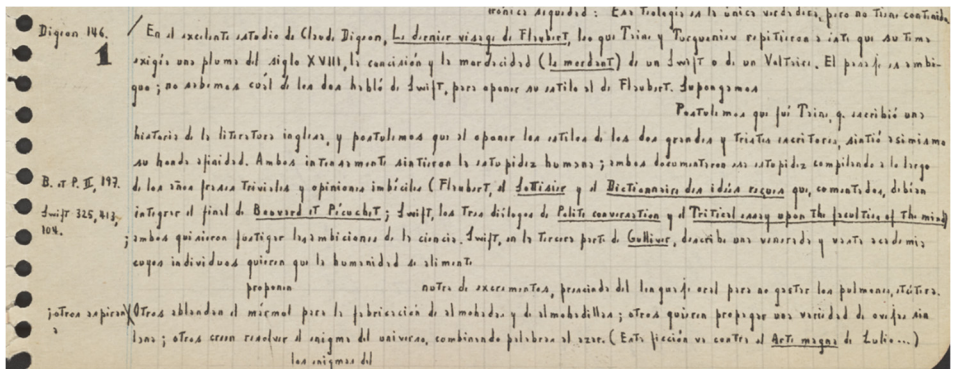
Fig. 25

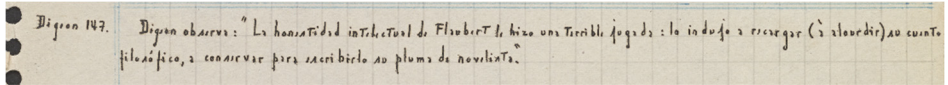


Once again, a wide variety of other sources are cited, including Maurice De Wulf (from the *Histoire de la philosophie médiévale* on Thomas Aquinas), Montesquiou, Dickens, Laurel and Hardy, Voltaire, Rabelais, Deussen, Duns Scotus. The notes end evocatively but abruptly:

En el excelente estudio de Claude Digeon, Le dernier visage de Flaubert, leo que Taine y Turgueniev repitieron a éste que su tema exigía una pluma del siglo XVIII, la concisión y la mordacidad (le mordant) de un Swift o de un Voltaire. El pasaje es ambiguo; no sabemos cuál de los dos habló de Swift, para oponer su estilo al de Flaubert. Postulemos que fue Taine, que escribió una historia de la literatura inglesa, y postulemos que al oponer los estilos de los dos grandes y tristes escritores, sintió asimismo su honda afinidad. Ambos intensamente sintieron la estupidez humana; ambos documentaron esa estupidez compilando a lo largo de los años prosas triviales y opiniones imbéciles (Flaubert, el Sottisier y el Dictionnaire des idées reçues que, comentados, debían integrar el final de Bouvard et Pécuchet; Swift, los tres diálogos de Polite conversation y el Tritical essay upon the faculties of the mind); ambos quisieron fustigar las ambiciones de la ciencia. Swift, en la tercera parte de Gulliver, describe una verdadera y vasta academia cuyos individuos proponen que la humanidad se nutra de excrementos, prescindiera del lenguaje oral para no gastar los pulmones, etcétera. Otros ablandan al mármol para la fabricación de almohadas y de almohadillas; otros quieren propagar una variedad de ovejas sin lana; otros creen resolver los enigmas del universo, combinando palabras al azar. (Esta ficción va contra el Arte magna de Julio...) Digeon observa: “La honestidad intelectual de Flaubert le hizo una terrible jugada: lo indujo a recargar (à alourdir) su cuento filosófico, a conservar para escribirlo su pluma de novelista.”

Fig. 26 a, b





The course ends, then, with a consideration of how Flaubert is exemplary in quite a different sense than was suggested in the first class: Flaubert's final work recalls a variety of precursors who mock the absurdity of human intellectual endeavors, including Voltaire and Swift. The eighteenth century wit that Flaubert's friends saw in this work betrayed a deep affinity with those two great, sad writers. He concludes quoting Digeon on Flaubert's intellectual honesty; clearly here, the "obra capital" announced as the theme in the *Boletín* is a work that is a collection of fragments, of impossibilities. I take it that Borges identifies with this Flaubert, with the sad chronicler of human failure.

The hitherto unpublished essay on Flaubert has an ambition that far surpasses the brief essays of *Otras inquisiciones* and those added to the second edition of *Discusión* (with the exceptions of the essays on Hawthorne and the Argentine writer, both of which derived from courses at the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores). It seems more like the nucleus of an unfinished book, similar to the extended essays on Dante and on the gauchesque tradition that Borges wrote about the same time. Blindness intervened; that prolonged study of Flaubert was not to be, the fate of so many other projects that Borges announced in the 1940s and 1950s (including a study in depth of Almafuerite). Certainly the Borges of this essay is no Francophobe; I wish that Juan José Saer, who always insisted that the novel began with *Don Quijote* and ended with *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, could have read Borges's pages on that remarkable and haunting novel. Borges returns in this late text (late because blindness would soon change the mode of his writing) to the French letters that he had no doubt studied in some depth in his only extended period of formal education, at the Collège Calvin in Geneva. The contrast between the course on Kafka (based on readings that began in that same period) and the one on Flaubert is notable: Kafka left his traces everywhere, while Flaubert is a sort of shadow for Borges, a legend. Kafka is a writer of the possible, Flaubert an impossibility, perhaps for that very reason a figure who fascinates and disturbs Borges. If Borges could say in the class on Kafka that some of his own writing was a deliberate imitation of Kafka, clearly that is not the case with Flaubert: he is a haunting example, a "destino ejemplar," of the impossibility of a writing project. Flaubert and Kafka were perhaps for Borges like those two "warring brothers" that Faguet saw in Flaubert, the romantic writer and the realist. Certainly for Borges both complicate the relations between human experience and

intellectual representations, both are of interest for their radical approaches to the representation of everyday life, both suggest that literature, no matter how far it seems to be from realism, works through notions of verisimilitude. The key concepts that Borges had developed twenty years before in “La postulación de la realidad” and “El arte narrativo y la magia” resonate in these two unfinished, fragmentary manuscripts, suggesting, beyond a doubt, that Borges imagines “una realidad más compleja” than the one that is affirmed in the text, a reality whose discordant traces—of dream, of fantasy, of horror—matter deeply to, and trouble, the Argentine writer in 1951 and 1952.

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