

Borges's "Pierre Menard": Philosophy or Literature?

In a letter to his wife, to whom he dedicated the Eighth Symphony, Mahler wrote:

It is a peculiarity of the interpretation of works of art that *the rational element in them (that which is soluble by reason) is almost never their true reality, but only a veil which hides their form.* Insofar as a soul needs a body—which there is no disputing—an artist is bound to derive the means of creation from the natural world. But the chief thing is still the artistic conception. . . . [In *Faust*] everything points with growing mastery toward his final supreme moment—which, *though beyond expression, touches the very heart of feeling.*¹

Mahler's point concerns what is peculiar to works of art: they defy rationality and expression. By this, I take him to mean that works of art are not reducible to ideas and, therefore, cannot be effectively translated.

If works of art are idiosyncratic in this way, then one would expect that this is also what distinguishes them from works of philosophy. Whereas art is irreducible to ideas and defies translation, philosophy is reducible to ideas and can be translated.

This is the standard modernist view of philosophy and art—and, by extension, of literature—that has been one of the points of attack by postmodernists. The postmodernist argument is not just that art and literature are not reducible to ideas and therefore untranslatable, but that there is no distinction in this respect between art and literature on the one hand and philosophy on the other. Philosophy is also art.²

Postmodernism has found a receptive audience in Latin America, particularly in literary circles and especially on this point. In-

deed, the view that there is no distinction between literature and philosophy is often treated as dogma. I quote from a recent source: "In fact, there is no substantial difference between philosophical discourse and literary discourse" in spite of "the boundaries that have been traditionally claimed to separate both discourses."³

The rationale behind the adoption of this position by Latin Americans has been well articulated recently. It takes the following form: Latin Americans have not produced to date a philosophical discourse that is recognized as such outside Latin America. The reason is that the criterion of what constitutes philosophical discourse is modernist; that is, it draws a sharp line between philosophy and literature. If this criterion is rejected, and the dividing line between philosophy and literature is erased, however, Latin America cannot be said to lack philosophy. Latin America has not produced philosophy only if one looks at it from the point of view of modernity. From the point of view of postmodernity, things are quite different. We must, then, change the way we look at philosophy and literature to make room for Latin America in the philosophical world.⁴

An author who, more than any other, is cited as proof of the absence of boundaries between philosophy and literature is Jorge Luis Borges.⁵ And with reason, for Borges is widely known outside the Hispanic world and it would be very difficult to claim that his thought is not philosophical. The short story "Pierre Menard, the Author of the *Quixote*" in particular seems to address a set of very interesting and even profound philosophical questions. Indeed, many authors from differ-

ent philosophical traditions have used it as a point of departure for discussions that are generally regarded as philosophical. We need mention only Michel Foucault and, more recently and from a different philosophical tradition, Gregory Currie, to give credibility to this claim.⁶ I want, then, to address the question of the distinction between philosophy and literature in the context of Borges and particularly "Pierre Menard." Is "Pierre Menard" philosophy or literature? And, more generally, what distinguishes philosophy and literature if, indeed, there is a distinction between the two?⁷

To ask these two questions in the way I have done, however, is confusing, for the terms "philosophy" and "literature" are used in ordinary language to mean a variety of things. It is common to speak of philosophy, for example, as a discipline of learning, as an activity, as the thought of an author, and so on. We find a similar variety of meanings for the term "literature." Moreover, because our ultimate aim is to establish whether Borges's "Pierre Menard" is philosophy or literature, and because "Pierre Menard" is both a work and a text, in order to facilitate our task I propose to reformulate the general question we are trying to answer as follows: What distinguishes literary works from philosophical works, and literary texts from philosophical texts? The more specific question about Borges turns out something like this: Is Borges's "Pierre Menard" a work of philosophy or of literature, and is it a philosophical or a literary text?

My thesis about Borges's "Pierre Menard" in particular is that it is a literary work and text rather than a philosophical one. My thesis about philosophy and literature in general is that literary works are distinguished from philosophical ones in that their conditions of identity include the texts they express. Moreover, literary texts are distinguished from philosophical ones in that they express literary works.⁸

As will become clear, this is an ontological rather than an epistemological or a causal claim. I assume that the question concerning the identity conditions of works and texts is not logically the same as the question concerning the conditions under which works

and texts are known, or are produced. This means that, in principle, knowing a work or text may entail certain conditions that are not part of the identity conditions of the work or text, and vice versa. The same could be said concerning the conditions of their production. But I shall argue that some of the conditions of identity of literary works that are not conditions of identity of philosophical ones are, nonetheless, necessary conditions, in context, of knowing philosophical works. This is one of the important elements of distinction between my position and the standard modernist view and has important implications that I shall point out later.

I. TEXTS AND WORKS

Let me begin by introducing a distinction between works and texts. This is, of course, a much disputed topic. Because I have no space to engage in a discussion of the relative merits of various current views in this matter, I shall proceed instead by presenting my own position.⁹ This will not be sufficient to establish it fully, I am sure, but I hope it will at least clarify how I use it to articulate my view concerning the nature of literary and philosophical works and texts.

A text is a group of entities used as signs that are selected, arranged, and intended by an author to convey a specific meaning to an audience in a certain context.¹⁰ The entities in question can be of any sort. They can be ink marks on a piece of paper, sculpted pieces of ice, carvings on stone, designs on sand, sounds uttered by humans or produced by mechanical devices, actions, mental images, and so on. These entities, considered by themselves, are not a text. They become a text only when they are used by an author to convey some specific meaning to an audience in a certain context. Ontologically, this means that a text amounts to these entities considered in relation to a specific meaning. The marks on the paper on which I am writing, for example, are not a text unless someone mentally connects them to a specific meaning. The situation is very much like that of a stone used as a paperweight. The stone becomes the paperweight only when some-

one thinks of it as a paperweight or uses it as a paperweight.

A work, on the contrary, is the meaning of certain texts. Not all texts have meanings that qualify as works. "The cat is on the mat" is a text as judged by the definition given, but no one thinks of its meaning as a work. By contrast, *Don Quixote* is both a text and a work. On the difficult question of which texts have corresponding works, and which do not, there is much disagreement in the literature. The matter does not seem to depend on length, style, authorship, or the degree of effort involved in the production of the text. Fortunately, there is no need to resolve the question at this juncture.¹¹ The pertinent point for us is that texts and works are not the same thing: A text is a group of entities considered in relation to a specific meaning, whereas works are the meanings of certain texts. I leave the notion of meaning open, for what I am going to say later does not depend on any particular conception of meaning.

In the case we are discussing here, namely, "Pierre Menard," the text is the marks on the page I am looking at, the sounds I hear when someone reads "Pierre Menard" to me, certain images I imagine when I think about the marks on the page or the sounds uttered by someone reading, and so on, as long as the marks, sounds, or images in question are considered as signs intended to convey a specific meaning. In contrast, the work "Pierre Menard" is the meaning those marks, sounds, or images are intended to convey.

II. LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS AND WORKS

Now that we have a notion of texts and works, we can go back to the issue posed at the beginning and ask: Is the postmodernist position correct? Is there no distinction between philosophy and literature because in fact philosophy is literature?

The answers to both questions are negative: the postmodernist position is not correct, and there is a distinction between works and texts of literature on the one hand and works and texts of philosophy on the other. A literary work is distinguished from a philosophical one in that its conditions of identity

include the text of which it is the meaning. This is to say that the signs of which the text is composed, the entities of which these signs are constituted, and the arrangements of the signs and the entities that constitute the signs are essential to the literary work in question. This is the reason why no work of literature can ever be, strictly speaking, translated. It is in the nature of a literary work that the text that expresses the work be essential to it. This is not the case with philosophical works. It should not really matter whether I read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in German or English (in fact, many believe it is better to read it in English). What should matter is that I get the meaning. The work is not essentially related to German, whereas Shakespeare's *Hamlet* could only have been written in English and Cervantes's *Don Quixote* could only have been written in Spanish.

So much, then, for the distinction between literary and philosophical works. Now we can turn to the distinction between a literary text and a philosophical one. But this proves not to be difficult: A literary text is one that is essential to the work it expresses, whereas a philosophical text is not essential to the work it expresses.

But perhaps I have gone too fast. After all, I have just stated my view and have not given any arguments for it. I could be wrong in holding that literary texts and works are distinguishable from philosophical ones. And even if I am not wrong about this, I could be wrong about the basis of the distinction. After all, there are plenty of philosophers who do hold, or have held, both views.

To provide the kind of substantiation that this objection implies would take more space than I have at my disposal here, but I do need to say something in response to it. As a compromise, I will offer some evidence to support my position, even if limited and sketchy.

First of all, let me point out that those who oppose the distinction between philosophical and literary works and texts do so from at least two different perspectives. According to some, philosophical and literary works and texts are not distinguishable from each other because all philosophical works and texts are also literary works and texts. The

distinction between them is artificial and based on a misunderstanding of the nature of works and texts. This is the kind of position that is quite popular these days in certain philosophical circles. All works and texts, and particularly philosophical ones, are to be viewed as literary or aesthetic works and texts; they are aesthetic or literary artifacts.¹²

Others, however, although they also reject the distinction between philosophical and literary works and texts, do so because they hold that all works and texts are philosophical to the extent that they express ideas, and philosophy is about ideas. Thus there is really no essential distinction between philosophical and literary works and texts, not because philosophical texts are literary, but rather because literary texts are philosophical. This kind of position is not very popular these days, but one can find echoes of it in the history of philosophy beginning with Plato and his followers.¹³

Now, what evidence can one supply against these positions? I offer three pieces of evidence. The first is that in practice we do make distinctions between at least some philosophical and literary works and texts and we treat them differently. That is, what we do with philosophical works and texts differs from what we do with works and texts we regard as literary. This is a kind of pragmatic argument. The *Critique of Pure Reason* is studied in different academic departments, by different specialists, and in different ways than *Hamlet*. We do act as if these works and texts were quite different in function and aim, and we use them for different purposes. Moreover, when we study them, we apply different methodologies to them. In the case of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, historians of philosophy and philosophers are concerned with the understanding of the ideas it proposes, with the arguments it provides, and with the truth value of the ideas and the validity and soundness of the arguments it contains. We do pay attention to the language and the way Kant expresses himself, but the study of this language and the way Kant uses it is secondary to the main purpose of the study, which is determining the meaning and value of what Kant said. On

the contrary, what we do with *Hamlet* is quite different. Here there may still be some concern about ideas, but there is no concern about arguments. No literary critic I know has ever tried to apply logic to discourses contained in the play. Moreover, the overriding preoccupation seems to be with the overall significance of the work and text. And by significance I mean the impact of the text on ourselves, others, society, and culture.¹⁴

Still, it is obvious that, although we do use at least philosophical and literary texts and works in different ways, we could be wrong about this. Someone could argue that we do so simply because we are following certain modernist traditions and customs well entrenched in our society, and that there is nothing in the works or texts themselves that justifies the different ways in which we treat them.

To this I respond with a second piece of evidence, namely, the case of poetry. Here is a kind of work or text that seems clearly to fit the distinction I have drawn between philosophical and literary texts and works. There are aspects of a poem that make it quite different from prose, and although some philosophy has been presented in poetic form, most philosophy has not been so presented. The fact is that poetry involves certain structures, punctuation, and rhythm that stand out in contrast with the form of expression generally used in philosophical texts and works. Moreover, it seems that in poetry, such factors are as essential for the identity of the work or text as the ideas expressed by the text.

But even if this piece of evidence were to convince us that at least poetic works and texts can be distinguished from philosophical ones, in that poetic texts are essential to works whereas this is not so with philosophical ones, the problem we still face is that not all literary works and texts are poetic. So what do we make of prose works and texts that are literary? How are we to distinguish them from philosophical ones, and vice versa?

My contention is that there is still a sense in which the identity of prose literary works depends on the texts they express, a fact that does not apply to philosophical works and

that also affects the identity conditions of literary texts and works. The reason is not controversial. Indeed, it is generally accepted that the terms that constitute the vocabularies of different languages are not all equivalent. There are some that are so, but the majority of these terms are not equivalent in meaning or function. Still, many people would hold that in a large number of cases one can find formulas in one language that would get across the meaning of the terms used in the other language. My point is that this is possible in principle in the case of philosophical works, but that it can never be in the case of literary works. We may ask, why is this so? What are the differences between literary and philosophical texts and works that make literary meaning to be dependant on the text, whereas this is not so for philosophical meaning?

There are many differences at stake here, but I shall refer only to five to make my point. Consider first the nature of the vocabulary used in literary and philosophical texts, how that vocabulary is used, and how the meaning of that vocabulary is treated. Philosophical vocabulary is overwhelmingly technical. This does not mean only that the terms that are used in philosophy are not generally used in ordinary discourse, whether spoken or written. It means also that, even when commonly used terms are employed by philosophers, most of these terms acquire meanings different from those involved in common usage. Moreover, even when the meanings are not changed completely, philosophers circumscribe and limit the meanings of the terms they use. A word such as "substance," for example, which is commonly used in ordinary English, is a technical term in philosophy. Indeed, it is a technical term for most philosophers who use it because they determine a particular sense in which they use it. The terms used in ordinary language, on the other hand, have meanings that are frequently open-ended both because there are no strict criteria for their use and because their connotations vary. So much, then, for philosophy.

The situation with literature is very different from that in philosophy. In literary works and texts, terms are used primarily in an or-

dinary sense, and their open-endedness is usually regarded as a good thing. Writers of literature do not generally define their terms or explain to us what they mean. They thrive on suggestion and connotation, leaving much leeway for the audience.

This brings me to a second difference that explains why the text is necessarily a part of the identity conditions of the work in literature but not so in philosophy. Most terms used in philosophy are rare, not because they do not occur frequently in common speech—if that were the case, many pieces of literature would be indistinguishable from philosophy insofar as they too use words not common in everyday speech—but because they are abstruse terms, which have meanings not directly related to common human experience. By contrast, literature is precisely founded on common experience; that is one reason why the appeal of most literature is broad and takes little for granted in audiences.

The order of the words is also very important in literature, because literature aims to cause a certain effect on audiences that does not consist in the pure intellectual grasp of ideas. Literature is highly rhetorical. Each language has developed certain syntactical structures that produce certain effects in the audience that speaks the language of the text, and which are impossible for, or produce very different effects in, audiences unfamiliar with that language. The audience plays a very special role in the case of literary works and texts.¹⁵ The Latin periodic sentence, the epitome of elegance in that language, is generally a failure in English. In Latin, it is not only a sign of elegance, but is intended to produce a certain effect. When one is reading Latin clauses and subclauses, not yet having arrived at the verb that puts it all together, one is supposed to develop a sense of anticipation that culminates in the grasp of meaning and in the relief one achieves when the verb is reached at the end. In English, it is impossible to put the verb at the end of a sentence in most cases, and the use of long periods of subordinated clauses, instead of causing anticipation, tends to produce confusion and frustration in audiences. A translation from Latin, then, that tries to

reproduce the Latin period in English is bound to have an entirely different effect on the English audience than the Latin had on the original Latin audience for which the Latin text was intended.

This brings me to style. Style is largely a matter of word choice, syntax, and punctuation. But style also depends very much on historical circumstances. Consider, for example, that a literary piece may be regarded as having an archaic style at a certain time, but as not having it at another time. A book written in the twentieth century in the style of Cervantes is considered archaic, but a book Cervantes wrote in the seventeenth is not considered to have an archaic style. Style is always historically relative. It is also contextual insofar as it is relative to an audience. Now, style is of the essence in literature. The style of an author is fundamental to the consideration of the author and his or her work. This is not so important, and some would say not important at all, when it comes to philosophy. What matters in philosophy is not the style of the author or the piece in question, but the philosophy, that is, the ideas the piece contains or, if you will, the claims it makes.¹⁶ In this sense, although a text of philosophy may have a certain style, generally the work has little to do with it. This is a reason why the elements constitutive of texts are not part of the identity conditions of works of philosophy, whereas they are in a literary work.

Of course, one may want to argue that, since philosophy is expressed in texts, there is no way of avoiding style. And indeed, there are some philosophers who have insisted that the only way to present philosophy be in a particular format. This was certainly the case with Plato, for whom the proper philosophical form of discourse was the dialogue.¹⁷ And many other philosophers' writings can be and are characterized stylistically, e.g., Russell and Hume. Indeed, even those philosophers who avoid stylistic peculiarities, like Aquinas, can be said to have a certain style that is clear or obscure, direct or indirect, and so on. Moreover, they use certain genres in their writing, such as the article form, the *quaestio* form, the commentary, and so on, and genre is bound

up with style even if it is not the same thing. So it is difficult to argue that philosophy does not care for style, although one might argue that it does not care for a particular style.

Still, the point I am making is not that philosophical writing lacks style, or even that the style is always unrelated to meaning. My point is that philosophers do not generally think that what they are doing is essentially related to the style they use. Of course, not all philosophers have thought this way. The mentioned case of Plato is a clear exception. But this attitude is rather the exception than the rule.¹⁸

Finally, let me turn to the use of cultural symbols and icons. In literature, these are most important; they are essential for both the work and the text of literature. These symbols and icons are particular to a society and are supposed to speak to us in ways that are not always expressible in discourse. This is not generally the case with philosophy. The language of philosophy is supposed to be transcultural and universal. Philosophers aim to communicate with the whole world, independently of elements peculiar to particular cultures.

III. "PIERRE MENARD"

All this sounds too general and theoretical, so an illustration is in order. Let us take a look at "Pierre Menard" and see whether it can put some flesh on the bones of my theory. To avoid the accusation that I concentrate only on certain passages of the text that particularly suit my view, I shall simply turn to the first two sentences of it to show how a translation of "Pierre Menard" into English does not do justice to the text or work "Pierre Menard" in Spanish. The point of all this will be to show that in "Pierre Menard" in particular, and in all literary texts and works in general, elements of the text are essential to the meaning.

In the very first sentence of the translation I am using, there are at least three English words that fail to carry the full meaning of the words in Spanish.¹⁹ The full sentence reads as follows:

La obra visible que ha dejado este novelista es de fácil y breve enumeración.

The *visible* work left by this novelist is easily and briefly enumerated.

The first two words of the English translation that create difficulties are "easily" and "briefly"; they translate *fácil* and *breve*. The Spanish words in question are adjectives, whereas the English words are adverbs. This changes the force of what is being said in subtle ways. For it is one thing to do something in a certain way—the adverbial modification—and it is another to have something that is easy and brief. There is also a problem with the word "easily" insofar as the English term has no negative connotation. If anything at all, it has a positive one: to do something easily is a good thing. But in Spanish to say that something is *fácil* sometimes carries the notion that in English is expressed by the term "facile." Things that are *fácil* are not always good things. Insofar as Borges is one of the greatest ironists of the Spanish language, one would expect that for him words like *fácil* will carry with them all possible ambiguity.

Another word that creates difficulty is "enumerated," which translates the Spanish *enumeración*. The English term is a verb form, but the Spanish term is a substantive. This again paints a different picture for us; we might even say a different ontological picture. In one case, an action, or the remains of an action at least, are involved; in the other, we have a more substantial entity. This is not all, for again the connotations of the English and Spanish terms are different, first because the use of the Spanish term in a context like this is not unusual. Indeed, the very term *enumeración* in Spanish is not an unusual term. But "enumeration" is rare and rather pedantic in English. When was the last time you, reader, said that you were enumerating anything? For English speakers, this is a word of foreign origin, a learned term derived from Latin; they prefer to count, not enumerate. We, in Spanish, *enumeramos* as much as *contamos* (the counterpart of "counting").

The second sentence also presents us with difficulties.

Son por lo tanto, imperdonables las omisiones y adiciones perpetradas por Madame Henri Bachelier en un catálogo falaz que cierto diario cuya tendencia protestante no es un secreto ha tenido la desconsideración de inferir a sus deplorables lectores—si bien éstos son pocos y calvinistas, cuando no masones y circuncisos.

Impardonable, therefore, are the omissions and additions perpetrated by Madame Henri Bachelier in a fallacious catalogue which a certain daily, whose *Protestant* tendency is no secret, has had the inconsideration to inflict upon its deplorable readers—though these be few and Calvinist, if not Masonic and circumcised.

The first area of difficulty with this sentence is its length: It is approximately six lines long, depending on the type that is used. This, by English standards, is too long a sentence. But by Spanish standards, which often derive from Latin, it is not particularly long. Moreover, judged by English standards, the sentence is rather convoluted and confusing, calling for certain modifications in the translation—note, for example, the addition of a comma after "secret." For a Spanish audience, on the contrary, the sentence is quite elegant, revealing the dexterity in the language that one would expect in the writer of the piece.

The second source of difficulty concerns the first word in the sentence. The first word in the English translation is "Impardonable," and in Spanish it is *Son*. The emphases of the two sentences, then, are quite different. In English, the character of the omissions and additions is paramount: The position of the adjective suggests that this is a great fault. In Spanish, the use of the form of the verb "to be" at the beginning suggests no such force, particularly when one considers that in Spanish one could also have placed *imperdonables* first. Of course, the translator in English had no alternative but to place "Impardonable" at the beginning, for he could not very well have begun with "Are," not so much because it is ungrammatical as because it is inelegant, and this sentence is, without a doubt, intended to be "elegant."

The word "fallacious" in English creates a different problem, for, although it does accu-

rately translate the word *falaz*, the latter is a more common word in Spanish and one whose connotation is not as technical and narrow as fallacious. Generally, when people use "fallacious" in English, they are thinking of arguments of some sort. In Spanish the word *falaz* is often used to mean simply false, or incorrect. The translation of *desconsideración* by "inconsideration" also poses problems. *Desconsideración* is a rather common word in Spanish, but the English cognate is rare. Again, it smacks of learning and pedantry. Finally, there is the subjunctive translation of *son* as "be." Borges is saying that the readers are in fact few, etc., but the subjunctive introduces a certain hesitation that is missing in the original text.

In short, the translation of the two sentences of "Pierre Menard" we have before us misses much that is essential to the work of the Spanish text. And yet, the translation is very good indeed. In many ways, it is so good that it cannot be improved. Now, if we were trying to be faithful merely to the ideas expressed by the text, I am sure we could find circumlocutions that would do the trick. Or we could add learned notes that would make possible for us to understand precisely what the Spanish says. But if we do this, we lose "Pierre Menard"; we lose tone, emphasis, elegance, irony, rhythm, and particular connotations, to mention just a few elements essential to it. Indeed, to do this would be like putting a commentary or gloss in place of "Pierre Menard," or to use another example, to put St. John of the Cross's *Commentary on the Spiritual Canticle* in place of the *Spiritual Canticle*. And this will not do, which suggests that "Pierre Menard" is a literary text and work rather than a philosophical one. But is this right and, more important still, is the general thesis of the distinction between philosophical texts and works and literary texts and works that I have presented defensible?

IV. IDENTITY, IDENTIFICATION, AND CAUSATION

According to my thesis, the difference between literary works and philosophical works is that for the former the texts that express them are part of their identity condi-

tions, whereas for the latter they are not. With respect to texts, I have proposed that those that are philosophical differ from literary ones in that they do not have corresponding works in which the texts are part of the identity conditions of the works, whereas in literary texts it is otherwise.

The particular thesis concerning the work "Pierre Menard" is that it is literary because its text is part of its identity conditions, with the result that it cannot be successfully translated. Its translations are more or less close approximations, rather than faithful renderings of the original. Moreover, the text of "Pierre Menard" is literary because the work it expresses depends on it essentially.

At this point two questions arise: First, is this anything more than the stale, Platonic-based position that philosophy is independent of the medium in which it is presented, whereas literature is not?²⁰ Second, is not the criterion for philosophy being used so strong that most of what we call philosophy is left out? Fair enough. These are good questions that I must address if my view can claim any originality and credibility. (Not that I am very concerned with originality. I would rather get things right than be original.)

The answer to the first question is that, indeed, my position has much in common with the Platonic position, provided that position is understood clearly. However, even then, there are elements in my position that do not coincide with it. I do not claim, for example, as some Platonists do, that the ideas philosophy is all about are independent from the texts that express them in the sense that their ontological status is independent of those texts. Perhaps they are, but nothing I have said requires such a claim. My position is more modest. I merely claim that philosophical works, unlike literary ones, are not supposed to be tied to particular texts. In principle, philosophical works, unlike literary ones, ought to be able to be presented or expressed, or conveyed, if you wish, through different texts, and the different texts should not alter their identity as works. In short, the translation of philosophical works into other languages should be possible, whereas it should never be possible for a literary

work.²¹ Indeed, the styles and genres used by philosophers are usually those that make possible translation, whereas the literati use forms and structures so bound up with their meaning that any attempt at translating becomes impossible. The philosophical text, then, is not entirely superfluous or merely instrumental to the work. It is essential insofar as a certain type of text is conducive to the independence of the work, whereas others are not. Moreover, no work does or can exist unless there is a text that expresses it, and this goes quite contrary to the Platonic position. To my knowledge, there are no works, ideas, meanings, or the like, floating around anywhere.

Finally, I hope it is quite obvious that the elements that constitute texts are essential for both philosophical and literary texts. German words are essential to the text of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, just as Spanish words are essential to the text of *Don Quixote*. But German words are not necessary for the work *Critique of Pure Reason*, whereas Spanish words are for the work *Don Quixote*. Particular literary contents are inseparable from particular forms; particular philosophical contents should be separable in principle from particular forms, even though they are not separable from all forms.

The answer to the second question, namely, Is not your criterion of philosophy so strong that most of what we call philosophy is left out? is as follows: If applied strictly, the criterion I have suggested appears to disqualify much that is considered philosophy and make it literature. Indeed, as stated at the beginning, I believe this is one of the reasons some philosophers wish to see philosophy as literature. If we were to apply strictly the criterion I have suggested, we might have to leave out of the philosophical canon many works that are part of it. Out would go such works as Pascal's *Pensées*, Montaigne's *Essays*, and even perhaps Descartes's *Discourse on Method* and Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Not only this, but we might have to develop a technically precise language to be used in all philosophical texts. Yet, I do not think any of us, except for a very small group of ideological

purists, would want to do this. The time of the Vienna Circle and the search for an ideal scientific language in philosophy is over, at least for the moment. So what do we do?

Part of the problem arises because so far we have not distinguished between identity, identification, and causation. Thus far, I have been speaking of conditions of identity, and these conditions concern the identity of philosophical and literary texts and works considered apart from the knowledge we may have of those texts and works and the causes that bring them about. But we can also speak of the conditions under which we know philosophical and literary texts and works and of the conditions under which they are produced. The distinction between identity, identification, and causation is standard, and I trust does not need much elaboration. I shall assume that the conditions of being X, the conditions of knowing X, and the conditions of there being an X are not necessarily the same. It is one thing to be human, another to know that something is human, and still another to cause something human.

The application of this distinction to philosophical texts and works allows us to draw certain important inferences. First, by keeping causal conditions separate from conditions of identity and identification, we can understand how the distinction between literary works and texts can still be made in terms of the character of the texts and works themselves in spite of the fact that the causes that produce them include factors other than the texts and works. Consider that a text is a human artifact. A text is a group of entities used as signs, which are *selected*, *arranged*, and *intended* by an author to convey a specific meaning to an audience in a certain context. This means, of course, that a text is causally dependent on its author, audience, and context. It depends on the author because the author is the one that does the using, selecting, arranging, and intending. It depends on the audience at least insofar as the audience is the target of the communication and, therefore, determines to some extent the choices the author makes (its dependence on the audience may actually be stronger, but this is another issue). And it depends on the

context because the context alters the conditions of receptivity for the text. The entities that constitute a text are not a text by themselves. The lines, sounds, and whatever, that an author uses to compose a text, are by themselves not a text. To be a text they have to be used for a definite purpose that is related to an audience and a context. This means that the conditions of the existence of a text involve factors outside the text, for a text does not come to be by itself. The conditions of being a text and the conditions required to bring a text into being are not the same. Something similar can be said about meaning. The meaning of a text is determined by factors that are other than the entities that constitute the text, for the meaning is not naturally tied to those entities. It becomes tied to them through the use the author and the audience make of it in context.²²

This has important consequences for the issue we are addressing in this paper. It entails that the distinction between literary and philosophical texts and works in general, and of particular literary and philosophical texts and works, is possible in terms of the texts and works themselves. But it also allows one to hold that these distinctions are caused by what authors and audiences do in particular contexts. For it is the uses and practices of authors and audiences that are responsible for texts and works and for the connection between particular meanings and the entities that constitute the texts. That the identity conditions of the meanings (i.e., works) of certain texts necessarily include reference to the entities that constitute the texts, whereas in others it does not, is a result of the actions of authors and audiences in context. Moreover, that there are some texts that express works like these, and others that do not, again is a result of the actions of authors and audiences in context. This does not reduce the conditions of identity of texts and works to their causes. It is a mistake, then, to reject the distinction between philosophical and literary texts and works based on the consideration of their character because texts and works are artifacts, that is, results of human activity and design. The conditions that make a coat hanger what it is are logically in-

dependent of the fact that someone invented and made the coat hanger.

Now let us turn to the distinction between identity and identification. This distinction is important for our purposes because, when applied to texts and works, it explains how although it is essential for the *identity* of a literary work to include the corresponding text and this is not so for a philosophical one, there is no reason why the conditions of the *knowledge* of a philosophical work cannot include precisely the conditions of identity of a literary work, at least in some cases. Indeed, I propose that they do for many reasons, at least three of which I would like to mention. First, many philosophical claims and issues are too profound and abstract to be grasped without heuristic devices that make them clear. We need to give them flesh and blood, as it were; that is, we need to make them concrete in order to render them intelligible. Second, human beings are not mere rational faculties; they are complex entities with passions and feelings. This make-up influences their capacity to understand, so that often they need to have their feelings and emotions moved in order for them to understand. Third, all works are known through texts, and texts are made up of linguistic entities and structures that are cultural in nature, and this has repercussions for our understanding.

In short, the conditions of our knowledge of philosophical works include textual elements, for without some of these elements we might not be able to know them at all, or if we are, at least we might not be able to know them effectively. So, although philosophical works do not in principle include these conditions among their conditions of identity, they can and often do include them among the conditions of their being known.

This looks fine at first sight, for it amounts to a distinction between a philosophical work and how we know it. But there is a difficulty. The philosophical work, as I have proposed, is the meaning of a certain text, and now we have found that in order to know the philosophical work, the text must include elements that are characteristic of literary rather than philosophical texts. Moreover, since every literary text expresses

a literary work, it turns out that those philosophical works that require the inclusion of literary devices in their texts in order to be known entail the existence of literary works as well as texts.

Consider Descartes's *Discourse on Method*. If what has been said is correct, then in Descartes's *Discourse on Method* we have: (1) a work of philosophy, (2) a text of philosophy, (3) a work of literature, and (4) a text of literature. This creates two problems. One is ontological: It appears that Descartes's *Discourse on Method* is two works and two texts rather than one work and one text. The other problem is epistemological: We cannot easily determine who is to separate works and texts or how they are to be separated. In the face of these difficulties, why not give up the whole thing? Why not go with the postmodernists or the Platonists after all?

Two viable responses can be given to the ontological difficulty. One, which I call the Two-Text/Two-Work Alternative, is that to say Descartes's *Discourse on Method* is two works and two texts is not such a bad thing after all. The philosophical work is a certain meaning that does not include a text among its conditions of identity. The philosophical text is the text whose meaning the philosophical work is. The literary work is a certain meaning that includes a text among its conditions of identity. And the literary text is the text whose meaning the literary work is. Presumably, then, only the philosophical work is translatable; the literary one is not. This sounds a bit strange, but it does make sense to this extent: It allows us to maintain that there is something about the *Discourse on Method* that is translatable and something that is not. And this is, indeed, something that anyone familiar with the French text knows quite well. Moreover, it allows us to hold that what is translatable is the philosophy, whereas what is not is the literature. This, again, makes sense in terms of our common intuitions and practices.

The other response, which I call the One-Text/One-Work Alternative, is that there are in fact only one work and one text in Descartes's *Discourse on Method*, because the literary textual devices required for the knowledge of the philosophical work are

merely ancillary and do not form part of the identity conditions of a separate literary work. And, of course, if there is no literary work, there is no literary text. This ancillary relationship is similar to the relationship that exists between a sentence written on white paper and the color of the ink in which it is written. The color is black in order to make the sentence visible, but the color is not part of the sentence or its meaning.

This response has at least two advantages over the first: It is more economical and it solves the epistemological problem we raised. If there are not two works and two texts, then we need not devise a way of distinguishing them. All the same, even if we adopt this second alternative, we are still left with an epistemological problem, albeit a different one. For how can we tell when we have a philosophical work expressed by a philosophical text accompanied by literary devices, or a literary work and a literary text? That is, how can we tell when the literary devices are not essential to the work and when they are? The answer is that it is probably a matter of degree. There are some works that have so little relation to anything textual that clearly they are philosophical. This is the case of Suárez's *Metaphysical Disputations* and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. At the other extreme there are some works that are so tightly related to their texts that clearly they are literary. This is the case of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and St. John of the Cross's *Spiritual Canticle*. There are many works that fall in between, and here it is not clear whether we have a philosophical work or a literary one. This is the case of Montaigne's *Essays* and Pascal's *Pensées*. But surely this does not undermine the distinction we have drawn between the literary and the philosophical, just as the existence of gray does not undermine the distinction between black and white.

Now, what do we make of Borges's "Pierre Menard"? Is it like Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, or Montaigne's *Essays*? I tend to think it is more like Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but this is not an incontestable conclusion. I am not absolutely certain of it. But I am quite certain of several other things as a result of the foregoing re-

flections, and regardless of whether one adopts the Two-Text/Two-Work Alternative or the One-Text/One-Work Alternative. First, the uncertainty about the literary or philosophical nature of "Pierre Menard" does not undermine the distinction between philosophical works and texts on the one hand and literary ones on the other. Second, we need not reject the distinction between philosophy and literature in order to make room in the philosophical canon for such works and texts as Montaigne's *Essays* or Pascal's *Pensées*. And, third, we do not need to reject this distinction in order to legitimize Latin-American philosophy. Indeed, I believe the argument that seeks to legitimize Latin-American philosophy by eliminating the distinction between philosophy and literature is counterproductive in this sense, namely, that it assumes that Latin-American philosophical works and texts do not pass muster if one maintains a strict distinction between philosophy and literature. But this is nonsense for two reasons: First, because there is much philosophy in Latin America that meets the strictest standards of what it is to be a philosophical work or text. And, second, because the reasons why Latin-American philosophy is generally disenfranchised, particularly in the United States, are quite different. But that is another story.²³

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1. Quoted by Jack Diether, in "Notes to the Program," Carnegie Hall, Tuesday evening, November 4, 1997, p. 19.

2. Still another view of this relation sees philosophy as sharing a method of knowledge with both literature and science. This is why it is not possible to distinguish philosophy from literature strictly speaking. See Christiane Schildknecht, "Entre la ciencia y la literatura: Formas literarias de la filosofía," trans. José M. González García, in *Figuras del logos: Entre la filosofía y la literatura*, ed. María Teresa López de la Vieja (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994), pp. 21–40.

3. José Luis Gómez Martínez, "Posmodernidad, discurso antrópico y ensayística latinoamericana.

Entrevista," *Dissens, Revista Internacional de Pensamiento Latinoamericano* 2 (1996): 46 and 45.

4. Eduardo Mendieta and Pedro Lange-Churrión, "Philosophy and Literature: The Latin American Case," *Dissens* 2 (1996): 37.

5. Gómez Martínez, p. 45; Mendieta and Lange-Churrión, pp. 37–40.

6. Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 113–138; and Gregory Currie, "Work and Text," *Mind* 100 (1991): 325–339.

7. Keep in mind, then, that in this article I am staying away from several other questions that are under discussion today concerning philosophy and literature. For example, I will not discuss issues concerned with the morality, value, or use of literature, or questions that have to do with the cognitive or noncognitive nature of the knowledge we derive from literary texts. These are issues that have received considerable attention recently. See, for example, Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays in Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

8. For other attempts at distinguishing literary texts and works from philosophical ones, and at exploring the relations between philosophy and literature, see, for example, S. Halliwell, "Philosophy and Literature: Settling a Quarrel?" *Philosophical Investigations* 16 (1993): 6–16; George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Cornell University Press, 1974); Susan L. Anderson, "Philosophy and Fiction," *Metaphilosophy* 23 (1992): 207; Peter Lamarque and Stein H. Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), chaps. 15 and 16; and Anthony Quinton, *The Divergence of the Twain: Poet's Philosophy and Philosopher's Philosophy* (University of Warwick Press, 1985).

9. For a discussion of other views, see Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality: The Logic and Epistemology* (SUNY Press, 1995), pp. 59–70.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

11. For some suggestions in this direction, see *ibid.*, pp. 59–70.

12. Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Plato and the Poets," in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies in Plato*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (Yale University Press, 1980), p. 46 ff., and "Goethe and Philosophy," in *Literature and Philosophy in Dialogue: Essays in German Literary Theory*, trans. Robert H. Paslick (SUNY Press, 1994), pp. 18–19.

13. Cf. Renford Bambrough, "Literature and Philosophy," in *Wisdom: Twelve Essays*, ed. Renford Bambrough (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), pp. 274–292.

14. Cf. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "Objective Interpretation," *PMLA* 75 (1960): 463–479, and *Validity in Interpretation* (Yale University Press, 1967), p. 62; also Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, pp. 18–19.

15. Arthur C. Danto, "Philosophy as/and/of Literature," in *Literature and the Question of Philosophy*, ed. Anthony Cascardi (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 7. Danto goes too far, however, when he argues that literature, in contrast with philosophy, is a kind of

mirror, and finds its subject only when it is read (p. 19). First of all, it is not just literary texts that require an audience—all texts do; second, that texts require an audience does not mean that they are about the audience. For my discussion of these issues, see Gracia, *Texts: Ontological Status, Identity, Author Audience* (SUNY Press, 1996), chap. 4.

16. Indeed, some argue that it is precisely the opposition to style that distinguishes philosophy from literature. See Dalia Judovitz, "Philosophy and Poetry: The Difference between Them in Plato and Descartes," in *Literature and the Question of Philosophy*, ed. Anthony J. Cascardi, pp. 24–51.

17. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 276–277a.

18. Some have gone so far as to argue not only that philosophy has style, but that its style and that of literature are similar. See Tom Conley, "A Trace of Style," in *Displacement: Derrida and After*, ed. Mark Krupnick (Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 79.

19. I am using the following edition and translation: "Pierre Menard, Autor del *Quijote*," in *Prosa completa* (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 425–433; "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. Donald Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions Books, 1964), pp. 36–44. The terms emphasized in the translation were also emphasized in the Spanish original.

20. Plato, *Republic*, 601a–b. Some literary people agree to the extent that they believe literature is not about ideas. Recent textualists accept this, but the position goes back to much earlier times. Danto quotes a text from Flaubert to this effect in "Philosophy/as/and/of Literature," p. 13.

21. Note that this does not imply a disagreement with Nussbaum's view that "if the writing is well done"—and I think this applies to both literature and philosophy—"a paraphrase in every different form and style will not, in general, express the same conception." See Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, p. 3.

22. The role of use and practice in this context is discussed by Lamarque and Olsen in *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, particularly chaps. 2, 10, and 17. See also my defense of cultural function as determining textual meaning in Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, chap. 4.

23. I have discussed some of these in chapter 6 of *Hispanic/Latino Identity: A Philosophical Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999). I also would like to express my appreciation to the audience present at the session of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association, where I read this paper, for their questions and objections. I am particularly grateful to William Irwin, Richard Bernstein, Martha Nussbaum, Ofelia Schutte, and to an anonymous referee of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Arts Criticism*.