

A garden for ideoscopy

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El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan is a disconcerting book, as its first readers came to discover. Very few of them could follow the labyrinthine detail of its plots or recognize, under its different layers of irony and parody, its truly revolutionary nature. Most of them had to react as did Mother, who asked Borges why he insisted on writing that kind of stories that scared her.

— Emir Rodríguez Monegal

The key lies in the enigma

There is nothing new in this article — nor in the words which begin it, a fact that ominously recalls some of the best known Borgesian formulations. However, it is almost a rule of decorum that this should be so: it is the duty of thousands of professionals of the sciences and the *belles lettres* to feed the muddle of forgettable writings whose only aim is to keep up the hope that out of such profusion will come a single offspring worthy of interest.

Those impossible inventories that Borges used to invent again and again (to show the unavoidable impossibility of the inventory, or, what is the same, that inventories are always invented) could include such erudite writings — on condition that one of its chapters be entitled 'Borges'. Borges wrote 'The Borges'; some other writer will write 'The Borgeologists'. And perhaps the inventory should also include the expressions that allude to Borges's ubiquity, not only because he is the point of reference of so many scholars, but also because on getting acquainted with his work, one realizes that nothing seems to escape the empire of his gifts. Among those impossible inventories a saying might slip in, an alteration imposed by the omnipresence of another saying that has survived for two thousand years: 'All labyrinths lead to Borges'.

After accepting the inevitable impregnation that comes from the proximity of several texts, and after giving up all attempts at novelty, it becomes acceptable to introduce these lines, with a renowned short story by Borges as a touchstone.

'El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan' is, among many other things, a spy story with the format of a detective story. Its key lies in the enigma and the resolution of the enigma. So does it consecrate the coincidence between police search and scientific research, which could not escape our cautious minds and that deserved, among others, Sebeok's well-known study on the methodological proximity of Sherlock Holmes and Charles Sanders Peirce (Sebeok and Umiker-Sebeok 1987). The enigma, if multiplied inside a garden — one of the many labyrinths of the story — is an unnecessary dialogue between the main character and Stephen Albert (a name that turns out to be the key to the military operation upon which the detectivesque elements of the story are centered; a man who poses and solves the epistemological problems that lie at the core of this story). Stephen Albert devotes himself to the unveiling of two mysteries on which several generations of scholars had worked unsuccessfully: a novel and a labyrinth built by an 'illustrious' ancestor of the main character. He ventures a series of hypotheses that lead to a series of failures, until he dares to conjecture that the whole problem is incorrectly posed: there have never been two mysteries. The novel was the labyrinth — 'A labyrinth of symbols' (Borges 1989/96: 1.477).

The touchstone I have chosen conjugates four primary observations evident in the text, and some others that a poor imitation of Stephen Albert's hypothetical doings allows us to add. The four primary observations are the following:

First, the attempts to understand the work of Ts'ui Pen failed while the ordering system of reality used for this purpose was the very system that the work questioned. It was necessary to realize this — that this system was a construction only valid until some event demonstrated the opposite. Such a system was that of successive logic. From an instrument of knowledge it became a prison for many scientists and for science itself. Borges's story barely summarizes a restriction that has affected knowledge for many years.

Second, the intellection of symbols and time are interdependent. This is valid not only of the interpretation of the signs but also for the study of their constitutions and interrelations, to which interpretation is subjected. With relation to this it is relevant to recall that Peirce inserted his analyses on the sign within a more global conception, his *Ideoscopy*, which is close to phenomenology but explicitly differentiated from it. Each one of the three ways of knowing included in the ideoscopy presupposes

a different conception of time. And the sign is perceptible as such only in the third one, which contradicts several of the premises related to the idea of temporal succession.

Third, in 'El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan' the future is plural. This is, at the very least, the memory that modernity's dominant conception of the future is historical, that is to say, subject to the same degree of error as any other construction. Moreover, as Borges states in the story, this notion of temporal plurality differs from other known temporal conceptions, hence it may permit access to previously forbidden knowledge.

Finally, 'In every fiction' according to the text (Borges 1989/96: 3.497) and until quite recently, in all research, 'every time a man is faced with different alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others'. Not only the temporal concept of modernity, but also the modern reading of the world as a whole is shaped in the disjunctive. This takes us back to the first four observations: we have lived under the empire of the disjunction: *a* or not-*a*, *a/not-a*, *a* vs not-*a*; these are shifts of a binary logic that twist the understanding of the sign.

These considerations could be juxtaposed with some others which will allow us to appreciate how Borges's garden is a fertile field for the ideoscopy. The four observations above coincide in one concept, disjunction, a figure of logic and linguistics (and it will be valid within the framework of these lines, the transposition from a proper name of literature to nonliterary fields, at least because the '*a* vs not-*a*' has become, at the very least '*a* vs not-*a*?'). A figure that Borges's text does not even mention, which is almost overlooked ('every time a man is faced with several alternatives, he chooses one and discards the others'), showing its mundaneness, its ubiquity, its consonance with common sense, with common prejudice.

The whole of Borges's work offers much more than a sort of denunciation of the unnoticed disjunctive error. It offers alternatives (in plural) — a demand forced upon him by a minimum of coherence with his presuppositions. Among these alternatives, temporal plurality, which is the attention point of our touchstone-text, will be for these lines, a permanent topic of reference, albeit not the focus of attention. The attention is centered here on a procedure construction that remains constant throughout the years in Borges's prose and poetry, through which he absorbs the alternative and inoculates it, making of the disjunction an adversative, and an affirmation of the partial negation established by every adversative conjunction.

To linger at this conjunction of conjunctions could pare the study and, apart from taking it from semiotics to the neighborhood of linguistics,

there would be a considerable risk of turning it into a delayed subscription of a Babelic omnipotence conjured by its own intrinsic logic. This excess (presently toned down) gave rise to statements like: 'Any nonlinguistic description of poetry would be a useless translation, if not impossible' (Greimas 1987 [1966]: 89). The conjunction of conjunctions that we are interested in matters here because it has other scopes. One of them becomes evident when, in the edition of the *Obras Completas* from 1989/96, 'Los Conjurados' appears as the last work of fiction by Borges. In it, and through it, the conjunction of conjunctions is combined with the 'conspiracy' (*conjura* in Spanish), a political and civic action (adjectives that the epistemological revision does not show as tautological; Benveniste 1974: 272-280) a word that amalgamates unity and division. In this conspiracy the aim of the union is the opposition, the segregation of the new unit from the original one. The word *conjura* joins two opposites to strengthen the disjunction; a disjunction which, besides all its linguistic and logic implications, is vested with Manichean moral connotations, sieged on both sides by betrayal. However, the conspiracy privileged by Borges is that of 1291 at Switzerland. The 'fact', as Borges calls it, was fostered by betrayal (as Schiller underscores); the incorporation of a *d*, the geographical distance which, in Spanish, goes from *traición* [betrayal] to *tradición* [tradition], makes of the conspiracy chosen by Borges paradigmatic (the final poem 'Los Conjurados' presupposes this, and only this, conspiracy that repeats itself ad infinitum 'all over the planet'), a synthesis in which the unity is inclusive of all forms of segregation, without denying it. It was a projection into the future operating, unlike that modernity it anticipated, a conquest not of the future but of the past, in a combination that disperses time. It was an act of individual and collective defense, of faith in tradition and in the most basic values. The symbol as convention, linked to the subordination of citizens to preestablished order, to the instituted norm, the *polis*, and the symbol as motivation, linked to a religious obligation among peers become fused in this conspiracy which congregates conjunctions.

Apart from this, the conspirators that wander along Borges's story, the characters of these fictions, as well as those of much of his fiction, object to the principle of identity: 'Fueron Winkelried, que se clava en el pecho las lanzas enemigas para que sus camaradas avancen. / Son un cirujano, un pastor o un procurador, pero también son Paracelso y Amiel, Jung y Paul Klee'. [It was Winkelried, who stabs his chest with the enemy's swords so that his comrades may advance. It is a surgeon, a clergyman or a notary, but it is also Paracelsus and Amiel, Jung, and Paul Klee.] (Borges 1989/96: 3.501)

Naturally, this implies, through a different channel, another rejection of the disjunctive. The primordial formulation *a* vs not-*a* implies a presupposition too simple to take into account: *a* does not represent an object, but rather a category; inversely, it presupposes the existence of several identical objects. This equality can only be understood insofar it can be conceived in terms of a disjunction: identical objects are those between which no differential features can be established (i.e. oppositions, within each one of the categories which constitute these characteristics). This is to say, *a* vs not-*a* allows for the world to be imagined as a sum of series, even though there might be filial or fraternal relationships between the series, which explains the clarification 'a sum of families of series'. He has been thinking of the world as an isomorphic object of the industrial assembly line. (Against the argument that the serial prototype is in Aristotle it could be said that in his writings is also the prototype, and the desire of the machine.) The negative as well as inclusive form of disjunctive seriation that Borges's texts offer is that of multiple repetitions rather than that of the plurality of objects, characters, facts, times, and spaces, a plurality which spreads without limits, in which each element is unique because it is plural; hence, from the individual and from the set we are projected toward the One. And towards conjecture, which in this context is one of the names of unity.

Antecedents

Science has attempted to be iconic for too long; everybody talks about 'maps' of every kind. There are maps of relations because the axiom of the arbitrariness of the sign prevents any other form of iconicity. Curiously (and now I am referring only to semiotics) the key to those relationships has been a zero of sorts, denouncing the ignorance of a relationship, but presenting itself as the death of all possible relationships: the disjunction. The inclusive and plural adversative of Borges unceasingly unlocks binary locks to liberate for our eyes the access to infinite conjunctions. A Janus-like face, who knows what other sees and can itself see at the same time, Borges's work enlightens, orientates, and makes some of legacies of Peirce bloom. With this aim in mind we will go from scientific iconism to ideoscopy, from ideoscopy to the disjunctive seriation of modernity and to Borges's inclusive adversative, arriving at the conspiracy to catch a glimpse of some of the possibilities of indetermination.

Binarism has predominated in occidental thought, as has one of its offshoots, the lineal conception of time. After attempts to trap Peirce's

'unlimited semiosis' inside the binary system, it has functioned as an albatross of sorts, diminished when restricted to its biped possibilities, and aim of the bitter jokes of the sailors in Baudelaire's emblematic poem. Just as this emblematic bird, however, it unfolds its potential in a tridimensional movement.

In the meantime, some subterranean currents of thought fostered other, nonlinear and nonbinary temporal conceptions: after the sixties, voices could be heard rereading Hegel and Nietzsche, the echoes of the questionings of modern schemes at the gates of modernism began to multiply: Benjamin — an original reader of the German Baroque — acquired a splendid vitality years after his physical death; Eliot had rescued John Donne, as Borges returned to Cervantes and Quevedo. Still in force, these tendencies are now at risk of suffocating themselves: one of the more famous survivors of these quests, Gianni Vattimo (1999), remarked recently that they had come to a blind spot, lacking methods to procure knowledge. At the same time, a few years earlier, at the same university, Thomas Sebeok (1996) insisted on his tireless consideration of the possibilities of semiotics as a metascience, laid out as the basis for all other sciences. The intrinsic compatibility of these currents and this metascience leads us to think in the need to link them, which is what Haroldo de Campos, the most distinguished of Brazilian semioticians, has been doing for years. In his latest collection of essays, for example, he undertakes the analysis of Kafkian clues, based on Peirce's notions, and, from this starting point, he progresses towards hermeneutic quests:

Todo símbolo verbal — toda palavra em estado de dicionário — é, na terminologia de Peirce, um LEGI-SIGNO, ou seja, um signo que tem a natureza de uma LEI, pois seu significado geral nasce de uma prévia convenção entre os usuários de uma mesma comunidade lingüística. ODRADEK é, portanto, um SIGNO-LEI. (de Campos 1997: 135)

[Every verbal sign — every word in a state of dictionary — is, in Peirce's terminology a LEGISIGN, that is, a sign which has the nature of a LAW, since its general meaning comes from a previous conviction among the users from the same linguistic community. ODRADEK is, therefore, a LEGISIGN.]

De Campos translates it as *advogadínculo do diabo* [little devil's advocate] and interprets it as the

cifra e decifração de uma linguagem que se transforma de máquina inútil, incapaz de produzir bens para o consumo dos usuários integrados no sistema, em máquina útil, eficientíssima para análise da condição alienada desses mesmos usuários

e de suas seqüelas (ainda que apenas veleitárias) de intolerância e violência. (de Campos 1997: 137)

[cipher and deciphering of a language which, from being a useless machine, incapable of producing goods for the consumption of those users integrated to the system, becomes a useful machine, extremely efficient for the analysis of the alienated condition of those very same users and their sequels of intolerance and violence.]

And, specifically with relation to Borges, although not exclusively about him, the pioneer of semiotic studies in Uruguay, Lisa Block de Behar (1999: 141–142):

Interesa trazar, en cambio, algunas líneas comunes en el pensamiento contemporáneo, proponer una síntesis de diversidades que alcanzara la unidad, más allá de consagraciones teológicas, superando la facilidad de las oposiciones binarias o la limitación de una numeración que, triádica, sólo agregue un número a la serie. ...

Borges descubre la magnífica ironía de Dios a partir de un lenguaje de hierro, de su lenguaje blindado, que es el de un ciego, habla del rojo Adán, de otros más rojos yuxtapuestos en sus propios nombres: Red Scharlach ... Por medio de un dispositivo onomasio-semasiológico extravagante el poeta o el filósofo desafía las fronteras, impugna el rigor de una historia, parodia las propiedades lingüísticas básicas (arbitrariedad, linealidad).

[It is interesting to lay out some common lines in contemporary thought, to propose a synthesis of diversities able to reach the unity, beyond theological consecrations, overcoming the easiness of binary oppositions or the limit of a numeration that, triadic, only adds a number to the series. ...

Borges discovers God's magnificent irony departing from a language of iron, from his blinded language, the language of a blind man, he talks about the red Adam, about others, with even more red juxtaposed in their own names: Red Scharlach. ... By means of an extravagant onomastic-semasiologic mechanism, the poet or the philosopher challenges the boundaries, opposes the rigor of a story, parodies the basic linguistic properties (arbitrariness, linearity).]

Conjunctions, inclusions

To summarize, if the notions of secondness, binarism, lineal time, series, equality, equation (Paz 1969), and disjunction are interdependent, the thirdness which Peirce considered as an instance inherent in the sign demands another set of notions, equally interdependent. A reading of Borges offers — among other alternatives which are not considered here — a group which features (and what follows does not intend to be

a comprehensive list) juxtaposition as an inclusive form (laid out in such a way that the series gives the idea of a temporal juxtaposition in which the same object, event or character reappears, as a constant element, and at the same time is multiplied in various forms on each appearance). It also features the unity of the multiple and the multiplicity of the unique (including the temporal conception). Each one of these three components of the group presupposes that from each of them one can reach the others, and one can reach knowledge. They are syntheses disposed in a great number of projections. Due to limitations on the extension of this work I will deal here only with those considerations related to conjunction. It is a well-known fact that among the syntheses contained in the work of Borges some words, forcibly recurrent and necessarily inevitable, gained a place in his writings: mirrors, labyrinths, swords, to which in 'El elogio de la sombra' (Borges 1989/96: 2.395) he adds 'la vejez y la ética' [old age and ethics]. Words, insofar as they are signs, are 'sensible things' as Paz recalled some time ago. They are signs to which the closing text of the last volume dedicated to Borges's fiction in his *Obras Completas* adds the conspiracy.

Grammarians distinguish two types of conjunctions: coordinating and subordinating. Coordinating conjunctions are known with the illustrative name of 'connectors'; they are the only units of occidental languages that do not form part of any grammatical 'structure' and which do not alter them. Their function is simply to join, they only establish a relationship between components. They offer, in consequence, a significant field of analysis to observe the viability of the reading scheme of structures-relations within a language.

The division of language in two fields, one monstrative and another symbolic, restricts the analysis of coordinating conjunctions. In a binary reading of the sign, the absence of a clearly delimited 'meaning' for conjunctions determines their inclusion in the monstrative field of language (cf. Bühler 1985 [1934]). The fact that they only account for a relationship strengthens this classification, since it makes it possible to consider connectors as deictics whose function is that of indexes within the text, as is the case of anaphora in Bühler's (1985 [1934]) now classic considerations. It must be added that, besides their statute of indexes — resulting from transposing Bühler's statements to semiotic categories — connectors also fulfil an iconic function, insofar as they represent a relationship between objects, situations or concepts, themselves represented by words of clauses joined by the connectors. This iconism through which a representation-information about a relationship of reality makes connectors relevant objects of study for this approach between Borges's writings and ideoscopy.

However, connectors have some differences with the other sets of words which fall under the category of deictics. In the first place, they are not only a sign of union between two structures of language; each one of the connectors represents (or, in a performative perspective constitutes) a type of relationship and this depends solely on the chosen connector. It is true that in different languages there is a different degree of formalization of meanings of the different connectors. In English grammars the very list of connectors changes: there is no doubt about *but, yet, and, nor, or*; some add *for*, and some other *so*, yet others keep the list open. In Spanish the formalization is much greater, and grammars have offered lists which are presented as comprehensive. In his *Gramática*, Alarcos Llorach (1994: 27–32) limits them to *y, ni, o, pero, sino* [and, nor, or, but] (noting some others, now obsolete). Besides, in English grammars there is a greater incidence of their indexal value insofar as their functions are repeatedly detailed, indicating the 'marks' these connectors carry. In Spanish connectors are grouped (Alarcos Llorach 1994: 27–32) in three functions (copulative, disjunctive and adversative) and each connector entails its own meaning (even though one of them is bisemic): *y* means a sum of affirmations; *ni* a sum of negations; *o*, opposition, and this is the bisemic meaning of equivalence of incompatibility; *pero*, restrictive contradiction; *sino*, contradiction of incompatibility. Naturally, all these meanings are relations and relations taking place at a metalinguistic level (affirmations, negations, opposition, contradictions). Nevertheless, they also represent relations which take place in the real world between mentioned objects (addition, equivalence, incompatibility). And, unlike the other deictics, these have their own denotation, and in their case the variability of denotation according to the context does not apply.

With regards to denotation, in Spanish one of the connectors adds to what has been said a feature which separates it from the others, and this is the particularity of having been nominalized by use. It is *pero* [but]. The expression *los peros* is used to refer to the set of objections which a situation, a fact, an object or a proposal deserves or could deserve. Let us limit ourselves to supposing that this indicates a particular attention of the speaker to the restrictive contradiction among the connectors; and that this attention is linked to an expectation or an intuition about the symbolic potential of this word.

Connectors, therefore, are not circumscribed to the monstrative area of language, and they present the triple condition index, icon and symbol concomitantly. This simultaneous plurality makes them especially apt for the construction of multiple uniqueness and unity of the multiple which we note as characteristic of the Borgesian cosmovision. Let us concentrate

on the connector *pero*:

Toda obra humana es deleznable, afirma Carlyle, pero su ejecución no lo es. (Borges 1989/96: 3.456)

[Every human work is negligible, states Carlyle, but not its execution]

¿Qué soñará el indescifrable futuro? ... La vida no es un sueño pero puede llegar a ser un sueño, escribe Novalis. (Borges 1989/96: 3.473)

[What will the indecipherable future dream? ... Life is not a dream, but it can be one, writes Novalis]

At first sight, the connector *pero* fulfils in both cases the typical restrictive function assigned to it by grammars. In both cases the restriction only stands if temporal lineality is accepted: the characteristics of an act previous to the 'work', to the 'execution' are opposite to those of the work. In a hypothetical future with respect to the moment of enunciation, the same object, 'life' dons the opposite feature of that established at the moment of enunciation.

If, with Peirce (1958 [1904]: 386) we think that 'great errors of metaphysics are due to looking at the future as something that will have been past', the restriction denoted by the connector *pero* annuls itself, once presented, insofar as it annuls the temporal succession which supports it. The question is whether in both cases the temporal line fades to give way to a vision of time. It may be observed that two 'past' actions — Carlyle's affirmation and Novalis's statement — have been stolen from time through the present of the verbs which refer to them and by means of its coexistence with the addresser 'Borges' (who debates with Carlyle and makes Novalis's affirmation his own), an impossible coexistence in 'factic' terms. On the other hand, the reference to Novalis's affirmation closes a poem constituted by a series of conjectures in which blended facts of fiction and reality, 'past' facts mutate, reiterating themselves in a different time from that assigned to them by 'history', denying themselves in their difference and denying history by losing their condition of 'unique' events. The fictional debate with Carlyle constitutes an argument for the validity of all the texts which form part of *Los Conjurados* in 'la dicha de escribir' (Borges 1989/96: 3.456); a joy he confesses to a reader, with whom he establishes a complicity. Joy and confession that become meaningful for the reader-accomplice only if he is being invited to participate somehow of this joy, which necessarily is the joy of reading. It is as if the text were but a support which kept, uncontaminated, the joy of the act of writing so that it may — saved by the magic of its eternal vessel — infect the reader with the force of

this joy. Another annulment of the temporal line, in which reading and writing fuse in a secret meeting, an intimate co-presence. In this way, the adversative form points to a restriction and, in annulling it, constitutes itself in an inclusion of what it affirms and of what it partially denies.

Thus Borges laid out all through his endless texts the pieces which make the disjunctive conception of the world burst, making real the alternative which Peirce announced and Paz (1969: 134) synthesized:

Las revueltas y rebeliones del siglo XX han revelado que el personaje de la historia es plural y que es irreductible a la noción de lucha de clases tanto como a la sucesión progresiva y lineal de civilizaciones (los egipcios, los griegos, los romanos, etc.). La pluralidad de protagonistas ha demostrado que la trama de la historia también es plural: no es una línea única sino muchas y no todas ellas rectas. Pluralidad de personajes y pluralidad de tiempos en marcha hacia muchos dondes, no todos situados en un futuro que se desvanece apenas lo tocamos.

[The revolts and rebellions of the twentieth century have revealed that the character of history is plural and cannot be reduced to the notion of class struggle nor to the progressive and lineal succession of civilizations (the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, etc.). The plurality of protagonists has demonstrated that the plot of history is also plural: it is not a single line but several ones and not all of them are straight. Plurality of characters and plurality of times headed toward many *wheres*, not all of them situated in a future which vanishes as soon as we touch it.]

Some years later (like Borges many years before), Paz (1991: 30–31) concentrates all those pluralities in one, the human plurality, considering it the highest example of the principle of 'indeterminacy' which has shocked the thought of the past few decades:

Pour terminer ce tableau succinct, il convient de souligner l'échec de toutes les hypothèses philosophiques et historiques qui prétendaient connaître les lois du développement. ... Est-ce la fin des utopies? Non, plutôt la fin de l'idée de l'histoire comme un phénomène dont le développement est connu d'avance. Le déterminisme historique a été une fantaisie extrêmement coûteuse et sanglante. L'histoire est imprévisible parce que son protagoniste, l'homme, est l'indétermination personnifiée.

The only difference is the all-inclusive Borges: all pluralities, all multiplicities are, at the same time, a unity, and even the unity.

'Inconfidência' and conspiracy

The conspiracy is the unity. But conspiracies have generally meant division, they are constituted against something and they have a civic

statute, which according to the etymologies of 'symbol' would link them to arbitrariness and therefore would return to rational Western thought and the whole of the disjunctive and serial system. But Borges chooses a peculiar conspiracy, that of 1291, the one which founded the Helvetic League. It was at once civic and transcendental; it was, at least in Schiller's (1970) famous recreation (to which Borges does not allude), an act of individual and collective defense, an act of faith in the most basic values and in tradition. Unlike the whole of modernity (which was about to be born) this conspiracy, perhaps the first premodern conspiracy, was not a conquest of the future but rather a conquest of the past, in a combination which annuls time. Something not at all 'Occidental'. It unites both etymological faces of the sign: it is the counterpart of American conspiracies, among which the '*inconfidência mineira*' (1789) is, from its very name, the most explicit: an act of betrayal caused by individual interests that romanticism turned heroic.

We have thought of history as a bunch of leaps, something which is motivated and fueled by the slogan of one or another revolution, something which fades in the absence of these strikes, and that as a result of so many leaps and bounds barely offers us the sad map of a memory scattered with holes. Thought as a disjunctive series, History is the history of the cuts humanity has inflicted on itself, and its study is the search, as tireless as it is useless, of the uncountable 'bridges' that would allow us to join all the pieces.

Borges, a great demystifier of heroes and of the very notion of 'heroic' is, at the same time, the maker of the Hispanic-American epic, scattered in poems, stories and essays, disordered and fragmentary, like the legacy of the ancient epics. The same Borges who looked for the keys to his heroes in their deaths and the sense of their rebellions in the instant of losing or giving their lives chose, for his own death, a fatherland he brought to posterity in that inclusive conspiracy, a form of rebellion which both denies and encompasses rebellion by diluting its disjunctive basis. To this fatherland he consecrated several of his last texts and dedicated his last book. After so many heroes and so many revolutions Borges reaches the conviction that bridges are not necessary because nothing is broken.

We imagine ruptures, the same way we imagine heroes and disjunctions. His invention of a Winkelried who constantly returns (because he never left in the first place) under the shape of Paracelsus, or Amiel, or so many others is, probably, more real than our suppositions.

The etymology of 'symbol' passed down to us the double possibility of arbitrariness and motivation, the promise of the disjunction and the eternal disjunctive, of the prolific discussion which, finally, aims not only at solving a scientific problem but also at providing a reason to our naked

rationality or to the unfounded (by definition) religious faith. Both etymologies of 'symbol', so dissimilar and always in confrontation, have much more in common than otherwise: they are born of a partition. By believing so much in it we have acted out the logic of partition so often that we have made it into a reality.

Secret links

The long metaphor of the garden weaves such dissimilar texts as the Genesis, the uncountable stories of 1001 nights, Columbus's paradisiacal dreams, Candide's daily utopia, some of the wonders lost East of the Mediterranean or North of the Gulf of Mexico, Alice's wonders turned into sleight of hands, croquet and chess at the same time, in Baudelaire's flowers, Coleridge's, Milton's, Paracelsus's and Borges's roses. This long metaphor, not quite metaphorical considering the stubborn fixation with which the Garden supports itself, synthesizes the four elements and as many temporal and spatial conception we care to imagine, in a garden whose paths scare us, but through which we must walk, tentatively, half-hearing many echoes which death makes louder, revealing something by rebelling against our disjunctive laziness because ... 'all things are joined by secret links'.

Translated by Cecilia Rennie

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Special Issue

Jorge Luis Borges: The praise of signs

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LISA BLOCK DE BEHAR

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