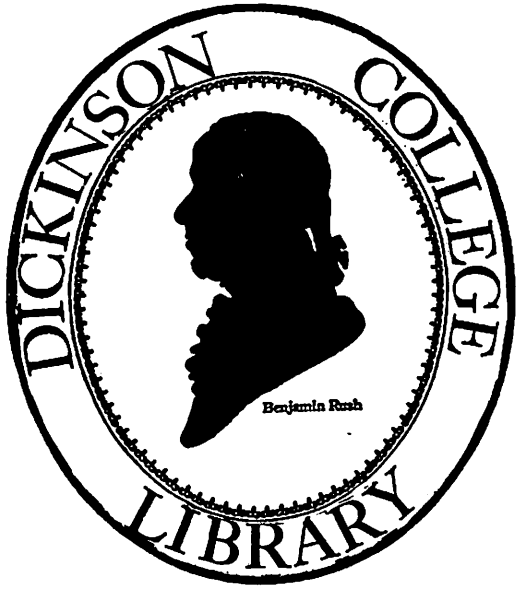

Simply a Man of Letters

Panel Discussions and Papers from the proceedings of a Symposium on Jorge Luis Borges held at the University of Maine at Orono

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FOREWORD

East Lansing, at Donald Yates' place on a friendly October evening in 1975: it was the right place and the right time. William De Sua, the chairman of the Michigan State University Romance Language Department, diffidently asked Borges if he might consent to be keynote speaker at a Shakespearean congress to be held by the Fogler Library as part of the bicentennial celebration. It was an unofficial, tentative question. The answer was immediate and bilingual: "You are pulling my leg. *Ud. me está tomando el pelo*"—the translation being a kind gesture to the latinos present who might not know the English idiom. No, they were neither holding his hair nor *tirándole la pierna*. It was a serious offer.

"It would be a great honor," said Borges after the initial surprise, "a great honor, completely undeserved, like all the honors I have received."

The friendly mood encouraged me to add at that point: "Yes, Borges, but the invitation carries an obligation."

"What is that?" he asked me.

"To extend the trip up to Maine to rest after the big event."

"Caramba," he said, "I don't need to be forced to go to New England."

That was the origin of what later became the Symposium (on) Borges and (with) Borges. It was that simple. I mention it here to answer all those who wonder how difficult it was to persuade Borges to undertake such a long, hard trip—to a place not even on the map.

The success of the Symposium was made possible not only by Borges' generous, uncomplicated disposition and the literary traditions of New England, highly appealing to the Argentine writer/English reader, but by the collaboration of many other souls who wanted the thing to happen. Though Borges was hardly a household word in Maine, and my Latin enthusiasm may have seemed a bit suspicious, the University administration quickly accepted my proposal. I want to acknowledge here the help received during the period of planning and, no less important, of funding, from Paulette French, Gordon Haaland, Robert Carroll, Ulrich Wicks, Carroll Terrell, Burt Hatlen, Stephen Weber, Robert Hunting, and John Frank, of the University of Maine, and the Arthur R. Lord Fund and the Patrons for the Fine Arts, as well as suggestions from colleagues and friends around the country, Jaime Alazraki, Enrique Anderson Imbert, Emir Rodríquez-Monegal and Donald Yates.

This book attempts to record faithfully, with minor deviations, corrections, omissions, and additions, the event that was held in those remote, but for many of us unforgettable, days of April, 1976.

Immediately after the Symposium, the President of the University of Maine, Dr. Howard Neville, offered to support the publication of the proceedings, so the lack of money cannot be used as an excuse for the long delay in the appearance of this book. I thought I had found a way to transcend the need for any excuses, avoiding mention of the unprofessional recording of fragmentary and occasionally unintelligible remarks which somehow had to be turned into sentences faithful to the intention of so many participants. Not all of them returned their corrected versions on time. Not always did the editor have time to fulfill his duties, or the fortitude to preserve his equanimity in the face of almost overwhelming difficulties. Since we were speaking of Borges, I thought I

could deny any blame, to myself or to others, by simply recalling his refutation of time...

And yet now, as these proceedings go to press (a fact only possible through the help of my friend Thomas Montgomery, who with monastic devotion has striven to illuminate the sometimes obscure manuscripts), I realize that they have not aged. On the contrary: they seem still alive, radiating the warmth with which they were written, read, and corrected by people of such different origins and personalities, all of them fused for one weekend of their lives by their admiration and affection for a man of letters.

If the University Press moves with the desired speed, these three-year-old words will be "made into a book," obeying Mallarmé's dictum, a little before, a little after, or—why not?—exactly on August 24, 1979, when Borges will be 80 years old.

The seventies, as King David said and Borges has repeated, are the years of the Spirit. May the eighties be for you, Borges, the years of Happiness, well deserved though elusive until now. It is the wish of all those who came to the meeting at Orono, who today offer you this book that you have so deeply inspired.

Carlos Cortínez

SIMPLY A MAN OF LETTERS

Jorge Luis Borges

The subject was given me by my friend Cortínez, so I'll see what I can do with it. I think "simply a man of letters" is a very precise definition of what I am, of who I am.

I am very fond of going back to my boyhood. I seem to be doing that all the time. Now I will go back to a certain book I read in Buenos Aires. I must have been eleven or twelve years old at the time. That book happened to be the *Odyssey* done into English by Butcher and Lang. Although young, I read the book and I found to my pleasure and to my amazement that I fully enjoyed the reading. I had attempted it before in Pope's fine verse translation. Of course Pope was beyond me, beyond my years. Afterwards I went back to Pope and I found in him a very fine version also. I remember the many things that happened to me; for example, leaving the War of Troy, traveling through the Mediterranean with my friends, since I became Ulysses—the sort of man who, reading the *Odyssey*, becomes Ulysses. And then I came on a certain passage and I think that it ran somehow thus: "The gods send joys and sorrows to man in order that coming generations should have something to sing about." What I would like to insist on now is the fact that I found those words fine, but I did not find them surprising. I thought that is the way things went: things happen to us in order that coming generations of men should have some matter for their songs. Years

and years later I came upon a sentence not quite so good by Mallarmé (of course Mallarmé is hardly the man to cope with Homer) where I read, "*Tout aboutit à un livre*": "All things lead to a book." At first, I was rather dazzled by that sentence, but then I remembered I had read it before in the *Odyssey*; except, in the case of Homer, as "joys and misfortunes happen to man in order that the coming generations should have a matter for their songs," of course, it stands for the spoken epic, while Mallarmé stands for the written book. But the meaning is the same, except that in the Greek there is a swing that we don't get in the too-precise French words, "*Tout aboutit à un livre*," where the whole thing is too economical to be, let's say, as stirring as the Greek was.

Now I suppose that the fact that I read those lines as they should be read, that I found them fine, but not amazing (I found out that they stand for the same thing, said, let us say, with some thirty centuries' difference between them) stems from the fact that I am a man of letters. I suppose most people would have thought it striking or strange to think that things happened because they only had to be made into sounds or made into books. I took that for granted. And this means that already when I was a boy, when I was twelve or so, when I was first reading Butcher and Lang's *Odyssey*, I already felt in a literary way about the words. That is to say I already thought of things happening because they might be woven into poems, into tales, into novels, into anything you like; into the epic, perhaps, into a rather secret poem like Mallarmé's poems were. I took that for granted, and this means that I have always been a man of letters, simply a man of letters as Dr. Carlos Cortínez has it.

"Simply a man of letters." Now what does that mean? Because I have to do what I can in order to understand what that thing means. I suppose I know it myself, but I have to explain it to you. Not what a man of letters is, since of course there is no such person—every man of letters exists through himself and in himself—but what being a man of letters means for me. It means the fact that I know that my destiny, my fate, my life has a certain shape, and that fate is a

literary one. This, of course, does not lead us very far. We have to find out what that stands for.

I remember reading about two men. Of course they were very notable writers, and still in a sense I know that they held to that fate. I think of Milton. Milton, before he had written a single line, knew that his destiny was to be a great poet. De Quincey, a very great writer also, knew that his destiny was to be literary; and I think that Coleridge knew the same thing. Naturally, I am not comparing myself to those men. After all, I am, let us say, a more or less invisible twentieth-century writer, an Argentine writer. How would I dare compare myself to Milton, to Coleridge or to De Quincey? I am not at all the same. I know my limits and perhaps that makes me into a man of letters, but I know that since there are many kinds of men (there are, for example, military men, my forefathers; there are men of action, my forefathers also; there are men of business, not my forefathers); since there are all kinds of men, I happen to be that particular kind of man. I don't think that being a man of letters is somehow, let's say, above the other kinds of men. I know that I happen to be that particular kind of man. I know that to be a man of letters is to have a very strange destiny; but after all, all destinies are strange, especially to a man who has to undergo them, who has to live through them. But I know of the strangeness of literary life since I have been living it all the time, before I wrote down a single line. And I have written many books, far too many books, I should say. I haven't taken the trouble to count them, but I know, I am sorry to say, that I have written more than fifty books, most of them hack work of course, but still fifty books. They stand for a lifetime's job. When my collected works came out, they included the work of half a century; they amounted to some twelve hundred pages, and I left three books out. Indeed, the chief aim of that book was to leave those books out, not to include the others in, because I disliked them so much.

I suppose that if you are a man of letters, there are many things needful to it. One of the first things (this is not

only an invitation but a danger, as most invitations are) this is the fact of an awareness of things, especially an awareness of words. I have noticed that most people seem unaware of words. They accept them. People hardly trouble to look at the etymologies of words, while a writer is fond of words. Because after all, words mean to him what shapes or colors mean to a painter; what shape or smoothness or roughness mean to a sculptor; what sounds mean to a musician. Words are, after all, his material. He has to do what he can with words, even though they may betray him. He should be keenly conscious of words.

I suppose a writer may be known by his oral speech, not only by his written matter. I remember two fine men of letters—or several. Alfonso Reyes, and the Andalusian Rafael Cansinos-Assens; I remember the Cordovan Arturo Capdevila. I remember a friend of mine in Buenos Aires, a fine poet, one of the finest poets in my country, Carlos Mastronardi, and I know that even had you not read a line of them you knew they were fine writers because they worded their thoughts in a fine way. Perhaps the only way to be a fine writer is to speak in a fine way, to be careful over your words. Most people are not. People go in for interjections, for broken sentences, for broken English, for broken Spanish. That, of course, does them no good; since you can't go, let's say, from "Hi!" and "Woe!" to writing good English. You can't go from broken Spanish to writing good Spanish. Spoken speech is all-important. We know that in the beginning was spoken speech. I suppose literature began by being oral. Literature began by being spoken, and so a writer knew how to speak, since after all, when he was singing he was using the same speech that he had been using all day. A good writer should be careful about his oral style, since if he is not, then he will have two styles: an oral and a written style. It would be very strange if those were quite different. There should be a link between them. I do not think a man should speak like a book, but after all to try to speak like a book is something to be aimed at; this is an ideal not to be despised.

I have always been interested in words. I have always thought of words as being very strange things, and of course, they are. I think of words as being symbols: symbols of the many facts of our lives, symbols of emotions, perceptions, feelings, symbols of thought; and all those are mere sounds, mere conventional sounds. And yet there is something more to the sounds. Sometimes we feel what the Greeks thought to be true. We feel that there is a hidden and ancient link between the word and its meaning. Let us take a very elementary example: the word *moon*. That lingering English word *moon* is a finer word than the Spanish *luna* or the Latin *luna*, because in *luna* you get two syllables and the moon seems to be broken into two halves. With *moon* you get a lingering word; you get a shining word, and somehow with the low sound of the *-oon* you get something mysterious; and the moon indeed is mysterious, the moon that we see every night. So I should say that *moon* is the right word, perhaps better than the French *lune*. *Lune* is also a fine word, and also a lingering word. Then you have the German *Mond*, which is short. Then you have the Old English *mona*, which is quite bad. And Greek *selene*, where the moon is broken into three pieces—nothing can be done about it as far as I know. But in English, we ought to be thankful for the word *moon*. That is the gift of the English tongue. The English had the word *mona* but somehow people felt that the word *mona* was wrong. Then I suppose there was a time when they just said *mon*, and now *moon*. That is the right sound for the moon. To speak of the right sound for a silent thing like the moon seems wrong, but of course you understand what I mean.

I recall other English words, or other Scottish words. For example *eerie* and *uncanny*, very fine words. You won't find those words in Spanish because the Spanish felt they had no need for them. They did not feel that peripheral view to be found in *eerie* and *uncanny*. The Germans felt that also. Perhaps this is something Germanic. The Germans have the word *unheimlich*, which would be exactly the Scottish, and now English, *uncanny*. You have words that seem to be the

right words. In English I will quote another fine example, since after all, I am simply a man of letters, and why should I not be talking about words? I think the word *nightmare* is a fine word. We know, of course, from etymologies, from etymologies in dictionaries, from the shorter Skeat—the shorter Skeat is one of my Bibles, I should say—that the word *nightmare* came from some words that meant the "demon of the night." Or perhaps if another etymology is allowable, something akin to the German word *Märchen*. And then you had the night mare of the fable of the night. But still *nightmare* is a fine word. Shakespeare talks of the "nightmare of the night foal." And Victor Hugo—quite English, as in everything else, I suppose—gives us a fine metaphor of the nightmare. He talked of "le cheval noir de la nuit," "the black horse of night." Or perhaps, if a free translation is allowable, "the black horse of midnight"; that would be better still. You see where he got the horse: from *nightmare*. Then he gave it blackness and it was night, "*le cheval noir de la nuit*"; while in Spanish, you have to put up with *pesadilla*, which is no good. And then in French, you have a fine word, *cauchemar*, which has nothing to do with English *nightmare*. And in German, you have the word *Alb*. The word *Alb* means nothing to us now but it stood for "elf," and an elf, an incubus, was supposed to be sitting on the dreamer's belly and giving him the nightmare. So you see, the word *nightmare* begets the sense of the awful that is to be found in nightmares; and only in nightmares, not in waking life.

I said a moment ago that a writer had to be aware of words because after all, words were his tools. And Stevenson complained of the fact that those tools, words, were after all more or less like blocks of paints; they were stiff, they were hardly pliable. And yet, says Stevenson, a painter knows that he has to paint somehow the insufferable sun with those colors, and he manages to do it. And poetry is happening all the time. I do not suppose poetry is something exceptional. I suppose poetry is happening all the time. I know nothing whatever of Hungarian; I have no Hungarian; but I know that were I to learn Hungarian, I would find therein all the things I find in other poetry, since beauty seems to come to men.

It seems to have come to men all the time and all over the world.

When I began studying Old English, I thought of it in terms of kennings, of metaphors, and so on, and then I was not long in finding out that Old English literature stood for very fine elegies and for very fine epic poetry. And those things were there. They were not to be had by translations. Translations may give you something, a silent version, but they do not give you the real original. I think that Frost had it that poetry is what gets lost in translation. That of course is wrong, since gibberish is untranslatable, but I think that poetry is translatable, only you have to do something different to it. I will take an example from Chaucer. He had read in Hippocrates, in a Latin version of the Greek, "*ars longa, vita brevis*." Now "*ars longa, vita brevis*" has something far too short about it, like a telegram, in a sense; a Latin telegram, a Roman telegram. Then he had to work that into a poem of his, not about medicine, but about, I suppose, the craft of love or the craft of verse. Why not suppose the craft of verse? Then he wrote (I will say it in English and then in my own personal Middle English, which is more or less guesswork): "the life so short, the craft so long to learn," or in Middle English I suppose he would have pronounced it thus (he won't be here to set us right): he wrote, "the lief so short, the craft so long to leerne." He found the music for that wistfulness; he found "the lief so short, the craft so long to leerne."

I said that a writer, a man of letters, should be interested in words, in words for their own sake. He should be interested in them all the time. In order to write in a really fine style, you should be able to speak in a fine prose style. I cannot do that in English, of course. In Spanish, I do my best, but of course I don't always succeed—I am very lazy, very indifferent; but somehow I manage not to run into broken sentences. I manage to say what I have to say. I remember many men of letters that I have known. I have thought of the Andalusian poet Cansinos-Assens, of Capdevila, of [Alberto] Gerchunoff the Jewish writer, of Lugones, and they all spoke in a fine way. I suppose a sentence might have been taken

down and they would have made fine essays. Now of course I cannot do that, but I seem to be interested in words. I can give you one proof: the fact that I was born to Spanish and to English; to English through my Northumbrian grandmother, Frances Haslam, and to Spanish through all my forefathers. And then I went in for the study of French; and French of course, gave me many fine experiences. If you know French, you know Verlaine, you know Voltaire, you know Flaubert, Diderot, Montesquieu, you may know Racine and Corneille, you know Leconte de Lisle. What earthly reason is there to refuse those gifts? Since every language is a gift.

People think of dictionaries as being, let us say, sets of synonyms; but they are not. Every language has a different way of feeling the words. Then I taught myself German in order to read Schopenhauer in the original text. I have done that many times over and I found joy in it. But other things were given me. I taught myself through a copy of Heine's *Buch der Lieder* and the German-English dictionary. I hold that poetry makes for brevity. And after a time I found myself reading Heine's *Intermezzo*, that is to say the finest poetry in the world. (The finest poetry in the world is, I suppose, to be found everywhere, in their own languages, happily.) I found myself reading the German variety of the finest poetry in the world in Heine's *Buch der Lieder*. Therein I found many things that stick in the memory. For example,

> ...Das küszte mich auf deutsch,
> Und sprach auf deutsch
> (Man glaubt es kaum,
> Wie gut es klang),
> Das Wort: ich liebe dich.–
> Es war ein Traum.
>
> [*Neue Gedichte*]

Those things are untranslatable. I have never taken the trouble to learn anything by heart–I think that kind of thing is wrong. I think poetry sticks to you; you cannot forget it. It is happily unforgettable. At the same time I was taught Latin, and the fact of being taught Latin also stood me in good stead, because after all I was going back to Latin, since Latin is the mother tongue of Spanish, Portuguese, French, Rumanian and Italian. Spanish was another tongue on its way back to that far more ancient and perhaps nobler kind of Spanish called Latin. I now remember what Browning said. He said, "Latin: the marble language. The language of marble is Latin." Of course, when I had Latin, I was given Virgil. Virgil is living with me all the time. I have forgotten my Latin, but I have not forgotten Virgil. For example when I walk down the street by myself, there are snatches of Latin which come back to me. Long ago, I have lost that treasure, but still I am given back some coins of Virgil, some silver coins of Virgil, when I walk by myself at night. Virgil, and why not Seneca? Since we may say–this is hardly exaggeration–that Seneca wrote the whole of Spanish literature before the Spanish language was evolved. Seneca, Martial, Lucan, Quintilian, and others wrote a fine Spanish kind of Latin before their own language came into being. When the Spanish language came into being it was always homesick for Latin, as you may find out if you read the finest verses of Quevedo or of Góngora. These verses were looking back at Latin. They are trying to remember the Latin origin; and this happens all over the world. For example, in Milton. When you are reading Milton, of course you are reading English verse. But that English verse is trying to be as Latin as it can; and it succeeds in doing so in an almost magical way.

Well, I taught myself German. I studied Latin, I studied French. And as to Italian, I stood in no need of studying it since Italian was given to me through the fact that I have been born to Spanish. Everyone with Spanish has Italian at least for reading purposes, and so I attained to one of the highest felicities of reading. I read the *Divine Comedy* in Italian without knowing Italian. I could not understand an Italian film or an Italian drama, but I have enjoyed Italian literature. I enjoyed Dante, Ariosto, Tasso, and afterwards Ungaretti, and other poets. Why should I say that I am wholly ignorant of Italian? In a sense I know Italian though I cannot speak it and I cannot understand it, but I know the written words. Those words, of course, are far more important than any chance conversation with a stranger.

Then afterwards, when I lost my sight (that was way back in 1955), I thought the fact of being blind should not be the end. It should be the beginning. And I had of course to create my own beginning, and so I said, "I will not think about blindness; I will think about something else. I have two great operations in the future for myself. I will think about the learning of Old English." And so with a few friends we began studying Old English. Of course, in the case of Old English, I had always been attracted to the North. I thought really of going back, as Spanish goes back to Latin. I thought of going back through English to the speech of my forefathers in Northumberland and in Mercia. At first, Old English was merely to me a kind of strange blend of German and English, but I was not long in finding out that since it came before the two languages, it was a language in itself; and it had a beauty, a harsh beauty of itself. And now I am going to attempt another adventure, the adventure of Old Norse, since one always goes from Old English to Old Norse.

I have been talking about words, about languages. All those things mean much to a man of letters. And now I shall talk about the fact of my writing—of what I think of my writing. I am not too fond of what I write, but still, what can I do about it? Writing is my destiny. Of course, I would prefer to be the writer of, let's say, Robert Frost's poetry, for example. I have to resign myself to the fact of being the writer of Jorge Luis Borges. After all, I can not do anything else about it. I have in a sense to be myself. I know my limits now. I should by this time of life! And I've been living and writing. When I began writing, my father gave me a very sound piece of advice. He told me, "Read all you can." So I played the sedulous ape, as Stevenson has it (Stevenson is one of my masters), to many writers. Stevenson plays the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Coleridge, and to Baudelaire. And I played the sedulous ape to Stevenson, to Whitman, to Browning, to Swinbourne, to Quevedo, to Lugones, to Victor Hugo for a time, to a German Expressionist poet named Johannes R. Becher, as to so many

others. But in the end, I found myself. Of course, I was far beneath them, but after all, what else could I do? Well, I began writing, and after I had written three books, my father said; "Read much, write much, tear up most of what you have written; and above all, never rush into print." At the age of twenty-four, I rushed into print. It was my fourth book, but it was in a sense my first one. I had mercifully destroyed the earlier ones. They were quite bad. I can hardly remember the titles, and I am ashamed to speak about them.

Well, the book came out. In those days you had no idea of success or failure. My country in those days was in all respects a better country than what it is today. We never thought of literature in terms of success or failure. No writer expected to live by his pen. That was impossible. Even such a great writer as Lugones brought out editions of 500 to 600 copies, and they sold very slowly. And the word "best-seller" was happily unknown in those days. So when we published, we did what Stevenson had done. He thought of a book as being a round robin sent to his friends. And this is what we did. I never thought of sending a book to the newspapers. I never thought of those secret writings of mine becoming known. I never thought of the public in any sense at all. Of course, I tried to write as finely as I could, but I was writing for nobody in particular. I can vouch for the truth of this. This happened in 1923. And when some eight years afterwards, or ten (Dr. Yates would set me right, but he is not here at my elbow. He knows my dates; I don't. I know nothing about dates. I only know that 1616 is Shakespeare's death and that's that), when some ten years afterwards I finished what was called, strangely enough, *History of Eternity*, when I found out to my unspeakable amazement that thirty-seven copies had been sold in the span of a year, I thought that was unbelievable. I went home and said to my mother, "I have sold thirty-seven copies of my book." Then she said, "No, that can't be so." Then we looked at what the bookseller had given me, and so it was. Thirty-seven copies! I wanted to write to all the people who had bought the book. I wanted to apologize for the mistakes. I wanted to promise

them a better book next time. But I could hardly get in touch with them. And yet, after all, it was all right, since you can imagine, or at least you think you can imagine, thirty-seven people. But selling 3700 copies, that is quite as bad as saying no copies at all, or selling an endless number of copies—you can't imagine that.

I went on writing. I went on publishing books. I knew that my life was to be a literary life, a life of awareness of words, and at the same time (this, I suppose, is the essential tragedy—but "tragedy" is the wrong word; I mean, too emphatic, as one is when one speaks in public), I suppose that the chief dilemma of a literary life is to know that one's materials are words and yet to know that words are merely coins, that words mean nothing. I suppose that what matters are not the words but the rhythms, the intonations, and you have to find that out for yourself. That kind of thing is not to be taught. Even the feeling for words is not to be taught. Most people have no feeling for words, even as they have no feelings for sounds, for shapes, for colors. But men of letters have a feeling for words. A man of letters is interested in language, as I am. He is interested in etymologies also. Every word is somehow a kind of toy to him; he may even be interested in slang, since slang, of course, is a game of words. He is interested in language and words all the time. But of course he should also be not too interested in words. I suppose the tragedy of a writer is that he knows that words are mere coins or mere counters. In themselves they mean nothing. There is no reason whatever why the word, even that fine English word I was talking about—why the word *moon* should stand for the moon. You have to accept this mere convention. And yet you have to work with these counters; you have to work with those rather toilsome tools. You have to do what you can about it. And you know at the same time that life is far richer than your own poor craft; and yet, that that craft is all you have; that that craft is finally to justify you somehow. And so you keep on writing.

You keep on writing, even as in my case, for example. We know that we have done the best we can. What we are doing now may be, I suppose, far inferior. I am an old garrulous man, but what else can I do but to go on writing, to go on attempting what is impossible? And there is something fine in attempting the impossible. If you attempt something impossible, you run the risk of being successful, and success is, of course, a kind of failure. But in the case of literature, you keep trying. Every time you write a poem or a tale, you are up against a blank page you have to justify somehow. And yet you do it, and then you publish it "in order to be rid of it," as Alfonso Reyes had it. Then you have to go on. But this also means that in a sense, in a very hidden sense (maybe I am exaggerating) you are aware of the value of things because you know that things are given to men—as Homer had it, that the gods send things to men in order that the coming generations (or in my case, that I) should have something to write about. So everything is grist that comes to our mill, or as Stéphane Mallarmé had it, "all things lead to a book." Well, all things lead to writing. When you are happy, when you are disappointed, when people hate you, or what is worse, are indifferent to you—when those kinds of things happen, you feel that you are given all those things as your tools. You should be worthy of them, you should be able to use them. That is to say you have to go on writing. You have to attempt the impossible.

Now I would like to say a few words (I have been saying them over and over again; at least some part may be helpful to some of you who haven't heard them before) about the way I go to writing a poem or a tale. It happens in this way: I may be walking down the street, or walking down the staircases and galleries of the National Library in Buenos Aires, or anywhere else; I may be walking, let's say in Michigan, or in Texas, in Montevideo; any place you like. Then, suddenly, I know something is about to happen. I get that feeling, and then I just stand back and wait, and then the thing happens. And the thing may take—if I am allowed the metaphor—the shape of an island, and I may be able to glimpse the two ends, let us say the two tips of the island, a long island. Why not think of a yellow island on a black map? I make out the two tips and those are—let me be allowed to drop the metaphor now; it is hampering me at this time—those are the end

and the beginning of what I am about to write. So that when I begin thinking of a tale or a poem, I know the beginning and the end, especially the end. I may be rather shaky about the beginning, but I know those two tips, and I have to find out for myself what happens in between; what happens between the first verse and the last, or what happens between the first sentence and the last one, if the piece be in prose and not in verse. And there I have to grope my way through a darkness. I may take a wrong turning; then I have to go back. I have to imagine everything that happened to the man. The man is all of us. I have created no characters. What happens to the man between his birth, the first line, and his literary death, the last line: those things I have to invent, I have to discover. After all the words "invention" and "discovery" stand for the same thing. You know that in Latin, the word "invent" means "to discover." This of course goes back to the Platonic doctrine that all things are there; you merely have to find them out. Even as a statue is in the marble and you have to chip off what is needless. Or as Timrod, the laureate of the Confederate South, said, "the shaft is in the stone." I mean the column was in the stone. It had not yet been carved, but the thing lay there; the statue lay there. Well, I have to find out what happens, and therefore I have to find the setting, the right names for the characters, and all that. And then, after that, I write it down. When I write it down, of course, I am very fond of the words.

Ever since poetry was revealed to me through my father, poetry came to me through the English tongue: it came to me through Shelley, Keats, and Swinbourne, and Fitzgerald's *Omar Khayyam*. Ever since that time, I have been fond of words, but I know that now I shouldn't believe too much in them, that they may betray me at any moment. So now, in my time of life, I never go in for purple patches. I try simply to be straightforward. I try to use no words that may attract much attention, or that distract attention, though I am fond of words. I try to write in a very simple style, in a style that will make the reader think of what I am writing about, not of the writer himself. I think a writer should be invisible, even as God is, I suppose, invisible in the world. God,

we think, may be thinking of us all the time, even governing us, but we are not aware of him, and I do not think that a reader should be too aware of the writer. This is what is wrong about many fine writers. It's not only the use of symbols, but being reminded of symbols all the time. In the case of Góngora, one is being reminded of words all the time, while in the case of Robert Frost, we are not reminded of him, but are reminded of what he felt. But in the case, let us say, of such a fine writer as Sir Thomas Browne, or Quevedo in Spanish, or Góngora or Victor Hugo, we are being reminded of them all the time. I don't think that is right. I think that a story or a poem should have a life of its own. After all, why remind the reader that somebody wrote it? Why remind the reader of a certain name and a certain bit of context? After the story or the poem is written there is no essential difference between them. The only difference lies in the expectation of the reader. The reader who is about to read a poem knows that he will be finding emotion therein, while the reader who reads prose may think that he will find reasons, arguments, syllogisms, or information. So, after all, something may be said for free verse. Even if it is not too different from prose, the fact that it has been printed like verse makes the reader feel that he will get something quite unlike prose, that he will get poetry. I don't suppose there is an essential difference between prose and poetry, but I have an idea when something is being given to me in that mysterious way, when I see the two tips of my island, I do not know whether it will become poetry or prose. That is found out afterwards. I suppose, essentially, poetry and prose are the same. I spoke in the beginning about Homer. In the *Odyssey*, in the epic, we see that all literature began by poetry and then became prose. The Saxons wrote a very clumsy kind of prose, and yet they wrote fine verse. That is to say, men began to sing before they knew how to write.

As I was saying, a writer should attempt many things, and the writer feels somehow that writing is something precious, since, if all things are to become words, if all things are to become poems or tales, or parables or dramas or whatever you want, then all things are needful to him. He should be

thankful for all things, even his personal misfortunes, since those things are giving him material all the time. There is also this to be said. You take certain handiworks. A man works at them, let us say, from eight to noon and then from two to six or so. But in the case of a writer, the thing is endless. He is working all the time, since the experience is flowing in all the time, and his experiences are raw material to be made into literature. So we might even say that when a writer is sleeping, he is working. When a writer is dreaming, he certainly is working. In dreams I have been given many poems. Of course, many of my stories have been given me in my dreams. I have not been Coleridge and I have not written "Kubla Khan"; I am not that Saxon shepherd to whom the gift of song was revealed in a dream, according to Bede; but still I know that things are being given to me continually. That is to say that a writer never sleeps, that a writer lives in a perpetual vision.

Naturally, I am not sensitive enough. I am not aware enough of things. If I were sensitive enough, then every moment in my life would be a moment of poetry, or a moment of literature. Every single moment. I need to somehow think of some things as being more poetical than others. I think, for example, that the sunset is a finer experience than meeting a chance acquaintance or than being in loneliness—and yet all things are poetry, all things should be made into poetry by the man of letters. The man of letters, of course, never thinks about success or failure. He knows that those things are fictions. After all, what is speaking but a way of being misunderstood? What is "to be famous" but to be taken for somebody else? I do not think of myself as having merited what I have got—people are far too generous to me—and yet, I keep on writing. Writing seems to be the shape of my destiny.

And now, after these too-long and too-rambling remarks, I would like you to ask me questions, as many as you like, and I will do my best to answer them. Thank you very much.

DISCUSSION

Q. What obligation does a writer have to respect literary conventions—words and what words should mean, story and what story form should mean, and so forth?

A. I think conventions help. Conventions make things easier. For example regular verse makes for easiness. There is no obligation. You have to accept certain things. If you refuse the language, you refuse the writing. Besides, I don't think what a man can do with the language is very important. Even in the case of such a fine writer, of such a renewer of the language as James Joyce. Let us take this sentence, one of his finest sentences: "The rivering waters of, the hither-and-thithering waters of night." That is very fine, but you have to accept the fact that "river" means "river" and "night" means "night," that "hither" and "thither" mean "hither" and "thither." It can't be done otherwise. Why not accept the conventions, since, after all, conventions are helpful? They are not all false; since we accept them, there is no reason why we should shy at them. But, of course, if you want to invent a fancy language of your own, then I suppose you will be a kind of Robinson Crusoe, no? You will lead a very lonely life.

Yates. But how about the convention which says that when you write a book review, the book that you are writing your review about should exist?

A. (Laughter) Well, I suppose you have me there. But still I remember a very fine book, *Sartor Resartus* by Carlyle, where he reviews a certain German philosophical non-existent book called *Die Kleider, ihr Werden und Wirken*. And then he wrote the book called *Sartor Resartus* or "The Tailor Patched"; so that review was also a convention.

Yates. You were following the convention then of the literary hoax.

A. The convention of the convention.

Q. The first part of the question: is writing pleasurable

for you? And the second part: when you are writing the middle of your story which you can't find, is it groping or does it come clear to you?

A. Writing should be a pleasure. All things should be a pleasure, even a toothache, I suppose, if taken the right way. Now as to groping our way, that is a pleasure also. There is a pleasure in groping; a pleasure in hesitating—why not? Those are parts of the game. I accept them. Yes, I always think of writing as a pleasure. If it's not done for pleasure, it can't be done. It's not compulsory.

Yates. The answer to the second part is that you do grope in the middle for what is going to be the story?

A. Yes. I enjoy the groping.

Yates. In one story that you wrote, "The Circular Ruins", your groping became part of the story since the magician or the stranger—whoever—was trying to find a way to imagine or dream or create another person, and he tried several things that didn't work. These were your attempts to write the story. Is that right?

A. Yes, of course I was. I am sure I was very clever to have woven them into a story.

Q. First, do you accept the linking of your name with Kafka, and second, do you enjoy being linked with Kafka?

A. I think Kafka taught me the way to write two quite bad stories: "The Library of Babel" and "The Lottery of Babylon". Of course, I owe a debt to Kafka. Naturally. I enjoyed that. At the same time, I couldn't go on reading Kafka all the time so I left it at that. I only wrote two stories following the pattern and then I left off. Of course I owe much to Kafka. I admire him, as I suppose all reasonable men do.

Yates. In the "Library of Babel" you insert a word spelled thusly: Qaphqa. I think the only way to pronounce that is Kafka. Did you put that in there to show that you were aware that you were writing like Kafka?

A. Yes. Of course I did.

[To a question on the influence on Borges of contemporary Latin-American writers.]

A. I am not a futurist. I was not aware of García Márquez and Cortázar, who came after.

Yates. The response is that Borges went blind for reading purposes in 1955 and simply hasn't read Cortázar and hasn't read Paz.

A. They came after me. I am not a prophet. I was not affected by them. They are in the future. We are not affected by the future.

Yates. Part of the question was: you have been credited with influencing them. In what way do you think you might have influenced them? Where do you think Latin American literature is going in their charge?

A. I hope Latin American literature has escaped my influence.

Yates. In 1955, you left off writing longish narratives and when the time came in 1960, when Carlos Frías, your editor at Emecé, asked you for a book, you said, "I have no book." And he said, "Every writer has a book if he digs around in his drawers and his files and his cabinets, and so forth," so you looked around and came up with a book called *El Hacedor—Dreamtigers*. They are all short pieces—apparently short pieces you had written since 1955 when you had lost your sight and couldn't write anymore in the old way. In 1966, after not having written a long story since "El Fin" in 1953—that's some 13 years—suddenly you wrote a long story, "La Intrusa". What was behind your change of mind about giving up writing just short pieces like those of *El Hacedor* and writing a long story like "La Intrusa"?

A. I had been rereading my Kipling. I reread *Plain Tales from the Hills*, and I thought that what a young man of genius like Kipling did (he was twenty-odd when he wrote *Plain Tales from the Hills*), perhaps an old experienced hand, who is certainly not a man of genius, may be able to do somehow. I put it down in a way that had nothing to do with Kafka or Henry James or Melville

but that might perhaps have pleased Kipling, though the setting, of course, was quite different. So I dictated that story to my mother, who wrote it down. I think it is one of my best stories, perhaps my best, because it is hardly like me. It is good enough to have been written by somebody else.

[In a question phrased in Spanish, Borges was asked about the theme of his poem "Lucas XXIII," and whether he might write another poem like it. He answered in Spanish to this effect:]

I would write another such poem if I could, because I consider it rather good. The poem's theme seems obvious to me: that the impulse which led the Good Thief to be a thief was the same one which led him to accept the extraordinary fact that the other person being crucified was God. I think that is the theme; and I would like to write another poem as direct as that one, especially that line which runs: "*De aquella tarde en que los dos murieron.*" I find it a line charged with feeling, although I should not say so because I wrote it. But after all, since I have written nothing, since everything has been given to me mysteriously, I can say that I like it—that I like that poem; and you are perhaps the first person who has noticed that poem, except for Dr. Cortínez, who seems to have noticed it because he recited it [in his introduction to Borges' talk]. At this point I have two readers, and I am grateful.

Yates. Professor Alazraki observes that in your fiction you have developed metaphors to disguise the autobiographical content or personal feeling behind your stories. You have done the same, he suggests, in your poetry. Then suddenly, in a new vein of poetry—he cites the poem "Remorse"—you have thrown away the mask and bare yourself—your personal self, your most intimate self—to us. What is behind your change in attitude towards hiding from the reader your most intimate feelings?

A. I suppose I was more inventive and now I have to fall back on saying simple things. It may be a failing for all I know. That might be a reason. I suppose that when I was a younger man, I was happy in inventions, and now I feel that I no longer need inventions, or maybe I am not getting them. I am unworthy of inventions. And so I fall back on merely stating my emotions or hinting at them, and that perhaps may prove sufficient, for all I know.

Yates. Do you feel that this new ability or need to express things simply and in a straightforward manner is an impoverishment of what you had before, or is it finding your voice at this stage in your life?

A. It may be an impoverishment, but I don't have to think of it in that way; that would be discouraging. I'd rather think of it as something new in order to go on.

Q. In respect to your relationship with the literature that you used to be able to read, that you can no longer read. Does someone read to you, and if that is the case, do you feel a different relationship now with what you used to be able to read before, and that is now just read to you?

A. Things are very generously read to me, but of course it is not quite the same thing. I cannot browse over a book. I merely have to hear what is being read to me. It is a pleasurable experience though not exactly the same. At the same time, having things read to me means knowing them better. When I had my sight, I used to read in a very superficial way, since I knew the book was there and I could look things up in it at any moment. But now I know that since readers are not available all the time, I have to remember what I have been read. And so that may have made my memory better, for all I know. Still, after all, the only thing I can do is to have things read to me, and having things read to me is a pleasure. Not the same kind of pleasure I had got before, but a different kind of pleasure, a pleasure one should be thankful for.

Q. What books do you have read to you now?

A. Except for the purposes of Old English or of Old Norse, I am more or less rereading. I prefer rereading to reading, since when you reread, you are delving down; but when you read, the thing is done in a very perfunctory and superficial way. So I am always going back to such writers as I read when I had my eyesight. I am always going back to Robert Louis Stevenson, to Edgar Allen Poe....

Q. In what ways has Poe influenced you?

A. Well, I suppose Poe taught me how to use my imagination. He taught me—though I was unaware of it, but I must have felt it strongly—that one may not be tied down by mere everyday circumstances; that being tied down to everyday circumstances stood for poverty, stood for dullness. I could be everywhere, and I could be, let's say, in eternity. And I suppose Poe taught me that. He taught me the width, the vastness of freedom. Those were taught to me in the first stories of his I read, *The Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque*. Though my style, of course, is far different from Poe, since Poe wrote in what we may call a pompous style, and I write in a rather grey, everyday style. But I suppose I should be thankful to him for his teaching me that writing could transcend personal experience—or rather, could be woven out of personal experience transmuted in some strange way. One should be thankful to Poe; and besides, why not be thankful to a man who gave us *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym*, and who created a genre, something nobody else has done—who has given us all the many detective books written since his time? They all came out of Poe; they were all begotten by Poe, when he wrote those three stories that you all know. So, I think I should be thankful to Poe, though I think of him as a prose writer. I do not like him as a poet. As for what was wrong with his poetry, I remember Emerson's joke about him. Somebody spoke to Emerson, that cold intellectual poet, about Poe, and he said, "Ah, Mr. Poe, the jingle man."

Q. What do you admire especially in Stevenson?

A. I admire everything in Stevenson. I admire the man, I admire the work, I admire his courage. I don't think he wrote a single indifferent or despicable line. Every line of Stevenson is fine. And then there is another writer I greatly admire: Chesterton. And yet Chesterton would not have been what he was had it not been for Stevenson. For example, if we read Chesterton's Father Brown saga, or *The Man Who Was Thursday*, or "Man Alive", we get the same fairy London that was invented or was dreamt by Stevenson in his *New Arabian Nights*. I suppose I should be thankful to Stevenson. I suppose we should all be thankful to Stevenson. I hardly see why you ask me that. The thing is as obvious as the sun in heaven.

Q. Why are mirrors a recurring symbol in your writing?

A. Because mirrors are very strange things. Mirrors give you the sense of the double. They give the Scottish wraith. When a man sees himself, according to Scottish superstition, he is about to die. His real self comes to fetch him back. Then you have in German the Doppelgänger, the man who walks at our side and with ourselves. Those things, of course, are given to us by the mirror. Then you have (I only know the Latin, I don't know Greek) the *alter ego*, the other I. Those things also were suggested by the mirror. There is something strange in the fact of the visual world being reproduced in every detail in a piece of glass, in a crystal. When I was a child I was amazed at it. I find it very strange that there should be in the world such things as mirrors.

Yates. Can you explain the perception that you have of two Borgeses? The two Borgeses that you write of in "Borges y yo"?

A. I suppose the perception came originally from the mirror. Because when you look into a mirror, well, there you are, there you are yourself looking at it, and the image looking at you. As for two Borges, I have been made keenly aware of the fact that there are two, because when I think of myself, I think, let us say, of a rather secret, of a rather hesitant, groping man. Somehow, this can hardly be reconciled to the fact that I seem to be giving lectures all the time and travelling all over the world. So I think of those two men as being different: the private man and the public man. Or, if you prefer it, why not speak of the private man, the shy man, the man still wondering at things even as he did when he was a boy, and the man who publishes books, whose books are analyzed, who has symposiums and that kind of thing happening to him—why not think of those two as being different? I do.

Yates. In your poem, "The Sentinel", "El centinela", do you give a chance for the other Borges to speak, the one whose voice was not heard in "Borges and I"?

A. [Affirmative.]

Q. What things are taken into account when you decide whether what you're going to write is poetry or prose?

A. I suppose if I feel very lazy, it's poetry. If I feel very active it's prose.

Q. You begin by reminding us that all things lead to a book. I wonder what, in your judgment, a book leads to.

A. It should lead to happiness. If not, if a book does not lead to happiness, or, let us say, to emotion, then that book doesn't really exist. I don't think in terms of compulsory reading. Books are meant to stand for experiences. For fine experiences. For real experiences.

Papers

OUTSIDE AND INSIDE THE MIRROR IN BORGES' POETRY

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In the Preface to his fifth book of poetry—*In Praise of Darkness*—Borges writes: "To the mirrors, mazes, and swords which my resigned reader already foresees, two new themes have been added: old age and ethics."[1] Mirrors are a constant in Borges' poetry, but long before becoming a major theme or motif in his works, mirrors had been for Borges an obsession that goes back to his childhood years. To his friends he has told that as a child he feared that the images reflected on his bedroom mirror would stay there even after darkness had effaced them. For the boy, the images inhabiting mirrors were like the ghosts haunting the castle of a gothic novel—constantly lurking and threatening through ominous darkness.

In the brief piece entitled "The Draped Mirrors" from *Dreamtigers* he reminisces those fears: "As a child, I felt before large mirrors that same horror of a spectral duplication or multiplication of reality. Their infallible and continuous functioning, their pursuit of my actions, their cosmic pantomine, were uncanny then, whenever it began to grow dark. One of my persistent prayers to God and my guardian angel was that I not dream about mirrors. I know I watched them with misgivings. Sometimes I feared they might begin to deviate from reality; other times I was afraid of seeing there my own face, disfigured by strange calamities" (D. 27).

One of the earliest references to mirrors appears in the essay "After the Images" originally published in the journal *Proa* in 1924 and later included in his first book of essays *Inquisiciones* (1925). There he says: "It is no longer enough to say, as most poets have, that mirrors look like water ... We must overcome such games ... There ought to be shown a person entering into the crystal and continuing in his illusory country, feeling the shame of not being but a simulacrum that nights obliterate and daylight permits (I.29)." This first use of mirrors as the country of simulacra appears also in his first poems. "La Recoleta", from *Fervor of Buenos Aires* (1923), opens with a series of images in which mirrors are just a simile, the vehicle of a comparison which is repeated with the frequency of a linguistic tic. In that poem he says that when "the soul goes out,"

> Space, time and death also go out,
> As when light is no more,
> And the simulacrum of mirrors fade
> ..... (O.P.20)

In his first volume of poetry and in the next–*Moon Across the Way* (1925)–mirrors are referred to merely on account of their reflective function. The city is "false and crowded/ like a garden copied on a mirror." In "El jardín botánico," "each tree is movingly lost/ and their lives are confined and rugged/ like mirrors that deepen different rooms." In "Ausencia," the reflection on the mirror represents the reflected object: "I shall raise life in its immensity/ which even now is your mirror:/ stone over stone I shall rebuild it." In other poems, some qualities associated with mirrors are mentioned: the silence of mirrors in "Atardeceres"; their capacity for repetition in "El Paseo de Julio," for multiplication in "Mateo, XXV, 30," and for memory in "El reloj the arena."

These random references meet in the poem "Mirrors" included in *Dreamtigers* (1960). In many ways this poem is a recapitulation of most of the previous motifs. Borges recalls his early fears of mirrors and asks: "...What whim of fate/ made me so fearful of a glancing mirror." The poem is an attempt to answer that question. A first explanation is its generative power: "They prolong this hollow, unstable world/ in their dizzying spider's web." Here Borges reiterates an idea advanced earlier in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." Facing a spying mirror, Bioy Casares "recalled that one of the heresiarchs of Uqbar had declared that mirrors and copulation are abominable, because they increase the number of men" (L. 3). And in the poem he writes:

> I see them as infinite, elemental
> Executors of an ancient pact,
> To multiply the world like the act
> Of begetting. Sleepless. Bringing doom. (D.60)

A second answer to the same question defines mirrors as "a mute theater" of reflections where "everything happens and nothing is recorded," and where the Other breaks in:

> Claudius, king of an afternoon, a dreaming king,
> Did not feel it a dream until the day
> When an actor showed the world his crime
> In a tableau, silently in mime. (D.61)

This last stanza brings to mind that memorable idea formulated in the essay "Partial Enchantments of the *Quixote*" where Borges wrote:

> Why does it make us uneasy to know that the map is within the map and the thousand and one nights are within the book of *A Thousand and One Nights*? Why does it disquiet us to know that Don Quixote is a reader of the *Quixote*, and Hamlet is a spectator of *Hamlet*? I believe I have found the answer: those inversions suggest that if the characters in a story can be readers or spectators, then we, their readers or spectators, can be fictitious. (O.I.48)

In a similar fashion, the poem "Mirrors" concludes:

> God has created nighttime, which he arms
> With dreams, and mirrors, to make clear
> To man he is a reflection and a mere
> Vanity. Therefore these alarms. (D.61)

Here we get much closer to the ultimate meaning of mirrors in Borges' poetry. That illusory reality that mirrors produce becomes in turn a profound mirror of our own uni-

verse since our image of the world is just a fabrication of the human mind. The world as we know it is that illsory image produced on the mirror of culture, "that artificial universe in which we live as members of a social group."[2] Mirrors, like the map within the map, like Don Quixote reader of the *Quixote*, and like Hamlet spectator of *Hamlet*, suggest that our intellectual version of reality is not different from that "ungraspable architecture/ reared by every dawn from the gleam/ of a mirror, by darkness from a dream." Mirrors and dreams have for Borges an interchangeable value. In the poem "Spinoza," for instance, the lens grinder "dreams up a clear labyrinth–/ undisturbed by fame, that reflection/ of dreams in the dream of another/ mirror ...", and more explicitly in the poem "Sarmiento" where dreaming is tantamount to "looking at a magic crystal." Borges has pointed out that "according to the doctrine of the Idealists, the verbs *to live* and *to dream* are strictly synonyms" (L.164). A more transcendental significance of mirrors in Borges' poetry should emerge, thus, from a syllogistic transposition of the terms *life*, *dream* and *mirror*. If *life* is a *dream* Somebody is dreaming, and dreams are, as stated in the poem "The Dream," "reflections of the shadow/ that daylight deforms in its *mirrors*," life is, consequently, not less illusory than the images reflected on the surface of the mirrors. In the poem "The Golem," the dummy is the dream of a Rabbi who in turn is the dream of a god who in turn is the dream of another god and so on *ad infinitum* as suggested in "The Circular Ruins." Yet, it should be noted that the Rabbi's Golem is described as "a simulacrum," as "a distressing son" and as "a symbol," and that all these terms have been used before in relation to mirrors. In the Rabbi's lamentations as he gazes on his imperfect son–"To an infinite series why was it for me/ to add another symbol? To the vain/ hank that is spun out in Eternity/ another cause and effect, another pain?"–there is an inequivocal echo of the "multiplying and abominable power or mirrors." On the other hand, in the poem "Everness" the universe is but the mirror of a total memory: God. God, in another poem entitled "He," "is each of the creatures of His

strange world:/ the stubborn roots of the profound/ cedar and the mutations of the moon." God is, in addition, "the eyes that examine/ a reflection (man) and the mirror's eyes." Also Emanuel Swedenborg knew, according to the poem so entitled, "like the Greek, that the days/ of time are Eternity's mirrors."

The notion that the whole of Creation is but a reflection of a Divine power is more clearly defined in the short stories. In "The Aleph," for example, Borges writes that "for the Kabbalah, the Aleph stands for the *En Soph*, the pure and boundless godhead; it is also said that it takes the shape of a man pointing to both heaven and earth, in order to show that the lower world is the map and mirror of the higher." And, in a more condensed manner, in "The Theologians": "In the *Zohar*, it is written that the higher world is a reflection of the lower," and once again in "the Zahir": "The Kabbalists understood that man is a microcosm, a symbolic mirror of the universe; according to Tennyson, everything would be." The pertinence of these quotations to our subject lies in the value conceded to reality as a reflection and the notion that such reflection contains a secret order inaccessible to men. Our reality, says Borges (our reality as codified by culture), is made of mirror images, appearances that reflect vaguely the Other, or, more precisely, as the sect of the Histrionics sustains in "The Theologians":

> To demonstrate that the earth influences heaven they invoked Matthew and I Corinthians 13:12 ("for now we see through a glass, darkly") to demonstrate that everything we see is false. Perhaps contaminated by the Monotones, they imagined that all men are two men and that the real one is *the other*, the one in heaven. They also imagined that our acts project an inverted reflection, in such a way that if we are awake, the other sleeps, if we fornicate, the other is chaste, if we steal, the other is generous. When we die, we shall join *the other* and be him. (L.123)

Borges' short stories and poems are full of characters and people searching for *the other*, for the source of the inverted reflection. Laprida, in "Conjectural Poem," "who longed to be someone else" finds *the other* "in one night's

mirror" when he can finally "comprehend his unsuspected true face." The idea of this life as a composite of reflections whose source is *the other* appears even more clearly in the poem devoted to López Merino's suicide included in the collection *In Praise of Darkness* (1969). There he says:

> . . . . . .
> . . . The mirror awaits him.
> He will smooth back his hair, adjust his tie (as fits a young poet, he was always a bit of a dandy), and try to imagine that the other man—the one in the mirror—performs the actions and that he, the double, repeats them. . . (P.D. 41-43)

Even about himself Borges has written in the poem "Junin": "I am myself but I am also the other, the dead one" (S.P. 211).

Mirrors are thus defined as the residence of the other. Life outside the mirror, by contrast, surfaces as a reflection, as a dream, and as a theater. Sometimes the reader witnesses a dialogue between the simulacrum outside the mirror and the other inside the glass. Among those poems, none has dramatized in such a definite manner that old dialogue between the two Borgeses that reverberates throughout his work as "El centinela" (The Sentry) included in *El oro de los tigres* (1972):

> Light comes in and I remember: he's there.
> He begins by telling me his name which is (clearly) mine.
> I come back to a slavery that has lasted more than seven times ten years.
> He imposes his memory on me.
> He imposes the everyday miseries, the human condition on me.
> I am his old male nurse; he forces me to wash his feet.
> He lies in wait for me in mirrors, in the mohagony, in store windows.
> One or two women have rejected him and I must share his grief.
> Now he is dictating this poem to me, which I don't like.
> He requires me to undertake the hazy apprenticeship of stubborn Anglo-Saxon.
> He has converted me to the idolotrous cult of military dead men, with whom I could perhaps not exchange a single word.
> On the last step of the staircase I feel that he is by my side.
> He is in my steps, in my voice.
> I hate him thoroughly.
> I notice with pleasure that he can barely see.
> I am in a circular cell and the infinite wall gets tighter.
> Neither of us fools the other, but we both lie.
> We know each other too well, inseparable brother.
> You drink water from my cup and you devour my bread.
> The door of suicide is open, but the theologians affirm that in the ulterior shadow of the other kingdom, I will be there, waiting for myself.[3]

The reader notices without much effort that "The Sentry" is a reenactment of the piece "Borges and Myself" from *Dreamtigers*. Both texts are part of an exchange between Borges the writer and Borges the man, between "a man who lives and lets himself live" and "the other who weaves his tale and poems," between one condemned to his inexorable destiny as writer and one who from the depth of a mirror paces equally inexorably toward his "secret center." In both texts the voice comes from an intimate Borges who watches the other as though one were the audience in a theater and the other an actor on stage, but whereas in the prose the exchange takes place between Borges the writer and the other who simply lives, in the poem the exchange is much less symmetric. The confrontation is not between the writer and the man. There is no confrontation, but rather reflections voiced by a person who has reached seventy and contemplates, in the manner of Kohelet, his life and the miseries of the human condition. This Borges, profoundly intimate, looks at the other as a sentry and examines this sentry's visible and public life as a fiction or a theatrical representation. To define life as a dream presupposes the notion that with death we shall wake up from that dream; to define the world as a stage implies the idea of a spectator who will applaud or boo when the show is over. Likewise, there is an obverse of the mirror that reproduces and multiplies, that dreams and gesticulates, and there is reverse from whose depths the other—the awake one and the spectator—watches us. The ultimate meaning of mirrors in Borges' poetry lies in that reverse, dwelling of the other, house of the self. "Ars Poetica" has masterfully expressed this meaning:

At times in the evening a face
Looks at us out of the depths of a mirror;
Art should be like that mirror
Which reveals to us our own face. (S.P.143)

Of the various significations that mirrors propose throughout Borges' poetry this is, beyond any doubt, the most transcending and the richest in suggestions. In a strict sense, we are dealing with the mirror of poetry as a road of access to the other, with literature as a bridge between the visible side of the mirror and the other side which poets of all times have always tried to reach. There is a mirror that "melts away, just like a bright silvery mist" so that the poet, like Lewis Carroll's Alice, may go through the glass and jump into the other side—the looking-glass room of fantasy—, and to such a mirror Borges refers in the poem devoted to Edgar Allan Poe:

As if on the wrong side of the mirror,
He yielded, solitary, to his rich
Fate of fabricating nightmares . . . (S.P.173)

But the mirror that in the last analysis Borges vindicates as a vehicle of art is the one "which reveals to us our own face." In the context of *Dreamtiger*'s Epilogue it is clear that the face he alludes to is a symbolic face which, like a cipher, encodes the destiny of the writer. It is this writer who "shortly before his death discovers that that patient labyrinth of lines (his writings) traces the image of his face" (D.93).

The poem "Oedipus and the Riddle" also adheres to this same meaning. Borges had already reviewed the myth of Oedipus and the Sphinx in *The Book of Imaginary Beings*. There he explains:

It is told that the Sphinx depopulated the Theban countryside asking riddles and making a meal of any man who could not give the answer. Of Oedipus the Sphinx asked: 'What has four legs, two legs, and three legs, and the more legs it has the weaker it is?' Oedipus answered that it was a man who as an infant crawls on all four, when he grows up walks on two legs, and in old age leans on a staff. (B.I.B. 211-212)

With these materials Borges makes his poem:

At dawn four-footed, at midday erect,
And wandering on three legs in the deserted
Spaces of afternoon, thus the eternal
Sphinx had envisioned her changing brother
Man, and with afternoon there came a person
Deciphering, appalled at the monstrous other
Presence in the mirror, the reflection
Of his decay and of his destiny.
We are Oedipus; in some eternal way
We are the long and threefold beast as well—
All that we will be, all that we have been.
It would annihilate us all to see
The huge shape of our being; mercifully
God offers us issue and oblivion. (S.P.191)

In the monstrous image of the Sphinx, Oedipus recognizes his own destiny and that of all man, and Borges adds: "It would annihilate us all to see/ the huge shape of our being." But the poet inevitably looks for "the shape of his being," and his written work is but the mirror where he will see his face, and in it the total image of his fate. But such a moment, similar to a revelation, comes "shortly before death." One of Borges' most personal and intense poems, "In Praise of Darkness," celebrates old age and darkness as forms of happiness; in the last lines he returns to the same idea presented in "Oedipus and the Riddle" but now in order to tell us that if art is "the imminence of a revelation that is not yet produced" (O.I.4) it is so because that last line to be traced by a hand stronger than any destiny (Death) is still missing:

From south and east and west and north,
roads coming together have led me
to my secret center.
These roads were footsteps and echoes,
women, men, agonies, rebirths,
days and nights,
daydreams and dreams,
each single moment of my yesterdays
and the world's yesterdays,
the firm sword of the Dane and the moon
of the Persian,

the deeds of the dead,
shared love, words,
Emerson, and snow, and so many things.
Now I can forget them. I reach my center,
my algebra and my key,
my mirror.
Soon I shall know who I am. (P.D.125-127).

Only with death the patient labryinth of lines that represents the writer's work is completed; only with death the labryinth yields its key and reveals its center; and only with death it becomes possible to cross and jump into the mirror and join the other, a way of saying that only then a revelation finally occurs as the outer image from this side of the mirror encounters its counterpart on the other side, looks at the shape of his being, and discovers who he is.

NOTES

1. J.L. Borges, *In Praise of Darkness* (Tr. by Norman Thomas di Giovanni). New York, Dutton, 1974, p. 10.
The following abbreviations are used:

D.: *Dreamtigers*, New York, Dutton, 1970.
I.: *Inquisiciones*, Buenos Aires, Proa, 1925
O.P.: *Obra poética*, Buenos Aires, Emecé, 1967.
L.: *Labyrinths; Selected Stories and Other Writings*, New Directions, 1964.
O.I.: *Other Inquisitions 1937-1952*, N.Y., Washington Square Press, 1966.
P.D.: *In Praise of Darkness*, N.Y., Dutton, 1974.
S.P.: *Selected Poems 1923-1967*, Delacorte Press, 1972.
B.I.B.: *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, N.Y., Avon, 1970.

2. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Arte, lenguaje, etnología* (Entrevistas de Georges Charbonnier), México, Siglo Veintiuno, 1968, pp. 131-132.

3. I thank my friend and colleague Willis Barnstone for having produced under rather unfavorable conditions, this English translation of "El centinela."

BORGES AND THE SYMBOLS

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Very often Borges modestly admits his poverty and his "essential monotony," (*H*, 109)[1] but he also reminds us that poetry "is immortal and is poor." (*P*, 225) Besides, when talking of language, metaphors or fables, he condemns as vain the search for originality and the detailed invention of new formulae.

In reference to language, suffice it to quote what he says in his prologue to *El informe de Brodie*:

> Each language is a tradition, each word a shared symbol, what an innovator is able to alter is trivial; let us remember the splendid—but often illegible—work of a Mallarmé or a Joyce. (*B*, 10)

To support his opinions he names two well-known writers whose great mastery makes their failure even more pathetic. Borges knows them well, he admires them and has commented on their work, but refuses to follow their path.

Concerning metaphors and essential fables, Borges has emphatically declared that only a few are able to translate man's eternal longings:

> ...It is probably a mistake to assume metaphors can be invented. The true ones, those formulating intimate connections between two images have always existed; the false ones, those we can still invent, are not worth inventing. (*OI*, 59)

Poetry should consist in repeating those eternal formulae, but his reflections go further, and on the other occasions he adds a finer shade of complexity. He begins his essay "La esfera de Pascal" saying:

> Universal history is perhaps the history of a number of metaphors. (*OI*, 16)

He ends the essay repeating the sentence slightly altered:

> Universal history is perhaps the history of the *various intonation* of some metaphors. (*OI*, 16) (my emphasis).

That varied intonation is precisely what should be comprehended in Borges, "algebra and fire," (*P*, 160 and *E*, 152) "fire and crystal." (*La Nación*, 11-2-75)[2]

One of the recurrent symbols in his work must be pointed out as one of the most significant—perhaps the most significant of them all—symbolization itself. In "El muerto" Borges calls himself "the man who interweaves these symbols," (*A*, 31) that is to say when he wears the mask of the writer he wants to show himself enslaved or justified by that task. Words, signs, figures, numbers, symbolize human acts and the whole creation; all the universe and the acts of men are in turn figures, letters, words or symbols of our destiny.

The importance of the symbols in Borges' texts has been pointed out by the critics and by the author himself—as a theorist on literature or as a judge of his own work. In my first studies I dealt with some of the most significant symbols, with the words that form his code of symbolic value in itself, and with the creation of fictions centered upon an event which is the key to the revelation of their destiny.[3] Later on I analyzed his narrative style which offers various levels of reading going from concrete facts to the archetypes.[4] But I missed something then that I clearly see now: to get a richer understanding of Borges' fictions we must bear in mind not only the various strata but also that the building of an "artefact" with various levels in tension constitutes an essential fact in the mapping of its structure.

It may be argued that it is almost a tautology to say that a work of art is a human event able to move us and a model of the universe, since that can be said of every great creation. And yet it is characteristic of Borges to offer a complex construction which, in hidden designs, bears the main lines of the model he proposes. This model lies on the tension among the different strata and not on one or more of the

symbolic values that can be deciphered.

To perceive the various levels of abstraction that organize Borges' fictions we only need to take the first stratum as a standpoint—the stratum of a personal history—the one that lends support to the rest. In the prologue to *El informe de Brodie* Borges says of his stories: "...they are abundant in the required invention of circumstancial events." (*B*, 9) Side by side with the invention of significant details he points out oblivion and also doubts in the knowledge of events. When he talks of what he considers his "tricks" as a writer he ennumerates the three characteristics noted before: "...to insert in a story circumstantial traits required by the reader now; to feign uncertainty since reality is precise but memory is not; to narrate events (this I learnt from Kipling and from Icelandic saga) as if I did not quite understand them..." (*P*, 340).

These and other techniques Borges does not mention, characterize the development of his narrative which I call "lacunar"—lacunae implicitly or explicitly attributed by the author to selective omissions or memory gaps.[5] His traits of make-believe impoverishment refer to the rich reality postulated in the text, but at the same time point to the presence of other levels of abstraction. To know that not everything has been said leads us to infer the existence of omitted or unrecalled facts; to know that there is a conscious or unconscious selection leads us to follow that line of gradual deprivation. On the other hand "not quite understanding" makes us believe there is a meaning not yet grasped and also incites us to decipher it. Many of his stories add explicit manifestations of the narrative voice to warn us about the existence of a semantic nucleus the reader should not miss.

Let us take up one of the stories of his latest period, for example "El duelo." The level of fake reality, the story, is the emulation of two women of high society, close friends, dilettanti in painting, constantly confronted in veiled artistic rivalries. The events are linked together and lead us to the existence of other levels of comprehension—a fact which is openly emphasized by the narrator from the very beginning. Those various layers of interpretation or reading are not always clear and defined, either in number or meaning. As in

every aesthetic event and specially in Borges' work, the symbols keep their polysemics and ambiguity. The reader keeps on receiving intermittent and disperse signals that have to be deciphered, leading toward an abstract goal that becomes more and more distant and elusive.

The first indication of the loss of concrete details is inserted at the very beginning, when commenting that a change of scenery, London or Boston, would not have changed the essential part of the story. In the following lines we are again induced to a selective interpretation of textual signals. "I must warn the reader that the episodes matter less than the situations that cause them and the characters. (*B*, 89) Here the ambiguity in the formulation of the warning may mislead us to a so-called psychological reading.[6]

The delicate and fragmentary version of the rivalry mentioned above ends with the void brought about by the death of one of the friends, the emptiness of the useless existence of the second one, who pays homage to her friend with a portrait, symbol of her vain envies and emulations. Her hypothetical reconciliation *post mortem* in the mind of God is a dim echo of the end of "Los teólogos," where the enemies after persecuting each other to death are explicitly unified by God.

The pen-ultimate[7] level of abstraction would then be the form of *the struggle*–struggle which in the end annuls the differences between the opponents. Borges has said again and again he likes to repeat the same subjects: "A few plots have persecuted me in the course of time; I am decidedly monotonous." (*B*, 9) The narrative metaphor of the struggle[8] recurs insistently under the mask of several main characters: two Irish conspirators, two "gauchos," two Saxon warriors, two theologians, two historians who imitate two heroes of the Independence two women painters, two bullies ("compadritos"). The struggle may appear as a *sacrificial rite*. Thus the sacrificer and his victim will be embodied by the traitor and the hero, the persecutor and the persecuted, or the more individualized figures of Judas and Christ, Caesar and Brutus, Martín Fierro and the negro, the Nazi and the Jew, the bully and the adolescent who betrays him, the revolutionary Irish leader and the cowardly partisan. This central form is brought out more emphatically in some of the stories where the characters–unaware–repeat canonical schemes immortalized by more conspicuous entities; "El evangelio según San Marcos," where some cruel and innocent countrymen reenact the drama of the Passion and "Guayaquil" where two contemporary historians reenact the confrontation between San Martín and Bolívar. (*B* 125 and 109)

Along with this symbolic form of *the struggle* or *the sacrifice*, the form of *the search* is found in other stories, always in that pen-ultimate level of abstraction as I have come to call it. One should have in mind that one of Borges' heroes:

> Realized as well that men have repeated two stories in the course of time: that of a lost vessel in search of a cherished island in the Mediterranean Seas, and the story of a God who gets himself crucified on the Golgotha. (*B*, 133).[9]

Narrative metaphors of the search are embodied in the hero who travels over India in pursuit of Almotasim, in the Roman tribune who goes through fevers and deserts to find the city of the Immortals, in the stranger of the circular ruins who consumes away nights and days creating a son in his dreams, in the impossible task of Funes or in that of Averroes, Aristotle's interpretor, or in the man who eternally goes over the library of Babel looking for a book to justify himself.[10]

And yet one could think that in an ulterior level both formulae (*search* and *struggle-sacrifice*) and perhaps others as well are narrative metaphors or better still symbols of the plurality solved in unity, or of a man who achieves community with the absolute. This would be the case of antagonists identifying themselves with their opponent or their victim, the heroes launched in search of an absolute (immortality, divinity, comprehension of the universe). The immortal, after being Homer, Rufo, Cartaphilus, is everybody and nobody; Shakespeare is his multiple creature of fiction but faces nothingness. The revelation of the name of God gives the magician of Qaholom power over the universe and simultaneously causes his own annihilation. The fables quoted are also combined with those that concede extasis under the image of unity. Unity obliterates diversity or multiplicity

Multiplicity delivers the infinite liberated from the boundaries of time and space. Suffice it to recall the man who was offered the Zahir and the Aleph, the immense and unattainable task of "El Conreso," Funes' vertiginous memory, the infinite library of Babel, or the infinite sand book; and also the literature summed up in one word as put forth by "Undr" or "El espejo y la máscara." (*LA*, 109 and 99)

The multiple and the one could be the enticing archetype which is surmised as another step on the road of abstraction referred to. Thus we reach the limit of some forms that through repeated metamorphoses in the recurrent mirrors of countless stories–always different but essentially the same–long for a pure form and at the same time are playing and threatening with the fascination of nothingness.

But now it should be made clear that they are not nothingness because all of them exist as forms in the substance of a pathetic human adventure, with the complexity such an adventure of man may have in the universe; besides because they exist not as an isolated and clear form but as a road. This road leads to a form through the levels of abstraction that shape different designs, often elusive and superposed. We should remember what Borges says about the stories of his latest period:"I dare not say they are simple; it is not so even of a single page or word on earth; they all postulate the universe, whose notorious attribute is complexity." (*B*, 7-8)

I mentioned before that his fictions are a human event able to move us and at the same time a model of the universe–actually of man in his attempt to understand the universe. I also said that the model lay on the tension among the various strata including that of concrete history, and not on one or more of the symbolic values that could be deciphered. What would the model itself be? I should suggest it is the eternal enterprise–always unsuccessful and always renewed–of the search for a model. Let us remember that in "Otro poema de los dones" grateful acknowledgement is expressed for the existence of "...reason which will never cease dreaming of a plane of the labyrinth." (*P*, 285)

Let us pause and reflect on his memorable definition of

the aesthetic act:

> Generalizing the previous case, we could infer that every form has a virtue in itself and not in its conjectural "content." [. . .] As early as 1877, Pater[11] had stated that all arts aspire towards the condition of music which is nothing but form. Music, the states of happiness, the faces carved by time, twilight and certain places want to tell us something, or they said something we should not have missed, or they are about to say something; this imminence of a revelation which does not take place is perhaps the aesthetic act. (*OI*, 11-12)

We know music[12] is not an art fundamental to Borges, the man. Yet we also know that he has found music useful as an essential metaphor of temporality and the eternization obtained through time. "Music–he has said–the most docile of the forms of time." (*P*, 159) When he wished to present this symbol within the form of an individualized deed he chose the strokes of a guitar (a "milonga", a "tango" as well) and Brahms' music. One of his latest poems not yet published in book form ("A Johannes Brahms") (La Nación, 11-2-1975) is dedicated to Brahms. This is the last stanza:

> My servitude is the word, impure
> conjunction of a sense and a sound.
> Yours is the river that flows away and lasts,
> neither a symbol nor a mirror nor a moan.

As I said at the beginning, the "symbol" is one of the recurrent symbols in Borges, and refers to the ambiguous nature of man, his servitude and his greatness. It proclaims his misery, the certainty that the enterprise undertaken by the poet is impossible; because neither the mirror, nor the moan, nor the symbol–i.e. nor art either as mimesis or as expression or as language–[13] is able to conform the mystery of the universe and of our destiny. It not only proclaims his servitude but also his greatness since art will build other forms (other drums, other palaces) that will tend incessantly and eternally to the revelation of that mystery.

Music is one of Borges' metaphors of that longing for the absolute. In his first essays he could dream of the language of God or of the angels, after St. Thomas, a notion

which is actually the very negation of the concept of language and sign for he sets forth the direct communication, without any intermediaries.[14] He could then find in music what was closest to that Utopia of angelic language, free from the servitude of the biplane signs (sound and meaning).[15]

The eternal metaphors that establish essential relationship (rose, circle, mirror, river, dream, twilight...) renewed in their "intonation" are one of his replies to that tyranny. Fictions are another reply: in the complex lines of a narrative metaphor they repeat essential fables with a new voice. In those fictions we are attracted by the capacity of the artist, who repeating opposite forms—man's limitations against his longings—in constant tension: *A confronting non A* gives a more complex formula of his destiny in a disjunction that becomes a conjunction: *A or non A = A and non A*. Let me express it in algebraic terms; because for Borges algebra is "a palace of exact crystals" and is always joined in his work to fire "whose sparkle nobody can watch without an ancient bewilderment." (*P*, 285)

NOTES

1.The quotations of Borges' works have been taken from the following editions, all from Buenos Aires, with initial letters in brackets: *El idioma de los Argentinos*, M. Gleizer, 1928 (*Id*); *El Aleph*, Losada, 1949 (*A*); *Otras inquisiciones*, Sur, 1952 (*OI*); the rest from the collection of *Obras Completas*, Emecé: *El hacedor*, 1960 (*H*); *Historia de la eternidad*, 1953 (*E*); *Discusión*, 1957 (*D*); *Obra poética*, 1972 (*P*); *El informe de Brodie*, 1970 (*B*); *El libro de arena*, 1975 (*LA*).

2.In "La metáfora" he insisted on the vanity of the invention of novelties and he also pointed out then that the forms of variation of the essential formulae are infinite: "The first monument in occidental literature, *The Iliad*, was written about three thousand years ago; one is likely to conjecture that during that long period every intimate, necessary affinity (dream-life, dream-death, rivers and lives that flow on, etc.) have been noticed and written once. Naturally that does not mean that the number of metaphors has been exhausted; the way of indicating or insinuating these secret sympathies of the concepts are in fact unlimited. Its virtue or weakness lies on words..." (*E*, 73-74)

3. See Ana María Barrenechea, *La expresión de la irrealidad en la obra de J. L. B., Buenos Aires,* 2nd ed. Paidós, 1967, for certain privileged symbols: labyrinths, mirror dreams, sunsets, sphere, book, theatre; for the other two points, read especially the paragraph "El lenguaje del sentido secreto," 82-93 and "Actos y vidas simbólicas," 93-99.

4. See Ana María Barrenchea, "Borges y la narración que se autoanaliza," *NRFH*, XXIV, 2(1975), 515-527.

5.Op. cit., 522-526, where I make a closer analysis of his rhetoric.

6.In this explanation there is a certain humorous game typical of Borges; the same happens in his allusion to Henry James close to the lines quoted. But it does not annul its validity of being a signal toward other levels of reading. Let me remind you that for Borges Henry James is also associated with the notion of a hidden pattern in his work, as the author of *The Figure in the Carpet*, even when this story is not mentioned in "El duelo."

7.I use *pen-ultimate* in its etymological sense of "almost the last," not postulating it must be the step previous to the last since in the structure presented there is not a definite and ultimate level. There is a path of abstractions but there is not a fixed goal.

8.We can find other examples of the archetype of *the struggle*, with explicit reference to symbolic reading in "El indigno" (32), "La intrusa" (15), "Juan Muraña" (72), "Guayaquil" (121), all of them in one book (*B*). See also the article quoted in note 4.

9.Note that this observation on the essential fables is not mentioned in an essay but in a fiction, "El evangelio según San Marcos," and not as the opinion of the narrator but as an inner thought of the hero who in the story enacts the part of Christ, he *is* Christ and will be sacrificed as such. This incident reiterates the situation of the character in "La espera" and other stories as well.It not only proves the effects of mirrors put face to face ("in abyss") but also tends to annul distinctions between symbolizer and symbolized when interchanging the constitutive elements and the trend in the semiotic fact. From an anthropological point of view he who enacts a mythical event in a ritual identifies himself with the hero. What is characteristic of Borges is that his stories—though incorporating archetypes—differ from the mythical attitude because of the consciousness of the distance they establish between the reader and the characters, between mythical paradigm and ritual act, between *signifié* and *signifiant*.

10.Of course I am not presenting a precise hierarchy of symbols and a definite relative position for all those symbols that appear in each of the stories quoted. For example, I do not state that in "La biblioteca de Babel" *the search* is the most important scheme before that ultimate and elusive goal, and that others not dealt with now such as the chaos, the infinite, etc., are inferior to it.

11.It is likely to call one's attention that Borges, so remote from the aesthetics of symbolism, quotes Walter Pater. He also remembers Pater in another essay "As Pater, [Mallarmé] felt that every art is biased to

music, the art in which the form is the matter..." (*OI*, 81) Maybe it was his own interest in problems of language and of signs that led him to Pater: that is to say, to the inner relation of the *signifié* and the *signifiant* and the external relation of sign with the reference–under the nexus of literature-reality, word-object. The conception of music as semiosis sets forth the problems of the referent and the biplanity of the sign, though neither Pater nor Borges has formulated them under those names but with traditional ones: *matter* and *form*, *subject* and *expression*. In Pater there is yet a use–not always so precise– of *matter* and *form*, in which matter is sometimes the material and sometimes the *theme* or the *subject*. Pater was influenced by some of Baudelaire's ideas–which Mallarmé took up later–and also by the problem of classification of the arts in Lessing, *Laocoonte*, IV and XVI. Lessing divided them in arts of space and of time, that is to say, of simultaneity and of succession, and his proposals were reelaborated by Herbart and Schasler. For Pater music was the supreme art because it accomplished the ideal of suppressing the duality substance-form, matter-form, whereas, the other arts tended to that ideal without entirely achieving the fusion. Cf. W. Pater, "The School of Giorgione," in *The Renaissance*, London, MacMillan, 1914, esp. 135, 137-139, 149; also 150 where one can see the appraisal of art through its power to perpetuate the fugitive instant.

12.Borges has also quoted Schopenhauer's opinion on the various arts, this opinion differs in that it places music beyond the hierarchy of the other arts, since it does not express the Platonic *idea* but *will itself*. The forms of space and time are not applied to music, only the general form of representation is. Borges remembers it in *D*, 44, because there he stated that music is "*...as immediate an objectification of the will as the world is...*" (underlined in the original) and he ends saying "that is to postulate that music does not need the world."

13.If instead of these traditional concepts in literary criticism, we want to use others quite extensively employed in semiotics, they could be translated with those of Peirce's art as an icon, or as an index or as a symbol. Even when not present in Borges they seem useful for establishing and defining certain categories. And yet I want to recall that in Peirce's nomenclature *symbol* has another meaning different from the traditional one in literary criticism, which is the one I use in my paper. In the classification of the signs he establishes according to the relationship of the sign-vehicle with its object: *icon* is the signal that has a certain similarity with the object but it does not presuppose its existance (a plane, a photo), *index* is the one which has some existential connection with the object and that, makes it liable to draw attention on it. (smoke in reference to fire) and *symbol* is that which is conventionally related to the object by habit (the greatest part of the vocabulary in the natural languages). Actually Peirce believes music is an icon.

On this subject see John F. Fitzgerald, *Peirce's Theory of Signs as Foundation for Pragmatism*, The Hague, Mouton, 1966 and Douglas A. Greenlee, *Peirce's Concept of Sign*, The Hague, Mouton, 1973.

14.As to the language of God or of the angels through direct communication, remember: "Evidently, neither this one [Spinoza] with his geometric metaphysics, nor that one [Lulio] with his alphabet that can be translated into words and these into sentences could elude language. Both fed their system on it. Only the angels can shun it, talk through intelligible species; that is to say, through direct representations and with no verbal mystery. What about us the non-angels, the verbals, those that on this earth's existence write, those whose inmost thought is that aspiring to printed letters is the greatest reality of all experience?" (*ID*, 26-27). For the concept of divine language as a code of infinite signs: *OI*, 122 and "Funes el memorioso." For the opposite notion that it consists of only one word: "Mateo, XXV, 30" (*P*, 159), "La escritura del Dios" (*A*) and "Undr" or "El espejo y la máscara" (*LA*). Cf., also A.M. Barrenechea op. cit., chapter on language, 103-115, esp. 1-9-111, for angels.

15.To be more precise music is not free from conventions because it works with codes (scales, clefs, tones, intervals, etc.). What Borges would like to indicate in his poem is not only the liberation from the biplanic signs (*signifiant* submitted to the existant of *signifié*) but also from the referent. As a sign, music would not aim at anything external to it.

BORGES AND BRUNO: THE GEOMETRY OF INFINITY IN *LA MUERTE Y LA BRUJULA*

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Por qué mención de Nicolas de Cusa para apuntalar un lugar común de la geometria?
—Tamayo y Ruiz-Díaz

This essay discusses the relationship of the geometrical logic which I propose is at work in *La Muerte y la Brújula* to that occuring in a group of Renaissance occultist thinkers who fascinated Borges, Ramón Lull, Nicolas de Cusa and Giordano Bruno.* Bruno's *De la Causa, Principio et Uno* will be my master reference, for this work elaborates very precisely the geometrical *episteme* which Borges follows in his story.

Geometrical logic is merely one component of a host of Renaissance notions entertained by Borges, undoubtedly in his Jungian days, in his stories and essays. My essay is purposely limited, therefore, to this single aspect of Renaissance epistemology and theorizes that it is the agent which organizes the text of *La Muerte* down to its very details. Its twentieth-century plot follows the order determined by a template of Renaissance geometrical thought superimposed upon the activity of the text. Borges works out the occult reasoning of the Renaissance in the guise of his detective story. By means of an absent determining principle, absent from the conventional signs of the story and from the superficial level of the story, that is the space in which the characters solve

*I would like to mention my colleagues Carlos Cortínez whom I thank for inviting me to participate in his Orono Borges Symposium (1976), and Cathleen M. Bauschatz, Renaissance scholar, who improved my text by her reading.

their quandries in their social context, Borges establishes the *episteme* of *La Muerte*. The geometrical model functions as a prior structuring element, as an infrastructure of the story whose work is to order a second set of relationships. The geometrical logic of the Renaissance operates in the story to determine the structure and logic of its plot.

Borges criticism contains copious analyses of *La Muerte y la Brújula*, much of it repetitive in discussion of the doubles, colors, and three's and four's of the text. While I must evoke some of this very familiar material I shall keep it to a minimum and hope that selected bibliographical references will suffice to cover the larger questions of the text.

"En los libros herméticos está escrito que lo que hay abajo es igual a lo que hay arriba, y lo que hay arriba, igual a lo que hay abajo. . . ." The apparently Manichean tone of this line from *Los Teólogos*[1] points to a characteristic fancy of Borges for certain historical epistemological dilemmas. The idea that any quality whatsoever implies by its existence an opposite or a negative raises a series of ancient questions concerning difference in identity, the infinite in the finite, and Hermetic theories of *coincidentia oppositorum*. It forms as well the basis for much of Borges' work including the collections *El Aleph*, *Otras Inquisiciones* and *Ficciones*, and characterizes his indulgence in the anti-scholastic solipsistic debates of the Hermetist schools during the Renaissance. A further example of this way of thinking in Borges can be seen in an ontological variation on the *arriba/abajo* opposition also from *Los Teólogos*; it describes the double nature of man as conceived by the esoteric heretical sect called Histriones. "Quizá . . . imaginaron que todo hombre es dos hombres y que el verdadero es el otro, el que está en el cielo. También imaginaron que nuestros actos proyectan un reflejo invertido, de suerte que si velamos, el otro duerme, si fornicamos, el otro es casto, si robamos, el otro es generoso. Muertos, nos uniremos a él y seremos él." (A, 41)

These human doubles suggestive of Lönnrot and Scharlach compare to the conceptual isometry of the first quotation, but it must be noted that while both schemes seem to postulate a Manichean division, this impression is false. For

the contrasting nature of the oppositions actually includes no negative or conflictive quality or value. Thus, in the context of the ontological example the opposite is, in a sense, the *same*; in both cases an isometric difference implies that while the opposite might be "other" it is also identical.

Moreover, the schema of these two puzzles demonstrates that in a sense there is no negative in Borges' work (a point which can be extended to many facets of the Borgesian commentary on time, space, the intellectual world, etc.), and that opposites can exist without plus and minus values, without good and evil. Borges seems to have little interest in the comparative values of opposites other than for the purely generative, or dialectical, potential of oppositional strategies. In an abstract, philosophical sense, they provide an intellectual commodity which is a supreme organizing principle. With anything less, he would have chaos; with anything more, ideology. Borges lives and writes in that clean, unencumbered world of epistemological operations and sequences characteristic of the logician and the geometer, the world of Blake's Urizen who divides and organizes incessantly.

The characteristic iso-symmetry shaping the rationality at work in these two citations from *Los Teólogos*, the first abstract and qualitative, the second ontological and speculative, undoubtedly recalls numerous other isometrical designs, such as Kubla Kahn's dream (OI, 23-25), discussed in the Borges opus. This essay, however, is concerned expressly with a parallel symmetry: the geometrical sequence in *La Muerte y la Brújula*, and particularly with the *episteme* which generates the sequence and its climactic, contingent evolution into the linear labyrinth.[2]

The thesis of this essay is that the story *La Muerte y la Brújula* is structured by an epistemological strategy whose provenance is the Hermetist school of the European Renaissaince, with its interest in the reduction of the many to the one, the complex to the simple, the location of difference in identity and, lastly, the relationship of the concepts of infinity and finitude. Borges seems to delight in the slippery, reversible, tautological schemas of a bouyant pre-classical ra-

tionalism during the period in which it emerges from the restrictions of scholasticism. In Giordano Bruno, a very late inheritor of Nicolas de Cusa, Borges finds a representative of that era. Furthermore, this writer believes, Bruno's strongest and clearest influence on Borges is felt in the manner in which the Italian's philosophical work, *De la Causa, Principio et Uno*[3] provides Borges the structuring *episteme* for the plot of *La Muerte y la Brújula*. Borges signals his interest in Bruno principally in the pages of *La Esfera de Pascal*, which alludes to several titles by Bruno, while Borges shows his admiration that, for Bruno, "la rotura de las bóvedas estelares fué un liberación (OI, 15). But Borges refers specifically to one chapter, that is, to one dialogue of this important work giving the reader a clear and strong signal to follow.

In the "Dialogo Quinto" of *De la causa*, Bruno employs geometrical models to demonstrate his neo-pythagorean thesis that the finite and the infinite are one. Bruno's concern for triads and quaternities also reflects early Gnostic symbolism for difference and unity, as one finds it recounted in Jung's *Aion*, a text which incidentally repeats almost to a title the various works cited by Borges on the occult. "Dialogo Quinto" also reflects Bruno's interest in the finite and the infinite and is the place where he develops his anti-scholastic, and anti-humanist debate, signaling a new trend issuing from an age which Bruno's life closes. In the fifth dialogue, Teofilo, speaking for Bruno sets out his modern exposition of the typical hermetist philosopher's thesis of the infinite and the one. "E dumque l'universo uno, infinito, inmobile. Una (dico) è la possibilità assoluta uno l'atto. Una la forma o anima; una la materia o corpo. Una la cosa. Uno lo ente. Uno il massimo et ottimo; il quale non deve posser essere compreso, e però infinible, et interminabile; et per tanto infinito et interminato: e per consequenza immobile.[4]

Resorting to what Borges calls those "ambiciosas y pobres voces humanas *todo mundo, universo*," (A, 119) Bruno describes the absolute engulfing infinity of the universe with its stark pantheistic or atheistic implications in such a way that it resembles the interminable paths of the labyrinth limited only by its own contained limitlessness.[5] Borges shares with Bruno a delight in that "concepto que es el corruptor y el destinador . . ." (D, 129)—the idea of the infinite. Nothing shatters the dogmatism of the scholasticism of Bruno's day nor the neo-positivism of Borges' like the imposition of a relativistic framework on the logican's enterprise.

The notion of infinity has several conventional geometrical symbols, one of which, the sphere or circle, is the subject of Borges' *La Esfera de Pascal*, wherein Borges summarizes the theological history of the sphere metaphor. He traces it from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, as have other scholars before him, through Alain de Lisle, Giordano Bruno and Pascal. All of these thinkers toyed with the idea that God or Nature, or the Universe is likened to the infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.[6] In *Avatares de la Tortuga*, Borges cites Bruno's forerunner, Nicolás de Cusa, who writes that "en la circunferencia vió un polígono de un número infinito de ángulos y dejó escrito que una línea infinita sería una recta, sería un triángulo, sería un círculo y sería una esfera." Borges adds wistfully that "Cinco, siete años de aprendizaje metafísico, teológico, matemático, me capacitarían (tal vez) para planear decorosamente ese libro" (OI, 149). Yet in *La Muerte y la Brújala*, Borges has treated much of the matter he postulates here, and altogether *decorosamente* at that.

These various geometrical figures play up to the symbolic aptitude of the routine appearance in Borges' work of the Renaissance thematic of *coincidentia oppositorum* in which the infinite is conceived to be explicit in the finite and the finite implicit in the infinite. Both Borges and Bruno draw from *De Docta Ignorantia* of Nicolás de Cusa, which boldly suggests by this reasoning the pantheistic notion that God and the world are one. The one implies the other, just as rest implies motion, potency act, the one the many, and number unity as Teofilo declares in *De la causa*.

Within the narrative of *La Muerte y la Brújula*, the leading indicator to Lönnrot of the pattern of the murders is that "polvorienta palabra griega," *Tetragrammaton*, which is the

cabalist's symbol for the name of God in the four letters JHVH. Lönnrot suddenly realizes that a quadrangular rather than triangular plan is in operation. Other clues which eventually fall into place are, to review for the reader, the deceptive three's of the date of each murder which convert to four's when Lönnrot finally discovers in the *Philologus Hebraeo-Graecus* that the Hebrew calendar counts days from sundown to sundown. The patches of the costumes of the harlequins, the losenges of the windows, the Tetrarch of Galilee, and the rhomboids of the painter's shop sign are other minor signals of the fours and quadrilaterals which eventually become the limited quantity of the infinite labyrinth.[7]

Likewise, triangles convert to quadrangles; triadic structures convert to quaternities. But the triadic forms are not lost; they are rather assimilated into the quaternity. In the words of one close reader of *La Muerte*, L. A. Murillo, "The rhombuses simultaneously contain the triangles and are displaceable by them. The "predicament" of symbolic knowledge . . . is that the same figure or symbol can contain two antithetical orders of meaning, a trinity and a tetragram, a mystic equilateral triangle and the Tetragrammaton."[8] The symmetry of the total scheme and the simple integrity of quadrature are, however, not sufficient responses to the questions one can put to Borges' text. The textual clues of three's and four's and of triads and quaternities are merely superficial; Murillo's excellent analysis of the story still does not uncover either the very determinate quality of the process whereby three *must* become four or how (or even why) the linear labyrinth is generated from this context, especially when the classical labyrinth is conceived as a *pair* of lines which cross at one point so that there can be only one entrance and no egress.

The generational principle behind three becoming four is often alluded to in Jung, where he discusses triadic and quaternary structures. He illustrates the natural process whereby triads move toward quaternities, and may even explain the significance of Treviranus' "No hay que buscarle tres pies al gato" (F, 149): ". . . three should be understood

as a defective quaternity or as a stepping stone towards it. Empirically, a triad has a trinity opposed to it as a complement. The complement of quaternity is unity."[9] This passage from Jung's *Aion* proposes an arrangement of forms identical to that discovered by Lönnrot when he realized that his equilateral triangle should have been a rhombus. In other words, Lönnrot's triad of points forming the triangle required a fourth point which made a quaternity of the triangle and thus awarded it unity and completeness. As a consequence of the added point, he created an opposed trinity to the first triad based upon a shared line; that is, two equilateral triangles share a single base line to form a rhombus. Jung's work is to the point here in demonstrating that the isometric shadow world must be known to make the pattern complete and unified, while most people are like Treviranus who, true to his name, can only see the triangle even though the quaternity exists before him in a shadow.[10] While Borges and Jung share more than just the first part of this century,[11] it is Bruno who can put even Jung into perspective for us, because Bruno personified the close of the Gnostic tradition which Jung elaborates and which inspires in *De la causa* its principles concretely exposed in plane geometry.

A medieval source for Bruno's inspirations was the Spaniard Ramón Lull, from whose mnemonic works were derived the Nolan's. Lull is also paraphrased by Borges in *Nota sobre (hacia) Bernard Shaw* (OI, 218). Frances Yates, known especially for her remarkable work on Bruno,[12] has also written on the symbolism inherent in Lull's works, which we may compare with that of Bruno, who was directly influenced by the Spaniard.[13] Professor Yates, having discussed the mystical or divine triangle and the quarternity which names the four elements of the universe, writes: "The geometry of the elemental structures of the world of nature combines with the divine structure of its issue out of the Divine Names [Divine Attributes] to form the universal Art [of Memory] which can be used on all subjects because the mind works through it with a logic which is patterned on the universe."[14] Professor Yates insists not only on the constant symbolism of the Trinity and the four elements, but also on the logic,

the epistemological and generative function of such symbolism: ". . . the four elements in their various combinations enter very deeply into the kind of geometrical logic which it uses. The logical square of opposition is identified in Lull's mind with the square of the elements, hence his belief that he has found a "natural" logic based on reality and therefore greatly superior to scholastic logic."[15] Certainly, Bruno appreciated exactly this superiority over scholastic logic of Lull's geometrical one, which we find continued in the Italian's arguments which follow this discussion below. Yates further characterizes Lullian logic as a "kind of geometrical logic with squares and triangles and its revolving combinatory wheels."[16] It is particularly interesting that Lull's system, although it lacked Bruno's delight in the infinite and was essentially apologetic, as Bruno's was not, does contain the generative notion of quaternities evolving from trinities and the square from the triangle. The generational aspect is noted by Yates as well, when she discusses Lull's own source, John Scotus Erigena, the ninth-century thinker with pantheistic tendencies. "Erigena's great vision, the Divine Names, are primordial causes out of which issue directly the four elements in their simple form as the basic structures of the creation."[17] The clue to Lull's art of memory in Yate's study is that the "Divine Dignities [or names] form into triadic structures, reflected from them down through the whole creation; as causes they inform the whole creation through its elemental structure."[18] The sense in which the divinity in its triadic shape informs the whole of creation in its quadrapartite elemental structure and is thence contained by it, is a logical thrust we also see in Bruno and Borges. And Yates' testimony to the logic of the geometrical evolution from triangle to square is basic to our reading of Borges and supplies a sense of the process that Jung only hints at.

The geometrical experession of these ideas is found in Bruno's "Dialogo Quinto" and is borrowed by Borges as an *episteme*, or absent determining principle around which the story is articulated. In the process, Borges follows Lull and the Nolan's ideal of reduction of the complex to the simple. The straight-line labyrinth of *La Muerte y la Brújula* is a radical simplification of the Cusan's infinite line tracing through all imaginable figures mentioned above. Moreover, it is the naturally generated outcome of the geometrical logic of the story and grounded in Bruno's explanation of the symbolic function of the triangle and the rectangle with regard to the finite and the infinite.

In"Dialogo Quinto" of *De la causa*, Bruno begins by offering a challenge to the quality of a person's intellect by distinguishing the superior from the inferior according to the ability of the former to reduce the many into one: "Credi che sarebbe consummatissimo e perfettissimo geometra quello che potesse contraere ad una intenzione sola tutte le intenzioni disperse ne' principii di Euclide. Perfettissimo logico chi tutte le intenzioni contraesse ad una. Quindi è il grado delle intelligenze: per che le inferiori non possono intendere molte cose, se non con molte specie, similtudini e forme. Le superiori intendeno megliormente con poche."[19] Borges rises to the Brunian challenge by attempting to resolve the finite into the infinite and reduce the infinite to a single line, which is nothing more than a simple, singular extended point. Borges accomplishes this reduction, similar to the aleph, through Lönnrot, who after entrapping himself by means of his brilliance and deductive logic, reduces Scharlach's schema to the single, simple all-inclusive line.[20] Bruno himself expounds upon the line relative to point, arguing that if act is not different from potency, then point cannot differ from line. "Se dalla potenza none è differente l'atto, è necessario che in quello il punto, la linea, la superficie, el il corpo non differiscano; perché cossí quella linea è superficie: come la linea movendosi puó essere superficie; cossí quella superfici é mossa et é fatta corpo."[21]

Lönnrot's method of winning the battle of the intellect demonstrates his brilliance and power of analysis, but in the end he becomes the victim not of the crime but the criminal. His reaction upon discovering his terrible fate is to do something analogous to adding a fourth point to the triad of points forming the triangle. Instead of creating a new tri-

angle, he creates a new world, the world in which his linear labyrinth would make him the victor—not victim of the criminal. Robert Gillespie writes an excellent explanation of this behavior in Borges himself; one need only substitute Lönnrot's name for Borges'. Comparing Borges to Father Brown, Gillespie writes: "It is just the reverse in Borges, whose spirit and reason both are thwarted by physical impediments, Borges' way of solving the mystery presented by these impediments is to construct a world that is analogous to them . . . from which the only outs are joking or death."[22] This analogous world is a projection of the real, and a kind of isometric opposite, created by placing a single point at some distant locus relative to, i.e., *based* upon, the real. He thus creates, in a gesture strongly suggestive of Romantic thinking in Borges, a second not quite believable world. This second world is a "reasonable" or "rational" alternative to the not quite dependable real world that is always prepared to thwart man's reason and intellect. It could also be termed idealistic, metaphysical, or hallucinatory after various Borgesian inferences. Borges' characters stand in a tantalizing posture of gamesmanship between the ideal world of limited human intelligence but of unlimited and extravagant hope, and the real world which scoffs at the evasions of intellect. This isometrical world of Borges' sceptical dialectic Lönnrot inhabits.

In the ideal world, that is, in Lönnrot's projected world, the detective's testament is not only the intellectual, Brunian reduction to the simplest figure imaginable, the line or extended point, but his reversal in the process—at least in his defensive analogous world—of his assassin's goals. In that other avatar proposed by Lönnrot before he dies, Scharlach becomes his victim. Borges allows Lönnrot to win, metaphysically speaking, but only in that other world, for he suffers like any genius the physiological limits of his vulnerable body and the material world. However, Lönnrot still has the better part, self-sacrifice or not, for he moves toward his goal according to Bruno's principle of simplification adopted by Borges for the process of his story: ". . . quando l'intelletto vuol comprendere l'essenzia di una cosa, va simplificando quanto può, voglio dire, dalla composizione e moltitudine se ritira rigittando gli accidenti corrottibili, le dimensioni, i segni, le figure, a quello che sottogiace a queste cose."[23] This is a goal characteristic of Borges himself, as Carter K. Wheelock discusses in his chapter on the epistemological character of Borges' writing. "Carried to a higher plane, the form of an idea becomes the form of a whole hierarchy of knowledge. A system, said Borges, is the subordination of all aspects of the universe to any one of them."[24]

In "Dialogo Quinto," Bruno begins his geometrical proofs by arguing that the universe is one, infinite, and immobile, and that it comprehends all contradictions. In the fourth argument of this dialogue, he proposes signs through which to conclude that contraries coincide in unity and from which he can infer, in the Hermetic tradition, that all things are one. Bruno begins with the difference between a circle and a straight line and concludes with his demonstration that as an arc increases it approximates more and more a straight line. From Nicolas de Cusa's elaboration of the ultimate indifference of the minimum arc and the minimum chord, Bruno extrapolates that in the maximum there is no difference between an infinite circle and an infinite line.[25] Therefore, in the maximums and minimums contraries coincide as one and undifferentiated. This demonstration begins the process of simplification which Borges will further, and which gives order to the geometrical progressions of *La Muerte y la Brújula*.

> Or quanto à segni. Ditemi che cosa è piú dissimile alla linea retta, che il circolo? che cosa è piú contrario al retto che il curvo? pure nel principio, e minimo, concordano. Atteso che (come divinamente notò il Cusano inventor di piú bei secreti di geometria) qual differenza trovarai tu tra il minimo arco, e la minima corda? Oltre nel massimo, che differenza trovarai tra il circolo infinito e la linea retta? Non vedete come il circolo quanto è piú grande, tanto piú con il suo arco si va approssimando alla rettitudine? chi è sí cieco che non veda qualmente l'arco BB per esser piú grande che l'arco AA; e l'arco CC piú grande che l'arco BB; e l'arco DD piú che gli altri tre: riguardano ad esser parte di maggior circolo, e con questo piú e piú avicinarsi alla rettitudine della linea infinita del circolo infinito significata per IK?[26]

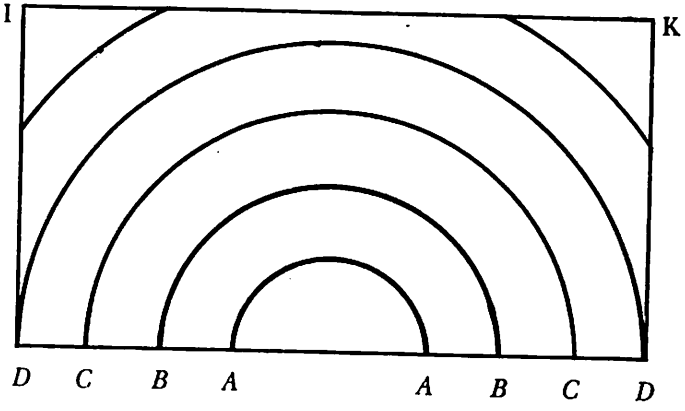

FIGURE 1.

Bruno next evokes the triangle and opposes it to the square. Borges, of course, does the same, with this difference: that the rhombus, still quadrilateral form, is substitued for the square. The triangle in Bruno's work demonstrates simple finitude. "Il triangolo è la prima figura, la quale non si può risolvere in altra specie di figura piu semplice (come per il contrario il quatrangolo se risolve in triangoli) e però è primo fondamento di ogni cosa terminata e figurata."[27] When compared to the Brunian arguments concerning the arc and the line, it is clear that either maximizing or minimizing the triangle has no effect on its measure. The sum and measure of its angles remains the same in an infinitely minimum or in an infinitely maximum triangle. Moreover, it cannot be resolved into another figure, which therefore awards it the Brunian attribute of uncompromised finitude.

> ...trovarai che il triangolo come non si risolve in altra figura, similmente non può procedere in triangoli, di quai gli tre angoli sieno maggiori o minori, benché sieno varii e diversi, di varie e diverse figure, quanto alla magnitudine maggiore e minore, minima e massima. Però se poni un triangolo infinito (non dico realmente et assolutamente; perché l' infinito non ha figura: ma infinito dico per supposizione, e per quanto angolo dà luogo a quello che vogliamo dimostrare): quello non arà angolo maggiore, che il triangolo minimo finito, non solo che li mezzani, et altro massimo.[28]

The quadrilateral figure, on the other hand, has qualities symbolically more appropriate to the concerns of Bruno and Borges, whether one considers squares or rhombuses. Borges' rhombus, simply, is formed from two equilateral triangles based upon a shared line, but when divided across its baseline the configuration is open to the analysis appplied by Bruno to the square.

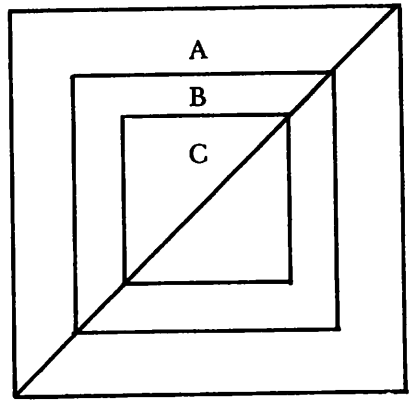

FIGURE 2.

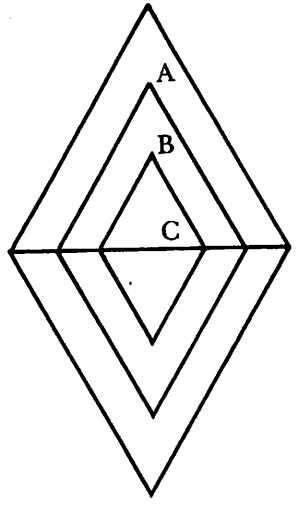

FIGURE 3.

Divided diagonally, Bruno's square offers two opposed right triangles which in turn, and in contrast to the isolated triangle, can reproduce the finite by the inscription of smaller triangles (or divided squares) within the infinitely divisble original. Bruno's argument runs as follows:

> Lasciando stare la comparazione de figure e figure, dico di triangoli e triangoli: e prendendo angoli et angoli, tutti (quantumque grandi e picciolo), sono eguali come in questo quadro appare, (Fig. 2) il quale per il diametro è diviso in tanti triangoli: dove si vede, che non solamente sono uguali li angoli retti di tre quadrati A, B, C, ma anco tutti gli acuti che risultano per divisione di detto diametro che constituisce tanti al doppio triangoli, tutti di equali angoli.
>
> Quindi per simultudine molto espressa si vede come la una infinita sustanza può essere in tutte le cose tutta, benché in altri finita in altri infinitamente; in questi con minore, in quelli con maggior misura.[29]

Proceeding from Bruno's reasoning to Borges', one sees that the prescription of a fourth point over the city of Triste-le-Roy forms the rhombus. The Borgesian quaternity, therefore, possesses the same qualities for embracing the finite within the infinite, for in Bruno's work the conclusion to be drawn is that Scharlach's labyrinth, devised to snare Lönnrot, and detected too late by him, necessitated a quadrangular form—the quaternity which Jung states is an organizing schema par excellence—in order to qualify as a labyrinth and not simply for reaons of mystical symbolism, as Treviranus mistakenly believes about the triangle. The quaternity was necessary purely and simply because it is the symbolical route to the infinite, and without the infinite there is no labyrinth. Jung's statement that quaternity "is a system of coordinates that is used almost instinctively for dividing up and arranging a chaotic multiplicity"[30] pertains particularly to the labyrinthine strategies of Scharlach and will pertain as well to the labyrinthine pretensions of Lönnrot. The quaternity will impose order and arrangement over the chaos of a labyrinth; moreover, it will provide an order and a finitude to the infinite and multiple aspects of its endless character. Thus the quaternity in Borges' story reflects the quality of Bruno's square by demonstrating finitude and infinity in one and the same schema, and finally awards at least a symbolic language to Pascal's "firmamento que no hablará"(OI, 13).

Borges, however, takes the Brunian *episteme* one step further. Until this point, the Nolan's reasoning has guided the story's intrigue, while the characters, puppets of Borges' narrative strategies, have worked out their destiny in accordance with the directives of this ancient principle. Scharlach, until now, represents that historical—and thus limited— character, and his is the function of ordering the story by the imposition of his worldly rationality. But no sooner does the labyrinth close on Lönnrot than the *episteme* of the ancients comes to a halt. Schlarlach has the trigger yet to pull and his own "history" of his pursuit to relate to his captive victim, but the determining rationality moves to Lönnrot. The detective and interpreter of signs now begins to spin his modern web in a fashion and place which one may now have come to expect—in the infinite world. Lönnrot's thinking, as opposed to Scharlach's, is not based upon history, with the exception of his bow to Zeno, which is a misleading clue throwing off the reader. His thinking operates in the world barely hypothesized by Bruno, the relativistic a-historical world of time, space and movement which has been consecrated by the twentieth century. Lönnrot's speculation is a break with history and Scharlach's world, just as Bruno's was a break with the history of his own. Unfortunately for Lönnrot, his creative wisdom was bounded by both history and material reality. His labyrinth is a projection of thought issuing from that projected isometric world which opposes the real world in the same fashion that the fourth point projected a second, equilateral triangle. From Lönnrot's analogous world, the world of intellect deprived of production and efficacity, arrives a metaphysical transendence which eludes the trap of Scharlach's rationality but cannot elude his reality.

Erich Lönnrot and Red Scharlach in the critical literature are regularly characterized as doubles because of the likeness of their names which each refer twice to shades of the color red. Yet this reference is as incomplete an interpretation as would be an interpretation of Lönnrot's labyrinth merely as a Zenonian paradox. Lönnrot and Scharlach are less doubles than they are enemy brothers. In their names and in their actions, they work out the epistemological theme of the story, that of difference in identity - of reciprocal difference. But more importantly, because of the different worlds in which they apply their rationality, they also symbolize the predominant model of difference and identity at work in the story, which is the presence of the finite explicit in the infinite and the infinite implicit in the finite. Lönnrot represents the infinite scale because of his projection of a labyrinth into a non-historical, speculative and infinite world of another avatar. Scharlach is concrete, historical, vengeful and finite; he is also successful, which is a Borgesian opinion on the world of the intellect. Lönnrot, who does not pursue the criminal with the worldly incentive

of vengeance, but rather for the spirit of the game, is an idealist and does not detest his victor in this hunt. He does not consider the search as a game of life, but naively, a game of intellect operating in a world of signs and significances so private and hermetic that they are shared by no one. The very privacy and irrelevancy of his act of projecting a labyrinth before he is shot testifies to the isolation and solipsism of his position relative to the social world.

However, in his idealism Lönnrot takes the historically limited Brunian problem one large step further when he leaves the geometrical quality of shape and radically reposes the schema of Bruno in terms of his linear labyrinth. For in rejecting rhombic symmetry for a labyrinth of a straight line, Lönnrot turns intellectual history upon itself. He and Borges hold to the Brunian idea of the intellectual's task of reducing multiplicity to its simple essences. Lönnrot, victim and victor at once, finite and infinite, proposes to Scharlach in Borgesian fashion that "En su laberinto sobran tres líneas" (F 158). Borges moves away from multiplicity by transforming the quadrilateral form into a (uni-)linear form reducing the multiple to the singular, four to one. Yet the genius of his reduction is that along the single line lay four points, the four points of the quaternity which insure completeness, organization, unity and the infinite. Borges' invention here, although a great step from Bruno, does have a parallel in Bruno.

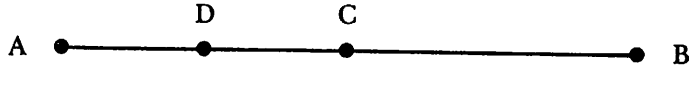

FIGURE 4.

In his arguments in the "Dialogo Quinto," Bruno extends his discussion of triangles and quadrangles to demonstrate that "in questo uno et infinito, li contrarii concordano."[31] After stating that acute and obtuse angles are contraries, he shows that they "nascono da uno, individuo, e medesimo principio, ciò è da una inclinazione che fa linea perpendicolare M, che si congionge alla linea iacente BD nel punto C. . . .

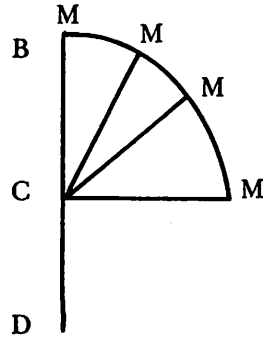

FIGURE 5.

At the point where the perpendicular line M moves toward conjunction with the line BD, the angles to each side of MC become increasingly obtuse and acute until all angles are reduced to indifference by virtue of the ultimate superposition of line MC over BD. They become one, he says, in the potency of the same line that . . .

> essendo gionta, et unita, fa l'indifferenza d'acuto et ottuso, similmente annullandosi l'uno e l'altro, perché sono uno nella potenza di medesima linea. Quella come ha possuto unirsi, e farsi indifferente con la linea BD, cossí può disunirsi e farsi differente da quella, suscitando da medesimo, uno, et individuo principio, i contrariissimi angoli che sono il massimo acuto, e massimo ottuso: sin al minimo acuto, et ottuso minimo, et oltre all' indifferenza di retto, e quella concordanza che consiste nel contatto della perpendicolare, e iacente.[32]

The principle at work in Bruno's straight line operates in Borges' as well, there being an indifference of the points of the quaternio as they are resolved from various angular schemes into the straight line.

The imposition of Zenonian paradox upon the simplification of the quaternary structure into a straight line rails with modernistic irony. For Borges, the hesitant modern, both critic and apologist of idealism, condemns both the hal-

lucinatory metaphysics of the idealist and at the same time gives to him alone the victory of the intellect. "Admitamos lo que todos los idealistas admiten: el carácter alucinatorio del mundo. Hagamos lo que ningún idealista ha hecho: busquemos irrealidades que confirmen ese carácter. Las hallaremos, creo, en las antinomias de Kant y en la dialéctica de Zenón." Borges goes on to quote Novalis in this regard and in such a way as to condemn Lönnrot. "El mayor hechicero sería el que se hechizara hasta el punto de tomar sus propias fantasmagorías por apariciones autónomas. No sería ése nuestro caso?" Borges concludes: "Yo conjeturo que así es. Nosotros (la indivisa divinidad que opera en nosotros) hemos soñado el mundo" (OI, 156).

The paradoxical schema of this superficially Eleatic enigma is that unlike other quaternities, Lönnrot's idealistic one refuses cloture at the fourth point, thus resembling the classic labyrinth. While Scharlach was able to enclose the unsuspecting Lönnrot within the rhomb when they met at the last point, he will never catch him in the radically new labyrinth proposed by his victim. In the next avatar, if that unassuaged irony were to inflict itself upon life, Lönnrot would survive based upon the principle that by proceeding by halves, Scharlach beginning at point B could never arrive within range of Lönnrot. The dreamer is one of the few who remembers Zeno's first paradox, for according to Borges, "Casi nadie recuerda el que lo [the second paradox] antecede—el de la pista—. . . ." The mechanism is well known: "el móvil debe atravesar el medio para llegar al fin, y antes el medio del medio, y antes el medio del medio del medio y antes. . . ." (OI, 150). Once the halving begins on a line terminated by the first two projected crimes, at points A and B, (Fig. 4) then the progress to point D is impossible; but the Eleatic dilemma is familiar to Borges scholarship and needs no further elaboration. What is different from and more important here than Zeno's paradox is that the postulated line includes the four points necessary to express qualities necessary to the labyrinth, infinity and unity. After the fourth point is reached in Lönnrot's schema, progress breaks down into infinite progressions toward a point and is thus tantamount to motionlessness. Borges' "El movimento es imposible (arguye Zenón) . . ." (OI, 150), recalls Bruno's "E dumque l'universo uno, infinito, inmobile. . ."[33]

Borges has it both ways. He maintains the figure of quaternity and the map articulating its four points.[34] He thus maintains the infinite within the four points while reducing a complex proposition to the most simple one by capitalizing on the features of Eleatic paradox. The line undergoes infinite segmentation between C and D as progress by halves proceeds in fashion similar to the procedure by which the square and rhomb can be infinitely divided and still remain true to their form. The infinitely divisible straight line labyrinth retains these necessary characteristics, and yet adds an additional Eleatic paradox which would trick Scharlach, the vengeful pursuer. In a most subtle fashion, the paradox reveals once again the common Borgesian bow in the direction of Oedipus. In a second reversal of roles in the last minute, Scharlach becomes the pursuer pursued, exchanging roles with Lönnrot, who was pursued from the start and victimized by the person he pursued. The exchange creates an isometric pattern of doubling and alternation of roles between the two. These doubles differ in their identity; Lönnrot and Scharlach are like Bruno's overlaid lines that can be both differentiated and undifferentiated. Like the double being from *Los Teólogos* which began this essay, dead, they will be united and one will be the other. "Muertos nos uniremos à él y seremos él." In another avatar, or *quizà*—dead, Lonnrot could be master. Like Tlön, Lönnrot's straight line "será un laberinto . . . destinado a que lo descifren los hombres" (F, 34).

NOTES

1. Quotations from Borges' works are taken from *Obras Completas*, 3 volumes (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1965). This edition merely sews together the separate volumes, with their individual pagination, known separately and collectively as the *Obras Completas*. It con-

tains nine separate collections, three to a volume, of works published through 1964. Volumes cited in this essay, with dates of latest editions until 1965, and the conventional abbreviations used in Borges criticism to identify them in the text are the following: *Otras Inquisiciones*, 1964 (OI); *Discusión*, 1964 (D); *Ficciones*, 1963 (F); *El Aleph*, 1961 (A). Page numbers follow abbreviations in the text of this essay.

2. Borges criticism has made little of this fascinating puzzle. The critical literature for the most part is content to allow the linear labyrinth to be explained by the Eleatic paradoxes, or to reduce the problem to a platitude as does for example J. Alazraki: "una sensación de inutilidad de todas las cosas" in *La Prosa Narrativa de Jorge Luis Borges.* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, n.d.) p. 177. This essay wishes to investigate the linear labyrinth in order to expand upon its intellectual implications and to anchor it in an historical context whose development in Giordano Bruno sets an astonishing parallel with its adaptation by Borges. This historical epistemological schema, or *episteme*, not only orders the Borges story, but must impart to it as well the meanings of its symbolism, a thesis which when imposed upon the story will obviously bring a new and sometimes conflicting interpretation to the fore. The test of its value as a reading will be in the coherence it can impose upon the story in its entirety.

3. Giordano Bruno, *De la Causa, Principio et Uno*, a cura di Giovanni Aquilecchia (Torino: Einaudi Editore, 1973).

4. *ibid.*, 142.

5. Marcial Tamayo and Adolfo Ruiz-Días in *Borges, Enigma y Clave* (Buenos Aires: 1955) have confirmed, with the same force as Bruno elaborates his opinion, Borges' reduction of the many to one: "No hay más que un ente, cada cosa en cuanto es, es todas las cosas. Todo está en todo, todo es uno" (p. 42).

6. C. G. Jung cites Mathias Baumgartner, *Die Philosophie des Alanus de Insulis* (Munster: 1896) as the scholar who accomplished the groundwork in tracing the saying "God is an infinite circle (or sphere) whose center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere," to a *liber Hermetis* or *liber Trismegisti:* in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, vol. 9, pt. I (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959) p. 325.

7. The reader is undoubtedly familiar with the many analyses of *La Muerte y la Brújula*, and to labor the three's and four's and other elements of the plot strategy would not add to my contribution nor offer more to the reader than can be found in the following excellent books: Ana María Barrenechea, *Borges the Labyrinth Maker*, trans. R. Lima (New York: New York University Press, 1965), pp. 36-37; Jaime Alazarki, *La Prosa Narrativa de Jorge Luis Borges* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, n.d.), pp. 58-59; Carter K. Wheelock, *The Mythmaker* (Austin:

University of Texas Press, 1969), pp. 90-91; Ronald J. Christ, *The Narrow Act*, (New York: New York University Press, 1969), pp. 120-121; L. A.. Murillo, *The Cyclical Night* (Cambridge:Harvard University Press, 1068), pp. 187-194. Also by Alazraki, "Borges and the Kabbalah" in *Prose for Borges* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 184-211, especially pp. 182-189. Also Lewis H. Rubman, "Creatures and Creators in *Lolita* and *Death and the Compass*" in *Modern Fiction Studies*, (1973) pp. 433-452.

8. Murillo, pp. 189-190. I cite Murillo here because he perceives the coexistence of the triangle in the square, even though he makes no allusions to Bruno. But without Bruno, in which the *hierarchy* of forms is foremost, Murillo can ostensibly state that the rhombuses are displaceable by triangles. But by following the thinking of Bruno, the weight and value of each geometrical form is revealed and the quivalence Murillo draws between the two forms cannot stand. Murillo reads like inspector Treviranus, who does not know that the mystic equilateral traingle *has* to have a fourth point outside itself to give it the qualities of the mystic it pretends to have. By following Bruno, as I suspect Borges must have done, the progress of the story and the generation of forms takes on order and meaning which no critic of this story has yet, to my knowledge, observed in print.

9. Jung, vol. 9, pt. II, p. 224. The idea of the three-legged cat, a colloquial Spanish expression, indicating something overly complicated, and in Treviranus' expression indicating the search to make an unnecessarily complicated matter of something, has an interesting relevance to this essay precisely because of Borges' own interest in Jung as a writer more than as psychologist. In Jung's *The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairytales*, 9 II, pp. 207-254, three-leggedness occupies the central place in one of the tales analysed and brings Jung to expound at length on the symbolism of three's and four's. "The superiority of four-leggedness over three-leggedness," writes Jung, "is not altogether unexpected. But what is the meaning of the opposition between threeness and fourness, or what does threeness mean as compared with wholeness: (p. 234). It is indeed ironic that Treviranus, whose name signifies the number three, would reject the "complication" of three, i.e. the three-legged cat. He is correct in the word play of his expression, but wrong in his name. The three-legged cat must be overlooked, because completeness lies in four. It has been pointed out above that Treviranus mistakenly believed in the triangular solution. Borges cannot have introduced this expression unknowingly given the numerology of his story and his interest, shared with Jung, in the ancient "axiom of Maria," which is the relatedness in alchemical thinking of three and four.

Jung has more to say on this opposition of three's and four's and uses the very same metaphor as do Bruno and Borges. The Argentinian undoubtedly was familiar with both examples. "If one imagines the

quaternity as a square divided into two halves by a diagonal, one gets two triangles whose apices point in opposite directions. One could therefore say metaphorically that if the wholeness symbolized by the quaternity is divided into equal halves, it produces two opposing triads. This simple reflection shows how three can be derived from four, and in the same way the hunter of the captured princess explains how his horse, from being four-legged, became three-legged through having one hoof torn off by the twelve wolves. The three-leggedness is due to an accident, therefore. . ."(p. 235). Jung nowhere cites Bruno in this volume even though Bruno's writings, and in particular *De la Causa*, are replete with figures of this nature.

10. It is interesting that besides containing in his name the symbolical components TRE and VIR, Treviranus has a near namesake in a little known Renaissance alchemist, contemporary, it is thought, with Nicholas de Cusa. Jung mentions Bernardus Trevisanus (1406-1490) author of *De secretissimo philosophorum opere chemico* in 9. II, p. 143. The two names are of distinct families however, one Venetian and the other German.

11. Emir Rodriguez-Monegal "Symbolism in Borges' Work" *Modern Fiction Studies*, 19 (1973), p. 329, writes of the relation of Borges to Jung's writings: "Not only does he admit to having read his works but also adds that he has always been a "great Reader" of his. In contrasting Jung with Freud he observes that 'in Jung you feel a wide and hospitable mind.' His recognition is not without some ironic undertones: he admits he has read Jung 'in the same way as, let us say, I might read Pliny or Frazer's *Golden Bough*, I read it as a kind of mythology, or as a kind of museum or encyclopedia of curious lores.' Thus even when he seems to accept Jung's psychoanalytical approach, he does not accept it to the letter." It would seem that perhaps Monegal and Borges both underestimate the degree to which the Argentinian was a reader of Jung when it might be correct to say that only with difficulty could one overestimate the degree to which he was a student of Jung, not of course for Jung's psychological perceptions, but for his encyclopedic knowledge of the heterodox. In the same issue of *MFS*, a tribute issue for Borges, see Saúl Sosnowski "*The God's Script*–A Kabbalistic Quest," pp. 381-394, to see the parallel interests of Borges and Jung. See also Alazaraki, article cited in note 7 above.

12. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

13. See *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966). Bruno's occult geometrical tradition does not stop at Nicholas de Cusa, but has roots extending into medieval times when the learning of the Greeks was combined with the religious thinking of the Egyptians. Ramón Lull, a Spanish contemporary of Dante, but of a different intellectual tradition, wrote mnemonic works, the last of which, *Ars Magna*, was published in 1305. Lull's place in this study lies in his interest in geometrical figures and numerology as well as the fact that Bruno, also a writer of mnemonic works was a student of those of Lull. Yates has occasion to compare the two hermetic thinkers in *The Art of Memory*. "Lullian Art," she writes, "works with abstraction, reducing even the Names of God to B to K. It is more like a mystical and cosmological geometry and algebra than it is like the *Divine Comedy* or the frescoes of Giotto" (p. 185). Speaking of the figures she continues: "The Art uses only three geometrical figures, the circle, the triangle, and the square, and these have both religious and cosmic significance. The square is the elements; the circle, the heavens; and the triangle, the divinity. I have this statement of Lull's allegory of the Circle, the Square and the Triangle in the *Arbor Scientiae*" (pp.182-3).

14. *ibid.*, 181.

15. *ibid.*, 178.

16. *ibid.*, 375.

17. *ibid.*, 178.

18. *ibid.*, 179.

19. *ibid.*, 154.

20. *El Aleph* is the ultimate in the Borgesian scheme of reduction since "un Aleph es uno de los puntos del espacio que contienen todos los puntos" (A, 160). Less abstractly it is "el lugar donde están, sin confundirse, todos lugares del orbe, vistos desde todos los ángulos" (A, 161). The difference between the reduction to the aleph and the reduction to the straight line is that one is a discovery within the natural order of things, and the other is a creation of human reason. The aleph is a given, ungenerated and fixed, whereas the straight-line labyrinth is the product of deduction, generation of forms, and a process of dialectic which makes of it by far the more interesting of the two motifs even though the aleph may be more "spectacular." With the Brunian element included, however, *La Muerte y la Brújula* certainly rivals *El Aleph*.

Maurice-Jean Lefebve, "Qui a écrit Borges?" *L'Herne* (Paris, 1964), has written that the entire Borgesian enterprise is the act of condensation of a multiplicity of facts to the meager surface of a text, a conclusion which supports Christ's (*The Narrow Act*, p. 11) observations on Borges and *Ultraismo*. To quote Lefebve: "Qui ne voit que chacun des contes, chacun des courts essais de Borges est un aleph qui se reve? En condensant sur une mince surface textuelle une multiplicité indéfinie de faits, de suggestions et de sens, . . . l'auteur ouvre l'esprit à un vertige et à une magie problématiques et inépuisables qui est proprement ce qu'on appelle la littérature" (p. 224).

Also of interest in this context are the radically reductive lines of *Tlön*, *Uqbar*, *Orbis Tertius* "No es exagerado afirmar que la cultura clásica de Tlön comprende una sola disciplina: la psicología.

Las otras están subordinadas a ella: . . . Juzgan que la metafísica es una rama de la literatura fantàstica. Saben que un sistema no es otra cosa que la subordinación de todos los aspectos del universo a uno cualquiera de ellos" (F 22-23).

21. *ibid.*, 144.

22. Robert Gillespie, "Detectors: Borges and Father Brown" in *Novel* (Spring 1974) 223. Tamayo and Diaz corroborate the tone of Alazraki's statement quoted in note 2 above calling this act "una melancólica refutación del racionalismo," (p. 29).

23. Bruno, 153.

24. Wheelock, 22.

25. "Quare, quanto curvum est minus curvum, ut est circumferentia maioris circuli, tanto plus participat de rectitudine; . . ." from Nicolas de Cusa *De Docta Ignorantia*, I. XVIII: cited in Bruno, p. 156, note of Aquilecchia. Cf. Bruno's own treatises on the minimum after the Cusan in *Opere Latine*, ed. F. Fiorentio, et al, (1879-1891; rpt Stuttgart: 1962): *De Minimo* and *De Triplici minimo et mensura*.

26. Bruno, 156.

27. *ibid.*, 158.

28. *ibid.*, 158. Cf. note 8.

29. *ibid.*, 158-159.

30. *Jung*, 9, II 242.

31. Bruno, 159.

32. *ibid.*, 159.

33. *ibid.*, 142.

34. The line is also the subject of one of Borges' favorite English writers, Coleridge. The Romantic uses the line to demonstrate a dialectical procedure, which we shall see he attributes to Bruno, whereby he too can arrive at a quaternary organization of reality, and Christian theology as well. Coleridge's reasoning is strongly supported by theories developed by Jung in 9, I, II. In "Aphorisms on That Which is Indeed Spiritual Religion," *Aids to Reflection* in Vol. I, *The Complete Works*, ed. W. G. T. Shedd, (New York: Harper, 1884) Coleridge, reader and enthusiast of Bruno, seeks to extinguish "the false *antithesis* between *real* and *ideal*." Coleridge uses as an example Euler's dissertation on the properties of arches–(Cf. Bruno and Cusa on arcs above) in their mathematically figured form and in their material construction to help illustrate this dilemma. He then continues adding the line metaphor: "Lastly, by the assistance of the terms Object and Subject, thus used as correspondent opposites, or as negative and positive in physics, . . . we may arrive at the distinct important and proper use of the strangely misused word, Idea. *And as the forms of logic are all borrowed from geometry ,···,* I may be permitted thence to elucidate my present meaning. *Every line may be, and by the ancient geometricians was, conceived as a point produced*, the two extremes being its poles, while *the point itself remains* in, or at least represented by, the mid point, *the indifference of the two poles*, or correlative opposites (my italics). Logically applied, the two extremes or poles are named *thesis* and *antithesis*. Thus in the line,

T ——————— I ——————— A

we have T = thesis, A = antithesis and I - punctum indifferens sive amphotericum. . . ." (p. 218).

From this thinking Coleridge developed his own Pythagorean thesis regarding quaternity. "The assumption of this point I call the logical prothesis. We have now the four relations of thought expressed: I Prothesis, or the identity of T and A, which is neither, because in it, as the transcendent of both, both are contained as one. Taken absolutely, this finds its application in the Supreme Being alone, the Pythagorean Tetractys . . . the point, which has no (real) opposite or counterpoint" (219).

The American editor, W. G. T. Shedd's "Introductory Essay," dogmatic in its trinitarian apologetics and evidently uneasy over Coleridge's, discusses in theological terms how Coleridge arrived at four rather than three as the principle of completeness and unity. "We are free to say for ourselves, that we think Coleridge committed an error in leaving the scheme of the Triad for that of the Tetrad, in his construction. The symbols of the Church, and the Christian mind, proceed upon the hypothesis of a simple Triad, which is also a Monad, and hence teach a Trinity in Unity and a Unity in Trinity. Coleridge, on the other hand, proceeds upon the scheme of the Pagan Trinity, of which hints are to be found in Plato, and which can be traced back as far as Pythagoras–the scheme namely of a Monad logically anterior to and other than, the Triad–of a Monad which originally *is* not a Triad, but *becomes* one–whereby four factors are introduced into the problem. The error of the scheme consists in this its assumption of an aboriginal Unity existing primarily by itself, and in the order of nature, *before* a Trinity–of a *ground* for the Trinity, or, in Colderidge's phrase, a *prothesis*. . ." (p. 44).

Coleridge himself attributes his theory of the identity of Thesis and Antithesis to Bruno when he writes in "Essay xiii" of *The Friend*, vol. 1: "Every Power in Nature and in Spirit *must evolve an opposite*, as the sole means and conditions of its manifestation: And all opposition is a tendency to Re-union (my italics). This is the universal Law of Polarity or essential dualism, first promulgated by Heraclitus, 2000 years afterwards republished, and made the foundation both of Logic, of Physics, and of Metaphysics by Giordano Bruno. The Principle may be thus expressed. The *Identity* of Thesis and Antithesis is

the substance of all *Being* their *Opposition* the condition of all *Existence*, or Being manifested; and every *Thing* or Phaenomenon is the Exponent of a Synthesis as long as the opposite energies are retained in that Synthesis." *The Collected Works of S.T.C.*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke, vol. 4 pt. I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) p. 94. See also pp. 115-119 for further discussion of Coleridge on Bruno, and vol. 4, pt. II, pp. 80-82. Of particular interest see A. D. Snyder "Coleridge on Bruno" MLN, XLII (1927) 427-436, and more recently Barry Wood "Coleridge's Dialectical Method and the Strategy of Emerson's *Nature*" PMLA, 91 (1976) 385-397.

FORKING NARRATIVES

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> . . . I saw in an alternate vision, as if life's course constantly branched
> Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*

Looking at the relations between North American and Latin American literature during the past thirty years, rather than at those literatures themselves, I would say that the most important date is 1967. In that year John Barth published his essay "The Literature of Exhaustion" in *The Atlantic Monthly* and reversed the course of literary relations in our hemisphere.

Until the publication of Barth's essay, the custom for critics in both parts of the hemisphere was to examine the literature of Latin America and to find there the influence of important North American writers. For example, we have Ricardo Alegria's well-known study of the influence of Whitman on South American letters and we have the brilliant study by James Irby of Faulkner's influence on Latin American novelists. The implication of these studies was clear: Latin American writers often looked north for inspiration and for solutions to esthetic problems; North American writers seldom, if ever, looked south.

"The Literature of Exhaustion" signaled an end to this period of one-sided literary relations by being the first full-fledged admission of a Latin American writer, Jorge Luis Borges, to influence on a major North American writer. Arguing that literature has used up the forms and possibilities

bequeathed to us by the great writers of the preceding century, Barth says that the problem every writer confronts is either to yield to this exhaustion and to do again what has already been done many times, or to try to find ways to go beyond what earlier writers have attempted. The "real technical question," he says, "seems to me how to succeed not even Joyce and Kafka but those who've succeeded Joyce and Kafka." For Barth, the most significant of these successors to Joyce and Kafka are Borges, Beckett and Nabokov.

Without going into an examination of how Barth himself has been influenced by Borges—influence that is evident in *Lost in the Funhouse*—you can easily see how Barth's essay has created a literary lineage for himself that includes Borges. In a certain way, Barth has taken up the challenge of Borges' "Kafka and his Precursors" and actively created a past for himself—a past that includes Borges as a precursor.

Ever since Barth's essay achieved a measure of fame, it has become commonplace to speak of Borges' influence on a whole generation of North American writers, including Barth, Robert Coover and Thomas Pynchon. Chiefly, however, this influence has been a matter of rumor and vague generalization. When it has been anything more precise, the critic has largely confined himself to thematic resemblances between two authors, noting, for example, that following the lead of Borges' notion that we do not have a fixed personality or identity, Barth creates characters who cross the boundaries of identity and point to the futility of introspection as they do so. What has not been attended to, it seems to me, is Borges' legacy to narrative procedure itself, to the telling of stories, no matter what their themes and styles. And that is what I want to try to do: to isolate one of Borges' narrative procedures that has been adopted by writers in English and, I want to suggest, revolutionized and renewed the way narrative can be formulated.

If Joyce imitated simultaneous sensory and mental perception in *Ulysses* and Eliot attempted mythic simultaneity in *The Waste Land*, Borges has instead lamented the inevitable linear quality of prose that precludes any embodiment

of simultaneity. Recognizing this inherent limitation of prose narration, Borges has nevertheless experimented with methods for overcoming it. His experiments, while not placing him within the tradition either of the simultaneity attempted by the stream of consciousness writers or of that simulated by the mythic writers, do place him at or near the source of the narrative technique that can most simply be called *alternate*. That is, the form of narration which while indicating one gesture, one action, one plot, not only does not exclude others but, rather, purposefully suggests them.

The old tale of the lady or the tiger—a narrative topos in which the protagonist is forced to choose between one alternative and another—either life in the form of the lady or death in the form of the tiger—is precisely the antithesis of the alternate mode. But Borges' fiction "The Other Tiger" may be taken as an emblem of that mode: while writing of one tiger, it is, precisely, the *other* that Borges is describing. The indicated, simultaneous alternative to what the narrative is presenting—the *other* tiger—is one of Borges' ways of attacking the linear, sequential nature of prose. Maintaining, rather than excluding such alternative though decisive choices, Borges takes pains to show at many forks in his work that while a character or persona chooses only one of the possible turns, the reader is invited not only to consider the road not taken, but to consider the same road as *both* taken and not taken.

The clearest example of this esthetic of simultaneous alternatives is the fiction "An Examination of the Works of Herbert Quain" where Borges uses a diagram to show how Quain's hypothetical novel, *April March*, is actually nine "ramifying" novels comprised of events that, as the text says and the punning title with its alternate meanings clearly implies, "rigorously exclude each other." Quain's narrative form is a sketch of antithetical alternatives all maintained by individual narrative assertion. In *April March*, no event is a preempting event; rather, all are mutually exclusive and, therefore, equally valid as narrative.

This plotting by means of keeping parallel and opposing actions active—not merely as potential events subsequently

excluded on the true/false basis of this-happened-so-that-couldn't-have happened, but on the multiple, no-choice basis of all-of-the-above-happened—corresponds to the historical studies that consider, once it is known what "did happen," what "history" would have been had some events *not* happened. (A wonderful example of this type of inquiry, known as *counterfactual history*, is R. W. Fogel's study of how the United States would have been settled if there had been no railroads.) In literature, on the other hand, alternate plotting is found, to cite one example, in Robert Coover's collection of short stories entitled *Pricksongs and Descants*.

The subtitle of Coover's collection is "Fictions," which immediately announces his development from Borges' own work, a development further indicated when Coover alludes to the "literature of exhaustion," the title of Barth's seminal essay. Beyond that, the connection between Coover and Borges is as deep as Coover's language, which at times can sound like the English translation of Borges. I am thinking of phrases like "my peculiar and unprincipled penchant for logogriphics" and "a night that seemed infinite in its innumerable dimensions." But more significantly, in stories like "The Magic Poker," "The Babysitter," and "The Elevator" Coover writes fiction that lives up to Herbert Quain's plan, although on a smaller scale.

In "The Babysitter," Coover narrates what at first seems to be a simple story of a teenager taking care of two children and a baby in the house of a couple who have gone to a party. However, in narrating that event, Coover refuses to distinguish between what did happen, what was thought to have happened, what did not happen, what was imagined to have happened and what might have happened. Each possibility is carefully, precisely narrated in sequences of separated sections—all asserted with the same seamless narrative authority, many containing contradictory data. For example, no event is distinguished from any other by being presented as a "possibility." All the narrated events share co-equal narrative validity, and Coover rejects no sequence in favor of any other, even though the reader may yearn to discredit some segments in favor of others, especially those beginning with a specific notation of time. Coover even goes so far as to give two conclusions to the story: one in which the parents come home to quietly sleeping children and a house that has been tidied up, and another in which the mother is informed that her children have been murdered, her husband run off, a corpse found in the bathtub and the house wrecked. Almost needless to say—almost—it is this latter, catastrophic conclusion that terminates the story—typographically terminates it, that is.

One way to read "The Babysitter" is to break it up into constituent sequences. (Such a reading would be practiced, I suppose, by people who unscramble their eggs before eating them.) Another way to read the story is to hear all the fictional possibilities as exactly that—fictional—and therefore not contradictory to anything at all: a kind of linear fugue comparable to the linear labyrinth alluded to at the end of Borges' "Death and the Compass."

Coover's "The Elevator" is even more schematic in presenting an alternate plot of the kind sketched by Herbert Quain. This story begins with a sentence that is repeated several times in the course of a narrative divided into fifteen or perhaps sixteen sections—even that seemingly simple datum is variable within Coover's scheme. The sentence reads: "Every morning without exception and without so much as reflecting upon it, Martin takes the self-service elevator to the fourteenth floor where he works." As the plot progresses, several alternate and obviously exclusive and contradictory events are presented. For example, in some paragraphs, Martin is early in arriving at work and he has the elevator all to himself, while in other paragraphs there are people in the car with him. This is no simple matter of Martin being in the car at different times, as Coover makes clear, because no matter how contradictory to what has just occurred in the story, each event or description is keyed with phrases like "Every morning and without exception," "Always the same," or "usual"—phrases that imply a continuum of time and custom precluding antithetical events or remarks. Most notably, near the end of the story, in section fifteen, we read about the crash of Martin's elevator: "They plunge, their damp bodies

fused, pounding furiously, in terror, in joy, the impact is "
The blank left by that endless sentence is perhaps filled in, partially at least, by the next paragraph-but-one where the text declares: "Martin does not take the self-service elevator to the fourteenth floor, as is his custom." Through the ambiguous coordination of that final phrase, these concluding lines not only contradict the narrative premise that Martin takes the elevator "every" day; they also suggest that it was not even his custom to do so.

Contradictory only when considered by the reader as a series of events strung in time like so many beads, "The Elevator" is not at all contradictory when considered as another linear fugue, a ramifying arrangement in space—the space of the typography, not the variable time it takes Martin to ride or not ride his elevator. And here we recover an important aspect of alternate plotting as practiced by Borges and Coover: such plotting is an attempt to overcome the necessarily sequential nature of prose, of printing, of narration itself. The attempt, like so much in Borges, is beautiful, is satisfying, is futile; it is an experiment, like earlier experiments with stream of consciousness, that is perhaps successful in exact proportion to the degree that we recognize how it can never truly succeed. (If, in fact, we were able to read several lines of text simultaneously—and we may be able if we follow Evelyn Wood's counsel—and so follow several strands of plot simultaneously—and I suppose that Evelyn Wood claims we can—the experimental quality of alternate plotting would not, could not exist. With these thoughts in mind, we can see how on the one hand alternate plotting is an attempt to revolutionize the act of reading, just as much as Evelyn Wood's is. On the other, we are drawn back to Barth and to Borges, who both see the baroque as that mode that purposefully turns on itself and exhausts its own possibilities of writing. In this sense, if in no other, Coover is a baroque writer.)

Of course Borges is no stranger to alternative readings of his fiction, having written them into it in the first place. In "Herbert Quain," for example, he tells us that one of Quain's books is a detective story in which a paragraph following the

detective's final solution contains the phrase: "Everyone thought that the encounter of the two chess players was accidental." Borges then writes: "This phrase allows one to understand that the solution is erroneous. The disquieted reader rereads the pertinent chapters and discovers *another* solution, the true one." With full irony, that word *true* may stick in our mind when we read the first paragraph of "The Garden of the Forking Paths," where we are told that according to Lidell Hart's history a certain battle was postponed because of "torrential rains." The story of course proposes an entirely different explanation for the postponement since the protagonist, who writes in the first person, would have us believe that his murder of Stephen Albert caused the delay. All that the unidentified narrator, who gives us a summary of Lidell Hart's text, ever says is that the protagonist's account "casts an unsuspected light upon the event." It is the unsuspecting reader, though, who falls into this trap by not taking careful note of what Albert himself has to say about the alternative actions within a plot:

> In all fiction when a man is faced with alternatives he chooses one at the expense of others. In the almost unfathomable Ts'ui Pên, he chooses—simultaneously—all of them. He thus *creates* various futures, various times that start others, which in their turn will branch out and bifurcate in other times. This is the cause of the contradictions in the novel.

Ts'ui Pên's narrative practice not only explains Borges; it also explains Coover, as I have tried to suggest.

The most famous case of alternative plotting in Borges, however, is his story "The South" of which he himself has said that it can be read in two ways: one in which all the events are presumed to have happened and another in which the second half is the fantasy or hallucination of Dahlman, the protagonist. Notice, though, that Borges' critical comment does nothing to exclude *either* reading.

But "The South" is interesting in still another way because while it, like "Death and the Compass," illustrates at least two ways of reading the same data, it also embodies Borges' mature narrative practice that he outlined in his

essay "Narrative Art and Magic." This theory of plotting demands symmetries in the story-telling whereby what Borges calls "inlaid" details of the text correspond to other details and therefore, in a certain sense, predict or predetermine subsequent events, just as in Voodoo, as Borges says, a pin inserted into a doll in one location kills a person in another. Such plotting eliminates the vagaries of psychology, which Borges has always tried to suppress in his fiction, and calls into relief the premediated quality of the fiction, emphasizing the author's patterning of events and objects. One of the best examples of the fulfillment of this theory is "The South," where the story line is really a coordinate of two parallel lines, the first corresponding to the plot up to Dahlman's release from the hospital and the second from that same point to the scene in which he is killed in a duel. Since the inlaid details in the first part predetermine the details in the second, you can see that while parallel or even contradictory actions are being maintained in the plot there is still an esthetic or "magic" cohesion, a unifying factor binding the apparently disparate elements. In other words: while alternate plotting creates a narrative situation comparable to a labyrinth, narrative "magic" gives us the thread by which to find our way out.

Few writers besides Borges have employed this technique of narrative magic. There are some resemblances to it in Robert Coover's story "The Magic Poker," and, of course, as Borges himself pointed out, Adolfo Bioy Casares' *The Invention of Morel* is an epitome of the theory in practice. Interestingly for English-language readers, Bioy-Casares' novel served as Renais' armature for *Last Year at Marienbad* since the best example of narrative "magic" in English is the British film *Performance*, written by Douglas Cammell and directed by Cammell and Nicolas Roeg. The film presents the story of a London thug who violates the rules established by his gang and turns the tables on the hoodlums sent to do him in by escaping and subsequently distinguishing himself and working his way into the weird household of a recluse rock star, Turner Purple, where he is fed a hallucinogenic mushroom. If Borges' "The South" can be read as a linear sequence in which all the events actually take place and in another way as a double or coordinate sequence where the latter half is hallucination counterpointing the physical actions, so too can we view *Performance* with everything up to the character's escape corresponding to the literal action and everything after as either literal action or, alternatively but not exclusively, as hallucination in Chas's mind, which would then be the setting of the film's second half.

Like the story, the film orders the alternate structure with a clever system of "inlaid" details predicting subsequent events and scenes. In the story, for example, Dahlman is struck first in the head while running upstairs and then later, in the hospital, he is stabbed in the arm with a hypodermic needle; in the second half, he is struck in the head with a pellet of dough and later stabbed in the duel. In the film, during the first half, one of the thugs is seen reading Borges' *Personal Anthology*; in the second half, one of the characters reads from that anthology—reads, in fact, precisely from "The South"—and when that character is shot, we follow the dizzying path of the bullet through his cranium, only to discover the face of Borges, in the book jacket's photograph, returning our gaze. Other details proliferate: in the first half, Chas, played by James Fox, smokes *Lark* cigarettes and in the second he lives a terrifying parody of a *lark*; in the opening sequences, we see Fox doing an isometric exercise whereby he locks the fingers of his left hand in those of his right and pulls, while in the second half, this physical tug of war between the self and itself is rendered in psychological images as when Fox tries desperately to get a photograph of himself that will not look like him. In fact, as the predominantly physical first part of the film is translated into the predominantly mental second part, we see that the word *isometric* applies perfectly both to Roeg's film and Borges' story. Where the movie goes beyond the fiction, however, is in the insertion of scenes from the parallel hallucinatory sequence—the shot of Mick Jagger's arm painting a red wall black in reference to the Rolling Stones' song "Paint It Black,"—into the initial physical sequence before the viewer can be aware of the counterpointing nature of the film. (Borrowed from the "Wandering Rocks" chapter of *Ulysses*—and one is entitled to

wonder at the possible pun—the technique might seem out of line with narrative magic unless you recall that Borges himself cites the Joyce novel in "Narrative Art and Magic.") Such scrambling is bewildering, yet watching the movie, you grasp the point that *con-fusion* is both what it addresses itself to and the manner of that address.

Related to Borges' fiction, *Performance* doubles its confusion in a way that may be more familiar to readers of Borges' essays. In the second half of the film, where Fox is living his hallucinatory experience in the house of the hibernating rock star played by Jagger, the musician reads from some text that is not Borges' "The South." This text is unidentified in the film but it is a perfect complement to Borges' story, telling of a certain Sheik who had created a fabulous garden in a valley between two mountains. Sometimes the Sheik would drug young men, who, when they awoke, believed they were in Paradise. Taken from *The Travels of Marco Polo*, the passage is deployed by the film's script in direct parallel to both the plot of *Performance* and to the plot of "The South," even though it, unlike the two modern works preserves a sharp demarcation between "reality" and "dreaming," thus precluding a truly co-equal alternation. Still, by the manner of its insertion into the film, *The Travels of Marco Polo* is converted into one of the precursors of both Borges and Roeg, so *Performance* is not only witty and allusive as Borges is, *Performance* is also witty and allusive in the way Borges is.

A good example of this latter quality occurs when Jagger is reading from "The South"—a passage, by the way, that is abbreviated and modified in the film just as such quoted passages are most often shortened and varied by Borges in his texts—and the character suddenly throws the book to the floor, exclaiming: "There's a fly in my eye." The subsequent announcements from those critics who are not aware of the film's special form. The ointment this fly has gotten into is precisely the "I"—not the organ of sight but the organization of sensory data in time and space known, sometimes, as the ego, the persona, the individual self. Just as Borges' story "The South" and many of his essays argue against and

demonstrate the meaninglessness of such a notion of the self, so does the film, right from its title, attack the notion of the single self. A short excerpt from the film's dialogue will show how the concern is dealt with subtly and wittily:

> —Who do you think you are, the Lone Ranger?
> —I know who I am, Harry.
> —Of course you do, son. You're Jack the Lad. I've known a few performers in my time but I'll tell you this: he's got the gift . . .
> —He enjoys his work and that's the half of it.
> —You think he does, eh, Denny?
> —Oh, I do, I get a load of kicks out of it.

The Lone Ranger is the script's metaphor for the single personality, the man who believes in his identity as an established and stable quantity rather than as the repetitive "performance" the film demonstrates it to be; the "kicks" that Fox refers to are the physical pleasures of his sadistic lovemaking and strong-arming but they correspond to the mental and emotional kicks he experiences when he passes himself off as a performer—significantly, a juggler. And when, a bit later on in the dialogue than I have quoted, he is referred to as "an ignorant boy, an out-of-date boy," the script points up the correspondence of Fox and Dahlman—they are both doll-men, in fact—in not recognizing the hallucinatory nature of their adventures, the phrase "out-of-date" specifically signifying that they have lived beyond their time, are already dead, like the character in Borges' story "The Dead Man," who similarly conducts a performance in bravado and leadership long after he has ceased to have any real existence.

This "ignorance" on the part of the character played by Fox is essential to an understanding of the notorious exchange scene at the film's end when Fox shoots Jagger and is led away into the gangsters' car only to be revealed as Jagger in Fox's get-up. Life and individuality, the scene points up, may be coincidental but they are not identical, a point further underscored by the concluding pan shot showing some books scattered on the floor, one of which is Yeats' *Autobiographies*. Not in the Borges' line, you might think, until

you realize that the script has shown how identity is plural, multiple—as in the case of Fox and Jagger being doubles of each other—as well as fractional—as in the case of Fox being different in the two halves of the film. *Performance*, like the *obra* of Borges, is clearly not a case for autobiography, but, precisely, autobiographies. Realizing that, you see, why the one Borges' text to be shown in the film itself is necessarily Borges' *Personal Anthology*.

In many ways, then, the film is a Borgesian meditation on personality by means of persona, performance. (Both Pirandello and Bergman begin to creep in at this point.) Of course the film is very unlike Borges in its detailed and shocking attention to sex and physical violence as well as to the specific activities of the underworld. Cammell complicates the theme of the plural personality by presenting Fox as a bisexual who is at one point confronted with this accusation: "Your relations with Joey was double personal, right?" But Cammell goes even beyond this, extending the *double personal* formula further than anything in Borges and clearly preparing the way for Roeg's even more complex film, "The Man who Fell to Earth."

The principal activities of the gang for whom Fox works is the taking over of small businesses. As John D. Rockefeller, an altogether unwitting precursor of Borges and Cammell, remarked: "The day of combination is here to stay. Individualism has gone never to return," so the gang's leader says: "United we stand, divided we're numbered." In this way, the negation of the individual is extended from the personal to the economic and social so that a lawyer arguing a case in which his client is being a fall-guy for the gang leader says: "This admittedly bold although in no way unethical merger. I say *merger*, not take-over. Words still have meaning!" The merger in question is a business one, but it implies all the other "mergers" in the film, including the racial one that is hinted at again and again as Black actors lurk in the background of the film's action and one character complains: "You're bleeding me white."

This extension and variation on the theme of the double, a theme that is at the core of all Borges' writings, marks the film's development away from Borges and is given added dimension by the manipulation of words in a continually on "I" so perhaps one brief excerpt will show how *Performance* doubles the texture of its dialogue by creating alternative interpretations through puns. The scene occurs when Fox, in the hallucinatory section of the film, comes to ask about the use of the telephone. What you must understand is that he has washed red paint out of his hair since he was last seen by the others and that the dialogue turns on the changed color and contour of his hair and the possible use of a hand dryer (or "blower") to accomplish this change:

> —Has anyone got a sixpence for the phone? Can I use the blower up here?
> —We haven't got a blower up here.
> —Hah! What in God's name has he done to his hair?
> —He's blown it.
> —Yeah. Well, that's it dear.
> —I rather fancied the red.
> —No, no. The red was dyed.
> —Dead.
> —Dyed. Red.
> —Dyed it. Dead.
> —Red, red.
> —Van Gogh, eh?

Nowhere in Borges do we find such elaborate punning creating a textual equivalent to the theme of the doubled character who does not know he's dead. In such passages as this, we are, I think, not in the presence of self-indulgent wit and certainly not in the face of meaningless dialogue as so many critics have argued. Rather, we are witnessing high mimesis.

Thus, in the more or less official line of succession depending from Borges through Barth, I would insert the makers of *Performance* as genuine pretenders. But there is no way nor should there be, to end that line, and besides Roeg's other films we have Antonioni's *The Passenger*. Instead of the free invention based on Cortázar that we saw in *Blow-Up*, *The Passenger* offers a digested presentation of the thematics of both Argentine authors. When the character in that movie is about to exchange his persona for that of another man, the

camera moves toward the ceiling and shows the slowly rotating, identical arms of a fan, always moving, always changing, always the same. That particular symbol, among so many other circular, spinning objects, never appears in Borges, but it well might. Perhaps, though, it can serve as a fitting sign for this whole question of narratives comprised of alternating segments as well as for that of literary succession itself: where author precedes author only to be succeeded by another author in a diachronic relation that is always moving, always changing, always—and only—the same.

ON THE CONCEPT OF ROMANCE IN BORGES

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It may be that Borges is the first and most well-read writer in the history of Spanish American literature. I mean to say that to him the life of the imagination has equal weight within his sensibility as one's life itself. As Borges himself put it in possibly excessive fashion, "Life and death have been lacking in my life; few things have happened to me, and I have read a great many. Or rather, few things have happened to me more worth remembering than Schopenhauer's thought or the music of England's words." To Richard Burgin, Borges made the same point in a more equitable fashion: "I think of reading a book as no less an experience than travelling or falling in love...Many people are apt to think of real life on the one side, that means toothache, headache, travelling and so on, and then you have on the other side, you have imaginary life and fancy and that means the arts. But I don't think that that distinction holds water. I think that imagination is a part of life." Both these statements hark back, of course, to Eliot's comments on John Donne in that essay entitled "The Metaphysical Poets," where Eliot noted that "A thought to Donne was an experience, it modified his sensibility. When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter (that is, the ordinary man) falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet, these experiences are always forming new

wholes." Let us always keep in mind that Borges is a poet and a metaphysician, first and foremost.

This is hardly the time to go into Eliot's theories regarding the fading of the associative sensibility into what he called the dissociation of sensibility, ending, as you will recall, in a refinement of language accompanied by a dimunition of sensibility toward the end of the 19th century. But I do think that it is worth noting the fact that, if we make a quick survey of the main tendencies of Spanish American Literature before Borges, even including the extraordinary achievements of such a poet as Rubén Darío, the seesaw between literature and life, between consciousness and reality was just that, a seesaw, with little fusion between the poetic imagination and the impositions of social and political realities. At times, the imperious demands of local political situations invaded the writer's and the poet's consciousness to such a degree that the literature of that consciousness was more related to a mimetic reflection of that reality than an abstractive consideration or transfiguration of that reality. The imagination was severely circumscribed, imprisoned by an ethic of sincerity and close identification with the fate of a race, a class, a nation. It has often been said that the classic literature of Spanish America was a literature that insisted upon the primacy of testimony, and this held and still does hold, as the differing cases of the work of Asturias and Neruda show. One must remember that, historically, there was no such thing as a genteel tradition in Spanish American letters, and that no such philosophy as Transcendentalism ever had any lasting effect on its major writers. In the 19th and the early 20th centuries, literature was often combative or reductive—in the case of the battle between man and Nature, Nature won. As Carlos Fuentes put it, Nature was the devouring enemy, destructor of will, the protagonist which reduced man and his possible consciousness to nil. This realist/naturalist view led to a destructive implosion of reality against the imagination.

On the other hand, toward the end of the 19th century, there appeared such a poet as Rubén Darío, who sought imaginative solace and projective fantasy in a world variously gleaned from readings in the French Parnassian and Symbolist schools, not to mention the work of Poe as transmitted through Baudelaire. In this sense, we might consider Darío's achievement as the only understandably evasive solution available to him against the subjection of literature to reality. So, if on the one hand the Spanish American novel and short story were plagued by the Tainian imponderables of Race, Milieu and Moment until well into the twentieth century, Latin American poetry and some of its short story writers often took easy shortcuts to beauty and insight, and avoided the finite and the restrictive. They flew off into azure realms all too readily, seeking solace in an Apollonian vision of culture. In both cases, however, there was no tensive balance between the varying allegiances between the imagination and reality, between which an artist must mediate.

I bring up these matters, the one relating to the association of sensibility in Borges and the other relating to the dissociation inherent in the life of letters in Spanish America, all to suggest the following: The tensive equation established by Borges between literature and life related directly to the function of the imagination in his literature, and affects the ways in which his work has altered the possibilities and practice of literature in all of Latin America.

This leads us to the apparently inexhaustible question of the nature of so-called fantastic literature, and its distinction, if any can be made, between that kind of literature and the literature that came before it. Let us begin by saying that the best way to get to the bottom of Borges' evident distaste for realistic practice is to approach him obliquely, through a scrutiny of his tastes, readings, likes and dislikes, but not through the stories themselves. They have their own rights, and one of them I suppose is to be let alone, going on their own crafty and fable-like way without dismantling them into a parade of symbolic parables or near-allegories. His criticism, on the other hand, might be revealing more clearly of a whole literary aesthetic, one that was surely new to Latin American literature in the mid twenties and thirties, but not at all new to readers of Hawthorne, Melville, Kafka, Chesterton, Wilde, Wells or C. S. Lewis, just to take a few names who

group themselves handily into Borges' literary pantheon. I mean to suggest that part of the much-vaunted revolution that Borges has worked in the theory and practice of letters in Latin America is due in part to his own authorial humility—he is the vessel through which many of these authors passed into Latin American literary consciousness for the first time. His originality lies not especially in the realm of individual intuition, but rather in the collation and fusion of apparently disparate literatures, genres and languages—he is the first critical mind in Latin America to cut across, to use a handy phrase, the babel that is the literature of this world.

Carlos Fuentes noted not long ago that without the example of Borges, there would be no contemporary Spanish American Novel. One is lead to ask in what sense this might be true. After all, Borges hasn't much taste for the novel as such. He would readily agree, for instance, with Henry James in characterizing the Russian novel wholesale as a random collection of "loose, baggy monsters." Borges himself complained that the Russians and the disciples of the Russians demonstrated to the point of tedium that nothing is impossible in a Russian novel—people kill themselves out of happiness, people kill each other out of benevolence, people adore each other to the point of separating each other from themselves forever. "That complete liberty," says Borges, "ends up by being the same as complete disorder." "And even worse," Borges adds, "the psychological novel wants to be a realistic novel also. It wants us to forget its character of verbal artifice, and make out of all kinds of vain precision or languid vagueness a new touch of verisimilitude." As Borges also said in his essay "Narrative Art and Magic," Realism results in the simulation on the page of "endless, uncontrollable processes." The key words, used in a pejorative sense as they are, are "uncontrollable" and "endless."

How can we reconcile Fuentes' statement regarding the Borgesian constitution of the new Latin American Novel and Borges' own distaste for the genre? It is not that difficult—both recognize that imaginative rigor and control must direct the making of short stories and novels, both recognize that the Spanish language must be remade into a critical, and even revolutionary tool of a critical consciousness. They both recognize that a language that is merely the medium of reportage is a dead language.

One more point—often the irreparable historical conflict between literature and life has led critics to divide Latin American literature into the literature of "reality" and the literature of "fantasy." This is a terrible error. *Realidad* and *fantasía* are two of the most overworked words in Latin American criticism. The fact that such a dichotomy still exists indicates a basic misunderstanding on the part of critics and authors concerning the relation between the life of the imagination and the sheer existence of reality. The work of Borges asks us to reconsider this relation, and this reconsideration is being passed on to another generation, to such an author as Gabriel García Márquez. Let me give you an example of this kind of critical error. Recently a distinguished Mexican critic made the following characterization of Juan Rulfo's novel *Pedro Páramo*: "In his work the mixture of the fantastic and the real reaches such a point that on some occasions reality and fantasy are practically indistinguishable." Here we have a polarized view of a work that is absolutely unpolarized. Rulfo's book contains a Faulknerian, constantly fluctuating and hallucinatory reality. There is no such thing as "reality" in the book with a little icing of "fantasy."

How did Borges and his friends in Buenos Aires solve this apparent and absolutely persistent dichotomy between "fantasy" and "reality"? Well for one thing, Borges used his philosophical readings as an aesthetic weapon to break down the reality of "reality" in literature. As he said to Richard Burgin, "I think that philosophy may give the world a kind of haziness, but that haziness is all to the good. If you're a materialist, if you believe in hard and fast things, then you're tied down by reality, or by what you call reality. So that in a sense, philosophy dissolves reality, but as reality is not always too pleasant, you will be helped by that dissolution. Well, those are very obvious thoughts, of course, though they are none the less true for being obvious." And moreover, Borges,

Bioy Casares and Silvina Ocampo composed in 1940 an *Anthology of Fantastic Literature*, the prologue of which, under the signature of Bioy Casares, is a clarion call to a reconsideration of what literature should be all about, in opposition to the then reigning leftovers of realism and naturalism. The prologue of Bioy makes a few fundamental points, all aimed against the idea of mimesis. Among other things, Bioy insists upon clearly plotted stories with a luxuriance of ghostly ambiance, often inserting one unbelievable event into a network of wholly believable happenings. Surprise effects are lauded, but they must be prepared and foreshadowed. As Borges said elsewhere, all the details in a story should prophesy the outcome. Such literature may make ample use of Travels in Time, Riddles, Dreamed Characters and strange Metamorphoses. These stories might take place anywhere, even Hell, and they may touch upon the theme of immortality and the metaphysical in general. The presence of vampires and ruined castles is not only acceptable but invited. In a postscript dated 1965, Bioy confessed that many of the declarations of 1940 were caused by sectarian zeal, and of the desire to attack the idea of literature as a "verbose record of types, legends, objects, and representative of this or that folklore, or simply of a plundering of the dictionary of synonyms." As a cure-all to mimetic excesses, "we recommended the fantastic story," says Bioy, obviously speaking for Borges too.

All of this brings us to the term *Romance*. I submit that in attempting to re-establish the primacy, if not the total triumph, of the imagination in its relation to reality, Borges' readings instinctively led him to the kind of prose literature that in English and in North American literary criticism is known as Romance, as opposed to the genre popularly known as the Novel. Now, the word *Romance* or Romance (sp.) does not now exist as a concept of criticism in Spanish or Spanish American literature, whereas it marks a fundamental differentiation in critical discourse in English. In English, one can and does distinguish between Novel and Romance. In Spanish, all long prose works are *novelas*, and this is not right. I submit that only through an understanding of the principles of *Romance* can we understand how Borges and Bioy achieved that tensive balance in their literary sensibilities. I mean, in a word, a vision that is not continually bifurcated between reality versus fantasy, or fantasy versus reality, or fantasy unleashed from reality, or reality crushing fantasy. I mean an absolute fusion of the two, the invisible imbedded into the very structure of all that we think of as real, literature which marks an easy confluence of the imaginative world and the real world, to use Borges' own description of the work of Hawthorne.

The term *Romance*, as we know, includes not only a chivalric tale in verse, but in general a fictitious narrative in prose of which the scene and incidents are remote from those of ordinary life. In North American literature, as Richard Chase has made the distinction, "the novel renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail; the people are in explicable relation to nature and to each other, to their social class, to their own past. Character is more important than action and plot. By contrast, the Romance, following distantly the medieval example, feels free to render reality in less volume and detail. It tends to prefer action to character, and the action will be freer in a romance than in a novel, encountering, as it were, less resistance from reality. Being less committed to the immediate rendition of reality than the novel, the romance will more freely veer toward the mythic, allegorical and symbolist forms." Most authors of Romances in the 19th century agreed with that arch romancer Edgar Allan Poe when he called realism "pitiable stuff, the depiction of decayed cheeses." Romancers were less interested in every man's particular humor than they were with human destiny in general. Borges' extraordinary interest in the work of the American romancer, not novelist, Nathaniel Hawthorne is a good case in point. In the words of a critic, Hawthorne's belongs to a literature of "ambiguity, irony, and paradox strongly inclined to allegory and parable—to introverted and labyrinthine designs which are almost perfectly opaque to minds expecting representations of life or expressive communications from works of art." In the prologue to *The House of Seven Gables*, Hawthorne reminded his readers that the novel

was "presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The romance, on the other hand, as Hawthorne explained it, has a right to present that truth under circumstances of the author's own choosing or creation. If he thinks fit, he may so manage his atmospherical medium so as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture."

Borges and Bioy, in their definitive attack against realistic simulation of reality in literature, and in their consistent advocacy of the rights of the imagination in literature, are reflecting the rich interplay and fusion, coalescence if you will, of the two realms which make up our world. Romance and Novel have always coexisted rather uneasily; as an 18th century critic put it, as literature gained in sense, "it lost a world of fine fabling." That world of "fine fabling," the romance, denotes the genre which includes *The Amadis of Gaul*, the Gothic novel, the work of Poe, Hoffman and Jules Verne, all Science Fiction, much of 19th century American prose fiction and plenty of the 20th, right up to Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*, for which Borges has written a significant prologue. The novel, on the other hand, less pleasing in general to Borges, might be said to include such authors as Smollet, Jane Austen, Flaubert, Proust, Mann and Tolstoy. Sometimes, novelists parody romancers, as did Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey*. Generally, the two haven't gotten along very well together.

It's a curious fact that the Romance, and its subsidiary genres such as the Gothic novel and the Quest novel never had much impact upon the Spanish American imagination until Borges and Bioy. The novel reigned supreme. The Spanish American imagination was thus choked off by politics and reality, cut off from a fundamental and uniquely imaginative approach to reality, and I suspect that it was Borges' and Bioy's instinctive tendency away from the constrictions of mimesis that gave the imagination a new lease. One really senses this when thinking about the effect that the Amadis and other such books have had upon García Márquez, for instance. As the author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* put it, "the authors of chivalric novels succeeded in inventing a world in which the imagination was possible. The only important thing for them was the validity of the account, and if they deemed it necessary for the knight to have his head cut four times, it would be cut four times. This amazing capacity for inventing fables penetrated the reader of that period in such a way that it became the emblem of the conquest of America. The sad part is that Latin American literature should have forgotten so soon about its marvellous origins." In this sense, *Cien años de soledad* is best understood in terms of romance, and not novel.

In both Americas, there never has been a world except the one which we create with our imagination. This is why Borges reminded the North American critic Alfred Kazin, and I quote, "not of any novelists, but of Poe and Melville—the childlike fantasists, the lonely builders of dreams in the wilderness. "Borges strikes me," continues Kazin, "as a writer who grew up with Poe, Emerson, Melville and Thoreau. He strikes me as a man who literally had to make up a world he could live in—he has gone far enough to please his imagination."

Borges, in constructing his world elsewhere, is, for Kazin, and again I quote, "a romancer, a teller of tales, a bit of a magician and puzzle-artist, a virtuoso of the symbol-tale, the legend told and retold from many an old manse, the quest. He is a writer fascinated and appalled by the empty space that broods over his stories like a curse." This fantastic alchemy is the art of the romancer, the artist who, as Borges said of Hawthorne, "tends more toward invention than transcription, more toward creation than observation." Borges also said of Hawthorne that "When he died, other writers inherited his task of dreaming." One of those unique inheritors of Hawthorne's romancing and dreaming is with us now—Borges himself.

TOPOGRAPHIES OF MEMORY

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For L. T.

A man dreamt that *he was asked someone's name, but could not think of it.* He himself explained that what this meant was that 'he would never dream of such a thing.'

Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*

1. *Pre-Text*[1]

If a literary text is by necessity a representation, then all theories of literature, whether they postulate the function of literature to be the mimetic representation of a non-textual reality or, within the broader context of intertextuality, the repetition, displacement, or reinscription of purely 'textual' entities, necessarily associate with each text a 'memory.' The representative function of the text is essentially bound to such a 'memory,' which the text is supposed to imitate, reproduce, or transcribe. Each theory of the text views the relationship of a text to its 'memory' differently, but what remains constant is the postulation of the necessary relationship of a text to a memory. Again, it does not matter whether this 'memory' is taken to be a metatextual 'reality,' a textual world—such as the medieval Book of Nature, or the Borgesian Library, which as the first sentence of *The Library* indicates is equivalent to the Universe—or a composite amalgamation of other texts, a textual archive. If the function of a

text is assumed to be in any way re-presentational, then to every text there correspond one or more particular memories.

In fact, it hardly seems relevant any longer to oppose mimetic conceptions of literature, which assign to the text the task of imitating an 'outside reality,' to non-mimetic conceptions, which characterize texts as unable, because of their representational nature, ever to reach anything beyond a textual horizon. If every text begins as repetition or representation—and after Derrida and Said this can be considered a settled point—it necessarily inscribes within itself, in no matter how derived, secondary, or inessential a fashion, a 'reality.' After Derrida, we can of course take it for granted that this reality is necessarily textual, or more precisely, representational, and that this 'textual reality'—the oxymoron is significant—appears always as the presence within the text of a non-textual reality situated outside of it. It is in fact the primacy of a representational inscription which determines the 'textual nature' of any 'reality' with respect either to perception or to language.[2]

That which inscribes itself with respect to a text as the non-textual metaphysical presence, derived, secondary and constructed though it may be, appears as the original exteriority of the text. The function of a text can hence always be read as the presentation, the rendering of a metatextual privileged origin. My concern in what follows will not be to review, from Nietzsche to Derrida and now to Said, what by now is a well-established critical commonplace, namely, that the privileged 'real' origins of texts are necessarily derived metaphysical illusions that every text constructs in its very inscription. I wish rather to attempt, through some random examples, to read a few of the metaphors by which some texts have tried to emblematize the relationship they maintain to the metaphorical memory they inscribe within themselves, and which seem to act as their original 'pre-text.'

Let us then take for granted that every text stages a pre-text which acts as, or takes the place of, that which the text is supposed to represent or repeat. Here again let us state

for the record that the representational play of the text is triggered by the fact that the origin as origin—that which Nietzsche indicated as 'the thing-in-itself,' or Derrida after Aristotle points to as the 'Sun' or, in a more philosophical vein, alludes to as the differance with an *a*—cannot be named or represented, and that it is the inevitable attempt to represent the unrepresentable, name the unnamable, conceptualize the inconceivable, that determines the primary metaphoricity of any text. Texts are, above all, metaphors, which in their attempts to metaphysically 'name' the real trigger an open-ended, non-centered play of metaphorical textual displacements. It is this metaphoricity of texts which determines the temporal and spatial relations they maintain with an 'Other text.' Temporally, to use Derrida's expression, texts 'always already' refer to an 'Other Text' which they display as their presumed metaphysical ground, or, to use De Man's more traditional expression, texts are always *allegorical*.[3] The exigencies of representation make for the fact that temporally, the 'now' of a text necessarily refers to the 'always already' of an 'Other Text.' Spatially, texts do not present themselves in an absolute fashion either; the spatial characteristics of a text are necessarily cleaved; the 'here' of a text always refers to a 'there' which apparently controls it. Again, in De Man's vocabulary, a text is necessarily *ironic*. Such a distinction between temporal and spatial characteristics of the text are artificial anyway; what every text lacks is an absolute 'Here' and 'Now,' and it is the play of a non-origin which makes for the pseudo-difference between space and time, since neither term is readable without the other.

From the preceding remarks it should be clear that a text necessarily always stages a metaphorical memory in the form of a 'pre-text' which, though generated by the text, always seems to precede it, and from 'another' place appears to control the strategic presentation of the text. Rather than speaking of mimetic or non-mimetic theories of the text, one could more profitably examine the presumed or staged relationship that a text bears to its 'memory,' that is, discover whether a text attempts to give itself as a faithfully adequate

rendition of its memory or attempts on the contrary to subvert, deconstruct, and molest the memory that it proposes, and in either case, analyze the ways in which a text emblematizes its particular fashion of staging its relationship to its inscribed memory.

II. *The Pyramid*

To start with a well-known example and a useful landmark let us turn to Derrida's reading of Hegel's semiology. If a sign represents—and hence by extension if a text represents—if a sign wills something to signification, for Hegel this process is not determined by a simple arbitrary mimetic correspondence, eventually representationally uncritical, between a 'thing' and a 'sound.' If a sign represents, that which is represented has to be inscribed somehow in the sign and to appear therefore as a memory which the sign wills again to presence, re-presents. As Derrida has shown, Hegel assumed an original internalization of the world which would function as the memory of representation, and which he metaphorized in the image of a dark, unconscious well. In this dark well, in Derrida's words,

> . . . intelligence keeps these images in reserve buried at the bottom of a very dark shelter like the water of a nocturnal well (nächtliche Schacht) or an unconscious well (bewusstlose Schacht) or rather like a precious vein at the bottom of a mine.[4]

It is out of elements taken from such a well, a shelter or a mine that the sign will eventually constitute itself for Hegel—and hence every sign will inscribe the well, the shelter, or the mine as a privileged spatial form of its 'memory.' When constituted, the sign will not refer to the *object* but to its sublated memory. Since every emblematization of the relation of a sign or text to its memory has to account for the hollow, dark, empty form the latter assumes spatially, the constituted sign will be metaphorically comparable to a tomb or a pyramid; again, in Derrida's words,

> Hegel knew that the proper and animated body of the signifier was also a tomb. The association *sôma/sêma* is also at work, in this semiology and it is not surprising. The tomb is the life of the body as sign of death, the body as different from the soul, of the animated psyche of the living breath
> . . .
> The sign, monument-of-life-in-death, monument of death in life, . . . the hard text of stones covered with inscriptions is *the pyramid*.[5]

For Hegel, then, if every sign has embedded within itself a spatial memory, this memory is in fact spatially absent. The memory of the sign represents itself by an absence, an empty hollowness. Curiously, then, what the pyramid emblematizes is the fact that the original memory of the sign is represented by a non-representation, an absence, a hollowness, a void. This empty space in turn becomes the center of the representational memory of the Sign/Pyramid as it manifests itself as an exteriorism. In other words, between the sign and its memory—or the pyramid and its origin—stands a hollow emptiness which disrupts any direct immediate relationship between the two. The relationship between the memory and its outward representation passes necessarily through the non-representable.

Hegel's *Pyramid* is adjacent to a *Labyrinth*. To ask "what is the *symbolical* form of art," which, as we have just seen, is equivalent to questioning the nature of the emblem of any form of representation, is to question a *pyramid*. In the same fashion that for the narrator of Borges' *The Immortal* "pyramids and towers" are adjacent to an "exiguous and nitid labyrinth," for Hegel the *pyramids* that one has to question exist in a single landscape with labyrinths and hieroglyphs. In Hegel's words, to find an answer to the original question "we have to look for it in the chief structures built by the Egyptians," and what we encounter is

> ...a double architecture...labyrinths under the soil, magnificent vast excavations, passages half a mile long, chambers adorned with hieroglyphics, everything worked out with the maximum of care; then above ground there are built in addition those amazing constructions amongst which the *Pyramids* are to be counted the chief.[6]

Hegel thus neglects the labyrinth in favor of the pyramid. His

choice is easy to understand, since the pyramid offers him an absent center inside a man-made, totally sealed enclosure which has the appearance of a natural product. The artifacts of architecture, pyramids for Hegel, resemble natural crystals:

> . . . the Pyramids put before our eyes the simple prototype of symbolic art itself; they are prodigious crystals which conceal in themselves an inner meaning and, as external shapes produced by art, they so envelop that meaning that it is obvious that they are there for this inner meaning separated from pure nature and only in relation to this meaning.[7]

III. *The Labyrinth*

In a first moment the labyrinth could be considered a variant of the pyramid, for like the pyramid the labyrinth is characterized by an absent center in a spatial artifact. Nevertheless, the labyrinth differs from the pyramid in at least one important respect. If the center of the labyrinth is also absent, its absence is not represented by a *hollowness*, but by a *dispersion*. A labyrinth is not so much characterized by the fact that it does not have a center as by the fact that any point of the labyrinth can be a center. This characteristic of a labyrinth is of course due to the fact that, again in opposition to the pyramid, a labyrinth is boundless. It has neither a beginning nor an end, neither an *Archë* not a *Telos*. It is this double constraint of dispersion and boundlessness that allows Borges to describe the *Library* ironically by the very metaphor with which the middle ages described God, the author of the Book of Nature: "The Library is a sphere whose exact center is any one of its hexagons and whose circumference is inaccessible."[8] If the *Library*, then, has to function as the metaphor of an Arch-Memory that includes any textual representation which might possibly be conceivable—". . . the Library is total . . . its shelves register all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols . . . ." (p. 54)—such a memory is unable to act in any privileged fashion. The metaphor of the Book, on the contrary, may do so, as Borges argues in "In the Cult of Books."[9] A book has an absolute beginning, an absolute end, and a privileged authorial voice, all of which the Library lacks.

If the metaphor of the Labyrinth is so pervasive in the Borgesian canon, it is due to the fact that literary representation systematically emblematizes its own representational memory as diffuse, non-ordered, without origin and without end. Labyrinths have a characteristic property regarding any displacement within them which is crucial to their use as a metaphor to describe a non-privileged type of memory which a text might inscribe. A labyrinth forces anyone who travels within it to an originless, endless, centerless displacement; nevertheless, such a movement need not be threatening as long as one recognizes a given point if he crosses it twice. What is threatening in a labyrinth is the possibility of not recognizing the same, of mistaking the same for the other. If to move in a labyrinth is, by definition, to err, nevertheless an errance can determine a form as long as one is capable of re-cognizing a point that has already been crossed in the past. In this respect the labyrinth emblematizes a form of memory where *any* point can act as a beginning, a pseudo-origin, as long as the identity of that point is determined by a return or a repetition. The principle of identity in a labyrinth is a principle of repetition. Every textual beginning of necessity establishes its non-primary originality by inscribing a principle of repetition, which does not privilege any anteriority, since all a beginning does—as Said has so eloquently and complexly argued in *Beginnings*—is repeat itself as beginning. If Borges, then, in his early fiction inscribes time and again the labyrinth as a specific form of textual memory, the spatial emblem would seem to determine a form of memory in which a text could begin anywhere and end anywhere—"Like all men of the Library, I have traveled in my youth... I am preparing to die just a few leagues from the hexagon in which I was born" (p. 52)—where the memory is unable to determine for the text either a privileged origin or a pre-determined end. All the memory can do is reveal every excursion in the labyrinth to be the repetition of a path already crossed. The presence of the text is generated by a constant repetition: "To speak is to fall into tautology" (p. 57).

At first, then, it would seem that a labyrinthine memory does not so much cleave or problematize the relationship of memory to textual representation, as in the case of the Pyramid, as much as deny any privilege to the latter by systematically reinscribing it, in a repetitive movement, into the domain of the already said or already written.

I should like to turn now to one specific labyrinth referred to by Borges to suggest, through a textual detour, that the topography of the labyrinth as the emblem of textual representation is, in fact, perhaps more complex, or at least not as homogeneous as it might appear in a first characterization.

In the poem entitled "Ariosto y los Arabes" in *El Hacedor*, Borges writes;

Nadie puede escribir un libro. Para
Que un libro sea verdaderamente,
Se requieren la aurora y el poniente,
Siglos, armas y el mar que une y separa.

Así lo pensó Ariosto, ...

. . . . . .

Como los ilusorios esplendores
Que al Indostán deja entrever el opio,
Pasan por el Furioso los amores
En un desorden de calidoscopio.

Ni el amor ignoró ni la ironía
Y soñó asi, de pudoroso modo,
El singular castillo en el que todo
Es (como en esta vida) una falsía.

. . . . . .

Escoria de los sueños, indistinto
Limo que el Nilo de los sueños deja,
Con ellos fue tejida la madeja
De ese resplandeciente laberinto.

. . . . . .

Europa entera se perdió. . . . . .

. . . . . .

[No one can write a book.
For a book truly to exist
Would require East and West
Centuries, arms, and the sea that unites and divides.

So thought Ariosto ...

Like the illusory splendors
Opium allows one to glimpse in Hindustan,
Loves pass throughout the Furioso
In a kaleidoscopic disorder.

He knew both love and irony
And thus dreamed, in a bashful fashion
That singular castle in which everything
Is (as in this life) a ruse.

Scum of dreams, indistinct
Silt that the Nile of dreams leaves behind,
From these was woven the skein
Of this resplendent labyrinth

Europe was completely lost in it.]

Ariosto's poem, then, is not a *Book*, inasmuch as a *Book* represents a totality with an absolute end, an authorial voice, and a metaphysical 'reality' which the *Book* mimetically represents. Ariosto weaves a text which is a labyrinth, in which future texts will lose themselves, describing within the space of the *Orlando Furioso* their own trajectories and their own figures. Ariosto has also defined the narrative space in which his characters move as a labyrinth. His heroes and heroines are condemned to err indefinitely through the "torta via de l'intricata selva" [twisted road of the intricate woods], the "labirinto . . . di stretti calli" [labyrinth . . . of narrow paths], the "boscherecci labirinti" [wooded labyrinths].[10] I have argued elsewhere that the Ariostean labyrinth is the labyrinth of fictional narrative, that Ariosto's poem is constructed of previous narratives which, throughout the *Furioso*, place at its center fiction as its genetic memory.[11] Borges singles out a particular place in Ariosto's labyrinthine text which any reader of the *Furioso* will easily identify as Atlante's palace, in which the characters err helplessly, chasing mirages which they believe to be the objects they are pursuing throughout the poem:

E mentre or quinci or quindi invano il passo
movea, pien di travaglio e di pensieri,

Ferrâu, Brandimarte e il re Gradasso,
re Sacripante et altri cavallieri
vi ritrovò, ch'andavano alto e basso,
né men facean di lui vani sentieri;
e si remaricavan del malvagio
invisibil signor di quel palagio.

Tutti cercando il van, tutti gli dánno
colpa di furto alcun che lor fatt'abbia:
del destrier chegli ha tolto, altri è in affanno;
ch'abbia perduta altri la donna, arrabbia;
altri d'altro l'accusa: e così stanno,
che non si san partir di quella gabbia;
e vi son molti, a questo inganno presi,
stati le settimane intiere e i mesi.

Una voce medesma, una persona
che paruta ere Angelica ad Orlando,
parve a Ruggier la donna di Dordona,
che lo tenea di sé medesmo in bando.
Se con Gradasso o con alcun ragiona
di quei ch'andavan nel palazzo errando,
a tutti par che quella cosa sia,
che più ciascun per sé brama e desia.

[This while, as here and there in fruitless pain,
He moves, oppressed with thought and trouble sore,
Gradasso, Brandimart, and him of Spain,
Ferrâu, he finds, with Sacripant and more;
Who ever toiling, like himself, in vain
Above, that building, and beneath explore,
And as they wander, curse with one accord
The malice of the castle's viewless lord.

All in pursuit of the offender speed,
And upon him some charge of robbery lay;
One knight complains that he has stolen his steed,
One that he has purloined his lady gay.
Other accuses him of other deed;
And thus within the enchanted cage they stay,
Nor can depart; while in the palace pent,
Many have weeks and months together spent.

One voice, one shape, which to Anglantes' peer
Seemed his Angelica, beseeching aid,
Seemed to Rogero Dordogne's lady dear
Who him a truant to himself had made;
If with Gradasso, or with other near

He spake, of those who through the palace strayed,
To all of them the vision seen apart,
Seemed that which each had singly most at heart.][12] (12, XI, XII)

The textual labyrinth of the poem thus contains within it a second labyrinth, in which the characters err without ever being able to find a principle of identity, where repetition does not define identity, and where the characters chase pure representations which do not remain identical to themselves either. The second labyrinth, emblematic of the first, is thus a threatening one which does not permit the principle of repetitive identities to delineate a stable narrative or textual form.

Italo Calvino, in his *Castello dei Destini Incrociati*, in his own quest for the emblem of fiction, like Borges will turn to Ariosto's labyrinthine forest and the castle at its center.

Calvino's narrator is an Ariostean character who, after crossing a textual forest composed of Ariostean reminiscences, finds himself with a number of other characters in a castle—on a helpless journey through representation, symbolized in this case by narrative patterns determined by tarot cards. In the words of Calvino's narrator,

> "d'ogni avvenire sembravamo svuotati, sosperi in un viaggio ne terminato ni da terminare" [of every future we seemed emptied, suspended in a journey neither ended nor terminable].[13]

What is at the center of this second labyrinth, of this labyrinth within a labyrinth and therefore second-degree emblematic memory, is not the homogeneous textual space of the Borgesian library but a chaotic, undifferentiated, barren, empty horizon. Calvino's narrator encounters Ariosto's Orlando, for whom the descent into the labyrinth corresponds to a descent into the

> "cuore caotico delle cose, al centro del quadrato de dei tarocchi e del mondo, al punto d'intersezione di tutti gli ordini possibili" [chaotic heart of things, at the center of the square of the tarots and of the world, at the point of intersection of all possible orders].[14]

It is, in fact, out of this chaotic undifferentiated center that

fictions and representations come forth or, more exactly, fiction and representation inscribe as their mimetic memory the labyrinth. They inscribe within this labyrinth, however, a second-degree memory which, characterized as chaos and undifferentiation, is *stricto sensu* unrepresentable. Representation, then, inscribes within itself its absolutely unrepresentable otherness as its original memory. To the question of whether Astolfo, in quest of Orlando's sanity, will find the totality of narrative representation—

> . . . ci dirà se è vero che essa [la luna]contiene il rimario universale delle parole e delle cose . . .
>
> [. . . he will tell us if it is true that it (the Moon) contains the universal anthology of words and of things . . .][15]

—the answer is

> No, la luna è un deserto . . . da questa sfera arrida parte ogni discorso e ogni poema; e ogni viaggio attraverso foreste battaglie tesori banchetti alcove ci riporta qui, al centro d'un orizzonte vuoto.
>
> [No, the Moon is a desert . . . from that arid sphere comes forth every discourse and every poem; and every journey through forests, battles, treasures, banquets, alcoves brings us back here, at the center of an empty horizon.][16]

IV. *The Well*: (*again, briefly*)

Let us return to Borges. The Library of Babel is usually taken as the archetype for a textual representational memory which contains in its shelves all possible textual fictions; nevertheless, even the library which wishes itself an infinite sphere is not a perfect homogeneous totality. The sphere is pierced by an infinity of empty wells—and in the light of Hegel's metaphoric well we should be attentive to this motif—the empty wells in turn contain the decaying, perpetually decomposing bodies of the inhabitants of the library—"my body will sink endlessly and decay and dissolve in the wind generated by the fall" (p. 52)—and it is the eternally decomposing cadavers, eternally inhabiting the library, that the books on its shelves will never be able to represent.

The library contains other centers of unrepresentable disorder, such as the sect of individuals who "would hide in the latrines with some metal disks in a forbidden dice cup and feebly mimic the divine disorder" (p. 56)—"Un coup de dès n'abolira jamais le hasard"—or those who speak "of the 'feverish Library whose chance volumes are constantly in danger of changing into others and affirm, negate and confuse everything like a delirious divinity' " (p. 57). It is, however, in some of the other stories of Borges that we find a better example of the necessity of inscribing within a representational memory a representationally irreducible nucleus.

The *Lottery of Babylon* also textualizes the world in the form of a labyrinthine memory. What is interesting in this particular short story is the way in which the logic of representation forces the *Company* to become secret. Its omnipotence depends upon its remaining hidden from representation, upon being in fact unrepresentable; from the point of view of representation the *Company* cannot have an ontological status. The proposition that the Company *is*—"Another declares that the Company is omnipotent"—cannot be differentiated from the proposition that the Company *is not*—"Another [declares] *that it has never existed and will not exist*" (p. 35). The *Company* cannot be a representational concept but has to remain as an otherness at the end of a hollowness burrowed into the labyrinthine plenitude of Babylon—

> There were certain stone lions, there was a sacred latrine called Qaphqa, there were fissures in a dusty aqueduct which, according to general opinion, *led to the Company*. . . (p. 33)

V. *The City*

The *Immortal* is probably the most remarkable of Borges' stories with respect to the problems of representation. The very epigram of the story, a quote from Bacon, relates representation to memory—

> Salomon saith, *There is no new thing upon the earth.* So that as Plato had an imagination, *that all Knowledge was but remembrance*; so Salomon giveth his sentence, *that all novelty is but oblivion.* (p. 105)

On the surface the story is rigorously faithful to the logic of the labyrinth: given enough time, someone, hypothetically, should be able to identify each point with space by repeating its original inscription:

> Homer composed the *Odyssey*; if we postulate an infinite period of time, with infinite circumstances and changes, the impossible thing is not to compose the *Odyssey*, at least once. No one is anyone, one single immortal man is all men. (pp. 114-5)

Given enough time, then, anybody and everybody could reinscribe a complete and total memory. Nevertheless, such a totalization brings the narrator of the *Immortal* face to face with the City of the Immortals. To have access to the City, he has to traverse a labyrinth. The crossing of the labyrinth is unproblematic; after all, a labyrinth is only "a structure compounded to confuse men; its architecture, rich in symmetries, is subordinated to that end" (p. 110). The interesting thing here is that the space of the labyrinth is an artificial construct that we create to stand between our representations and the City of the Immortals. The City of the Immortals is an unrepresentable chaos; even a teratological language could only give an idea of it, but not represent it—

> . . . a chaos of heterogeneous words, the body of a tiger or a bull in which teeth, organs and heads monstrously pullulate in mutual conjunction and hatred can (perhaps) be approximate images. (p. 111)

As I suggested before, it is very important that the City of the Immortals should not be representable—any more than the Company—even in the form of a linguistic monster. The City is, again, an otherness which cannot be treated as a concept, nor can it have a representational ontology. The City is and is not, or rather, it does not matter whether it is or is not—"I do not know if all the examples I have enumerated are literal; I know that for many years they infested my nightmares" (p. 111).

The most interesting detail of the story is, of course, that the City of the Immortals has a temporal as well as a spatial inscription. The City was once razed, then rebuilt. The

present unrepresentable chaos itself is therefore desired and constructed, and stands literally as well as metaphorically in lieu of the transcendent ordered origin that always once was. What stands as the unrepresentable center of representation, as the non-original beginning, always replaces the lost privileged transcendental ordered origin. To this temporality of the City corresponds the temporality of the gods that built it. In a first moment, the narrator states, "This place is a fabrication of the gods," then corrects himself: "The gods who built it have died," and finally: "The gods who built it were mad" (p. 110). And this temporal deployment of the gods corresponds, perhaps, to the three moments which historically have conditioned the ideologies governing our perception of the original center which is supposed to order representation. At first a divine order governed by a divine origin, then the metaphorics of nostalgia in the face of a lost absent origin, and finally, the necessity of coming to terms with an irrational irrepresentable force which governs representation without ever allowing itself to be inscribed, to be made readable, or to be mastered in any form whatsoever:

> This City . . . is so horrible that its mere existence and perdurance, though in the midst of a secret desert, contaminates the past and the future and in some way even jeopardizes the stars. As long as it lasts, no one in the world can be strong or happy. (p. 111)

If Nietzsche imposed the necessity of thinking the problem of representation in the temporality of God's death, perhaps the lesson that it remains for us to learn from Borges is to think of the problem of representation in a space where the gods have gone mad.

NOTES

1. This paper complements the argument I developed in " 'Here Now'/ 'Always already': Incidental Remarks on Some Recent Characterizations of the *Text*." in *Diacritics*, vol. 6, no. 3.
2. See Jacques Derrida's *Speech and Phenomena* (tr. David B. Allison, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1973), in particular ch. 3: "Meaning as Soliloquy," pp. 45-6.
3. See De Man, Paul: "The Rhetoric of Temporality" in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles S. Singleton, The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1969.
4. Derrida, J.: "Le Puits et le pyramide" in *Marges*, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1972, p. 88.
5. *Idem.*, p. 95.
6. Hegel, G. W. F.: *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, tr. T. M. Knox, Oxford, 1975, Section 11.1: *The Symbolic Form of Art*, p. 356.
7. *Idem.*, p. 356.
8. Borges, J.: "The Library of Babel" in *Labyrinths*, New York, 1964, p. 52. Subsequent references to this edition will be indicated by page number.
9. On this subject see Derrida's "Hors Livre" in *La Dissémination*, Editions du Seuil, 1972.
10. Ariosto: *Orlando Furioso*, 19 V, 18 CXCII, 13 XLII.
11. See my " 'Per Selve e Boscherecci Labirinti': Desire and Narrative Structure in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*," *Barocco*, v. 4.
12. Ariosto: *Orlando Furioso*, 12 XI, XII; 12 XX.
13. Calvino, I.: *Il Castello dei Destini Incrociati*. Einaudi, Torino, 1973, p. 6.
14. *Idem.*, p. 33.
15. *Idem.*, p. 38-39.
16. *Idem.*, p. 39.

IDENTITY AS DISCOURSE AND IMAGE IN THE POETRY OF BORGES

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The elucidation of the problem of identity—as a unity, and as a plurality of being—is a constant in the trajectory of Borges' production, which extends from the days of "ultraism" to his most recent creation, *La rosa profunda* (*The Deep Rose*). In one of his first critical essays—"Ultraism"—which dates back to 1921, Borges already presents the foundations of the basic theme in his poetic credo: the metaphysical unrest of man's being, and the pantheistic vision of personality. At that time he remarked: "personality is a broad collective denomination which comprises all states in man's consciousness. Any new state that joins the others becomes an essential part of the *I* and is an expression of it."[1] This conception of the individual *I* as an all-encompassing *I*, in which the subjective and the objective, singularity and plurality are fused, is reinforced and amplified, as a poetic theory, in the preface to *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, published in 1923.

> If in the following pages there is some successful verse or other, may the reader forgive me the audacity of having written it before him. We are all one: our inconsequential minds are much alike, and circumstances so influence us that it is something of an accident that you are the reader and I the writer—the unsure, ardent writer— of my verses.[2]

For Borges identity means, therefore, the unity of many beings within the same objective frame of reference, which can be represented in one concept. The poet should thus identify himself with the reader, since both integrate the

circle of participation in the poetic phenomenon and constitute a unity. The reader on re-creating the poetic reality, enters into the work as a subject, fills the empty space created by the grammatical person, and becomes as much an author as the one who wrote the poem. Let us emphasize the use of the verbs "to write" and "to cast into words" (*redactor*), since in Borges' estimation "poets are the amanuenses of a god that animates them against their will, as the magnet animates a series of iron rings."[3] This concept of creativity explains the two-fold aspect of the idea of identity, since in the rationale of Borges' metaphysics, in the poet's original intuition, the essence of being is Nothingness. In appearance, it is a unity (singularity and plurality) and in essence, a void, an absence. For this reason it is possible to consider the author-reader unity as a nothingness; however, since the two of them constitute the integration of the poetic phenomenon, they are everything as well. The irony of opposites–the being which is one as well as miscellaneous beings repeating themselves, in contrast to the skeptical notion of reducing the reality of being to a total non-existence–is handled effectively by Borges: "God is the primordial nothingness of the *creatio-ex-nihilo*, the abyss where first the archetypes and then the concrete beings were engendered. He is nothing and nobody; those who imagined Him thus did so in the belief that it was more than being a Who more than being a What."[4] Borges concludes that perhaps existing entities are merely forms, forms that repeat themselves, empty spaces that are filled with the continuous process of dissolution and incarnation of the *I*.[5]

These concepts, which according to Borges himself are just aesthetic games, constitute a philosophical theory of the dialectics of contradiction and furthermore embody the very corpus of the writing and the creative discourse of his works. In this paper I intend to show how the concern with identity creates a discourse as well as a poetic function in Borges' poetry, evolving from the depersonalization of the poetic subject found in his early ultraist poems to a true inter-subjectivity of the *I*, as shown by his latest work *La rosa profunda*.

In studying this evolution, it is not amiss to present some brief considerations in regard to the theory of discourse, as expressed by Emile Benveniste in *Problems in General Linguistics*.[6] If we accept discourse as an act of "parole" through which a grammatical person re-organizes language, then, according to Benveniste's concept, of the three grammatical persons, the first (*I*), is the active creator of the discourse. Insofar as language is a system of different but inter-related signs, the discourse is an actualization of language, that is, language put into action and necessarily between partners. The personal pronouns escape the norms which govern the other signs of language; they are exclusively indicators of person, grammatical forms that do not denominate any lexical entity. The reality to which they refer is the reality of the discourse in relation to the first person. *I* is a unique sign, only a form devoid of content, but it achieves a semantic value when one calls himself *I*.[7] In the relationship between the first and the second person (*I - you*) the *I*, as an incomplete form of being, projects itself into the other, its complement and opposite. *I - you* are the two opposites which cannot become realities except on the basis of the opposition which differentiates one from the other. *I - you* is the reversible and dialectic relationship which represents the principle of inter-subjectivity of language. There is no *you* without *I*, and every *I* addresses *you*. The third person, on the other hand, as the Araba believe, is "the absent one," the outsider who has been, therefore, suppressed as a person capable of "actualizing" the discourse. *He* is literally a "non-person," which neither exists nor has a character of its own, except by referring to the subjective *I - you* relationship. The establishment of "subjectivity" in language creates the category of person.[8]

One should bear in mind that the domain of subjectivity in the discourse is mainly related to the expression of temporality. This, in spite of the distinction of grammatical tenses, is always a reference to the present: "The coincidence of the event described with the instance of discourse that describes it."[9] According to Benveniste, the act of the discourse always fixes a temporal present, "a re-creation of an original act." As

in Benveniste's theory, in Borges' poetry *I*—the archetype of identity—is the crucial point at which temporal differences meet.

Identity is always a fascinating equivocation sharing unity and contradiction. Borges affirms in *Historia de la eternidad* (History of Eternity), "I am I and all those who said *I* before me,"[10] in other words, *I* is a changing form that may be repeated and recreated *ad infinitum*. Identity has, in the Borgesian discourse, all the validity of a poetic function, as conceived by Roman Jakobson, by means of establishing the unification of successive temporality—the paradigmatic—in the contiguity of the spatial—the syntagmatic.[11]

There is, moreover, a clear evolution of the function of identity in the trajectory of Borges' poetry. In the early ultraist verses of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, the attempt to establish identity can be observed as a tendency to depersonalize the poetic object, making it an alien to the speaker. In the poem "El truco", in the magic reality created by the world of gambling, "identity" emerges as a poetic function unifying the diachronic act of distant men with the identical ritual of players in a present game.

> Cuarenta naipes han desplazado la vida.
> Amuletos de cartón pintado
> conjuran en placentero exorcismo
> la maciza realidad primordial.
> . . . . . .
> En los lindes de la mesa
> el vivir común se detiene.
> Adentro hay otro país:
> las aventuras del envido y del quiero,
> . . . . . .
> los jugadores en fervor presente
> copian remotas bazas:
> hecho que inmortaliza un poco,
> apenas,
> a los compañeros muertos que callan.[12]

The remote past converges into the simultaneity of the present as a repeated act. This ritual survives in the gamblers themselves who have transmuted their individuality into a depersonalized identity: "los compañeros muertos". The speaker, nevertheless, is an outsider who does not share the magic of gambling, nor does he feel involved in the poetic discourse.

In another ultraist poem, "Inscripción en cualquier sepulcro" ("Inscription on Any Tomb"), the impersonal subject also predominates:

> Ciegamente reclama duración el alma arbitraria
> cuando la tiene asegurada en vidas ajenas,
> cuando tú mismo eres la continuación realizada
> de quienes no alcanzaron tu tiempo
> y otros serán (y son) tu inmortalidad en la tierra.[13]

Although the poem culminates with an appeal to *you* (*tú*), this *you* is just one more sign in the concatenation of subjects, the actual "continuation" of the beings that preceded him. This *you* is a void sign that will survive only in the identity of others. In "Remordimiento por cualquier defunción" ("Remorse for Any Death") the poetic object is alien to the speaker. He is "death," the absent person whose identity has been transmuted into the objective form of other beings.

> Libre de la memoria y de la esperanza,
> ilimitado, abstracto, casi futuro,
> el muerto no es un muerto, es la muerte
> . . . . . .
> el muerto ubicuamente ajeno
> no es sino la perdición y ausencia del mundo
> Todo se lo robamos,
> no le dejamos ni un color ni una sílaba.[14]

As we have suggested, in Borges' ultraist verses the poetic persona does not feel involved in the subjectivity of the discourse, rather, the speaker addresses the poetic object only as a referential, depersonalized entity. In the poems of *El Mismo*, *El Otro* (*The Self and the Other*), however, one may perceive a remarkable change in the attitude of the speaker. "Poema conjetural" ("Conjectural Poem"), which is a key-work in Borges' poetic evolution, may illustrate this change by showing the participation of an expressive *I*.

> Vencen los bárbaros, los gauchos vencen.
> Yo, que estudié las leyes y los cánones,
> yo, Francisco Narciso de Laprida,
> cuya voz declaró la independencia

de estas crueles provincias, derrotado,
de sangre y de sudor manchado el rostro,
sin esperanza ni temor, perdido,
huyo hacia el Sur por arrabales últimos.[15]

In the manner of Robert Browning's monologues, the speaker defines his individual voice and makes a final confession. The protagonist–Francisco Narciso Laprida–the Argentine patriot facing death in the imminent charge of the Barbarians' army, is the *I* who feels himself to be a repeated identity.

Como aquel capitáin del Purgatorio
que, huyendo a pie y ensangrentando el llano,
fue cegado y tumbado por la muerte
donde un oscuro río pierde el nombre,
así habré de caer.[16]

Although the identification is not fully unified as a simultaneous image, since the dual relationship is established by way of the comparative term *como*, it is evident that the metaphorical interplay *I - the Other* is a repetition of fate. Laprida, like the Captain Buoconte, a character in *The Divine Comedy*, confronts the same destiny: the freedom to exist, in the face of defeat and death. *I* and *the Other*, as opposite and reversible metaphors, complement each other in a symbolic sameness–identical circles in the unity of a unique labyrinth. Thus, as we read the poem, its lyrical beauty resides primarily in the expressive *I* of the discourse, which is its focal point. Even the identification with *the Other* is realized because the *I* recreates him.

In another significant Borgesian poem, "El poema de los dones" (The Poem of the Gifts), the search for identity embodies a fundamental question in the last three stanzas. Here, in an ambiguous interaction of subjects which transmits its inter-subjectivity to the poetic process, Borges, the blind protagonist, incarnates the same attributes as Paul Groussac, the blind librarian who, years before, walked the same halls of the National Library of Buenos Aires.

Al errar por las lentas galerías
Suelo sentir con vago horror sagrado
Que soy el otro, el muerto, que habrá dado
Los mismos pasos en los mismos días.[17]

It is unquestionable that recognizing one's identity in the Other functions in these verses as a more intimate and direct revelation than in "Poema conjetural." The lines two and three affirm the reversible identity: *I* am the Other; the Other is *I*, which establishes an ambiguous metaphoric double subject:

Cuál de los dos escribe este poema
De un yo plural y de una sola sombra?
Qué importa la palabra que me nombra
Si es indiviso y uno el anatema?[18]

The above interrogative opens a fluctuating, semantic space, which the *I* seeks to share with the Other, his complement and opposite. The plural *I* stated in the poem refers implicitly to two persons (*I* - the Other), who have become inter-subjectified by the *I*. This shift, a dramatic act involving the double identity, the plural *I* (*we*), and its unity: one single shadow, suggests a void that should be filled by the discourse. The final stanza reads:

Groussac o Borges, miro este querido
Mundo que se deforma y que se apaga
En un pálida ceniza vaga
Que se parece al sueño y al olvido.[19]

The verb "miro"–a first person singular–identifies both subjects actualizing identity as a primordial act. Borges and Groussac are the same *I* sharing a vanishing, visual image of the world.

In the poems of *Elogio de la sombra* (*In Praise of Darkness*) the fluctuating metaphor of the poetic persona achieves the unity of duality (obverse and reverse) within a dynamic, and simultaneous image. In "Heraclitus" the first thirteen verses seem to be an enunciation from without. The speaker, who contemplates the temporal cycle of twilights (succession - simultaneity) captures it referentially, as if it were an alien entity. However, from verse fourteen on–in which the relationship "time-river" is established–a sudden unrest is expressed through an interrogative which conveys contradiction and doubt.

Qú trama es ésta

del será, del es y del fue?
Qué río es éste
por el cuál corre el Ganges?
Qué río es éste
cuya fuente es inconceible?
Qué río es éste
que arrastra mitologías y espadas?[20]

Although the poetic persona is still unrevealed, he seems to be involved in the process of the discourse and may be identified with Heraclitus himself. Unexpectedly, in the last seven verses of the poem he discloses his real identity as a first person singular.

El río me arrebata y soy ese río;
De una materia deleznable fui hecho, de misterioso tiempo.
Acaso el manantial está en mí.
Acaso de mi sombra
Surgen, fatales e ilusorios, los días.[21]

As in Benveniste's theory of the discourse, in Borges' poem the first person singular re-creates the discourse and takes over all the resources of language for his own behalf.[22] In the poem the speaker unifies both signifiers–*river* and *I*–within a dynamically simultaneous image of two different entities that acquire the function of an oxymoric metaphor. The second of these signifiers–*I*–reorganizes inversely the semantic elements of the poem. The subjectivity of the discourse projects its contradiction and doubt by means of repetition of the adverb "acaso" (perhaps) and the *enjambement* "sombra/surgen". This process of contradicting reality, arising as it does in the poet's perception, establishes truth as an intimate revelation. The subject *I* illuminates a new, inner world with the light of the oxymoric image, which binds together the dynamic difference of opposites. The revelation nevertheless suggests a frustration, since it is not attainable as an absolute, definitive truth. This procedure, which reintegrates the semantic of the poem through the sudden appearance of the speaker's revelation in the discourse, is significant in the sonnets of *Elogio de la sombra* (*In Praise of Darkness*) and *El oro de los tigres* (*The Gold of the Tigers*). Borges' sonnets, most of them structured in Shakespearean manner, convey a dynamically simultaneous image in the final couplet. In "New England, 1967" the poet's new vision of America is expressed through an ambiguous interplay of dream and reality. Even though in the first stanza one is aware of the presence of *I*, what predominates is a referential depiction of an American landscape. In the fourth quatrain, however, temporality takes on the appearance of something attainable.

Pronto (nos dicen) llegará la nieve
y América me espera en cada esquina,
pero siento en la tarde que declina
el hoy tan lento y el ayer tan breve.[23]

The frustration inherent in the temporal significance of the two last verses of this quatrain is developed in the contradictory revelation of the final couplet of the sonnet, with a new image in which the *I* counteracts the logic of the preceding verses.

Buenos Aires, yo sigo caminando
por tus esquinas, sin por qué ni cuando.[24]

This dynamic image, endowed with the function of an oxymoron, identifies two different entities–New England and Buenos Aires. For the speaker New England, temporally and spatially, is Buenos Aires. The poetic persona creates the subjectivity of the discourse in an active and permanent present, establishing an original and perpetual image of Buenos Aires. This is thus, the eternally "present" moment which can only be internal to the discourse.[25]

In "Acevedo", "my grandparents' fields" appear as the poet's inner contemplation. Moreover, he captures lyrically the fields of Acevedo when he identifies them with those in the South, those in Iowa or Galilee.

La llanura es ubicua. Los he visto
En Iowa, en el Sur, en tierra hebrea,
En aquel saucedal de Galilea
Que hollaron los humanos pies de Cristo.[26]

Once again, in the final couplet, the subjective *I* reorganizes the poetic reality, and the fields of Acevedo, never seen concretely by the poet, become his intimate possession in the in-

ner vision of an original present.

> No los perdí. Son míos. los poseo
> En el olvido, en un casual deseo.[27]

In the poems of *Elogio de la Sombra*, as we have seen, identity is the simultaneity of differences expressed in the oxymoric image that unifies two opposite signs in a reversible identification. The poetic persona *I*, by conferring subjectivity to the discourse, creates the oxymoric image as an aesthetic revelation, as a new visible presence of something that has been invisible within the intimate reality of the self. In *La rosa profunda*, which represents the culmination of Borges' lyric search for identity, the poetic persona operates in the discourse as the mediator of differences in a constant process of dissolution and reincarnation into the Other or Others. The *I* acts as an identity that is reflected by ever-changing entities, always different and reversible in the recurring repetition and transmutation.

It is significant that in the verses of *Elogio de la sombra* and *El oro de los tigres* the oxymoron, as an image, generally condenses the unity of different entities, as in Borges' famous story "El Aleph," that is, as a center of cosmic confluence which reflects the total universe. In *La rosa profunda*, on the other hand, the oxymoric image seems to recreate poetically the interpolated verse of Asrar Nama (The Book of Things Unknown) by Attar, which Borges inserts in his story "The Zahir": "He who has seen the Zahir will soon see the Rose: "the Zahir is the shadow of the Rose and the rending of the Veil."[28] The *I*, like the Zahir–which means the visible–is the identity that encloses the microcosmic entity: the visible form of the invisible.

In the first sonnet of *La rosa profunda*, significantly entitled "Yo," the first quatrain expresses a chaotic juxtaposition of objects by combining concrete and metaphorical reality.

> La calavera, el corazón secreto,
> Los caminos de sangre que no veo,
> Los túneles del sueño, ese Proteo,
> Las vísceras, la nuca, el esqueleto.[29]

While the two middle verses suggest dream and transmutation, the fourth one closes the quatrain with concrete nouns by establishing a dynamic *chiasmus* with the first verse (calvera-esqueleto/ corazon-visceras). In the second quatrain the *I* suddenly appears endowing the object with subjectivity: I am the things which are myself, that is the things that become *I*.

> Soy esas cosas. Increíblemente
> Soy también la memoria de una espada
> Y la de un solitario sol poniente
> Que se dispersa en oro, en sombra, en nada.[30]

In this reversible transmutation the intersubjectivity of the discourse emerges from the expressive intimacy transmitted by the lyric persona. The anaphora of the verb *soy* and the insistent iambic pentameter suggest the flight and return of the *I* in its progression from concreteness to total abstraction (en oro, en sombra, en nada). The poetic persona (*I*), remaining as a fluctuating metaphor in the third quatrain (soy -el; soy-los) achieves the grammatical semantic inversion in the final couplet.

> Soy el que ve la proas desde el puerto;
> Soy los contados libros, los cantados
> Grabados por el tiempo fatigados;
> Soy el que envidia a los que ya se han muerto.
> Mas raro es ser el hombre que entrelaza
> Palabras en el cuarto de una casa.[31]

In the two final lines the speaker refers to himself as "el hombre que entrelaza/palabras". He is now more impersonal than things are, as suggested by the use of the third person (the neglected part of the discourse) and by the enjambement "entrelaza/palabras" which accentuates the unexpected final affirmation. There is evident a reversible process of intersubjectivity: the personification of the object, and the objectivation of the poetic persona, a true Proteus of the Borgesian discourse. The establishment of subjectivity in language affirms the category of person, and the basis of the intersubjectivity depends on the exercise of the discourse. The polarity of person is the fundamental condition of language. It is

a polarity, moreover, very peculiar in itself, as it offers a type of opposition whose equivalent is encountered nowhere else outside of language."[32]

In the poem "Proteo" (Proteus), the identity is a constant process of dissolution and reincarnation into the Other and Others.

> Urgido por las gentes asumía
> La forma de un león o de una hoguera
> O de árbol que da sombra a la ribera
> O de agua que en el agua se perdía.
> De Proteo el egipcio no te asombres,
> Tú, que eres uno y eres muchos hombres.[33]

The dynamic transfer of the *I* into "the Other" or "Others" (león, hoguera; árbol, agua) operating as an ever-changing metaphor (I - He-You) alters the logical discourse and creates a new semantic space, which functions as a *meta-image.* This rhetoric figure resulting from a spatial and temporal operation, unifies the metaphoric, paradigmatic difference of *I - the Other* in a dynamic, syntagmatic identification whose semantic is to be found in both its unity and its contradiction. Identity as a meta-image is neither *I*, *you* or *he*, but the simultaneity in which differences meet becoming a ultimate, aesthetic revelation.

The ever-changing identity occupies thus a new place in the discourse, a place that implies a void to be filled with language. The transmutation of identity is, at the same time, a "delusion", that is, the impossibility of identity as an absolute. The sign is always the deferred presence of the thing, the presence of an absence. Just as in the already quoted verses, "The Zahir is the shadow of the Rose and the rending of the Veil," the ultimate significance of the Protean image in Borges' poetry, is a revelation that does not take place.

In the poem "The Unending Rose" Borges' voice gives the definitive message:

> . . .Cada cosa
> es infinitas cosas. Eres música,
> Firmamentos, palacios, ríos ángeles,
> Rosa profunda, ilimitada, íntima
> Que el Señor mostrará a mis ojos muertos.[34]

In conclusion, the *I*—as a unity and as a plurality of being—incarnates both the poetic discourse and image in Borges' poetry. The Protean, ever-changing identity by establishing the subjectivity of the discourse embodies itself every entity—there is always a Zahir, there is always an *I* in search of incarnation, all of which nevertheless, suggest the ultimate impossibility of a true, unique revelation.

NOTES

1. "Ultraísmo", *Nosotros*, XXXLX, No. 151 (1921), p. 471.
2. "Preface to the 1923 edition of *Fervor de Buenos Aires,*" trans. N. T. Di Giovanni, *Jorge Luis Borges Selected Poems 1923-1967* (Delacorte Press/ Seymour Lawrence, 1972), p. 269. (The following quotations from this book will use the abbreviation: *JLB*).
3. "El escritor argentino y la tradición," (The Argentine Writer and the Tradition) *Discusión* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1932), pp. 151-162.
4. *Other Inquisitions 1937-1952*, trans., Ruth L. C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), p. 147.
5. *Ibid.*
6. E. Benveniste. *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans., M. E. Meeks (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971), pp. 217-230.
7. *I* is the indicator of subjectivity in language. The reality to which it refers is the reality of the discourse. *I* has no linguistic existence except in the act of speaking in which it is uttered. There is thus a combined double instance of *I* as referent and the instance of discourse containing *I* as a referee. See Benveniste, op. cit., p. 218.
8. "It must be seen that the ordinary definition of the personal pronouns as containing the three terms *I*, *you*, and *he*, simply destroys the notion of person. Person belongs only to *I*/*you*, and is lacking in *he*. This refers not to itself but to an 'objective' situation." Benveniste, op. cit., p. 217.
9. op. cit., p. 127.
10. *Historia de la eternidad* (Burenos Aires: Emecé, 1953), p. 19.
11. *Fundamentals of Language* (S. Gravenhage: Mouton, Co., 1956), pp. 58-59.
12. "Forty cards have displaced life,/ Amulets of painted cardboard/ They dispell in a pleasant exorcism/ The massive, primordial world/ Of carnal pleasure and suffering,/ . . .On the boundaries of the table/ Everyday life interrupts its course./ Within lies another territory:/ The adven-

tures of bidding and taking tricks,/ . . .

The players, fervidly enwrapped in an immediate present/ Repeat card tricks of remote days,/ Thus immortalizing somewhat,/ Barely perhaps,/ Former players now speechless and dead." *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. Trans., E. Neale-Silva (unpublished).

13. "Blindly the willfull soul asks for length of days/ when its survival is assured by the lives of others,/ when you yourself are the embodied continuance/ of those who did not live into your time/ and others will be (and are) your immortality on earth." *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. Trans., W. S. Merwin, *JLB*, p. 17.

14. "Free of memory and hope,/ unlimited, abstract, almost future,/ the dead person is not a dead person: it is death./ . . .

the dead person, everywhere no one,/ is nothing but the loss and absence of the world./ We rob it of everything,/ we do not leave it one color, one syllable:" *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. Trans., W. S. Merwin, *JLB*, p. 15.

15. ". . .The gauchos have won:/ victory is theirs, the barbarians'./ I, Francisco Narciso Laprida,/ who studies both canon law and civil/ and whose voice declared the independence/ of this entire untamed territory,/ in defeat, my face marked by blood and sweat,/ holding neither hope nor fear, the way lost,/ strike out for the South through the back country." *Obra poética* (Buenos Aires: Emecé' 1967), p. 142. Trans. N. T. Di Giovanni, *JLB*, p. 83.

16. "Like that captain in *Purgatorio*/ who fleeing on foot left blood on the plain/ and was blinded and then trampled by death/ where an obscure river loses its name,/ so I too will fall. . ." *Ibid*.

17. "Straying through the slowness of these galleries/ I often feel with unclear, holy dread/ That I am the other, the dead man who tread/ The same steps on the same days. . ." *Obra poé*tica, p. 170. Trans., Willis Barnstone (unpublished).

18. "Two beings, which of us is writing this poem/ of a plural I and one lone shadow? I came/ To ask: what difference if one name is my name/ When our curse is indivisible, a single gloom?" *Ibid*.

19. "Groussac or Borges, now I look upon/ A dear world coming apart like smoldering trash,/ Formless, burning to a vague, pale ash/ That looks like sleep and like oblivion." *Ibid*.

20."What web is this/ of *will be*, *is*, and *was*? What river's this/ through which the Ganges flows?/ What river's this whose source is unimaginable?/ *Elogio de la sombra* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1969), p. 19. Trans., N. T. Di Giovanni, *The New Yorker* (August 2, 1969), p. 34.

21. "The river bears me on and I am the river./ I was made of a changing substance, of mysterious time./ Maybe the source is in me./ Maybe out of my shadow/ the days arise, relentless and unreal." *Ibid*.

22. According to Benveniste, "Language is so organized that it permits each speaker *to appropriate to himself* an entire language by designating himself as *I*." See Benveniste, op. cit., p. 226.

23. "Any day now (we are told) snow will come/ and out on every street America/ awaits me, but as evening falls I feel/ today so slow and yesterday so brief." *Elogio de la sombra*, p. 31. Trans., N. T. Di Giovanni.

24. "Buenos Aires, yours are the streets that I go on walking without a why or when." *Ibid*.

25. "Ultimately, human temporality with all its apartus reveals the subjectivity inherent in the very using of language." Benveniste, op. cit., p. 220.

26. "The plain is ubiquitous. I have seen them/ in Iowa, in the South, in the land of Hebrews/ in that willow grove in Galilee." *Elogio de la sombra*, p. 103. Trans., E. Neale-Silva (unpublished).

27. "I did not lose them. They are mine, I possess them/ in forgetfulness, in a casual desire." *Ibid*.

28. See the short story "The Zahir," *Labyrinths, Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed., D. A. Yates and J. E.. Irby (New Directions: New York, 1962), pp. 156-164.

29. "Skull, the secret heart, tunnels overrun/ With dream, the roads of blood I cannot see,/ That seagod Proetus, the cavity/ Of viscera, the nape, the skeleton." *La rosa profunda* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1975), p. 13. Trans., W. Barnstone (unpublished).

30. "I am those things. And I am, even more/ Incredibly, the memory of a sword/ And of a lone declining sun that pours/ Its light in gold, in shadow and in void." *Ibid*.

31. "I am the one who sees the prows from the port;/ I am the precious book, the rare engraving/ Time has wearied. I am the one saving/ Envy for those already dead. My sort/ Is even stranger. I am the one who chose/ To interlace words in a room of a house." *Ibid*

32. Benveniste, op. cit., p. 218.

33. . . . Urged by humans he took on/ The form of a lion or a bonfire/ Or a tree spreading shade on the shore's briar/ Or water vanishing in water. Drawn/ From Egypt, dont let him astonish you, when/ You too are one and many men. *La rosa profunda*, p. 75. Trans., W. Barnstone (unpublished).

34. . . . Each thing/ Is infinite things. You are music./ Firmaments, palaces, rivers, angels/ An intimate, limitless, profound rose,/ Which the Lord will show my dead eyes." *La rosa profunda*, p. 153. Trans., W. Barnstone (unpublished).

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BORGES AND METAFICTION

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That the writings of Jorge Luis Borges have helped to open up a new set of possibilities for fiction is by now a critical commonplace. We might, with John Barth and John O. Stark, describe this new fictional mode as a "literature of exhaustion"[1]; for, as this label implies, in the writings of Borges something is coming to an end. But the works of Borges and his younger disciples (including, in America, Barth and Coover) represent not only the last gasp of a dying tradition but also the beginning of something new, and therefore I find the "literature of exhaustion" label unsatisfactory. A more appropriate term for this group of writers might be a word invented (or reinvented) by Robert Scholes, who has described certain contemporary writers as "fabulators."[2] Scholes applies this term specifically to Lawrence Durrell, Kurt Vonnegut, John Hawkes, Iris Murdoch, and John Barth; but that delight in "fabulation" as an end in itself which Scholes detects in these writers is also apparent in Borges. Nevertheless, I prefer another word popularized by Scholes to describe the new fictional mode exemplified by works like "Tlön, Uqbar, and Orbis Tertius" and "The Aleph." This term is "metafiction." Apparently the word was coined by William H. Gass, who applied it to the works of some of his contemporaries:

> There are metatheorems in mathematics and logic, ethics has its linguistic oversoul, everywhere lingos to converse about lingos are being contrived, and the case is no different in the novel. I don't mean merely those drearily predictable pieces about writers who are writing about what

> they are writing, but those, like some of the work of Borges, Barth, and Flann O'Brien, for example, in which the forms of fiction serve as the material upon which further forms can be imposed. Indeed, many of the so-called anti-novels are really metafictions.[3]

The word "metafiction" was next taken up by Robert Scholes, in an essay of 1970 titled simply "Metafiction." "Metafiction," says Scholes, "assimilates all the perspectives of criticism into the fictional process itself."[4] Since Scholes's essay, the term "metafiction" has been adopted by several critics. An example is Margaret Heckard, who in her recent essay on Robert Coover defines "metafiction" as follows:

> The shifting of gears, the widening of frames, the expanding of consciousness, this is what metafiction does to reader and writer alike; this is where its value lies. It paints a landscape for the reader and encourages him to include himself in the painting and stand back to view himself. It affirms Beckett's notion that at the core of the individual is only the self perceiving the self. Such selfconscious moments can be cause for both despair and exhilaration.[5]

By this definition, the works of Jorge Luis Borges must indeed be regarded as examples of metafiction; and Heckard includes Borges in her list of "metafictionists" (along with Beckett, Barth, Barthelme, Nabokov, Gass, Pynchon and Coover himself). There is, then, some precedent for my belief that the works of Borges and his disciples can accurately be labelled as "metafictions." Criticism has, however, scarcely begun to elucidate either the nature or the significance of the metafictional mode, and no critic has sought to explain in detail *why*, in our time, traditional fiction has so largely given way to metafiction. Accordingly I shall in the next section of this essay offer my own definition of "metafiction." In the second section of this essay, I shall turn to some specific works by Borges, for this great Argentine writer is, in my judgment, the principal progenitor of this new literary mode. Finally, in the third section I shall attempt to elucidate the broader social and cultural significance of the shift from fiction to metafiction initiated by Borges and his followers. My speculations on this matter must of necessity

be tentative. But any criticism which is content to describe rather than to explain cultural phenomena seems to me inadequate, and therefore I shall here conclude with a provisional theory of metafiction.

I

A metafiction is by my definition a fiction which forces us to become conscious of the nature and significance of the "fictioning" process itself. This self-reflexivity makes problematic the reality of the text, of the author, and of the reader, and thereby opens up the possibility of a new kind of relationship between the reader and the writer. In these respects metafiction is analogous to certain other kinds of "meta-phenomena." A case in point is "metalanguage," which Roman Jakobsen explains as follows:

> A distinction has been made in modern logic between two levels of language, "object language" speaking of objects and "metalanguage" speaking of language. But metalanguage is not only a necessary scientific tool utilized by logicians and linguists; it plays also an important role in our every day language. Like Molière's Jourdain who used prose without knowing it, we practice metalanguage without realizing the metalingual character of our operations. Whenever the addresser and/or the addressee need to check up whether they use the same code, speech is focused on the CODE: it performs a METALINGUAL (i.e., glossing) function. "I don't follow you—what do you mean?" asks the addressee, or in Shakespearean diction, "What is't thou say'st?"[6]

In the arts, such self-reflexive moments are probably most common in drama. The plays of Pirandello, for example, fall almost without exception into the category of "metadrama." But metadramatic moments are also common in the works of earlier dramatists, including Shakespeare. Several of Shakespeare's plays, as Lionel Abel and James Calderwood have suggested, explore systematically the nature and significance of dramatic invention.[7] Abel, for example, sees *Hamlet* as a play about four playwrights: Claudius, the Ghost, Polonius, and Hamlet. The question which the play raises. Abel ar-

gues, is who will in the end "write the script" (Abel, pp. 45-51). To understand Shakespearean metatheater, perhaps the simplest method is to look at an example of what I would like to call the "metadramatic moment." At such a moment, we are offered a dual perspective on the events occurring on stage—a metadramatic as well as a dramatic consciousness. One such moment occurs in *Julius Caesar*, immediately after the conspirators kill Caesar. As the conspirators stoop to dip their hands in Caesar's blood, Cassius and Brutus speak as follows:

> *Cas.* Stoop then, and wash. How many ages hence
> Shall this our lofty scene be acted over
> In [states] unborn and accents yet unknown!
> *Bru.* How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport,
> That now on Pompey's basis [lies] along
> No worthier than the dust![8]

We have been watching, entranced, as the greatest man in the world is struck down. What we are seeing, we have told ourselves, is History in the Making. We are watching one of the pivotal moments in the Development of Civilization. But no, Shakespeare gently reminds us. We are not watching History. We are watching a *play*. It is all "make believe," we suddenly realize—and no longer are we simply watching a play. We are also watching ourselves watch a play, and this sudden shift into a higher mode of consciousness forces us to reconsider our whole relationship to what is happening on the stage. The new metadramatic consciousness cuts two ways. The actors on the stage, we are now forced to recognize, are just that: actors. But what of the historical Brutus and Cassius themselves? Weren't they too "actors"? Weren't they merely playing the roles and speaking the lines that someone (God? History?) had prescribed for them? As we begin to ask our selves these questions, we ourselves, our "real" lives, are absorbed into the ongoing drama. We have come to the theater to watch an imitation of the action: the killing of Caesar. But if the distinction between the imitation and the action blurs, then our status becomes problematic. Are we spectators of or participants in this act? To what extent am I myself a reincarnation of Brutus or of Cassius, the man of good will and the egotist, both futilely struggling to impose their wills on history? Or of Caesar, the victim who lies bleeding on the stage? What is the historical significance of my decision to come to a theater and watch this event re-enacted? Will my own "real" actions within history be changed by my watching these "illusory" events in the theater? These are at least a few of the questions that Shakespeare, by shifting from a dramatic to a metadramatic perspective at this moment in the play, forces me to confront.

"Meta-artistic" moments can occur in any art form, and the metadramatic moment in *Julius Caesar* which I have here described can serve as a model of all such moments. At a "meta-artistic" moment, we are forced to become conscious of the artifice of art. Our impulse to grant the artist a willing suspension of disbelief is here thwarted. Instead the artist forces us to become conscious of the process of suspension of disbelief, to watch ourselves assuming an "as if," a "make-believe" posture. The anthropologist Gregory Bateson has suggested that the very possibility of play among humans or animals depends upon our capacity to communicate, along with our actions (the nips which a mother dog gives her puppies, for example), a secondary message ("this is play—these aren't real bites, but play bites").[9] Art is, it is useful to remember, a form of play—a game. (The double meaning of our word "play" preserves the connection between the artistic and the athletic performance.) Games, unlike wars, demand that all participants agree to abide by certain rules. The players and umpires in a baseball game all agree to call any ball that falls inside the foul line a "fair ball," and any ball that falls outside this line a "foul ball." There is no "objective" reason for locating the foul line at one place rather than another. But the batter whose hit falls a few feet outside the foul line never complains that the location of the foul line is arbitrary. Instead the location of the foul line is a "given," a convention of the game; and the participants agree to accept this convention because they know that it is only their acceptance of the rules of the game that makes the game possible. Yet the placement of the foul line *is* arbitrary; it can be changed, by a mutual agreement of all participants. In-

deed, from time to time the rules even of baseball *are* changed—cf., for example, the creation of the designated hitter rule. (When we temporarily suspend play so that we can discuss—and perhaps revise—the rules of the game, we have entered, Bateson suggests, the realm of "metaplay.") In a game, it would thus appear, rules are simultaneously *constitutive* and *contingent*. Without rules there is no game; but the rules themselves are, not objective "facts," but social conventions which come into being only through a tacit agreement among the participants in the game. Artistic events too, like athletic events, demand that we accept as binding certain conventions which are in fact arbitrary. As the lights dim in the theater, we agree to believe that an area of varnished boards walled by cardboard columns is "really" the Forum in Rome, that an aging, narcissistic alcoholic from Cleveland is "really" Julius Caesar, etc. This suspension of disbelief results from a tacit collusion between playwright, actor, and audience. Yet the rules of the theatrical enterprise, like the rules of any other game, are in fact arbitrary and subject to change. Indeed, it is the very contingency of these rules that makes art "art"—rather than "life." In "normal" art, the "fictionality" is assumed, a given; secure in the knowledge that we all know that this is just a game, we surrender ourselves to this illusion of "reality." At "meta-moments," however, the artist forces us to become *conscious* of the rules of the game, and to recognize that these rules are contingent; and at these moments our attention is focussed on the rules themselves, and on the possibility that the current rules might well give way to a new set of rules.

Basically, artists can create a "meta-artistic" consciousness in one of two ways. Perhaps the most common is the "play-within-a-play" technique. By having the characters within a play watch a play, or by having a character in a fiction create a fiction of his own, or by painting a picture of a painter painting a picture, the artist reminds us that the work of art itself is not a natural phenomenon, but something made by a human being, who might well have decided to make it differently. By this means too, the artist enables us to realize our own role in the artistic process; for we must

collaborate in the creation of the rules of the game or there is no game, and without a tacit collusion between artist and audience there can be no work of art. If we cease to agree on the rules, moreover, play must immediately be suspended; and the play-within-a-play is in some respects a conference between playwright and audience to re-establish the rules of the game, so the game can continue. Meta-artistic effects can also be achieved by bringing the playwright on stage, by having him (or the actors) move out among the audience, or by permitting the members of the audience to participate in the shaping of the drama. At this point "art" dissolves into the "happening." Both the play-within-a-play and the happening force us to revise our usual expectations about the relationship between "art" and "life." In general, we expect the work of art to have a frame around it: the covers of the book, the proscenium arch of the theater stage, the wooden frame surrounding the painting. But in meta-art we are prevented from making such an easy separation of art and life. In the happening, the frame is simply destroyed. In the play-within-a-play, our attention is directed toward the frame, and we are reminded of the contingent status of the frame: the decision (a co-operative decision, I should remind you) to establish these rules rather than some others, to place the frame at this spot rather than another, to agree that this sort of thing should happen within the frame—all these decisions are contingent. If cultural, social and economic conditions had been different, we realize, then the frame would have been different. But both the play-within-a-play and the happening issue in the same result: they evoke in us a consciousness of the contingency of the artistic structure, and it is this awareness of contingency which seems to me the primary difference between meta-art and more "normal" kinds of art. The first great epoch of meta-art was the period from 1550 to 1650, and I believe we are currently in another such epoch today. In the plays of Shakespeare and Calderón, the dramatist repeatedly confers with his audience about the rules of the game. Neither the playwright nor the audience assumes that the rules are simply given, but they are both committed to the notion that the game must go on. The same could be

said, I believe, of the writings of Borges, Nabokov, Barth, Coover, etc. One of the major cultural forms of the last three centuries has been fiction in general and the novel in particular. But the rules of the fiction game have become increasingly problematic in the last half-century. Apparently the time has come to revise the rules—or perhaps even to abandon this game and devise a new set of rules, which will define a new kind of game. Rather than simply turning out novels in the assumption that we are in a business-as-usual situation, writers like Borges have urgently invited us to confer with them about the rules of the game. They do so through the medium of metafiction, and it is to the achievements of Borges as a creator of metafiction that I shall now turn.

II

Just as the metadramatic moment evokes in us an awareness of the problematic relationship between the audience and the dramatic event, so the metafiction of Jorge Luis Borges gives us a new awareness of the rules of the "fiction game." The great social realists of the 19th century—Stendhal and Flaubert, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky—claimed to offer us "reality." To maintain an illusion of life, they painstakingly labored to conceal their art. In contrast, Borges ostentatiously refuses to give us "reality." Rather he offers us made up things—"*ficciones*." And he demands that we recognize them as such—that we see the artist's hand at work upon his materials. It is also significant that Borges refuses to write novels—before his time the supreme form of fiction. From Balzac to Joyce, the novel grew vaster and vaster, as it frantically sought to encompass all of reality. But Borges ironically demonstrates for us the futility of the novelistic enterprise by creating carefully crafted mini-fictions which seek infinity, not by expansion, but by contraction toward the Aleph, that single point which includes all space. Finally, and most significantly, Borges is a metafictionist in his persistent concern with the problematic relationship between essence and existence, between the world as known by (or re-created in) the mind and "reality" as it exists (if it exists) apart from any

knowing subject. Borges's concern with such recondite matters may seem to justify Robert Alter's suggestion that he is more a creator of metaphysical puzzles than a writer of fiction.[10] But art, especially literature, is to Borges the primary way in which consciousness gives form to itself, and so all of Borges's explorations of the relationship between consciousness and "reality" are also, by implication at least, attempts to elucidate the relationship between art and "reality." Thus the problems at issue even in Borges's most esoteric stories are not only metaphysical but also metafictional.

A good case in point is "Funes the Memorious." This story invites us to contemplate the idea of a mind that knows everything and can forget nothing, a mind that is co-extensive with the world:

> Locke, in the seventeenth century, postulated (and rejected) an impossible language in which each individual thing, each stone, each bird and each branch, would have its own name; Funes once projected an analogous language, but discarded it because it seemed too general to him, too ambiguous. In fact, Funes remembered not only every leaf of every tree of every wood, but also every one of the times he had perceived or imagined it.[11]

Initially, Funes seems to us an object of envy: he has carried to its limit one of our human potentialities. He has transformed all that exists into a green thought in a green shade—or perhaps a grey thought in a grey shade. By so doing, he has made "reality" a redundant excrescence, and he has achieved for himself a God-like autonomy. On the metafictional level we might see Funes as the supreme novelist. For the mind of Funes has achieved the goal toward which all realistic fiction aspires—it is (to borrow Stendhal's metaphor) a mirror walking down a road, but a mirror so vast that it is able to reflect, at an instant, all that exists. But gradually, as the story proceeds, Borges reveals to us the horror of total awareness. The mind of Funes, indeed, is no crystal mirror; rather it is a "garbage heap," and the multitudinous weight of existence in the end crushes not only the mind but also the life of Funes:

> With no effort, he had learned English, French, Portuguese and Latin. I suspect, however, that he was not very capable

> of thought. To think is to forget differences, generalize, make abstractions. In the teeming world of Funes, there were only details, almost immediate in their presence (*Labyrinths*, p. 66).

Overwhelmed by the immediacy of the world, Funes dies, appropriately of "congestion." What the story of Funes offers us is an ironic acceptance of our limits, a realization that it is precisely the *failure* of our attempts to encompass the world within our heads—or within our fictions—that makes our existence endurable. Those who desire to "expand" their consciousness should take this warning to heart. For it may be that we are most human in those moments when we accept our limits—when rather than seeking to draw the world into our heads, we refuse to know, and instead offer to the multifarious splendor of What Is the homage of our ignorance.

In "The Library of Babel" Borges develops a similar theme, as he directs our attention to the hubris that is implicit in the act of creating a book—any book. For a book, by its very nature, seeks to *be* the world, and in this story Borges reveals to us how oppressive a world made solely of words would be. "The universe (which others call the Library) . . ." (*Labyrinths*, p. 51)—so begins this memorable story, and immediately we find ourselves in a territory where the tension between word and world has vanished. Rather the verbal universe has become the only universe, and "reality" is the sum total of all possible verbal combinations:

> . . . the Library is total and . . . its shelves register all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols (a number which, though extremely vast, is not infinite): in other words, all that is given to express, in all languages. Everything: the minutely detailed history of the future, the archangels' autobiographies, the faithful catalogue of the Library, thousands and thousands of false catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of those catalogues, the Gnostic gospel of Basilides, the commentary on that gospel, the commentary on the commentary on that gospel, the true story of your death, the translation of every book in all languages, the interpolations of every book in all books (*Labyrinths*, p. 54).

This universe is governed by rules: the "laws" of grammar.

But simply because the verbal world has here become the *only* world, any possibility of recognizing these rules as contingent has vanished. If we cease to play the game by the rules, then the universe itself will disappear. (Or, more precisely, the very questioning of the rules, because it must take place in language, merely confirms the inescapability of these rules.) Again Borges's aim seems to me ironic. The sub-sub-librarian who narrates this story is trapped within a labyrinth, but a reading of this story forces us toward a recognition of our own freedom. We remain trapped within the structure of language (or of any other cultural form) only as long as we see this structure as inevitable and eternal. By reducing to nightmare the human desire to substitute a verbal for a "real" world, Borges evokes in us a sense that the cultural worlds in which we must all, perforce, live are as much prisons as habitations. But the very realization that we live in such a man-made world permits us to see the structure of this world as contingent. That is, as soon as we see this structure as something which we have, collectively, made, then we also realize that we can (if only collectively) change it; and at this moment we are, if not liberated *from* the labyrinth, at least liberated *to* make it our home.

But Borges's supreme metafiction is surely "Tlön, Uqbar, and Orbis Tertius": for no text of our times has done more to illuminate the problematic inter-relationship between the writer and the text, between the reader and the text, and between the writer and the reader. The story begins by invoking, in the first sentence, a mirror (which should once again remind us of Steindhal's definition of the novel) and an encyclopedia (the very model of the book that seeks to encompass the world). Between the mirror and the encyclopedia, Borges and Bioy Casares are, appropriately enough, discussing "the composition of a novel" (*Labyrinths*, p. 3). As the night proceeds Borges and Bioy Casares discover that mirrors "have something monstrous about them"; and as the story proceeds, we learn that encyclopedias also are monstrous. For encyclopedias, while claiming to assemble all truth, in fact lie, and they have the disquieting power to spawn other encyclopedias. (The encyclopedia on Borges's

shelf "is fallaciously called *The Anglo-American Cyclopaedia* (New York, 1917) and is a literal but delinquent reprint of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* of 1902" (*Labyrinths*, p. 3)). In the course of the story, as everyone knows, this same pirated encyclopedia gives birth to a verbal fragment (the article on Uqbar in Bioy Casares's copy of the encyclopedia) which gradually takes over all "reality." The subject of Borges's story is thus the struggle between the text and the world, a struggle which Borges's own text dramatizes in a variety of ways. In the story, the text (the Encyclopedia) wins; but Borges himself refuses to claim for his own text a similar victory, and therein lies the power and grace of this remarkable story. One way Borges here brings home to us the problematic status of the text is by creating an infinite regression of texts within texts: in Borges's text we find an encyclopedia which contains Uqbar; and Uqbar, itself a fantasy world, has a literature which "never [refers] to reality, but to the two imaginary regions of Mlejnas and Tlön" (*Labyrinths*, p. 5). As for Tlön itself, two qualities of its civilization especially deserve our attention. First, in it "reality" is explicitly created by language: some inhabitants of Tlön speak a language composed wholly of nouns, while others speak a language of verbs, and these two groups obviously inhabit different "realities." Second, on Tlön *all* modes of thought are fictions; every philosophy is "by definition a dialectical game, a *Philosophie Des Als Ob* . . . ." (*Labyrinths*, p. 10). These details force us to reflect on the status of Borges's own text, which we now see as, not a "reflection" of "reality," but an act which creates a new "reality." We (and Borges) learn about Tlön from the *Encyclopedia of Tlön*, which in the course of the story gradually supplants the "real" world. In his description of the development of this encyclopedia, Borges once again brings home to us the insatiable desire of the human imagination (and specifically of language) to incorporate into itself all that exists. Soon, the narrator prophesies on the last page, "The world will be Tlön" (*Labyrinths*, p. 18). But this nightmare vision is, for us, a liberation. Borges's text, we may be confident, will never impose itself upon us the way the *Encyclopedia of Tlön* imposed

itself on the world. Moreover, by evoking, ironically, this peril, Borges has innoculated us against all future threats of "creeping textualism." Can we, after reading this story, ever again naively surrender ourselves to a novelist's vision of reality? I think not. For Borges has taught us to see the text (his texts, and all texts), not as something fixed, immoveable, "real," but as a *made* object, as something we have helped make—as, in short, contingent.

For a final example of Borgesian metafiction, I would like to turn to "The Aleph," a story which not only examines once again the problematics of consciousness, but also offers us specifically a *problematique* of the literary text. The Aleph itself, a point in space that contains within itself all space, is a symbol of the mind—that "ocean" in which each (material) thing "straight its own (immaterial) resemblance finds."[13] As in "Funes the Memorious," the weight of all the world is here a potentially crushing burden; but in the Aleph the "unimaginable universe" becomes a wondrous mystery. Including as it does everything within itself, the Aleph necessarily includes itself, and Borges himself, the text he is creating, and the reader of that text. "I saw the Aleph from every point and angle," the narrator tells the reader, "and in the Aleph I saw the earth and in the earth the Aleph and in the Aleph the earth; I saw my own face and my own bowels; I saw your face . . . ."[14] But as a symbol of the mind, the Aleph also necessarily represents all those concrete forms, including the literary text, in which the mind gives form to itself. Indeed, Borges implies, every literary text aspires to become an Aleph. Carlos Argentino Daneri, the poet who tells Borges of the Aleph and finally permits him to see it, derives his poetic inspriation from the Aleph. Daneri is at work on a monstrous poem titled, simply, *The Earth*. In this poem, Daneri is creating, with the assistance of the Aleph, nothing less than a poetic description of the entire planet. Necessarily, this work remains fragmentary:

> Daneri had in mind to set to verse the entire face of the planet, and, by 1941, had already displaced a number of acres of the State of Queensland, nearly a mile of the course run by the River Ob, a gasworks to the north of

> Veracruz, the leading shops in the Buenos Aires parish of Concepcion, the villa of Mariana Cambaceres de Alvear in the Belgrano section of the Argentine capital, and a Turkish baths establishment not far from the well-known Brighton Aquarium (*The Aleph*, p. 7).

If completed, we realize, such a poem would necessarily be as large as the earth itself; and thus Borges once again forces upon us an ironic realization that the verbal and the "real" universes are incommensurable. But there is more than one kind of irony at work in this story. Another set of ironies revolves around the narrator of the story. This narrator, a fictional "Borges," is a pseudo-Dante who has developed a sentimental cult around the dead Beatriz Viterbo, a cousin of Daneri. "Borges" has only contempt for Daneri's poetic efforts, but "Borges" himself is also clearly incapable of creating his own verbal cosmos, his divine or secular comedy. And by the end of the story we suspect that Daneri, despite his inadequacies, is probably a better writer than "Borges." Daneri's ability to create a verbal universe (even a fragmentary one) may manifest a certain crude, even obtuse dimension to his character. But if the alternative is the feeble aestheticism and petty spitefulness of "Borges," we are likely to choose Daneri. The story thus defines for us two equally "impossible" literary alternatives. The vast poem that Daneri is creating, seeking as it does to encompass all reality, is a futile dream. Daneri is, perhaps, a kind of Argentine Tolstoy, a super-realist, and as we watch Daneri's artistic struggles (and his ultimate degeneration into a creator of patriotic myths) we perceive the futility of artistic "realism." But the mini-fictions of Borges, including "The Aleph" itself, are equally inadequate to the splendor or the Great I Am-as Borges reveals by his ironic undercutting of "Borges," the fictional narrator, who writes Borgesian books with titles like *The Sharper's Cards*. Thus once again we are left with the sense that all our efforts to give final form to the world must end in failure, simply because all the structures of consciousness are contingent.

Stories like "The Aleph" seem designed to self-destruct. Apparently they establish a formal structure only to explode

it. Nevertheless we cannot escape the suspicion that this and the other stories here discussed also offer us, however ironically, a new kind of structure: a "metastructure," a structure of consciousness which contains within itself its own negation. And the creation of such metastructures is, I would again assert, the artistic enterprise that has chiefly engaged Borges throughout his career. Nor is Borges alone among modern writers in his devotion to the metafictional mode. For the stories by Borges I have here discussed, I could easily have substituted other examples of metafiction by writers like Barth, Pynchon, Barthelme, and Gass from America, Landolfi and Calvino from Italy, Robbe-Grillet and Butor from France, García Márquez and Cortázor from Latin America—and, I suspect, innumerable writers whose works I have not read. Among older writers, I should add, the work of such august figures as Gide, Broch, and even Kafka also points forward, at least occasionally, to the practice of contemporary metafictionists. The work of all these writers lends credence to my contention that metafiction is the characteristic literary mode of our time. Why do these writers impose upon us their labyrinthine, sometimes willfully perverse metafictions? Why are they unwilling or unable to write ordinary novels? It is to these broader questions that I wish, now, to turn.

III

To understand the broader implications of the shift from "normal" fiction to metafiction, we must be willing to recognize the ways in which the history of literature is related to the history of society as a whole. In the western world fiction was from the late 17th century to the 20th century essentially a commodity; and the emergence of metafiction as a dominant mode augers, I believe, the impending end of fiction writing as a form of commodity production. In the bourgeois epoch, all the arts have been integrated into the commodity system of production, some more perfectly than others. Poetry was never more than partly integrated into

the commodity system; but Defoe and his successors early demonstrated that fiction-writing could be a commercially viable enterprise. Ever since, novelists have generally seen themselves, and have usually been regarded by other people, as manufacturers of commodities. The reader, in turn, has been essentially a consumer. The reader's role, the economics of literature has assumed, is passive. He influences the fiction market by the consumer choices he is theoretically free to make; but the novelist has been the sole owner and proprietor of his fictional world. Indeed, it has been precisely that world which the consumer has, generally, been "buying." This notion that the primary function of the novelist is to create an alternative world has been clearly articulated by Wellek and Warren, in their *Theory of Literature*:

> But the novelist offers less a . . . character or event . . . than a world. The great novelists all have such a world—recognizable as overlapping the empirical world but distinct in its self-coherent intelligibility. Sometimes it is a world which can be mapped out in some area of the globe—like Trollope's counties and cathedral towns, Hardy's Wessex; but sometimes—as with Poe—it is not: Poet's horrendous castles are not in Germany or Virginia but in the soul. Dickens' world can be identified with London; Kafka's with old Prague: but both worlds are so "projected," so creative and created and hereafter recognized in the empirical world as Dickens characters and Kafka situations that the identification seems rather irrelevant.
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> This world or *Kosmos* of a novelist—this pattern or structure or organism, which includes plot, characters, setting, world-view, "tone"—is what we must scrutinize when we attempt to compare a novel with life or to judge, ethically or socially, a novelist's work. The truth to life, or "reality," is no more to be judged by the factual accuracy of this or that detail than the moral judgment is to be passed, as Boston censors pass it, on whether specific sexual or blasphemous words occur within a novel. The soundly critical appeal is to the whole fictional world in comparison with our own experienced and imagined world, commonly less integrated than that of the novelist. We are content to call a novelist great when his world, though not patterned or scaled like our own, is comprehensive of all the elements which we find necessary to catholic scope or, though narrow in scope, selects for inclusion the deep and central, and when the scale or hierarchy of elements seems to us such as a mature man can entertain.[15]

What makes the work of Borges and his successors revolutionary is their *refusal* to construct such self-contained worlds. They reject the idea that the novelist's job is to offer a self-contained world to a passive world-consumer, and thereby they have opened up the possibility of a radically new kind of relationship between the writer and the reader.

If, after reading Borges, we attempt again to read traditional fiction, we begin to realize that the surrender to illusion demanded by writers like Flaubert was a profoundly alienated and alienating experience. The traditional novel offered us perhaps the most richly saturated mode of language ever devised, but it also established a sharper distinction between the status of the "wordsmith" and that of the reader than any other literary form. We can enter the novelist's world, but it remains his world. We are not participants in but passive spectators of his creative act. And that act itself is a creation *ex nihilo*; like God, the novelist summons an entire world into being, and he then becomes a *deus absconditus* as he disappears behind his creation. But if the realistic novelist takes on quasi-divine (or quasi-satanic) powers, the reader of realistic fiction becomes merely an anonymous member of a mass public. The new artist caste which emerged at the beginning of the bourgeois epoch sought to seize control over the words of passion and precision and in general it succeeded. When we read Tolstoy or Flaubert or James, it is the novelist who speaks, while we listen. Insofar as we identify with the author, we may not directly experience our alienation while we are reading a novel. But the moment we awaken from the verbal dream, we are again overwhelmed by a sense of solitude and powerlessness. We sit alone, the closed book in our hands, and we cannot talk back—except, perhaps, by writing critical articles. For this reason I would describe novelists like Tolstoy and Flaubert and Joyce as "imperialists of the imagination." Each of these writers insists that *his* reality will be *our* reality—and each succeeds in

imposing his vision of things upon us. For many men and women of the last one hundred years (including myself), the worlds created by these writers—the worlds inhabited by Emma Bovary and Pierre Bezuhov and Leopold Bloom—have seemed more "real" than my own world. But the metafictionists have revealed that fiction need not necessarily demand that we deny the reality of our own lives to enter into these supremely "real" fictional worlds. "Who am I," a Borges modestly asks us, "to impose my world on you? After all, we are in the labyrinth together, and my perceptions of the labyrinth are in no sense privileged. They are no better than yours." This kind of authorial diffidence augers, I would propose, the end of the "imperial imagination," and thus an end to alienation. In refusing to create alternative worlds for us, Borges and his disciples are implicitly declaring that all worlds (the reader's along with the writer's) are limited, contingent, "broken." At this point writer and reader become—perhaps for the first time in the history of literature—truly equal.

If fictional realism has in our time arrived at its limits, one reason is that the great writers of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and early Twentieth Centuries worked through (or, if you like, "exhausted") the possibilities of traditional fiction. As we move from Richardson to Balzac, we see the novel struggling to encompass within itself ever larger dimensions of the world. *La Comédie Humaine* marks the climax—and in some respects the end—of the effort to create a fictional structure as large and as various as life itself. Some later novelists—Tolstoy, Zola, Romains, Dos Passos—sought to emulate Balzac. However, in the mid-nineteenth century Flaubert defined another alternative; for our sense that *Madame Bovary* gives us a "complete" world derives, not primarily from the scope of the novel, but from its formal perfection. Nevertheless the disciples both of Balzac and of Flaubert were pursuing the same goal: the creation of a fictional universe so complete that it would rival (and, indeed, perhaps replace) the "real" world. This sort of artistic imperialism reaches its climax in the books of a refugee from colonial Ireland, James Joyce. In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce has quite

literally attempted to absorb into a single linguistic act the totality of all that ever was or ever will be. With Joyce the ultimate limits of language also become clear. For while *Finnegans Wake* may absorb into itself more of existence than any other book ever written, the book itself becomes, ultimately, as enigmatic as the world. No-one, quite literally, can read *Finnegans Wake*. Instead we can only walk around it, poking it here and there, as we do the world. But we cannot enter into the book, nor can the book enter into us. If the function of language is to render the world intelligible, then the example of *Finnegans Wake* suggests that the closer language approximates to the total richness of existence, the more unintelligible language itself must become. Language, it is clear, cannot absorb being into itself; the book cannot supplant the world. Thus with *Finnegans Wake*, the great dream of a purely verbal world—the dream which had sustained the novel throughout its history—dissolves into nightmare. Where, after Joyce, can the novel go? Critics liked to ask this question in the 1930's and 1940's; and today it is clear that these critics were pointing to a real problem, and that the oft-proclaimed "death of the novel" has in fact occurred. But today the answer to this question is also clear. After Joyce dramatized the ultimate inability of language to encompass the world, the only direction in which fiction could move was to turn back upon itself, to become self-reflexive, to explore the significance of the fictive act itself—and, more broadly, to illuminate the meaning of the "supreme fiction," the labyrinth within which we all live, language itself. And this is the task to which Borges and his disciples have committed themselves.

The rise of metafiction can be in part explained as resulting from an exhaustion of the possibilities of realistic fiction, but the emergence of this new artistic tendency also seems to have some broader social implication. The great epochs of meta-art—i.e., the period from (roughly) 1580 to 1650, and the period from 1930 until now—have been times of rapid social and cultural change. In times of relative social stability, we can generally accept cultural forms as a given. We dwell contentedly inside these forms, and we experience

them as fully adequate habitations of human consciousness. But when the social and economic bases of human life begin to shift, cultural forms (and in this category I include such institutions as "the theater") are also likely to become problematic. Such periods demand a good deal of metatalk, as we work at revising the rules of the various games (social, political, artistic) in terms of which we live our lives. The contemporary popularity of meta-art thus is symptomatic of a general social and cultural crisis. More specifically, the emergence of metafiction suggests that the novel, a cultural form which we once took for granted, has become problematic. And if we see the novel not only as an artistic form but as a social institution, it becomes apparent that the movement of the novel from the status of the "given" to the status of the "problematic" reflects some profound structural changes in our society as a whole. As Ian Watt argued several years ago, the novel is a distinctively bourgeois literary form.[16] It comes into being at the beginning of the bourgeois epoch, and it embodies bourgeois modes of thought and perception. Furthermore, the "economics of the novel" follows, as I have previously suggested, the normal pattern of entrepreneurial capitalism. The novelist packages his "world" and offers it for sale in the marketplace. The customer there buys this "world" and takes it home to consume it, privately, in a comfortable chair beside the fireplace. Given the distinctively bourgeois character of the novel, it is not surprising that the great age of the novel coincided with the most vigorous period of entrepreneurial capitalism. The great fictional world-builders of the 19th century found their counterparts in the powerfully energetic industrial world-builders of the same period—Carnegie, Rhodes, etc. But in the last fifty years the industrial "baron" has become an archaic phenomenon, as entrepreneurial capitalism has given way to the "organizational society." I use this phrase, rather than the term "monopoly capitalism," because this new social form does not seem distinctively capitalist in nature. Whether a modern institution is "public" (like a university) or "private" (like an oil or auto company) seems relatively unimporrant. For all large organizations place more emphasis on "team-play."

internal co-operation, than on aggressively competitive behavior. This new emphasis on structure, organization, and co-operation marks, I believe, the end of the bourgeois epoch. That the characteristic literary form of this epoch (the novel) should also be dying seems natural, even inevitable. The imperialist of the imagination, like his cousin the economic empire-builder, is disappearing from the stage of history. (The last American novelist to aspire to this role was Norman Mailer, and his troubled career illustrates how difficult it has become for any novelist to claim the imperial crown.) Instead we seem to be entering (however gropingly) an epoch of co-operative art. Hereafter, if we are to have any art at all, we will have an art that we make together, rather than an art that is offered to us as a commodity to be consumed. The new art still manifests itself primarily in negative forms, as successive waves of the avant-garde hack away at the vestiges of traditional art forms. Both implicit in the refusal of the Living Theater troupe to "make plays," or the refusal of John Cage to "make music," or the refusal of Borges to "make a world" is a hidden invitation: an invitation to begin, co-operatively, to make a new world—a world that will be, not Ibsen's or Wagner's or Tolstoy's, but our own.

Borges and the other metafictionists will not let us remain passive spectators of their artistic performances. Instead they insist that we recognize the contingency of their worlds; and as we watch them make their (tentative, crumbling) worlds we learn to recognize the ways in which all of us, all the time, are making our own worlds (worlds that are, if we are wise are also, tentative). We can't simply "read" Borges. Instead we must become his collaborator. Thus by refusing to assume the privileged stance of the traditional novelist Borges and his disciples force us to recognize our own freedom and our own responsibility to join in the collective, continuous act of world creation which constitutes the history of consciousness. In the work of Borges and other recent metafictionalists, dialogue begins to emerge within that linguistic medium—i.e., the printed text—which has heretofore most vigorously repressed any sense of language as a reciprocal exchange between equals. If the work of these writers testifies

to the "death of the novel," then, it also affirms the continued vitality of the word, and it points us toward new territories of linguistic experience which we have as yet scarcely begun to explore. The works of these writers open out new possibilities of fiction as collaboration between reader and writer. They also evoke, however dimly, the prospect that live, vigorous, creative language—the words of power and precision will someday leave the printed page and become operative within our lives, so that we will *all* be artists. At this moment art will disappear, as all life becomes art. Thus not only does the work of the metafictionist tell us something about the future of literature, but it also suggests something about where our civilization itself may be moving. Implicit in the Borgesian enterprise is a vision of a world in which every speech act will be implicitly self-reflexive, and in which all our actions will be permeated by a sense of the contingency of the formal structures within which we live our lives. It might seem that the end result of this enterprise can only be a debilitating relativism—that this sense of contingency will in the end so paralyze us that we will become incapable of any sort of action. But I believe the opposite is in fact true: once we are liberated from the dogmatic belief that one picture of the universe is "right" and all the others "wrong," we are free to discover our common humanity. Truth exists, we can now recognize, not in this set of statements or in that, but in an ongoing discourse; and the realization that our primary commitment is to the process of the search for truth and that truth itself exists only within what this process offers us, I believe, a new freedom. The discovery that "reality" is something that we are, collectively, making is dizzying, but freedom is always dizzying. The metafictions of Borges are designed to make us dizzy; but they also offer us the gift of freedom, if we have the courage to take it.

NOTES

1. Cf. John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," *Atlantic Monthly*, 220 (August 1967), 29-34; and John O. Stark, *The Literature of Exhaustion: Borges, Nakokov, and Barth* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1974).
2. *The Fabulators* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).
3. *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (New York: Knoph, 1970), pp. 24-25.
4. Scholes, "Metafiction," *Iowa Review*, 1 (1970), 106. In addition to popularizing the concept of "metafiction," Scholes has also consistently affirmed the central role occupied by Borges in modern letters. (Scholes's fullest commentary on Borges to date is "The Reality of Borges," in *Fabulation and Metafiction* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979], pp. 9-20). Although Scholes has offered important commentaries both on Borges and on metafiction, however, he has been reluctant to link these two concerns. Generally, he seems to see Borges as a "pre-metafictionist," a precursor of such true metafictionists as Coover, Barth, and Gass. In the "Metafiction" article, for example, he describes Coover, Gass, *et al.* as "working in [the] rarefied air of metafiction, trying to climb beyond Beckett and Borges . . ." (p. 115). In contrast, I see Borges as a fully developed metafictionist; and I am not convinced that Coover and Gass have gone "beyond" Borges in any way.
5. "Robert Coover, Metafiction, and Freedom," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 22 (1976), 211.
6. "Linguistics and Poetics," *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1960), p. 356.
7. James L. Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971) and Lionel Abel, *Metatheater: A New View of Dramatic Form* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963).
8. Text from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, *et al.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p. 1118.
9. "The Message 'This is Play,' " *Group Processes: Transactions of the Second Conference*, ed. Bertram Schaffner (New York: Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation, 1956), p. 158.
10. Robert Alter, *Partia Magic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 227.
11. *Labyrinths*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions), p. 65.
12. Both this and the other stories by Borges here examined have generally been treated by critics as explorations of metaphysical problems. For example, both Ana Maria Barrenechea *Borges the Labyrinth Maker* (New York: New York University Press, 1965) and Carter Wheelock, *The Mythmaker: A Study of Motif and Symbol in the Short Stories of Jorge Luis Borges* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969) discuss all

four of the stories which I here examine; and both critics focus on the way these stories dramatize certain metaphysical dilemmas (the relationship of the microcosm to the macrocosm, the relationship of the finite to the infinite, etc.). At least one critic has, however, recognized the metafictional implications of Borges's art: Ronald Christ, in *The Narrow Act* (New York: New York University Press, 1969). And Christ quotes a perceptive comment by Maurice Jean Lefebve, which sums up the point that I am here seeking to elaborate:

> Who does not see that each of Borges's stories, each of his short essays is an Aleph of the dream world? In concentrating an indefinite multiplicity of acts, suggestion and sensation onto a narrow textual surface, in pursuing enumeration with a taste for the eternal [sic], as well as in making each story capable of reflecting itself (in the way facing mirrors do), the author opens our minds to a vertigo, to a problematic and inexhaustible magic, which is what one properly calls literature. (quoted by Christ, p. 11).

13. Andrew Marvell, "The Garden."
14. *The Aleph and Other Stories*, ed. and trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (New York: Bantam, 1971), p. 14.
15. *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harvest Books, 1956), pp. 203-4.
16. *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

SOME NOTES ON "PIERRE MENARD"

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One of the Borges texts that has always perplexed me the most, that has drawn me back to it most often and most often insinuated itself into other readings, is "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*". Its force was especially strong when I worked my way repeatedly through Roland Barthes' *S/Z*, which now seems to me a set of Menardian "writings" of Balzac's tale, and it was also strong when I pieced together for myself one of the common pretexts for Barthes and other post-structuralists: the drafts and fragments of Nietzsche known as *The Will to Power*. What I offer now are some notes on "Pierre Menard...," in the light of those readings and rereadings. Though I cite the word at one point, I am not talking about "influence." I have no conclusions; eventually, my notes will just stop.

"Pierre Menard..." sets forth the paradox that Menard, a French Symbolist, has written (not transcribed, but produced independently) some fragments of *Don Quixote* which are identical in wording to Cervantes' text and yet totally different and much richer in meaning. How are we to understand this? The simplest way would be to replace the verb "write" with "read": Pierre Menard *reads* the *Quixote* so carefully, so resourcefully, that he leaves every word in place but accounts for it according to his Symbolist way of thinking, hence the simultaneous "sameness" and "difference." This would domesticate some of the strangeness and, in the process, generally and plausibly assimilate this text to the

current post-structuralist view that reading and writing are aspects of the same activity: to write a text is to offer a reading of one or more previous texts, to read a text is to write or trace in mind and memory one or more subsequent texts, neither aspect being separable from an ongoing universal network—or textwork—of signs which traverse both readers and writers and are always "already there" and other than themselves. See, for example, Barthes' statement in *S/Z* that "I write my reading" and the whole section—entitled "Reading, Forgetting"—where it is found.

But such a replacement of verbs only transposes the strangeness (to this post-structuralist view as well as to the Menardian writing one could apply what Borges once said about the idealism of Berkeley: "to understand it is easy; what is difficult is to think within its limits") and, besides, it neglects the surprising strategy with which Borges unfolds his text. Cast in the guise of a commentary, "Pierre Menard ..." thoroughly confounds the premises of all traditional commentary: that the author has authority and priority, that the reader's status is subsequent and subservient, and that a text has distinct boundaries and consistency and an ultimately representational—i.e., truthful—nature. Menard's commentator suggests in his last paragraph that Menard's *Don Quixote* is perhaps *unintentionally* a reading, as if he—the commentator—were adding an afterthought and as if the super-lucid Menard had not always calculated the furthest consequences of his moves: a suggestion reminiscent of the closing remark of "Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain," about offering the vain and absent-minded reader deliberately imperfect plots, so he can think *he* invented them. Who is the vain reader here, Menard's commentator or us? The commentator certainly begins as one, opening with his pedantic, bigoted and racist claims to possess the only truth about Menard's work. But what happens along the way, where has our snob gone by the end, when his commentary calmly and ecumenically proposes we read the *De imitatione Christi* as if it had been written by the anti-Semite Céline or the renegade Catholic Joyce? This, then, would be the "truth" of Menard's work: the truth of the "deliberate anachronism and the

erroneous attribution...whose applications are infinite," the truth of the reversible commentary and commentator (like Menard's article on chess, like his opinion of Valéry and—possibly—of the dear Countess of Bagnoregio as well), the truth of identical yet totally different passages on truth laid side by side, the truth of "reconstructing" Menard's destroyed notebooks (an abyss that might be no deeper than the gaps between each word of *Don Quixote* that Menard reasoned together), the truth of any reading—any text—we can devise with these elements, instantly other, instantly given over to an endless play of permutations. This is more than perplexity, more than strangeness, and a dire corrective for academic note takers.

Another question: why the combination of a French Symbolist and *Don Quixote*? As for a sense of the Symbolist, consider Valéry's "Lettre sur Mallarme" the pursuit of the totally significant text, calculated and revised and rerevised in every detail, seeking to make each poem "a marvel of reciprocal combinations," "a balance of intrinsic forces," and moving toward the formulation of the principles of all texts, of all systems of ideas; the rigorous avoidance of all facility, all readymade solutions, valuing the relentless effort and lucidity of the writer as martyr more than the work itself, which may exist only negatively amid endless drafts and in an ideal of unattainable perfection ("an atrocious and dangerous idea for Literature," Valéry casually observes). To be sure, Menard signifies not only an extreme instance of these endeavors but also their parody: such efforts to disappear into a few fragments of an existing and alien text! The catalogue of his "visible" work exhibits the same ambiguity, the same instability. On the one hand, we see in it his repeated study of the most general systems of permutability, of *translation* in the broadest sense (projects for universal languages, Boole's symbolic logic, Leibniz's *Characteristica universalis*, Llull's *Ars magna generalis*, the theory of chess, the other than logical patterns governing prose, and the perennially variable arguments against Zeno's paradox, which negates all progressions by endlessly *expanding* them). On the other hand, we see in the catalogue Menard's

undoing of one of Symbolism's most cherished and arduous products by turning against it its own method (Valéry strove to make his *Cimitière marin* a necessary elaboration of the underdeveloped decasyllable, "to raise this *Ten* to the power of *Twelve*," and weave into its texture with equal necessity and elaboration "the most constant themes of my emotional and intellectual life"; Menard perversely transposes it all into alexandrines). And, finally, we also see in the catalogue Menard's undoing of his own "visible" work into invisibility: the literal translation of Quevedo's literal translation of St. Francis of Sales, so "literal" that it can't be found. What catalogue can survive items like that?

Now, why *Don Quixote* and how alien is it? It is a novel, of course, and we know what Valéry said about novels; it is also a vast sprawling novel in mingled styles, completely at variance with Symbolist tenets of concision, unity and decorum. In that sense it is like a random piece of reality, a chaotic *donnée*, to be passed through Symbolist grids and given order and "necessity." But, again, even though the Symbolists were fond of challenges, what a monstrously parodistic notion: the total organization of *Don Quixote*, down to the last word, after the fashion of a poem by Mallarmé!

Menard sees the *Quixote* as "contingent," as "unnecessary;" therefore, he can write it without "falling into a tautology." At the same time, it "interests him deeply," though he doesn't say why. Would this be precisely because of its contingency or because the *Quixote* is also a permutation of texts, a parodistic translation and extension of other novels, a compendium and critique, a book of books? But, after asking these questions, I suspect that, in "Pierre Menard....," Cervantes' novel cannot be exclusively one thing or another, any more than the commentator's discourse can. At one point, it is said that Menard did not look at the chapters he "wrote" and, at another point, that he *used* them to control his variants. This indeterminacy, by the way, seems not unlike that of Barthes' definition, in *S/Z*, of "writerly" and "readerly" texts, to which I will return in a moment.

It is interesting to note, however, which chapters Menard "essayed." All are in the first part: chapter nine, where

the story is broken off, while Cide Hamete Benengeli's manuscript is found and translated; chapter thirty-eight, the discourse on arms and letters; and a fragment—we don't know which—of twenty-two, the incident with the galley slaves. All involve translation of some kind: the debate on arms and letters coordinates two arguments, two languages, precisely in order to favor one over the other, and the galley slaves' jargon must be explained to Don Quixote. All involve as well some interruption of narrative: in chapter twenty-two, Ginés de Pasamonte says his autobiographical novel isn't finished yet because his life isn't finished, an ironic parallel to Menard and his fragmentary writing, for the completion of which he claimed he should merely need to be immortal. More than a direct correspondence between Menard's "visible" work and *Don Quixote*, these parallels imply an analogy of process, a set of variations or chain of readings in *Don Quixote* being continued by Menard, according to a productive rather than a mimetic model. But it is well to note a further paradox: Menard's writing of *Don Quixote* tends toward a totalization of its meaning, a multiple accounting for its every detail, an intensification of its status as a book, and yet, at the same time, it destroys the book as book and as narrative, not just because only a few fragments were done, but because the multiplicity of reasoning disperses even the smallest units in different directions. Consider just the commentator's gloss on Menard's version of the brief lines concerning "truth, whose mother is history" etc., which breaks them into both pragmatist and anti-pragmatist segments. Consider also how the commentator finds in another chapter never written by Menard echoes of his "style" and "voice," thus momentarily suggesting a virtual sense of completion in his fragments. But the reminiscence immediately finds another such echo in a line by Shakespeare, another author, another book: the process has no boundaries. In this perspective, there are no authors, no books. I am reminded of that remark in Derrida's *De la grammatologie* about how what he calls the "aphoristic" power of writing, of *écriture* (which is "reading" as well), disrupts and ultimately destroys the idea of the book as a natural totality. And, to return to my earlier point of

departure, I am also reminded of Barthes' insistence, in *S/Z*, that there is no totality of a text with respect to which any of our readings can be pertinent or impertinent, "right" or "wrong"; the validity of a reading lies in its systematic character, which, as Barthes says and "Pierre Menard..." vividly demonstrates, has no terminus. And, besides, we too—that is, our consciousness, our identity—are textually defined by the unknown and unknowable sum of all our readings and therefore we cannot stand outside the textual process and put limits on it: it has no origins either in us or elsewhere. Barthes states: "This 'I' which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost)." This would be another way of understanding Menard's catalogue of "visible" works: his "identity" is a list of texts on texts, shading off into "invisibility."

The possible nature of Menard's destroyed notes and drafts is suggested by this remark attributed to him:

> My solitary game is governed by two polar laws. The first permits me to essay variations of a formal or psychological type; the second obliges me to sacrifice those variations to the "original" text and reason out this annihilation in an irrefutable manner...

His worksheets, then, "lead" (or "return") to the words in the novel by some process of permutation, a process either implied by a set of drafts or made explicit in the form of a transformational argument (remember that the universal languages studied by Menard, such as Leibniz's *Characteristica universalis*, offer the means of translating any idea, any text, into any other). If such drafts or arguments were superimposed upon, or interpolated into, Cervantes' text, the result would resemble *S/Z*: the text of Balzac with Barthes' discussion interrupting it constantly, sometimes at every word, to show what sequence of reasoning, what code," accounts for this word, this sentence, this segment of discourse: how does one get from "this" to that," why is this different, why is that the same, why does this repeat? This is what Barthes calls a text in "slow motion" or what, in the language of mechanical drawings, could also be called an "exploded"

text: a text opened up at many points, read back and forth so as to deny its naturalness, to draw it out of its internal (and external) chronology and thereby to *interpret* it, which in Barthes' usage (I will mention another usage in a moment) does not mean giving the text some meaning or other but rather finding what kind of *plurality* it is made of. And this is what, on a small scale, we see in the scrutiny of Cervantes' and Menard's "identical" fragments on truth and history, the second "almost infinitely richer" than the first because of being "slowed down" and anachronistically read, rotating the key words "truth" and "history" this way and that.

Barthes postulates two extremes of permutability in literary texts: the "writerly" (*le scriptible*), which is that of total plurality, and the "readerly" (*le lisible*), which is that of total fixity. Two extremes that only exist in theory: in practice all texts are more or less one and the other. (At times, however, Barthes seems to suggest that texts are not "writerly" or "readerly" by virtue of inherent traits but rather by virtue of the way in which they are *read*: this is the indeterminacy I referred to earlier and can only mention now in passing.) Balzac's story "Sarrasine" has a limited plurality: the details and small segments of its text signify in terms of several alternating or simultaneous codes, but, predominantly, these are used to maintain certain conventions of representational—or "realistic"—sequentiality. Barthes repeatedly refers to the story's deceptively "natural" flow, to the devices used to make its discourse seem much more homogeneous than it really is.

By comparison, the text of "Pierre Menard..." is highly discursive, discontinuous and ridden with ellipses and shifts of perspective, small and large, one of the largest of which, as I pointed out earlier, is the reversible nature of the commentary itself. Perhaps, for Barthes, a highly plural text would be like Mallarmé's *Un coup de dès*. "Pierre Menard..." is not as "exploded" as that, but its plurality is great. One of its pluralizing features would be its play of metacommentary, which is not found even in *S/Z* itself. There is, furthermore, a deep gap or absence in "Pierre Menard...": the obliterated text(s) of Menard's drafts and notebooks, the nature of which is

only implied tangentially or metonymically, in terms of productive models. The notebooks, perhaps approaching the pure activity of variation that Barthes calls the triumphantly plural text, cannot be represented: they suggest endless conjectures. Barthes says that such a plural work "demolishes any criticism, which, as soon as it is produced, mingles with it." I think this is a good way of indicating what one feels in trying to write about "Pierre Menard...": it seems to anticipate and mock one's every move.

Now, in this fable of reading and writing called "Pierre Menard...," along with the paradoxes, the parody, the reversals and the absurd humor I've mentioned, there is to me something else that I can only name as *pathos*: a painful lucid determination to write with the force of exact coherence, in the face of death and annihilation, but only to have one's writing ground up in the universal machine of textuality, and no one knows to what end. This is a very frequent tone or quality in Borges, which does not appear, I think, in Derrida or Barthes, whatever the affinities between their thought and his, and not just because he is a "narrator" and they "philosophers" or "critics" ("Pierre Menard..." alone is sufficient to show how dubious those distinctions are), but it is found in what I called earlier a common pretext of theirs, Nietzsche, whose name, it so happens, appears in the text of "Pierre Menard...." And so I'd like to end my notes with a few remarks on that name, that citation, and a few contexts that it suggests.

When the commentator compares Menard's version of chapter thirty-eight with Cervantes', he mentions four possible interpretations for this Symbolist's surprising exaltation of arms over letters, the third of which (ascribed to the intriguing Baroness of Bacourt) is "the influence of Nie-tzsche," an opinion the commentator judges to be "irrefutable," though he modestly adds as the fourth interpretation that we should not forget how inclined Menard was to state ideas *opposite* to those he preferred. The layers of irony are so inextricable here (what possible meaning could the word "irrefutable" have in this text:) that it may seem senseless to single out a mere name for scrutiny. But let's try. Let's discard the

simple, all-too-simple notions of Nietzsche as vitalist or as self-contradictor. Let's trace a modestly Menardian graph (after all, Menard wrote on graph paper), using "Nietzsche" as one of its points (though I realize that no name, no word, is a single point). Another point would be the nearby noun "interpretation," so charged with Nietzschean connotations, and another, a page later, the adjective "nihilistic," similarly charged and also prominently placed, as follows:

> Fame is a form of incomprehension, perhaps the worst. There is nothing new in these nihilistic verifications; what is singular is the determination Menard derived from them.

And yet another point would be not a word but the last of the statements attributed to Menard:

> Every man should be capable of all ideas and I understand that in the future this will be the case.

In certain fragments of *The Will to Power* (especially nos. 481, 556, 600, and 604), Nietzsche outlines his theory that there are no facts, no things, no values, but only interpretations in flux; not even the self or subjectivity exist, since they are only further interpretations devised by the activity of interpretation, a form of the will to power in constant becoming, in a world whose disturbing and enigmatic character can never be interpreted away. In other fragments (notably at the beginning of the collection) he recommends that nihilism as disbelief be intensified to a total denial of truth in order possibly to accede to a "divine way of thinking" (no. 15), to a total command of all ideas as interpretations. Parallel to these passages is the one called "On Self Overcoming" in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, where the prophet exhorts "those who are wisest" to know their will as "a will to the thinkability of all beings, ...to *make* all being thinkable." and this, with its relentless thrust toward the future, bears the mark of Nietzsche's crucible of the Eternal Return—the test of reliving and *willing* every detail of our lives, over and over again—, so vividly evoked by Borges in *Historia de la eternidad* as a nightmarish approximation of immortality, of selflessness. Borges' later story "The Immortal" is clearly a meditation on such Nietzschean lucidities and ordeals; I suggest that "Pierre

Menard..." implies a similar meditation, which serves to extend even further the already extreme Symbolist method it cites.

"Pierre Menard..." begins parodistically as a claim to preserve the true memory of a dead writer; by its end it has stated that all fame is misunderstanding and proposed a total freedom of interpretation; the experiment it outlines bears upon *Don Quixote*, the novel of reading novels, so long all but unread in any rigorous sense, here to be totally, minutely, systematically *mis*-read. Nietzsche has been one of the most grossly misrepresented writers in recent history; not long after writing "Pierre Menard...." Borges devoted two brief articles, still uncollected in any of his books, to vindicating him with textual arguments. The first article, "Algunos pareceres de Nietzsche," published in February 1940, refutes the vulgar image of Nietzsche as racist and proto-Nazi by quoting from his posthumously published notebooks, which, Borges observes, justify with impartial theories his tendentious publications, the most notorious and equivocal of which is *Zarathustra*. The second article, "El propósito de *Zarathustra*," published in October 1944, attempts to account for this book's excesses and obscurity by claiming that it was fashioned after the model of prophetic scriptures of the Orient as a deliberately overbearing and contradictory text for successive generations of future exegetes to discuss, vindicate and enrich, line by line. Borges states: "Nietzsche condescended to a book poorer than himself; he anticipated that others would supply what he left unsaid," a strategy complementary to Menard's—the contingent text already implying its infinite enrichment...and annihilation—, with the difference, of course, that teh apochryphal and selfless Menard never has, even for an instant, a book of his own, and exists only as a limitless activity (*our* activity, and yet never really ours, either) that destroys and extends *all* texts, sacred, classic and trivial.

This is where my notes stop.

BORGES IN SEARCH OF THE FATHERLAND

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Both national and cosmopolitan incentives have endowed the works of Jorge Luis Borges with their own distinctive texture and configuration. Just as there is one Borges who meditates on metaphysical problems, conjures up uncanny worlds and elaborates vast readings of foreign authors, there is another Borges who has his roots deeply planted in a region centered in Buenos Aires, who incorporates in his creation a rich familiar and historical heritage, and who seeks his place in the literary tradition of Argentina through contacts with major national writers such as José Hernández, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, and Leopoldo Lugones. Borges is fully conscious of this underlying tension in his work, and considers it inherent to both North American and Latin American literatures:

> Whether from the Northern or the Southern hemisphere, the man born in the Americas is an exile from Europe who is no longer a European; nostalgia for the land of his forefathers takes him back to Europe, but in those lands of his blood the homesickness for America makes him restless.[1]

Therefore it is only after these two partial and complementary faces of Borges—the Argentine and the cosmopolitan—are superimposed that we can perceive his true literary profile. A chronological reading of his poetry reveals an emotional search of his fatherland which, in turn, illuminates a lesser-known facet of Borges' work—the poet as patriot.

The passionate quest for the essence of the fatherland, typical of writers in young countries, connects Borges with a succession of intellectuals who since the Argentine nation first came into being have attempted to decipher its essence, its character and its destiny. During the nineteenth century several of them formulated, in different ways, the questions that Sarmiento was asking in 1858: "Who are we? Where are we going? Are we a race? Who are our ancestors? Are we a nation? Where are our borders?"[2] Around 1910, during the centennial celebrations of the May Revolution, such intellectuals delved again into the Argentine soul which, many felt, was threatened by the avalanche of foreign immigrants. And after the political crisis of 1930 Borges joined other contemporary authors–Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz, Eduardo Mallea–in a searching analysis which became more intense during the forties and early fifties under the dictatorship of Juan Domingo Perón. However, Borges' exploration, which had begun instinctively in his early poetry, was not sociopolitical in nature, but sentimental and personal. Patriotism, he would later write, is "the least discerning of all the passions" (F, 117)[3]; and throughout his poetry one perceives clearly his attempt to determine intuitively what his fatherland is and what it represents for him as a man and as a writer.

A vision of the fatherland implies a concept of the area it encompasses and of its peculiar features. Both elements already appear in the poems of Borges' first book, *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), which communicates the enthusiastic rediscovery of his native city after a prolonged residence in Europe. In this early work Borges delimits for himself a small poetic world, one he could cover thoroughly during his customary evening strolls. In the prologue he cautions the reader:

> My fatherland–Buenos Aires is not -the extended geographic myth alluded to by these two words; it is rather my own home, the friendly quarters and–together with the streets and secluded places to which I have lovingly devoted my time–all that which I have learned in them about love, sorrow, and doubt. (FBA, n. p.)

Starting from the quaint outskirts of Buenos Aires, Borges enlarges in ever-widening circles the limits of his favorite geography until its borders embrace the areas surrounding the Argentine capital–the Southwestern *pampas* and, to the North and East, the lands of Entre Ríos and Uruguay. This territory has for him a special meaning; for it is here, where his ancestors labored, fought, and died, where the mythical *gaucho* showed his serene courage, that Borges finds the symbols which speak for his fatherland.

In the mid-twenties, after abandoning the avant-garde tenets of *ultraísmo*, he sets out to compose poetry which has "the flavor of our fatherland" (I, 19). And in fact most of his poems written between 1925 and 1930 reveal that he is indeed acting on this self imposed patriotic task. "My fatherland," he declares in *Luna de enfrente* (1925), "is the strain of a guitar, the promise in the dark eyes of a girl, / the manifest prayer of the willows in the evening" (LE, 17). In *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929) he speaks of "the fatherland pared down to its essence: a fig tree and a patio well" (CSM, 44). And years later he refers to having perceived his fatherland "in jasmine flowers / or in an old sword" (SP, 203). In Borges' preference for simple symbols there is a strong rejection of "the clumsy imitations of the professional patriots" (OI, 169), a desire to find the essence of the fatherland "beyond the pomp and ashes of the anniversaries" (OP, 27), because one's fatherland is ultimately "a bitter and loving mythology" (F, 118) that each one creates for and by himself. This is evident in, among other poems, "The Mythical Founding of Buenos Aires" in which a possessive adjective underlines his personal perspective:

> And was it along this torpid muddy river
> that the prows came to found my fatherland?
> . . . . . .
> Hard to believe Buenos Aires had any beginning.
> I feel it to be as eternal as air and water. (SP, 49-51)[4]

Besides sensing the presence of his fatherland through these modest symbols which evoke in him an emotional response–guitar, creole girl, willow trees, patio well, fig tree, jasmine blossoms, old sword–Borges continues his search by

evoking his ancestors. From his early poems he reveals a vivid consciousness of having descended directly from men who played a role in the conquest, the colonization, and in the revolutionary and civil wars of that region of South America. For this reason, he views the heroes and the events of his country's history as part of the tradition of his own family.[5] This epic heritage is one of the gifts with which he anxiously tries to retain his lover in "Two English Poems" (1934):

> What can I hold you with?
> I offer you lean streets, desperate sunsets, the
> moon of the ragged suburbs.
> . . . . . .
> I offer you my ancestors, my dead men, the ghosts
> that living men have honoured in marble: my father's
> father killed in the frontier of Buenos Aires, two
> bullets through his lungs, bearded and dead, wrapped
> by his soldiers on the hide of a cow; my mother's
> grandfather–just twenty four–heading a charge of
> three hundred men in Peru, now ghosts on vanished
> horses. (SP, 77)

At the same time Borges attempts to discern the impulses which motivated other historical figures, such as Facundo Quiroga and Sarmiento, in whom he perceives typical features of the Argentine character. Listening to the "inner voice" that speaks from his blood (DBR, 104), he continues to create throughout his career a poetic gallery of heroes whose courage and epic destiny he both envies and admires.

In the 1930's Borges' ardent *criollismo* gives way to a more complex art in which universal concerns and national elements are integrated naturally. His admirable poem "The Cyclical Night" (1940) reveals this evolution. Once again there appear interwoven the three fundamental motifs on which his concept of the fatherland is based–the territorial, the historical and the familiar. In the first stanzas Borges speculates on the doctrine of eternal return, and then applies it to his own situation:

> This, here, is Buenos Aires. Time, which brings
> either love or money to men, hands on to me
> only this withered rose, this empty tracery
> of streets with names recurring from the past

> in my blood: Laprida, Cabrera, Soler, Suárez...
> Names in which secret bugle calls are sounding,
> invoking republics, cavalry, and mornings,
> joyful victories, men dying in action. (SP, 79)

In this fashion Borges' meditative strolls through the streets of his hometown also become moving pilgrimages through the living past of his family and his country.

During the fascism in Europe, and the resulting World War, a marked ideological change occurs in the political climate of Argentina. This ominous trend toward totalitarianism which precedes and accompanies the military coup of 1943 leads Borges to experience a new and bitter dimension of his fatherland. His almost prophetic "Conjectural Poem" (1943) foretells the beginning of an ordeal for him and for the nation. In this poem Borges, guided by his ancestor Laprida, descends to the hell of national reality; and as he senses the advance of violent forces at home and abroad, he realizes that he too has come "face to face" with his "South American destiny" (SP, 83). But it is his painful experience under the regime of Perón (1946-55) that deepens Borges' understanding of the fatherland. The years of frustration and humiliations familiarize him with the hemispheres of light and darkness, courage and barbarism, which coexist throughout Argentine history. He also comes to understand the oracular dimension of such essential books as Sarmiento's *Facundo*, or Hernández' *Martín Fierro* whose fatal knife duel, says he, "unfortunately for the Argentines, is read with indulgence or admiration, and not with horror" (MF, 32).[6] The memory of his military forefathers becomes more than a pretext to evoke a glorious and irretrievable past; this memory now becomes an incentive to resist the oppression of his fatherland. The "Page to Commemorate Colonel Suárez, Victor at Junín" (1953) closes with these verses alluding to Argentina's contemporary political circumstances:

> His great-grandson is writing these lines,
> and a silent voice comes to him out of the past,
> out of the blood:
>
> "What does my battle at Junín matter if it is only
> a glorious memory, or a date learned by rote

for an examination, or a place in the atlas?
The battle is everlasting and can do without
the pomp of actual armies and of trumpets.
Junín is two civilians cursing a tyrant
on a street corner,
or an unknown man somewhere, dying in prison." (SP, 91)

Borges' long search culminates with two remarkable poems which express the final and moving encounter with his fatherland. In his "Ode Composed in 1960," celebrating the sesquicentennial of Argentina's move toward independence, the poet establishes an intimate dialog with his "necessary and dear fatherland" (OP, 203). Destiny, he says, has determined that "I, a mere drop of water, should speak to you, the river, / that I, a mere moment, should talk to you, time itself."[7] Borges recognizes that his fatherland has had years of "glory" and of "infamy," which he accepts as unavoidable. He then enumerates a series of symbols which evoke it:

O fatherland, I have sensed you in the decaying
sunsets of the sprawling suburbs
and in the thistle flower that the Southern wind
brings to my door and in the patient rain
and in the slow customs of the stars
and in the hand tuning a guitar
and in the gravitation of the plains
to which even from afar our blood responds.
You are more than your lengthy territory
and more than the unending days of your time,
more than the inconceivable sum
of your generations. (OP, 204)

The fatherland is rather a Platonic ideal which can not be precisely defined; and yet

for that face barely seen
we live and die and long for,
o inseparable and mysterious homeland.

A few years later, in his "Ode Written in 1966" commemorating the sesquicentennial of Argentina's Declaration of Independence, Borges takes up again the subject. "No one is the homeland" (SP, 205), he admonishes: neither its

heroes, nor its writers, nor its faceless crowds; not even its tumultuous history or its vast territory "stretching into the dawn and the sunset." "The homeland, my friends," he says, "is a continuous act," a shared dream in whose realization all should participate. He then concludes:

No one is the homeland—it is all of us.
May that clear, mysterious fire burn
without ceasing, in my breast and yours. (SP, 207)

The passionate tone of these poems sets them apart from most of his essays and fictions in which—even though there are clear references to Argentine subjects—the predominant perspective is conjectural or skeptical. This is because Borges cannot be detached or ironic regarding an entity which he values highly. For that reason, when in 1972 Argentina was about to enter anew into a period of turbulence and repression, Borges called again upon his ancestors and courageously raised his voice:

I am already blind, and have passed my 70th year;
I am not Francisco Borges, the Uruguayan
who died with two bullets in his chest,
. . . . . .
and yet the Fatherland, now desecrated, wishes
that I, with my dim grammarian's pen
well-versed in academic technicalities
but inexperienced in the actions of the sword,
assemble the harsh-sounding epic
and claim my place. I do it now. (RP, 107)

After a long search the poet has come to find the essence of his fatherland in that "glorious burden bequeathed" by his ancestors (SP, 207), and in the sum of his own most poignant memories. He has also found in the protection of these treasured values one justification for his own existence. It has been argued that Borges' vision tends more toward an archetypal Argentine past, than toward its problematic present or its projected destiny.[8] But on a continent where so much of the patriotism expressed in poetry has seldom been more than a rhetorical exercise, the vigor and depth of the poems Borges has written on this and other national themes—

his "bitter and loving mythology"—mark him as one of Argentina's most genuine patriotic poets.

NOTES

1. Borges, Prologue to Mariana Grondona, *Más allá de mi río* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1971), p. 10. Ernesto Sábato has discussed from another angle this essential duality of Borges. See his essay "Sobre los dos Borges" in *Tres aproximaciones a la literatura de nuestro tiempo: Robbe-Grillet, Borges, Sartre* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1968), pp. 32-62.
2. Quoted by Roberto Rodríguez Bustamante, *Los intelectuales argentinos y su sociedad* (Buenos Aires: Libera, 1967), p. 116.
3. I insert in the text the reference to the book of Borges and to the page from which I quote, using the following abbreviations: CSM=*Cuaderno San Martín* (Buenos Aires: Cuadernos del Plata, 1929); DBR=*Doctor Brodie's Report*, tr. by Norman Thomas di Giovanni (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1972); F=*Ficciones*, ed. by Anthony Kerrigan (New York: Grove Press, 1962); FBA=*Fervor de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Serantes, 1923); I=*Inquisiciones* (Buenos Aires: Proa, 1925); MF=*El "Martín Fierro,"* in collaboration with Margarita Guerrero (Buenos Aires: Columba, 1953); OI=*Otras inquisiciones*, tr. by Ruth L. C. Simms (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968); OP=*Obra poética, 1923-1967* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1975): SP=*Selected Poems, 1923-1967*, ed. by N. T. di Giovanni (New York: Delacorte Press, 1972). All translations from works not available in English version are mine.
4. In the last words of the 2nd. verse quoted I offer an English rendition which is closer to the Spanish original: "vinieron a fundarme la patria?"
5. In "The final creole: Borges' view of Argentine history," *Triquarterly*, 25 (Fall, 1972), pp. 149-171, I have studied the reflection of this familiar tradition and of Argentine political change on his works.
6. I have analyzed Borges' ambivalence toward *Martín Fierro*, and his commentaries on *gauchesco* poetry, in "Borges frente a la poesía gauchesca: crítica y creación," *Revista Iberoamericana*, 40 (1974), 321-336.
7. The poetic vision and the structure of this ode suggest some possible contacts with the poem "La Suave Patria" composed by the Mexican writer Ramón López Velarde (1888-1921). Adolfo Bioy Casares attests that López Velarde's poem was one of the subjects he discussed at length with Borges. (See Bioy Casares' essay "Lettres et amitiés," *L'Herne*, Paris, 1964, p. 17.) In addition to a few lexical coincidences—the metaphor of the river, for example—both poems include an enumeration of significant features of the fatherland which have a deep sentimental value for the poet. López Velarde favors domestic or subtly ironic images, but Borges is more concise while tending to employ the epic tone.
8. Although Borges has not been indifferent to what he considers his moral and civic duties, he has refused to allow ideological concerns to interfere with his aesthetic work. Replying to some of his critics, he wrote: "I am not, nor have been, what used to be called a preacher of parables or a fabulist and is now known as a committed writer. [...] I have never kept my opinions hidden, not even in trying times, but neither have I ever allowed them to find their way into my literary work, except once when I was buoyed up in exultation over the Six-Day War. The art of writing is mysterious; the opinions we hold are ephemeral" (DBR, 9-10).