

Literary Philosophers

Borges, Calvino, Eco

edited by
Jorge J. E. Gracia, Carolyn Korsmeyer,
and Rodolphe Gasché

ROUTLEDGE
New York and London

2002

3.

WILLIAM IRWIN

Philosophy and the Philosophical, Literature and the Literary, Borges and the Labyrinthine

In reading the short stories of Jorge Luis Borges one is struck, prompted, and awakened by his exploration of philosophical themes. This lover of labyrinths calls our view of reality into question as he throws us into fictional worlds of illusion and allusion, halls of mirrors, and roads less traveled. He forces us to consider the ontology and epistemology of texts in "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," the nature of time and parallel universes in "The Garden of Forking Paths," the unexpected origin of fate and chance in "The Lottery in Babylon," and the importance of forgetting and the horrors of memory in *Funes, His Memory* (to name just a few of his better known short stories).

Beyond simply challenging our unreflective beliefs about the nature of reality, the short stories of Borges call into question the nature of literature and philosophy. Are these *ficciones* literature? Are they philosophy? If there is one lesson to draw from Borges, it is that we cannot and should not necessarily trust our usual take on things. We must first ask ourselves, What is literature? What is philosophy?

As we shall see, the many attempts at defining literature and philosophy provide much insight but ultimately fail. Why? Not for lack of diligence or ingenuity, but because we cannot define "literature" and "philosophy" in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, that is, give essential definitions of them. Rather, I shall argue that they are terms akin to, though not the same as, Wittgensteinian family resemblance terms. Having argued this, what can we say about the short stories of Borges? Are they literature? Are they philosophy?

Family Resemblance?

As is well known, Wittgenstein articulated the notion of family resemblance in the *Blue Book*¹ and the *Philosophical Investigations*,² giving the classic example of games. What makes something a game is difficult or perhaps impossible to specify, but any competent speaker of English knows how to

properly use and apply the term "game." Wittgenstein's ingenious, yet straightforward, explanation is that games share a family resemblance; each of them bears some resemblance to, that is, shares something significant in common with, at least one other, but not all other, games.

In the *Blue Book* Wittgenstein tells us, "games form a family, the members of which have family likenesses. Some of them have the same nose, others have the same eyebrows, and others again the same way of walking; and these likenesses overlap."³ I would argue that we can give a better account of things such as games if we coopt and make use of family resemblance by looking to this passage from the *Blue Book*. What we will offer then is not what Wittgenstein and his followers mean by family resemblance but something significantly different. We will coopt and transform Wittgenstein's antimetaphysical notion for our own metaphysical purposes.

When we consider what it means for two people to share an actual family resemblance, we must note that there are right and wrong attributions of it. Two close friends may be mistaken for brothers; a stranger may even say that they look alike and so share a family resemblance. The stranger is right to notice the similarities but wrong to attribute them to a family resemblance. So, noticing similarities and thinking there is a family resemblance are not always sufficient for there actually being one. In the case of actual family resemblance, there must ultimately be an appeal to shared genetics.⁴ Shared genetics is a necessary, although not a sufficient, condition for being a person of whom it is correct to say he or she bears the family resemblance.⁵

If actual family resemblance works this way, then perhaps there is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the correct application of family resemblance terms. The condition would, of course, depend on the case at hand. To be clear, Wittgenstein would not agree. Rather, he would maintain that there is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the correct application of family resemblance terms. What we are offering then is inspired by, developed out of, and transforms Wittgenstein's notion; it is not identical to it. To distinguish our conception let us call it "necessary-condition-family-resemblance."

Let us see how this conception of necessary-condition-family-resemblance works in the case of a game. For something to qualify as a game, it must be intended, actually or counterfactually, as a game by at least some of the people playing it at the moment, or, if not being played at the moment, must have been intended, actually or counterfactually, as a game by the players.⁶ This clearly applies to all cases of actual games from paradigms, such as basketball, to odd cases, such as *Dungeons and Dragons*. Still, intending⁷ something to be a game is not a sufficient condition for it being a game. Arsonists may (in their own demented minds) intend the burning of orphanages to be a game, but that does not make it a game. Burning orphanages does not fit the necessary-condition-family-resemblance. How do we

know and correctly object that something does not fit the resemblance? It is in fact absurd in many cases to ask someone to justify the claim that a necessary-condition-family-resemblance term does not apply to a certain entity. As Michael A. Simon aptly says, "We are no more called to account for why we do not call fishing a game than we are for why we do not call reading or washing a game. Reasons can ordinarily be given for declining to apply a predicate to a particular case, to be sure, but they are always of a negative sort and do not differ in principle from why a cat is not called a primate or why a blackboard-eraser is not called an automobile."⁸ We can know that a necessary-condition-family-resemblance term applies even when we cannot clearly say why we know it or what our evidence is.⁹

As we observed, a person may look like he shares the family resemblance even if he does not. It is the same with necessary-condition-family-resemblance terms. Something may not be a game although it is game-like. For example, literary allusions with their sense of play are ludic, game-like, but are not games. We should also note that actual family resemblance is open ended and subject to change, with intermarriage and the addition of new members. In the same way then, the proper application of a necessary-condition-family-resemblance term is subject to change and development. What we call a game today may bear only the faint resemblance of a distant ancestor to what we call a game a thousand years from now.

What Is Literature?

In asking the question, what is literature?, we are not speaking of literature in the sense of the secondary meaning of the word,¹⁰ in which it means anything written down—the sense in which we speak about the literature on cloning or Columbus, for example. Rather, we mean literature in the primary, although broad, sense of the word. The range of texts that historically has been classified as literature is indeed broad, and some would like it to be even broader. The poet Shelley wanted to include some legislative statutes as literature,¹¹ and E. D. Hirsch, Jr., argues that some of the writings of Niels Bohr should be classified as literature, given the way they engage the heart and mind.¹²

How are we to define literature? Hirsch observes that all attempts at a definition of literature end up being stipulative definitions about how the term *ought to be used* rather than describing how the term *actually is used*.¹³ Of course a stipulative definition may be fine for certain purposes, but it will not do for our purpose of articulating an objective account of what literature is. I shall argue that Hirsch¹⁴ is on the right track; to use our terminology, literature is a necessary-condition-family-resemblance term.¹⁵

Although we cannot even begin to examine every definition of literature proffered by scholars through the ages, we can inspect some of the more

promising definitions.¹⁶ Monroe C. Beardsley argues, "it is on my view, not the presence of aesthetic merits per se but the aesthetic intention they evince that distinguishes literary works of art from other discourses."¹⁷ This talk of intention at first seems strange coming from the co-author of "The Intentional Fallacy,"¹⁸ but his definition sheds some light on the matter: "aesthetic intention"—that is, the intention to make something capable of affording aesthetic satisfaction to one who properly approaches it."¹⁹ Beardsley's emphasis on aesthetic intention, rather than simply aesthetic merit, is sensible. Aesthetic merit alone is neither necessary nor sufficient for a text's being literature. To see why it is not sufficient consider the following possibility. If a text has aesthetic merit but we have good reason to believe there was no intention, counterfactual or otherwise, to produce literature, then individuals may choose to read the text *as* literature but it would be odd and potentially offensive to say it *is* literature.²⁰ So we may read the Bible or the Koran *as* literature, but this does not necessarily imply that these texts *are* literature. It appears that Beardsley can avoid the problem of imposing normative standards of aesthetic merit and so avoid giving a stipulative definition.

In his article "What Is Literature?" Robert Stecker concludes with the following definition:

- A work *w* is a work of literature if and only if *w* is produced in a linguistic medium and
1. *w* is a novel, short story, tale, drama, or poem, and the writer of *w* intended that it possess aesthetic, cognitive, or interpretation-centered value, and the work is written with sufficient technical skill for it to be possible to take that intention seriously, or
 2. *w* possesses aesthetic, cognitive or interpretation-centered value to a significant degree, or
 3. *w* falls under a predecessor concept of literature and was written while the predecessor concept held sway, or
 4. *w* belongs to the work of a great writer.²³

Literature in terms of the aesthetic is too narrow the class too far, although admittedly not by much.

To be clear, each of the four conditions is intended as sufficient, although none is intended as necessary. In condition 1 Stecker avoids the problem Beardsley faced in restricting literature in terms of aesthetic intention, allowing that other values may suffice in lieu of the aesthetic. A text may have cognitive value, presenting stimulating ideas, or may have interpretation-centered value, being the kind of text open to numerous and varied interpretations. There are other values Stecker should have included, for example, the emotive, the ability to stir the emotions in a sense that is not necessarily aesthetic. There are also other genres that should be included, such as the memoir.

In condition 2, Stecker misses the distinction between an entity being literature and being taken or used *as* literature. A linguistic entity may manifest aesthetic, cognitive, and/or interpretation-centered value to a significant degree, and yet, if there was no intention to manifest these (or this) values (value), the entity may be taken or read *as* literature although it would be mistaken to say it *is* literature. (We made this point above in the context of aesthetic merit.) In condition 3, the predecessor concept is given too much power. Simply because a text was at one time regarded as an instance of *belles lettres*, for example, does not necessarily imply that we should now regard it as literature. Condition 3 may commonly be the case, but there is no reason to accept that it is always the case. In condition 4, what "belongs to the work of a great writer" is terribly vague, a point that Stecker concedes somewhat.²⁴ Certainly we do not necessarily want to consider everything an author ever wrote as included in his or her "work." Laundry lists, for example, would not ordinarily count, but what about personal letters? Is the music criticism of Shaw, for example, part of his "work" and thus literature? Is T. S. Eliot's *Poetics* or Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in an instance of literature. To restrict

Stecker gives us a thorough and insightful definition but one that is nonetheless inadequate. In the end what he has given us is, as we shall see, a list of some of the things that go into the necessary-condition-family-resemblance indicated by the term "literature." Before proceeding to our account of literature as a necessary-condition-family-resemblance term, however, we must consider one last definition.

In *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* Peter Lamarque and S. H. Olsen give the following account: "A text is identified as a literary work by recognizing the author's intention that the text is produced and meant to be read within a framework of conventions defining the practice of . . . literature."²⁵ Lamarque and Olsen point toward a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for literature. The condition is necessary because, as I have argued, unless the text is intended, actually or counterfactually, as literature then it is *not* literature, although it may be read *as* literature.²⁶ The condition is not sufficient, however, because unless the text can actually be identified as intended to fit the framework they mention and actually does fit that framework, it is not literature. For example, the writing of a child may be sincerely intended as literature, although no one can recognize that intention, or, even if that intention is recognized, the writing may not actually fit the framework of literature.

On the other hand, a text produced at a time or in a culture with no conception of literature could still be literature, despite the lack of an actual intention to fit the framework. A counterfactual intention would suffice. That is to say, if (hypothetically and counterfactually) the author of the text were presented with the notion of literature, would the author agree that the intention was to produce a text that fits the necessary-condition-family-resemblance of literature? If the answer is yes, then we have a counterfactual intention to fit the resemblance. This is very much like asking whether the author of a living will or advance directive would have intended artificial nutrition and hydration to be prohibited by the declaration of "no extraordinary care." If the patient had actually considered the issue of nutrition and hydration we are ferreting out an actual intention; if the patient had not actually considered nutrition and hydration, then we are ferreting out a counterfactual intention. In either case our search for the intention is legitimate. The epistemological difficulty of discovering counterfactual intentions does not disqualify them, no more so than does the epistemological difficulty sometimes involved in discovering actual intentions. In fact, some counterfactual intentions are abundantly clear. For example, although the framers of the Constitution did not actually intend the free speech guaranteed by the First Amendment to cover cyberspace communications, it is clear that they counterfactually intended it. That is to say, they obviously did not actually consider cyberspace communications, but if presented with the possibility of such communications they would have intended for them to be covered by the First Amendment.²⁷

Lamarque and Olsen's definition places only one very broad requirement on a text being literature, that it be intended and recognized as intended to fit the framework of conventions defining literature. I would suggest that the framework of conventions that "define" literature does not truly define it, but simply enables us to give a rough account of literature.²⁸ That is, we cannot give a nonstipulative definition of literature in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Rather, like other necessary-condition-family-resemblance terms, literature has a necessary, although not sufficient, condition. Among the intentions (which may be many and varied) of the author in producing literature must be, actually or counterfactually, the intention to produce a text that would fit within the application of the necessary-condition-family-resemblance term "literature." This is a necessary but not a sufficient condition, for if the text does not fit the resemblance despite the intention, it is not literature. Because the proper application of a necessary-condition-family-resemblance term, in this case "literature," can never be conclusively settled, there is no hope of combining the caveat that the text must fit the resemblance with the necessary condition that it be intended to fit the resemblance. In combining these two demands we would simply be left with an account that is correct but that does not settle the matter in terms of an essential definition. The chief specification of the definition would rest on something that could not be conclusively settled, that is, how we know if something appears to fit the resemblance.

This is not to suggest that we are in the dark when it comes to knowing what kind of things we look for in judging whether a text fits the necessary-condition-family-resemblance of literature. In judging whether an entity is a game we may consider things such as whether it involves skill or luck, has a winner and loser, provides entertainment and diversion, etc. In a similar way there are characteristics to look for in judging whether a text is an instance of literature. Our preceding discussion and criticism of proposed definitions of literature make a number of those characteristics clear: belonging to a genre such as poetry or the novel normally considered part of literature, having aesthetic intention and merit, being fictional discourse, making extraordinary use of language, being diversionary or nonpragmatic discourse, having cognitive, interpretation-centered, or emotive value, having been accepted by a predecessor concept such as *belles lettres*, belonging to the work of a great writer, etc. As is the case with "game," though, neither any single characteristic of literature nor any combination of characteristics yields a nonstipulative definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions.

"Literature," as a necessary-condition-family-resemblance term, potentially has a rather broad application; it is not restricted normatively. Still, there are two considerations to keep in mind with regard to the application of the term "literature" that keep it from becoming a vacuously broad notion. First, although the use of the term "literature" is not stipulatively restricted

What Is Philosophy?

As is well known, the English word "philosophy" comes from the Greek word φιλοσοφία (*philosophia*), love of wisdom. It is, then, in its etymology and original use an extremely broad term. As Pythagoras conceived of it, philosophy is living the life of the mind as opposed to living the life characterized by love of bodily pleasure.²⁹ Its objects of study have been many and various, and thus it is in some sense a truism that philosophy is "a more or less general theory of everything." The serious problem faced in answering the question, "What is philosophy?", is that there may be no good definition to be had, that is, no essential definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. It may also be that most, or all, definitions, including those that do succeed in giving necessary and sufficient conditions, will be stipulative. Giving a definition of philosophy based on necessary and sufficient conditions is inevitably restrictive. For, if it is not to be vacuous, it will exclude certain candidates, and that exclusion is inevitably, it seems, a normative matter. In the end, then, we may not be able to *answer* the question, "What is philosophy?" but only *respond* to it. Perhaps "philosophy," like "literature," is a necessary-condition-family-resemblance term. Before jumping to this conclusion, however, let us consider some of the more promising definitions of philosophy.³⁰

Howard Kainz defines philosophy as, "what Socrates said and did . . . systematic re-examination of accepted meanings and values in his culture, for the explicit purpose of increasing self-consciousness of oneself and society."³¹ This is a fine definition in certain respects. Historically, much philosophy has been systematic (and perhaps still can be, at least to an extent). The examination of meanings and values is a prime activity of philosophy, and raising the self-consciousness of both or either oneself and society is a primary goal of philosophy. And finally, there could not be a better model of philosophy than Socrates. Kainz, by articulating the Socratic paradigm of philosophy, has offered a definition that will fit most, if not all, paradigms of philosophy. At first it seems difficult to deny that this definition offers a sufficient condition for philosophy, but given the division of labor in the modern academy the difficulty disappears. A number of other disciplines could rightfully claim to offer "systematic re-examination of accepted meanings and values in culture, for the explicit purpose of increasing self-consciousness of oneself and society." Sociology and political science come immediately to mind, but history and literature³² might also take this as part of their task. It cannot be objected that this is *only* part of the task of these other disciplines, since in fact it is *only* part of the task of philosophy too. That is, there are things with which philosophy is concerned, for example, concepts and the nature of ultimate reality, that are not explicitly part of this definition. And also, not all of what the definition offers is necessary to philosophy. For example, some

by normative standards, this does not preclude us from talking of good and bad literature. We simply do not decide in advance that all literature must be "good" in accord with certain set standards. We are free to employ our own aesthetic standards, however, we may have determined them, in judging the merit of an instance of literature. For example, because they clearly are intended to and actually do fit the resemblance, I take John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and John Gritsham's *The Firm* to be literature. I judge the former to be great literature and I judge the latter to be poor literature. Others may disagree with my judgments, and that is fine. Judgments of aesthetic merit are not purely subjective, but they do allow room for disagreement. Further, these judgments involve a normative element, which is not our interest here. The second consideration is that there can be (and are) texts that approach, but fall short of, or to the side of, being literature (texts that are "literature-like") and other texts that can be read *as* literature although they *are not* literature. I would suggest that texts that fit either of these descriptions can aptly be called *literary*. For example, the philosophical writings of William James are literary, even if they are not literature. The literary, then, is a broad category including texts that are "literature-like," texts not intended to *be* literature that may still be fruitfully read *as* literature, and literature itself (it would be odd and mistaken to deny that an example of literature is literary). So, if we were to agree that the latest physics textbook is not literature we could still describe it as literary if there were sufficient reason to do so—a judgment of some "literary flair" might do. Also, if we were to agree that the Koran was not intended to fit the resemblance of literature (whether or not this is actually the case) and so is not literature, we could still judge it to be literary. This, I believe, allows for an important compromise with those who seemingly want to take a very broad range of texts (including their own works of criticism) as literature. Our response to them is that we can agree with them that such texts are literary and can be read *as* literature, although we would not say they *are* literature.

To return to our motivating interest, let us ask: Are the short stories of Borges literary? Are they literature? They certainly share much in common with paradigmatic works of literature, being of aesthetic, cognitive, and interpretation-centered value. The short story is also normally recognized as a subgenre of literature. Borges's *fictiones* are indeed imaginative fictions; they can be diversionary and nonpragmatic; and Borges is commonly regarded as a great writer. Certainly this is more than enough to say that the *fictiones* are literary. In fact, given that these texts of Borges evince the intention to have all of these qualities and there is no external evidence to suggest the qualities were not intended, it is clear that the texts were intended to, and actually do, fit the necessary-condition-family-resemblance of literature. The short stories of Borges are literature. There is no surprise in this conclusion, but it does lead us to the next question, one with a potential for surprise in its

Husserl and other phenomenologists are not concerned with meanings and values but with descriptions and eidetic essences.³³

In his article, "The Conditions of the Question: What Is Philosophy?," Gilles Deleuze tells us that "philosophy is the art of forming, inventing and fabricating concepts."³⁴ Moving further in the direction of Nietzsche, Deleuze says "philosophy more rigorously understood is the discipline that consists of *creating* concepts."³⁵ "[T]o create ever new concepts—this is the object of philosophy."³⁶ This is an important contribution to the conversation, and philosophers from various camps would nod approvingly at the inclusion of concepts in an account of philosophy. Still, rather than discovering, investigating, and interrogating concepts, Deleuze would have the philosopher fabricate and create them. Although no doubt it is true that much great and original philosophy has done just what Deleuze describes, it is hard to see how it is necessary. Much that has traditionally been considered philosophy would be excluded. As Deleuze says, "[philosophy] is neither contemplation, nor reflection, nor communication, even if it can sometimes believe itself to be one or the other of these because of the capacity of every discipline to engender its own illusions."³⁷ Although it would be fine to define philosophy stipulatively in these terms, and perhaps that is all Deleuze seeks to do, this will not work as the kind of definition we seek. Deleuze's account stipulates that only what creates new concepts counts as philosophy, a normative condition that simply is not a necessary condition outside of this stipulative context. The creation of concepts will also not work as a sufficient condition for philosophy. Disciplines other than philosophy create concepts, psychology, and literature, for example.

Rather than stipulating the importance of concepts for philosophy, we could focus on some other concern instead. Russell and many Anglo-American partisans might insist that there is no philosophy without analysis (not necessarily analytic philosophy per se but analysis in a sense that would include Plato, Aristotle, et al.).³⁸ Like Deleuze's glorification of concepts, this worship of analysis can serve only to stipulate normatively the definition of philosophy, and this will not do for our purposes.

My position is that we cannot give a nonstipulative definition of philosophy in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Like other necessary-condition-family-resemblance terms, philosophy has a necessary, although not sufficient, condition. Among the intentions (which may be many and varied) of the author in producing philosophy must be, actually or counterfactually, the intention to produce a text³⁹ that would fit within the application of the necessary-condition-family-resemblance term "philosophy." This holds for the same reason that the counterpart intention to fit the resemblance holds in the case of literature. This is a necessary but not a sufficient condition, for if the text does not fit the resemblance despite the intention, it is not philosophy. Because the proper application of a necessary-condition-

family-resemblance term, in this case "philosophy," can never be conclusively settled, there is no hope of combining the caveat that the text must fit the resemblance with the necessary condition that it be intended to fit the resemblance. In combining these two demands we would simply be left with an account that is correct but that does not settle the matter in terms of a proper definition. The chief specification of the definition would rest on something that could not be conclusively settled: how we know if something appears to fit the resemblance.

This is not to suggest that we are in the dark when it comes to knowing what kind of things to look for in judging whether something fits the necessary-condition-family-resemblance of philosophy. There are characteristics to look for in judging whether something fits the resemblance of philosophy, but neither any single characteristic of philosophy nor any combination of characteristics yields a nonstipulative essential definition.

"Philosophy" as a necessary-condition-family-resemblance term potentially gives it a rather broad application; it is not restricted normatively like a stipulative definition. Still, there are two considerations to keep in mind with regard to the application of the term "philosophy" that keep it from becoming a vacuous notion. First, although philosophy is not stipulatively restricted by normative standards, this does not preclude us from talking of good and bad philosophy. Our necessary-condition-family-resemblance account does not specify in advance that all philosophy must be "good" in terms of standards all must adopt. The necessary-condition-family-resemblance of philosophy can be, and is, shared by even its black sheep and embarrassing uncles. We are free as individuals or as followers of a particular school to employ our own standards of what good philosophy is. For example, because they clearly are intended to, and actually do, fit the resemblance, the writings of Derrida and Searle are both correctly considered philosophy. We may differ in our evaluations of their writings, but that is another matter altogether.

The second consideration is that there can be (and are) texts that approach, but fall short of, or to the side of, being philosophy (texts that are "philosophy-like") and other texts that can be read *as* philosophy although they *are not* philosophy. I would suggest that texts that fit either of these descriptions can aptly be called *philosophical*. The philosophical, then, is a broad category including texts that are "philosophy-like," texts not intended to *be* philosophy that may still be fruitfully read *as* philosophy, and philosophy itself (it would be odd and mistaken to deny that an instance of philosophy is philosophical). So, if we were to agree that the latest physics textbook is not philosophy, we could still describe it as philosophical if there were sufficient reason to do so—for example, if it clearly gestured toward metaphysics. Also, if we were to agree that the Koran was not intended, even counterfactually, to fit the family resemblance of philosophy (whether or not

of our time, consists of the ninth and thirty-eighth chapters of the Part I of *Don Quixote* and a fragment of Chapter XXII.⁴⁵ Borges's story immediately raises the issue of the ontology of authorship. How can one be the author of a text that has already been written? It would be possible, although unlikely, for two authors to independently produce texts that appear identical. (Consider that Leibniz and Newton are said to have independently arrived at the calculus.) Still, this cannot be the case for Menard, who is not ignorant of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*; Menard has indeed read it, some parts more than once. Simply copying the text would not do either, and that was not Menard's plan. Rather, "His admirable ambition was to produce a number of pages which coincided—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes" (p. 91). Menard's plan raises yet another question: Is it possible for two authors to independently produce such a long and complex text? It is a difficult, some would say impossible,⁴⁶ task simply to understand the author as he intended to be understood. Still others, including Schleiermacher,⁴⁷ would say we in fact must attempt to understand the author better than he understood himself. Menard, we are to take it, was an extraordinary man and would have had no trouble in assuming the mindset of Cervantes in producing his *Don Quixote*. In fact this was his first approach at the task. "Initially, Menard's method was to be relatively simple: Learn Spanish, return to Catholicism, fight against the Moor or Turk, forget the history of Europe from 1602 to 1918—*be Miguel de Cervantes*" (p. 91). The whole method sounds not only impossible but absurd, yet the narrator tells us that Menard was quite capable of it. "Pierre Menard weighed that course (I know he pretty thoroughly mastered seventeenth-century Castilian) but he discarded it as too easy" (p. 91). Not only was it too easy but it was not interesting enough. "Being, somehow, Cervantes, and arriving thereby at the *Quixote*—that looked to Menard less challenging (and therefore less interesting) than continuing to be Pierre Menard and coming to the *Quixote through the experiences of Pierre Menard*" (p. 91). Is this possible? In theory, we must suppose it is; different causes can have the same effect, after all.⁴⁸ Despite the limitations of ordinary human beings, the narrator tells us that this exceptional Menard succeeded in independently writing the *Quixote*, although he did not finish the task before his untimely passing.

Menard's success raises another question regarding the ontology of texts: Are two texts that are indiscernible the same text? The answer is, not necessarily. Clearly, this happens all the time with simple texts. The text of an advertisement, "big furniture sale!" could mean that the store is offering terrific savings in one context and that it is selling huge chairs and couches in another context. So, logically speaking this could occur for longer and more complex texts as well. Menard's success at arriving at the *Quixote* would result in a text different from Cervantes' yet identical in appearance. The two texts would embody different intentions and their differing historical contexts

this is indeed the case) and so is not philosophy, we could still judge it to be philosophical. Similarly, even if Henry James did not intend his novels to be philosophy they are philosophical.⁴⁰ This, I believe, allows for an important compromise with those who seemingly want to take a very broad range of texts as philosophy. Our response is that we can agree with them that such texts are philosophical and can be read *as* philosophy, although we would not say they *are* philosophy.

So, what is and what is not philosophy? This is the kind of question that needs to be answered on a case-by-case basis, and so I will do my best to avoid broad generalizations.⁴¹ Our method for arriving at an answer has been articulated, and that is all we need for the moment.⁴² Is literature philosophy? Certainly it can be, in a given case, if it is intended to fit the necessary-condition-family-resemblance and does indeed fit. That philosophers can produce literature that is also philosophy seems uncontroversial; indeed many of the existentialists seem to have considered it necessary for their projects. But is all literature philosophy? Clearly the answer is no, inasmuch as a great deal of literature is not intended to fit the resemblance of philosophy. More difficult cases are those in which the instance of literature is undeniably *philosophical*. Some instances of literature, such as Homer's *Odyssey*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, and Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, are undeniably *philosophical*. Many would argue that they are indeed philosophy, and many more would not hesitate to teach them in their philosophy courses. As I have suggested, we need to examine such texts on a case-by-case basis, and we must remember that the *philosophical* is not necessarily *philosophy*.⁴³

Borges?

In this story, Borges's narrator tells of the life and work of his recently deceased friend, Menard. He begins with a catalogue of Menard's "visible" work, which includes sonnets, literary criticism, and monographs on the history of philosophy, among other items. All of this, however, is said to pale in comparison to "the other, the subterranean, the interminably heroic production, the *oeuvre nonpareil*, the *oeuvre* that must remain—for such are our human limitations!—unfinished. This work, perhaps the most significant

would result in differences in style. As the narrator tells us, "The contrast in styles is equally striking. The archaic style of Menard—who is, in addition, not a native speaker of the language in which he writes—is somewhat affected. Not so the style of his precursor, who employs the Spanish of his time with complete naturalness" (p. 94). The narrator also tells us that despite the affectation of Menard's archaic language, his *Quixote* is actually superior to that of Cervantes. "Menard's fragmentary *Quixote* is more subtle than Cervantes'. Cervantes crudely juxtaposes the humble provincial reality of his country against the fantasies of the romance, while Menard chooses as his 'reality' the land of Carmen during the century that saw the Battle of Lepanto and the plays of Lope de Vega" (p. 93).

Menard's *Quixote*, in its writing, points toward new ways of reading, given that his text is far less clear in its intention. As the narrator tells us, "The Cervantes text and the Menard text are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer. (More *ambiguous*, his detractors will say—but ambiguity is richness)" (p. 94). Ambiguity, this celebrated virtue on which the poets thrive, is there in spades for the reader of Menard's text. But why go through the trouble of the Menardian project? Who among us could hope to achieve it anyway? Why not simply read texts *as if* they were written by someone else? Haven't Foucault and Barthes buried the author anyway? Aren't readers free to read any text as if they were the author, or, if they prefer, as if someone else were the author? As the narrator tells us, "Menard has (perhaps unwittingly) enriched the slow and rudimentary art of reading by means of a new technique—the technique of deliberate anachronism and fallacious attribution" (p. 95). Noticing the narrator's parenthetical statement, we cannot be sure that Menard himself would approve of this new technique of reading, but it is already too late. Menard has opened Pandora's box. Now a feminist need not rewrite *Hamlet*; she can simply read the text as if it were written by Judith Butler or Toni Morrison. A homosexual need not rewrite *Zarathustra*; he can simply read it as if its author were gay—and as if Zarathustra were seeking an erotic tryst with the Übermensch. As the narrator tells us, "That technique, requiring infinite patience and concentration, encourages us to read the *Odyssey* as though it came after the *Aeneid*, to read Mme. Henri Bachelier's *Le jardin du Centaure* as though it were written by Mme. Henri Bachelier. This technique fills the calmest books with adventure. Attributing the *Imitatio Christi* to Louis Ferdinand Céline or to James Joyce—is that not sufficient renovation of those faint spiritual admonitions?" (p. 95).

I would not claim that Borges intended us to agree with the conclusions the narrator draws or those that the story points to, nor am I agreeing with them. Given his playful nature, I suspect Borges himself believed quite the opposite and would have had a hearty laugh at those who took his narrator seriously. Even the character Menard, we are told, often said the opposite of what he meant and believed. With regard to Menard's invective against

states the exact reverse of Menard's true opinion of Valéry; Valéry understood this, and the two men's friendship was never imperiled" (p. 89–90).

Clearly, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" is philosophical in that it raises issues and asks questions that are of concern to philosophers. Any one of the issues would be a worthy subject for a journal article in the *Philosophical Review*. Still there is little more surprise in saying that one of Borges's short stories is philosophical than there is in saying it is literary. The more pressing question is: Is "Pierre Menard" an instance of philosophy? To ask this question is, first, to ask whether it was intended to fit the necessary-condition-family-resemblance of philosophy, and although I cannot say for certain, I suspect with good reason that it was not. Borges certainly read philosophy and had a love for and affinity with certain philosophers, but there is no indication that he regarded himself as a philosopher and, more importantly, there is no indication that he intended his "Pierre Menard" or other short stories to be philosophy. A writer of short stories would need to make clear that the stories were intended to be philosophy for them to be taken as philosophy. Otherwise the natural presumption of the reader is that they are literature, albeit philosophical literature, and so the author's goal and intention would be thwarted.

As I admitted, it could be that I am wrong and that Borges did in fact intend his "Pierre Menard" to be philosophy. In that case "Pierre Menard" would fulfill the necessary condition of being philosophy; it would be a text intended by its author to fit the necessary-condition-family-resemblance. This, however, would not be sufficient because the text would also have to actually fit the resemblance, which it does not. The short story is not ordinarily accepted as fitting the resemblance of philosophy; in fact, I know of no short story offered by its author and generally accepted as fitting the resemblance. "Pierre Menard" in particular does nothing to change that. It raises interesting and important philosophical issues, but it neither argues for, nor provides answers. I suspect, although I will not assert here, that we could say the same of Borges's other *ficciones*. I could go on in saying why "Pierre Menard" does not fit the resemblance, but that would be to verge on the absurd. Simply recall what Simon argued, "Reasons can ordinarily be given for declining to apply a predicate to a particular case, to be sure, but they are always of a negative sort and do not differ in principle from why a cat is not called a primate or why a blackboard-eraser is not called an automobile."⁴⁹

Let us not leave the labyrinth on a negative note, however. Although "Pierre Menard" is not philosophy, it is certainly philosophical. Given that Borges likely did not intend this short story to be philosophy, it is no criticism of it or him to say that it is not—no more than to say that it is not science. Nonetheless, Borges can, and perhaps should, be read by philosophers, and particularly students of philosophy—as he has the ability to awaken and excite

- claim that literature is imaginative writing. Monroe C. Beardsley's first definition of literature as presented in his *Aesthetics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958) is as follows: "A literary work is a discourse in which an important part of the meaning is implicit" (p. 126). Colin Lyas in "The Semantic Definition of Literature," *The Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969) exposes the inadequacy of Beardsley's so-called semantic definition. We can have instances of literature that leave nothing to the imagination, much nonfiction for example (cf. p. 84). Jean-Paul Sartre's account contends that literature utilizes words in engaged social and political commitment. Both the writer and reader are free but situated. Notably, Sartre does not include poetry in this utilitarian account. See Bernard Frechtman, trans., *What Is Literature?* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), pp. 19, 45, and 51.
17. Monroe C. Beardsley, "Aesthetic Intentions and Fictive Illocutions," in *What Is Literature?*, ed. Paul Hernadi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 166.
18. W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), pp. 3-18.
19. Beardsley (1978), p. 165. Even in "The Intentional Fallacy" Wimsatt and Beardsley did not deny the role of authorial intention altogether; they simply denied the validity of appealing to intentions not manifested in the text, for example, consulting the author about his intentions.
20. It is potentially unethical as well. See my *Intentionalist Interpretation: A Philosophical Explanation and Defense* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), pp. 50-54.
21. Hirsch, p. 29.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
23. Robert Stecker, "What Is Literature?" *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 4 (1996), p. 694.
24. Stecker, p. 694.
25. Peter Lamarque and S. H. Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 255-256. They go on to specify the conventions of literature in mimetic and aesthetic terms. Cf. Stecker, p. 685.
26. For a different view on causal conditions and conditions of identity see Jorge J. E. Gracia, "Borges's Pierre Menard: Philosophy or Literature?" this volume, pp. 85-107.
27. For further discussion of counterfactual intention see E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "Counterfactuals in Interpretation," in *Interpreting Law and Literature: A Hermeneutic Reader*, ed. Sanford Levinson and Steven Mailoux (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 55-68.
28. Cf. Deborah Knight on the "practice" of literature in "Intersections: Philosophy and Literature, or Why Ethical Criticism Prefers Realism," this volume pp. 15-26.
29. For Pythagoras' definition, see Howard Kainz, "The Definition of Philosophy," *Epistemologia* 17 (1994), p. 201.
30. These will be, for the most part, definitions offered in print by people addressing the question, what is philosophy? To be clear, the definitions we shall consider have been removed from the contexts in which they were originally offered. We do not mean to attack a straw man, but only to point out that typical definitions of philosophy do not provide necessary and sufficient conditions while remaining nonspulative. Indeed, many or most do not even make this their goal.
31. Kainz, p. 202.
32. In his contribution to this volume Gracia argues that philosophy can be distinguished from literature in that a work of philosophy can be translated whereas a work of literature cannot. This is debatable, given that arguably some works of philosophy, such as Heidegger's *Being and Time*, cannot be translated whereas a promising at first glance, but it turns out to be only a sophisticated version of the

Notes

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), p. 17.
2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 65ff.
3. *Blue Book*, p. 17. Cf. L. Pompa, "Family Resemblance," *Philosophical Quarterly* 17 (1967), p. 65.
4. Cf. Erich Kahler, "What Is Art?" in *Problems in Aesthetics*, ed. Morris Weitz (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), p. 160; and Maurice Mandelbaum, "Family Resemblances and Generalizations Concerning Arts," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 2 (1965), pp. 220-221.
5. Mother and father can partake in the family resemblance through sharing genes in common with their offspring.
6. Or counterfactually would be if they stopped to consider it.
7. In his discussion of family resemblance and the arts Mandelbaum draws attention to the importance of intention in a similar way but does not fully endorse the importance of intention. Cf. pp. 220, 222, 223 n16, and 225.
8. Michael A. Simon, "When Is a Resemblance a Family Resemblance?" *Mind* 78 (1969), p. 415.
9. Even reflecting upon our knowledge may not yield a good answer. It is sometimes a matter of intuition, not in the mystical sense of the word but simply in the sense of not fully knowing how we arrive at the conclusion. For example, a husband may have an intuition that his wife is being unfaithful. We need not attribute this to some mysterious power but simply to reasons he cannot clearly identify. In the same way I may recognize that a word is of Greek origin, intuitively, without being able to clearly identify my reasons for being able to identify its etymology.
10. That is, we do not mean to be faithful to the etymology of the word. Etymologically, literature means anything in print. Cf. René Wellek, "What Is Literature?" in *What Is Literature?*, ed. Paul Hernadi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 16.
11. Cf. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "What Isn't Literature?" in *What Is Literature?*, ed. Paul Hernadi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 32.
12. Cf. Hirsch, p. 32.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Hirsch gives his own admittedly stipulative definition. "Literature includes any text worthy to be taught to students by teachers of literature, when these texts are not being taught to students in other departments of a school or university" (p. 34).
15. For a related view on using family resemblance to account for art see Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15 (1956), pp. 27-35. For arguments against the possibility of family resemblance, particularly as applied to the arts, see Kahler, pp. 157-171; Haig Khatchadourian, "Common Names and Family Resemblances," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 18 (1957-58), pp. 341-358; and A. R. Manser, "Games and Family Resemblances," *Philosophy* 42 (1967), pp. 210-225.
16. Some examples of faulty definitions and accounts of "literature" include literature as imaginative writing, literature as a matter of form, and literature as nonpragmatic discourse. Cf. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 1-7. Richard Ohman in "Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 4 (1971) offers an innovative approach to this elusive definition. "A literary work is a discourse whose sentences lack the illocutionary forces that would normally attach to them. Its illocutionary force is mimetic" (p. 14). This definition seems promising at first glance, but it turns out to be only a sophisticated version of the

- be translated without producing a different work. In any event, Gracia's account does not aim to provide essential definitions of "literature" and "philosophy."
33. Other definitions of philosophy include F. E. Sparshott in "On Saying What Philosophy Is," *Philosophy in Context* 4 (1975), "Philosophy is what philosophers do. But who is a philosopher? Someone who understands someone who tells him what philosophy is" (p. 27). Edward O. Sisson, in "What Is Philosophy: A Proposed Definition," *Philosophical Review* 57 (1948), offers a definition of philosophy in terms of its function. "The function of philosophy is to observe and systematize the maximal characters of the Universe" (p. 169). Chris Dicarlo, in "What Is Philosophy?: A Causal Explanation," *Eidos* 6 (1987), offers a definition of philosophy in terms of its cause, "our inability to know what is real" (p. 130). As he says, "philosophy is the attempt to construct an understanding of one's experiences in the face of philosophy's very cause for being—namely, ignorance" (p. 131). Cf. Anthony J. Cascardi on Borges's take on philosophy, "Mimesis and Modernism: The Case of Jorge Luis Borges, this volume pp. 109–127. Martin Wolfson, in "What Is Philosophy?" *The Journal of Philosophy* 55 (1958), defines "original philosophy" as follows: "Every original philosophy is an autobiography. Thus to philosophize is to express one's discontent with what is; to show that what was, or what is, was and is in error" (p. 323). Joseph Flay, in "What Is Philosophy?" *Personalist* 47 (1966), answers the question by citing "the following characteristics of philosophy: (1) Its objects are the activities of men and the conditions under which they take place; (2) the cultural matrix partially defines the orientation of the philosopher involved; (3) there is a continuity or historical nexus which links the philosophical systems of the various epochs in some way" (p. 212). To be fair, Flay seems to intend to give a description or explanation, not a definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Archie Bahm, in "What Is Philosophy?" *The Scientific Monthly* 52 (1941), responds to the question by saying, "Philosophy is a kind of attitude, a kind of method, a group of problems, and a group of theories" (p. 553). He then proceeds to describe each of these elements of philosophy in loose and open-ended terms. Another possible way of defining philosophy is to distinguish it from literature by asserting that what is essential to philosophy is only ideas, not the texts that express those ideas. Whereas literature is essentially about texts, philosophy is essentially about ideas; cf. Gracia in this volume. In "Philosophy and Literature in Calvino's Tales" Ermanno Bencivenga tells us that philosophy aims at disconnecting us from our ordinary contexts, demands truth, and leads to liberation, this volume.
 34. Gilles Deleuze, "The Conditions of the Question: What Is Philosophy?" (trans. Daniel W. Smith and Arnold I. Davidson), *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1981), p. 471.
 35. Deleuze, p. 473. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), pp. 220–221.
 36. Deleuze, pp. 473–474.
 37. *Ibid.*, p. 474.
 38. Gerald F. Kreyche, "What Is Philosophy?" *Listening* 21 (1986), pp. 56–65.
 39. Using the term "text" rather loosely and including mental and spoken texts.
 40. Cf. Knight, this volume p. 25.
 41. Is work in the history of philosophy, philosophy? We cannot answer in the affirmative or negative in advance of considering the case in question. We must ask of the case at hand, was it intended to fit the resemblance of philosophy and does it fit the resemblance? Some cases are easy to answer in the affirmative; for example, whatever one's judgment of Heidegger, it is clear that his *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* was intended to, and does, fit the resemblance. Other cases are easy to answer in the negative; for example, Jostein Gaarder's *Sophie's World: A Novel about the History of Philosophy* was neither intended to, nor does it, fit the resemblance.

- What about accounts of the history of philosophy, such as those offered by Guthrie, Copleston, and Jones? These cases are not immediately clear. What were their intentions? To produce philosophy, or simply to present the facts and interpret them in the manner of the historian? I do not claim to know, nor is this the appropriate place to launch such an investigation. Does what they offer fit the resemblance of philosophy? If it does not, then their intentions will be moot. I will not, in the short space allotted me, be so arrogant as to answer here, in what I suspect is a close case.
42. According to our account, Eastern thought and Western precursors to philosophy, in the contemporary sense of the term, are instances of philosophy if they meet the necessary condition account established.
 43. We can find strong examples of the *philosophical* outside of literature as well. The list of texts and figures I would assert (but cannot here argue) are *philosophical* but not philosophy or philosophers includes some of the writings of Benjamin Franklin, the American Declaration of Independence, Hume's history of England, Skinner, Freud, Jung, Lacan, Einstein, Hawking, and Dawkins.
 44. For examples of philosophers who discusses this story, see Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 33–38; Jorge J. E. Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality: The Logic and Epistemology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), pp. 117, 242, 254, and 263; Robert Stecker, "Apparent, Implied, and Postulated Authors," *Philosophy and Literature* 11 (1987), pp. 261–262; in this volume see the essays by Knight, Gracia, Cascardi, and Krysinski.
 45. Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 90. Further page references to this story are given parenthetically in the text.
 46. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised edition (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1989), cf. p. 296.
 47. See E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967); and my *Intentionalist Interpretation*.
 48. Cf. Gracia (1995), pp. 104–105.
 49. Simon, p. 415.
 50. I wish to thank Jorge J. E. Gracia, Carolyn Korsmeyer, Gregory Bassham, and Megan Lloyd for helpful criticisms of an earlier version of this essay. I also wish to thank my audiences at the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics, The Mid-South Philosophy Conference, and the Philosophy Club at the United States Military Academy at West Point.

LOIS PARKINSON ZAMORA

Borges's Monsters: Unnatural Wholes and the Transformation of Genre

The probing of the philosopher is deliberate, as the role of logic in philosophy demonstrates. . . . On the other hand, the probing of the poet is fortuitous.

—Wallace Stevens, *Opus posthumous*

Every object whose end is unknown to us is provisionally monstrous.

—Jorge Luis Borges, "A Vindication of the Cabala"

Jorge Luis Borges would be pleased with the fervor surrounding the centenary of his birth, and also a little perplexed. Pleased to wander into the bookstores of Mexico City or Buenos Aires and encounter great quantities of new and reprinted editions of his work, stacked on tables devoted solely to him. Perplexed, though, to find that these stacks do not routinely include the work that has made him, for many early twenty-first-century readers, *the* indispen-
sable writer of our time. There are new collections of juvenalia, four-
nalism, and miscellany,¹ new editions of Borges's lectures and literary
conversations,² and an illustrated collection of his *mitologías*.³ There are also
recent critical studies of Borges's work from a variety of disciplinary perspec-
tives: psychoanalysis,⁴ cultural history,⁵ and philosophy.⁶ Yet despite this
array of critical commentaries and new anthologies of his occasional writings,
fully two-thirds of Borges's work remains uncollected, and thus inaccessible
to all but the most diligent, Spanish-speaking researchers. Borges's *Opus*
completas are, alas, far from complete.⁷

Everywhere present and yet two-thirds absent, Borges's work is apparently
also endlessly polysemic. He has become *the* man for all seasons and disci-
plines, a multipurpose postmodernist, a marvelously mobile source of
authority for every point of view. His work is routinely invoked to illustrate
a vast array of theories and critical positions—some held by such diametri-
cally different critics as, say, Michel Foucault and Harold Bloom.