

reflection and medium of the rapport between them. Man, made in God's image and the crown of creation, repeats again who or what God is: the world is the occasion of the utterance.

These examples suffice to prove Aldana's talent and originality, as well as the profundity of his thought. One cannot but be amazed at the skill with which he exploits in such great variety this single emblem of the infinite sphere. One must surely admire the loftiness of concept and sentiment with which he employs each of numerous motifs, expressive in their totality of the many-faceted wonder and mystery of an infinitely transcendent and infinitely immanent God.

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HISTORY, MYTH, AND ARCHETYPE IN BORGES'S VIEW OF ARGENTINA

The writings of Jorge Luis Borges are notable for the degree of fascination and challenge they exercise over his committed readers. It is, perhaps, hardly surprising that Borges, who is a highly 'committed' writer, should provoke equal and opposite reactions among those who feel his personal dedication misplaced in terms of the contemporary world. Whatever view one takes of Borges's position as an artist, it can hardly be denied that his genius lies in his power over the implicit; seen as symbols, extended metaphors, or myths, his fictions unfold multiple dimensions as they allude to or suggest some universal truth while always stopping short of ultimate revelation. His literary achievement is an intensely premeditated one. It rests upon a dual foundation consisting of the well-defined aesthetic which forms his unique style and vision, and a heterogeneous collection of metaphysical and historical ideas. Borges's 'aesthetic of negation and compression', which has been admirably described by Ronald Christ,¹ is clearly a means of viewing language and human experience in which Borges believes. However, the extent to which he believes — as distinct from wishing to believe — in the metaphysics, is entirely debatable. But here he discovered ideas which his love of speculative thought — his predilection for the fantastic also — would not let him release, but demanded that he juggle them continually within the literary contexts he created.

For instance, in the two essays written in 1944 and 1946, now bracketed together under the title *Una refutación nueva del tiempo*, Borges attempts to establish for himself a philosophical position which rejects the existence of time as an immutable series. As he confesses, with customary modesty and self-deprecation, the exercise is, to some extent, a *post hoc* rationalization of a concept of time to which his imagination had led him some twenty years previously, and which has since been present throughout his poetry and prose:

En el decurso de una vida consagrada a las letras y (alguna vez) a la perplejidad metafísica, he divisado o presentido una refutación del tiempo, de la que yo mismo decreo, pero que suele visitarme en las noches y en el fatigado crepúsculo con la ilusoria fuerza de axioma.

Borges does not delude himself into thinking that he has provided a key to a fresh understanding of time as a philosophical concept, much less a scientific fact. (The essay contains the deliberate irony of an argument that is anything but novel, and even the word 'nueva' assumes, as the author points out, the existence of that very time he claims to refute.) Instead he takes Berkeley's denial of the objective existence of matter, and Hume's denial of the independent existence of mind and spirit, one logical step further. Once matter and spirit — which are continua — are denied, asks Borges, once space is denied, what right have we to time, the third continuum? Using the arguments of Idealism, Borges seeks to deny also the vast temporal series which that philosophy allows — the existence of one single, universal time in which all events are linked. One has only to show, he maintains, that a single point in time is capable of repetition to confound utterly the notion that time is an irrevocable series. But even in the strict terms of his own argument, Borges postulates this rather than proving it. Though plausible, his demonstration

¹ Ronald J. Christ, *The Narrow Act: Borges' Art of Allusion* (New York, 1969), Chapter 1.

is little more than the assertion that such a repetition is present in a strong, experienced impression of *déjà vu*. At the end of the later of the two original essays, Borges revealed something of the motive behind his assiduous speculations: Negar la sucesión temporal, negar el yo, negar el universo astronómico, son desesperiadas aparentes y consuelos secretos. Nuestro destino (a diferencia del infierno de Swedenborg y de la mitología tibetana) no es espantoso por ser irreal; es espantoso porque es irreversible de hierro.

Borges knows, then, that in working out a deliberately anachronistic refutation of time, he is indulging in a kind of philosophical *reductio ad absurdum* which the artillery of modern science will immediately reduce to rubble. Yet to him it is in that it affords his imagination an escape from intolerable limitations. But the idea of time which emerges from Borges's poetry and fiction is different from that propounded in the essays by turning idealist dialectic in upon itself. Indeed, it owes more to the passionate assertions of Nietzsche than to eighteenth-century rationalism. Like Nietzsche, Borges sees time as a cyclic phenomenon, such that every event which takes place is destined to be repeated, and will have been repeated already, in analogous forms, throughout the myriad temporal cycles which comprise 'circular time'. Borges departs from the Nietzschean model in that he does not claim that the world will repeat itself exactly in each successive cycle, but that 'circular time' consists of the re-enactment of archetypal human actions and deeds in innumerable differing contexts. Instead of stating, as does Nietzsche, that when the stars once more enter into a certain configuration, a Stoic and Epicurean will conspire to murder Caesar, Borges says — more enigmatically — that when, nineteen centuries after, a *gaucho* is set upon by others among whom he recognizes an adopted son, and dies uttering words similar to those of Caesar, he does so purely to fulfil one of destiny's recurrent symmetries (see 'La trama', *Hacedor*, 1960). Thus Borges avoids adopting a Nietzschean idea of eternal recurrence which would have been every bit as monolithic and oppressive as the notion of time as an immutable succession.

One result of this is that Borges's thought proceeds from a minimum of assumptions, and is thus enabled to demonstrate that uniquely mythic quality to which numerous critics have turned their attention — few more clear-sightedly than Carter Wheelock¹ — which must absolve Borges of the charge of being frivolous or escapist. 'Radical speculation', states Wheelock, '— imagination — is the special property of archaic man, who has little fixed knowledge to guide his children for the same reason; and of the artist, poet and sceptic.' This mode of thought gives rise to a *philosophia perennis* which Wheelock describes as belonging to a 'circular, predestined universe, capricious and chaotic, capable of an infinite number of equally valid configurations; a world in which everything conceivable is true, and where "false" can only mean "unthought"', and he compares it directly with the attitude to time and history common to archaic societies described by Mircea Eliade. In discussing the viewpoint known as *historicism* (generally accepted by modern civilization as a frame of reference for consideration of the past), Eliade states:²

¹ Carter Wheelock, *The Mythmaker* (Austin, Texas, 1969).

² Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (London, 1955), p. 153.

position, although the most modern and, in a certain sense, almost inevitable position of modern thinkers who define man as a 'historical being', has not yet made a definite conquest of contemporary thought. Some pages earlier, we noted various recent orientations that tend to derive value upon the myth of cyclic periodicity, even the myth of the eternal return. These orientations disregard not only historicism but even history as such. We believe we are not seeing in them, rather than a resistance to history, a revolt against historical time, an attempt to restore this historical time, freighted as it is with human experience, to a place of time that is cosmic, cyclical and infinite. In any case it is worth noting that the work of some of the most significant writers of our century — T. S. Eliot and James Joyce — is saturated with nostalgia for the myth of eternal repetition and, in the last analysis, for the notion of time.

Borges, no less than Eliot and Joyce, felt the tyranny of history keenly, and his metaphysics were, in a very real sense, just such a conscious revolt against the inevitable, linear progression of time. On the other hand, he was a rational man of the twentieth century, an Argentinian moreover, acutely aware of the immediate role of his nation, in the shaping of which his own ancestors had played a markedly significant role. Indeed, it is from this divided vision of time — historical time in the particular — and the ingenuity of his efforts to reconcile the modern viewpoint with the mythic, that many of the tensions, intricacies, and paradoxes of Borges's thought flow.

Finally, Borges's preoccupation with his national history had much in common with the prevailing spirit of the inter-war years in Latin America, when many poets and thinkers were attempting to define a cultural role for the Spanish-speaking Americas independent of the artistic and scientific hegemony of Europe. An unmistakable note of nationalistic fervour, bordering at times on cultural chauvinism, is present in Borges's early works *Evaristo Carriego* and *El lamaño de mi esperanza*. Equally apparent, however, is a distinctly unorthodox approach to Argentinian history is apparent. In a portentous footnote to the opening chapter of *Evaristo Carriego* (1925) Borges says:

El tiempo — sin remilgado temor ni novelero amor de la paradoja — que solamente los muertos tienen pasado; es decir, recuerdo autobiográfico de él; es decir, tienen historia — el tiempo es sucesión, debemos reconocer que donde densidad mayor hay de hechos, el tiempo corre y que el más caudaloso es el de este inconsecuente lado del mundo. La conquista y colonización de estos reinos . . . fueron tan efímera operación que un abuelo mío, pudo comandar la última batalla de importancia contra los indios, realizando una victoria de la mitad del siglo diecinueve, obra conquistadora del dieciséis.

It appears that Borges is already adopting the idea of time as a succession of events with strong reservations. A few pages further on, in the second chapter which constitutes a brief biography of Carriego, he states: 'Yo pienso que la cronología es inaplicable a Carriego, hombre de una conversada vida y de una eternidad, sus repeticiones.' Similarly, historicism is also insufficient to describe events with the kind of significance which is, for Borges, illuminating. In the opening chapter of the same work entitled 'Historias de jinetes', Borges traces a parallel between the *gaucho* cavalry of the Banda Oriental and the Mongol hordes of Genghis Khan, in that neither army of wild, nomadic horsemen had been able to overcome the obstacle posed by the existence of urban civilization. Both regarded the cities as useless and incomprehensible, but yet feared them. Both failed to comprehend the strength and significance of the city as an opposing, inimical means of social organization. Recounting these points, Borges reflects:

Remotas en el tiempo y en el espacio, las historias que he congregado son una sola: el protagonista [el jinete] es eterno, y el receloso peón que pasa tres días ante una puerta que da al último patio es, aunque venido a menos, el mismo que, con dos arcos, un lazo hecho de erin y un alfanje, estuvo a punto de arrasar y borrar, bajo los cascos del caballo estepario, el reino más antiguo del mundo.

Borges thus clasps the idea of the cyclical nature of time in a lasting embrace. The human acts which, when seen as a succession, serve as a means of measuring time, are no longer regarded as separate and unique, but as recurring in an infinite number of shifting contexts. By this means, Borges supplies an eternal dimension for all actions such that they transcend the ephemeral individuals who enact them, and (in Borges's phrase) universal history then comprises archetypal acts and situations which will be repeated, while time lasts, throughout limitless combinations of circumstances by innumerable hands and minds. But ten years later Borges is still far from taking a firm view on the cyclical nature of time, though in the poem 'La noche cíclica' (*El otro, el mismo*, 1943) he is again turning over the question in his mind:

Lo supieron los arduos alumnos de Pitágoras:
 Los astros y los hombres vuelven cíclicamente;
 Los átomos fatales repitirán la urgente
 Afrodita de oro, los tebanos, las ágoras.
 No sé si volveremos en un ciclo segundo
 Como vuelven las cifras de una fracción periódica;
 Pero sé que una oscura rotación pitagórica
 Noche a noche me deja en un lugar del mundo.

Once human actions and motives are reduced to mere paradigmatic gestures, it is a short step to a position where individual personality is relegated to insignificance. Aesthetics and metaphysics, then, led Borges to repudiate in his writings objective details and temporality in order to focus upon the quintessential and primordial, where all men's destinies become — within the non-chronology of a mythic, circular time, and by a mysterious and secret process — merged in one archetypal destiny. Or rather, they are part of a revolving, universal history which is the history of all men, and within which all men are one man. The human actions which comprise history are not seen as a series of interrelated, sequential facts imprisoned in the past, but take place in an eternal present. To express this process of universalization Borges has replaced metaphor (perhaps the cornerstone of modern descriptive writing) with allusion. As Ronald Christ points out: 'For Borges, allusion first of all expresses the collapse of time and the disintegration of the personality . . . to think the same is to be the same. To make allusions is to demonstrate the timeless universality of the human mind.'¹ And to demonstrate this is to create myths. But myth will not readily lie down with history. Sooner or later one becomes the other (a Borgesian conceit in itself), achieving in the process either the demystification of myth, or seeking to mythologize history.

Whereas Borges's work is chiefly remarkable for the latter process, there emerges from both his poetry and prose a view of Argentine history which is highly personalized and based upon a miscellany of episodes bound up in fact and also imagination with individuals to whom posterity has attributed some historical importance. Two poems separated by thirty years commemorate Borges's maternal

great-grandfather (Colonel Isidoro Suárez, 1799–1846), whose decisive cavalry action won the battle of Junín in 1824 for the Republican forces under Bolívar.¹ Another recalls the death of his grandfather, Colonel Francisco Borges, at the battle of La Verde in 1874.² In his 'Poema conjetural' (*El otro, el mismo*, 1943) Borges imagines the death of yet another distant ancestor, Francisco Laprida, formerly President of the Constituent Assembly and a signatory to the 1826 Constitution, at the hands of the *gaucho* militia under José Félix Aldao. In the poems 'Rosas' and 'El General Quiroga va en coche a la muerte', both written before 1925, the Argentinian *caudillo* Juan Manuel Rosas and his one-time supporter, the *gaucho* general Facundo Quiroga, are recalled with a kind of grudging awe and admiration. Later, in *El Hacedor* (1960), Borges was to write the short prose piece 'Diálogo de los muertos', an imaginary conversation beyond the grave between the two, indicating a changed attitude towards Rosas, whom he now regards, by comparison with the iron-souled Quiroga, as a coward.

One cannot realistically claim that in speaking of Laprida, Rosas, Quiroga, even his own military ancestors, Borges has of them the 'recuerdo autobiográfico' to which he referred in *Evaristo Carriego*. But by an effort of will and imagination, Borges embraces them, establishing a link which makes them part of his own 'historia viva'. They are for him, as he claimed in 1925, the ancestors of his blood and spirit to whom his verses were an offering. Reflecting upon this, Humberto Rasi suggests that for Borges, a man of books and letters, very different from those to whom he pledges his filial and patriotic devotion across the gap of years, the preoccupation with his soldier antecedents was in part an attempt to establish for himself some kind of historical identity. Rasi observes:

We touch here the emotional core of Borges's attitude towards his civic and familial heritage, which to a large extent are one and the same for him. Conscious of being the last link in a long line of brave men who fought and died for his *patria*, Borges sees himself as a 'final creole'. This sentiment, expressed early in his work, becomes more intense as he melancholically approaches a childless old age, and foresees the unavoidable extinction of his name.³

Ultimately Borges cannot escape the implications of his view of history. Sooner or later historical events must cease to live as recollections in the minds of individuals who preserve some kind of direct link with them as they and their contemporaries age and die, and their children and grandchildren see with different eyes. In one of his more recent collections of prose fiction, *El informe de Brodie*, Borges makes use of family memorabilia to illustrate both the dilemma and its solution in the stories 'La señora mayor' and 'Guayaquil'. In the first tale, María Justina de Jáuregui, now a senile old lady whose father, Colonel Mariano Rubio (like Borges's great-grandfather Suárez), had led a charge to win the Battle of Cerro Alto during

¹ 'Inscripción sepulcral', in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), and 'Página para recordar al Coronel Suárez, vencedor en Junín', in *El otro, el mismo* (1969). The poems collected in this volume were written between 1930 and 1967.

² 'Alusión a la muerte del Coronel Francisco Borges', in *El otro, el mismo*.

³ Humberto M. Rasi, 'The Final Creole: Borges's View of Argentine History', in *Prose for Borges*, edited by Charles Newman and Mary Kinzie (Chicago, 1972). Here Rasi points out that in the poem entitled 'Dulcia linquimus arva', in *Luna de enfrente* (1925), the following dedication appears:

Mi canción de criollo final
 por la noche agrandada de relámpagos
 en el expreso del Sur
 que desfondándose pierde los campos

The dedication has been omitted in editions of Borges's *Obra poética* printed after 1967.

¹ Ronald J. Christ, p. 33.

the Wars of Independence, is publicly honoured on the occasion of her hundredth birthday. Over the years Señora de Jáuregui's faculties have gradually deteriorated. The exploits of her father, her childhood years, the attitudes and standards of her early life remain as fixed points of reference whilst her subsequent existence has become a vague confusion. Worn out by the sudden, uncomprehended flurry of recognition, publicity, and official visitations, the old lady dies shortly after the party given in her honour, and Borges observes, referring to the Battle of Cerro Alto: 'Pienso que la última víctima de ese tropel de lanzas en el Perú sería, más de un siglo después, una señora anciana.'

The 'señora anciana' was a victim of the historical event with which she was linked, and was, ultimately, totally unable to convey her experience of it into the present. The same cannot be said of the ageing historian who is the central character and narrator of the story 'Guayaquil', who must also be seen as representing Borges himself. An important historical find, a letter written by Bolívar the Liberator, has been made available for examination to a nominee of the Argentine Government who will travel to the Central American republic where the manuscript is kept. The letter contains an account of Bolívar's meeting with San Martín at Guayaquil in 1822, after which San Martín withdrew from the liberation struggle, leaving Bolívar in control. The narrator, distinguished holder of a chair in American History, is recommended by his university, and official government approval of this highly appropriate candidature seems a foregone conclusion. Then he is visited unexpectedly by a second and obscure contender for the honour, one Dr Zimmerman, a recent immigrant of German-Jewish extraction. They begin to discuss the nomination, and in the course of their conversation the narrator realizes that he is destined not to undertake the mission, and must defer to the superior will of the younger man, despite his reputation as a scholar and his close family links with Argentina's past. Zimmerman declares:

Usted es genuino historiador. Su gente anduvo por los campos de América y libró las grandes batallas, mientras la mía, oscura, apenas emergía del ghetto. Usted lleva la historia en la sangre, según sus elocuentes palabras; a usted le basta oír con atención esa voz recóndita. Yo en cambio, debo transferirme a Sulaco y descifrar papeles.

The analogy is clear. Borges is making, in these two stories, a statement about history and his place within the history of his country. As the 'final Creole' he cannot allow his historical experience to die with him, but must recognize the right of others, who may not directly share it, to keep it alive and, perhaps, to interpret it in different ways. Yet in making his statement, Borges still puts forward the notion of circular time; the death of the 'señora anciana' echoes those at Cerro Alto; the conversation between the historian (Borges) and Zimmerman repeats the meeting of Bolívar with San Martín at Guayaquil.

Despite his preoccupation with family and national history, Borges's natural inclination towards abstraction and speculation invariably leads him to transmute history into literature and thence into myth. It is as if Borges were saying that there exists a many-faceted, composite core of national experience peculiar to Argentina which is an amalgam of its history, literature, superstitions and beliefs, and the inaccessible strivings and privations of its people. From this broad, dark current recorded history emerges as an occasional isolated island which scarcely hints at the true nature of the forces which shape and surround it. For instance, in the story 'El otro duelo' (*El informe de Brodie*) the chief protagonists are two *gauchos* from the

Banda Oriental whose mutual rivalry is well known, and who are about to die having been taken prisoner in an obscure battle during a period of civil war. Borges observes: 'El combate, que no duraría una hora, ocurrió en un lugar cuyo nombre nunca supieron. Los nombres los ponen después los historiadores.'

Borges was drawn to two sources in his search for that indefinable quality of a people of which history makes no assessment, but which constantly inspires myth, poetry, and literature. The first was the city of Buenos Aires and the suburb of Palermo in which, at the turn of the century, urban criminal and political gangs flourished with their notorious knife-fighters and assassins. Typically, in later years, Borges, far from ignoring these early insights and explorations, returned to the world he first uncovered in *Luna de enfrente* (1925) and the story 'El hombre de la esquina rosada' (*Historia universal de la infamia*, 1935) in three stories contained in the *Brodie* collection. The second source was the turmoil and violence of the post-independence years of the last century, when the histories of Buenos Aires Province, the Banda Oriental and South-East Brazil were closely interwoven, and Argentina itself was split by civil wars in which irregular *gaucho* cavalry played a significant part on the side of the Federalists. Indeed, in the story 'El muerto' (*El Aleph*, 1949) Borges unites both strands in the person of Benjamín Otálora, a small-time suburban *compadrito* who turns bandit along the Brazilian border.

But though Borges was able to find at first and second hand, impressions, stories and incidents connected with Palermo, he had no direct contact with the life of the *pampas*. Here his material had to be drawn from hearsay, literature, and history. As his monographs on gauchesque literature, and in particular on Hernández's epic *Martín Fierro*, clearly demonstrate,¹ he was a discerning and scrupulous critic of poetry belonging to this genre, and also well acquainted, through Leopoldo Lugones's work on the subject, with the oral tradition of poetry and song practised by the itinerant *payadores* of the *pampas*. In these scholarly works Borges is careful to avoid blurring the lines between fact and nostalgia, and points out:²

Cabe suponer que dos hechos fueron necesarios para la formación de la poesía gauchesca. Uno, el estilo vital de los gauchos; otro, la existencia de hombres de la ciudad que se penetraron con él y cuyo lenguaje habitual no era demasiado distinto . . . Podemos agregar una circunstancia de orden histórico; las guerras que unieron o desgarraron estas regiones. En la guerra de independencia, en la guerra con el Brasil y en las guerras civiles, hombres de la ciudad convivieron con hombres de la campaña, se identificaron con ellos y pudieron concebir y ejecutar sin falsificación la admirable poesía gauchesca.

Neither is Borges prepared to be diverted from what he knows to be the essential character of the *gaucho* by misplaced descriptive outpourings and false lyricism. It is, above all, the integrity with which Hernández has succeeded in portraying Martín Fierro, his environment, and harsh life which impresses — perhaps even inspires — Borges. He applauds Hernández's deliberate avoidance of detailed description, by which he infers the existence of a vast landscape without attempting to define it. 'Las muchas descripciones', says Borges, referring specifically to Guiraldes's *Don Segundo Sombra*, 'parecen ajenas a la índole del paisano para quien el cielo, por ejemplo, sólo existe como profecía de lluvia o de buen tiempo; en el

¹ J. L. Borges in collaboration with Margarita Guerrero, *El Martín Fierro* (Buenos Aires, 1953); *Poesía gauchesca*, edited by J. L. Borges and Bioy Casares, 2 vols. (Mexico, 1955); J. L. Borges, *Aspectos de literatura gauchesca* (Montevideo, 1950); the text of a lecture given at the University of Montevideo; J. L. Borges, *El gaucho Martín Fierro* (London, 1964), the text of a lecture given at Bristol University.

² *El Martín Fierro*, pp. 9 and 11.

Martin Fierro la pampa está sugerida, con admirable tino,¹ a technique which Borges himself employs as fundamental to his writing. On the subject of the *gaucho* himself, Borges observes that, judged by his actions, Fierro is a quarrelsome, drunken murderer, but this is to censure him according to a morality he did not profess. The *gaucho* lived by a code of courage, passion, and fortitude, in which turning the other cheek was dangerous cowardice and pity had no place; he nevertheless desired to be dealt with fairly and justly by his fellow-men, and aspired to treat them in like fashion. Despite the views he expresses as an academic critic, as an artist Borges does not seek to create yet another portrayal of the *gaucho* in a social, historical, or even literary context, any more than his stories about knife-fighters like Rosendo Juárez and Juan Muraña pretend to be studies of urban crime. Instead, he is intent upon sifting and refining his material until he can extract from it that elusive quality, realization, apprehension of a truth, even, which is symbolic of the archetypal pattern. 'A genuine archetype', claims Philip Wheelright,² 'shows itself to have a life of its own, far older and more comprehensive than ideas belonging to the individual consciousness of particular communities', and he goes on to list a number of repeated thought and story patterns which persist in the literature of many peoples. Borges, however, is concerned to discover — or to create — the archetypes beneath the experience that is peculiar to his own country; to establish something identifiable and distinct from the patterns which underlie the thought of the ancient world. Significantly, these are very different from the abstract symbols of the Aleph and the Zahir, the interplay between which, as Wheelock has remarked, is a recurring theme in *El Aleph* and *Ficciones*.³

Quite simply, Borges sees his country as having been fashioned by two forces — individualism and violence — of which the *gaucho* is the embodiment, and *Martin Fierro* the quintessential artistic expression. These combined forces constitute the basis of that *barbarie* which Domingo Sarmiento had courageously condemned in his famous work *Facundo*, and contrasted with the standards of civilized order on which he thought society should be based. Borges seeks to demonstrate his premise, not in terms of history, but through a process of extrapolation from a vestigial historical context into the realms of literature and myth. In an essay entitled 'Nuestro pobre individualismo' (*Otras inquisiciones*, 1960) Borges makes the direct political comment that the Argentinian does not normally identify himself with the State, either because governments are disastrously bad, or because 'the State' is for him an inconceivable abstraction. He is an individual, not a citizen; his popular hero is the man who fights the multitudes alone. This attitude is epitomized by the rural police-sergeant who, shouting that he would not condone the killing of a brave man, began to fight against his own men on the side of a known murderer and army deserter whom they had cornered. The criminal fugitive was *Martin Fierro*, and Borges treats this entirely fictional episode as if it were fact (for him it obviously rings true enough to be a fact), creating quite deliberately an ambiguous hinterland between history and myth. He has done much the same thing in the story 'Biografía de Tadeo Isidoro Cruz' (*El Aleph*) where he places within an actual historical context the life of Cruz, the *gaucho* turned policeman, up to the moment

¹ *El 'Martin Fierro'*, p. 39.

² Philip Wheelright, *The Burning Fountain: A Study in the Language of Symbolism* (Bloomington, 1968).

³ Carter Wheelock, p. 64.

of his appearance in Hernández's poem as the unexpected ally of Fierro. This single act of asserting his individuality, Borges maintains, suddenly gave point and meaning to Cruz's life:

Comprendió que un destino no es mejor que otro, pero que todo hombre debe atacar el que lleva adentro. Comprendió que las jinetas y el uniforme ya le estorbaban. Comprendió su íntimo destino de lobo no de perro gregario; comprendió que el otro [Fierro] era él.

Martin Fierro also provides the vehicle for the story 'El fin' (*Ficciones*, 1945). In this brief narration Borges imagines the final meeting between the negro singer and Fierro, which does not take place in the actual poem, but which, as Borges himself observed,¹ seems destined to be fought out in some extra-literary limbo. Watched through a gap in a clapboard wall of a *pulperia* by Recabarren the owner, who lies paralysed by a stroke, the negro and Fierro fight a duel with knives on an immense willit plain, and Fierro is killed. The negro has avenged the death of his brother at Fierro's hands, an incident from the first part of Hernández's epic. 'Cumplida su tarea de justiciero', says Borges, 'ahora era nadie. Mejor dicho era el otro: no tenía destino sobre la tierra y había matado a un hombre.' Thus both Cruz and the negro exist to realize a destiny which is the assertion of their own individuality. In the case of the former it is a gesture made at the expense of society; in the latter it is made at the expense of another individual. Having made it, both men cease to have a meaningful existence. Symbolically each becomes 'el otro' since, in Borges's philosophy, the individual destiny is part of a universal destiny, and both are repetitions of archetypal actions within a recurring time-cycle. Borges in fact asserts that, despite themselves and their fleeting apprehension of their destiny, individuals are powerless to perform anything other than paradigmatic acts, the inevitable nature of which may, or may not, be revealed in some significant or symbolic way to the participants, who may, in turn, through culture or upbringing be totally unfamiliar with the primordial nature of the action they are about to perform. The convalescent librarian Juan Dahlmann in 'El Sur' (*Ficciones*) leaves the city for the first time to visit an old family property in the country so that he can rest after an illness. At a bar near a tiny railway halt, Dahlmann is irrevocably drawn into a confrontation with a drunken young *compadrito*. An old *gaucho* huddled in a corner suddenly rouses himself and throws a knife to the challenged Dahlmann, who instinctively picks it up, though without any idea of how to defend himself with it. This action, which will almost certainly result in his death, is, however, undertaken with a strange conviction of spirit:

Sintió que si él, entonces, hubiera podido elegir o soñar su muerte, ésta es la muerte que hubiera elegido o soñado. Dahlmann empuña con firmeza el cuchillo, que acaso apenas sabrá manejar, y sale a la llanura.

Variations on this theme can be found in two stories in the *Brodie* collection, 'El encuentro' and 'Juan Muraña'. In both, individuals are given, either by fate or accident, knives belonging in the past to famous knife-fighters. Symbolically, Borges attributes the archetypal but suppressed instinct in the characters concerned to some latent power in the weapons themselves, and deaths again result.

¹ *El 'Martin Fierro'*, p. 65. Discussing the singing contest between the negro and Fierro, Borges comments that the negro appears to give Fierro the benefit of the encounter, but lets it be known that he is the brother of the man Fierro has killed, and that (or when) they meet again, things will be very different. 'Podemos imaginar', says Borges, 'una penitencia allá del poema, en la que el moreno venga la muerte de su hermano.'

It has already been shown in the above discussion that Borges's chief reason for resorting to myth and allusion was to free his imagination in this attempt to delineate immutable, universal aspects of the human condition. In doing so, he has repeatedly turned to ideas and symbols offered him by the literary, historical, and individual experience of his country, now moving from them, as being particular to one nation of men, to a position where they can be seen to be fundamental to all human experience, then at times following the reverse course. Yet what are the ideological connotations for the artist himself of this process, and the circular, ahistoric temporal context into which he constantly inserts sequential historical facts?

The degree to which Borges's artistic vision precludes genuine historical or social analysis and evinces an identifiable 'class position', has frequently been commented on, not least by a younger generation of Latin-Americans. For many his work represents a bourgeois, metaphysical irrelevance which ignores the political and social issues of the day, and even denies change by adopting a particular view of time and history which this article has attempted to illustrate. Yet Borges's writing can only be labelled 'bourgeois' in as much as the term is used as a catch-all category for everything not committed to a definable Marxist viewpoint. His art is as radical (and thus by other definitions as anti-bourgeois) as, say, that of the Surrealists.

Borges's view, of course, like all those that tend towards a doctrine of pre-determination, is passive and essentially a pessimistic one. He does not deny change. He simply states that change is illusory. Furthermore, since neither individual nor collective joys, suffering, striving, or privations, can act as levers by which change is brought about — human destiny being comprised of recurrent archetypal actions and gestures — of what use is sociological analysis or even literary realism to him as an artist? They would serve only to obscure the deeper truths and structures which the symbols and myths he has so painstakingly elaborated seek to disclose.

The last word should, perhaps, be left to Borges himself. Again Hernández's poem is the springboard for a reflection entitled 'Martín Fierro' in *El Hacedor*. Here Borges refers to the wars of independence in Argentina, and the struggles, atrocities, and tyrannies of the civil strife that followed, to the cultural achievements of scholars and men of science, and concludes: 'Estas cosas, ahora, son como si no hubieran sido.' What endures, he claims, has been the dream of a man who in 1870 imagined a fight between two men in which a *gaucho* stabs a negro to death, trying to seem calm and unhurried so that the onlookers shall not think he is afraid, wipes his knife-blade, mounts his horse, and rides off. Borges says: 'Esto que fue una vez vuelve a ser, infinitamente; los visibles ejércitos se fueron y queda un pobre duelo a cuchillo; el sueño de uno es parte de la memoria de todos.'

Only the dream, then, the myth which bestows the archetypal act, stays in the minds of men, and the fundamental, recurrent pattern at the base of the national consciousness is expressed in the fatal confrontation born of inherent violence and self-assertion.

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SOME GERMAN THEORIES ON THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE FROM HERDER TO WAGNER*

At the inception of modern linguistic theory stand the contributions of a number of philosophic minds such as Leibniz and Johann Gottfried Herder, whose thought influenced linguistic speculation for many generations afterwards. Herder's treatise on the origin of language,¹ which received the prize of the Royal Academy of Berlin in 1770, contains several hypotheses which have maintained their validity into the present. Herder maintains, for instance, that the original language, far from being simplistic in form and content, was redundant and complex, and that the developmental trend in language is towards simplification. The more primitive the language, he says, the richer it is in synonyms: 'bei aller wesentlichen Dürftigkeit hat sie den größten unnöthigen Überfluß' (p. 75). Such a language, he contends, 'ist reich, weil sie arm ist, weil ihre Erfinder noch nicht Plan genug hatten, arm zu werden' (p. 76). Otto Jespersen (1860-1943) is generally credited with having established the theory that language developed principally in the direction of simplification — a view directly opposed by scholars of his time, who concluded that language began with monosyllabic words and developed more complex forms only later. Jespersen's hypotheses are similar to those of Herder in several respects. Both proffer the opinion that the words for animals might have their genesis in the sounds which the animal produced (Jespersen refers to this as 'the bow-wow theory'); or that words might originally have developed from exclamations ('the pooh-pooh theory'). When Herder says that the first language was 'eine Sammlung von Elementen der Poesie', a 'Nachahmung der tönenden, handelnden, sich regenden Natur' (p. 56), Jespersen suggests song as a possible origin of some words, and calls this 'the tarara-boom-de-ay theory'. These theories on the origin of language are not mutually exclusive, as Jespersen points out, since the origin of different words could have been different. But, Herder maintains, '[s]elbst da die Sprache später mehr regelmäßig, eintönig und gereiht wurde, blieb sie noch immer eine Gattung Gesang' (p. 58).

Actually, Herder's essay on the origin of language is conceived as a rebuttal to and refutation of Johann Peter Süßmilch's treatise, which attempts to prove 'daß die erste Sprache ihren Ursprung nicht vom Menschen, sondern allein vom Schöpfer erhalten habe'.² Süßmilch, who was a member of the Royal Prussian Academy which awarded Herder the prize on his essay, contends in his book published in 1766 that language shows such distinctive properties and organizational and regenerative powers that it could not have been invented by primitive man, but must have been taught him by God. While Herder assails the logic of Süßmilch's thesis point by point, he also takes issue with Condillac's theory,³

* A somewhat briefer version of this paper was read in March 1977 at the University of Kentucky in Lexington.

¹ 'Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache', in *Herders Sammtliche Werke*, edited by Bernhard Suphan, 33 vols (Berlin, 1877-1913), v. 1-147. Quotations from this treatise are identified in the text by parenthetical page numbers without further designation.

² Johann Peter Süßmilch's 'Beweis, daß die Sprache göttlich sei' was read at the Academy in 1756, and appeared in print ten years later. Süßmilch died in 1767.

³ Etienne Bonnot de Condillac was a friend of Rousseau and a disciple of Locke. Herder refers to Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* of 1746.

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THE 'INFANT ATOMS' OF GARTH'S 'DISPENSARY'

The Dispensary (1699), by Dr Samuel Garth, is commonly criticized as an entertaining but formless specimen of the mock-epic. Although Geoffrey Tillotson admires Garth's 'amusing, exquisite, or poignant glimpses of the "beau monde"', he feels them lost 'in the general chaos of the poem . . . in a medical satire in mock-heroics they should not be there at all'.¹ *The Dispensary* is more than a mere medical satire; it is a carefully-organized work of art with a far more comprehensive basis for its satire than has been realized. The unity of the poem arises from the themes and *topoi* through which Garth presents the world view of a scientific atomist, or 'Epicurean', at the end of the seventeenth century. An examination of the circumstances and philosophical background of Garth's poem will allow us to appreciate its integrity.

The occasion of Garth's first venture into poetry was the feud within the Royal College of Physicians in London over the establishment of a charity clinic which dispensed drugs to the poor at intrinsic value rather than at retail price. Alarmed at the implicit threat to their prerogatives and their pocket-books, the London apothecaries and sympathetic physicians within the College united to oppose the project. Writing to 'rally some of our disaffected Members into a sense of their Duty' to support the charitable establishment, Dr Garth lamented that the disension had effectively terminated the scientific research which he saw as the real business of the College: 'And Faction skulks, where Learning shone before' (l. 64).²

Underlying the spirited battle of 'batter'd Bed-pans, and stav'd Urinals' (v. 206) which Garth depicts as the result of this controversy is an Epicurean ethos which allows *The Dispensary* a positive system of values sufficient to raise it above the level of an occasional lampoon. When the authorized edition of *The Dispensary* appeared, in the wake of one that 'stole into the World' in May 1699, an escort of complimentary verses by notable 'Wits' heralded it as a sort of Epicurean manifesto which linked ancient with modern materialists: 'Lost in our Pleasure, we Enjoy in you | Lucretius, Horace, Sheffield, Montague.'³ Garth further emphasized his atomistic orientation by assigning to several of his heroes names taken from ancient Epicureans.⁴ More interesting than circumstantial details is the emergence of

¹ *The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems*, edited by Geoffrey Tillotson, third edition (New Haven, 1962), pp. 113 f. See also Richard I. Cook, 'Garth's *Dispensary* and Pope's *Rape of the Lock*', *CLA Journal*, 6 (1962), 107-16. John F. Sena, 'Samuel Garth's *The Dispensary*', *TSLL*, 15 (1974), 639-48, is more perceptive.

² Frank H. Ellis summarizes the quarrel in his splendid edition of the poem in *Poems on Affairs of State*, 7 vols (New Haven, 1963-75), VI, 58 f.; subsequent references will be to this edition; the phrase here from Garth's preface (21v) is quoted from the second edition (London, 1699), Ellis's 1699².

³ 'To My Friend the Author, Desiring my Opinion of his Poem', sig. a4 of the second edition. The character of the unorthodox 'Wits' appears in Richard C. Boys, *Sir Richard Blackmore and the Wits* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1949); see also Thomas F. Mayo, *Epicurus in England* (Dallas, 1934), pp. 200-201. The dissertation of Philip E. Roberts, 'A Critical Edition of . . . *The Dispensary*' (Philadelphia, 1966) annotates the commendatory verses and supplies other information not in Ellis.

⁴ Professor Ellis's query why Garth identified the politically-active Lord Somers with the retired literary patron Atticus (*POAS*, VI, 65, l. 51 n.) may be answered by appealing to the common Epicureanism of both figures. Garth's 'Celsus' seems to allude to another ancient Epicurean, for whom see John Masson, *Lucretius: Epicurean and Poet* (New York, 1907), pp. 137 f. On Somers, see Mayo, pp. 200-201; Swift glances at Somers's unorthodoxy in *History of the Four Last Years of the Queen and the Succession*, No. 26.

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