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**FACCIONES: FICTIONAL IDENTITY AND THE FACE
IN BORGES'S "LA FORMA DE LA ESPADA"**

A SCAR, AS HOMER KNEW LONG AGO, is more than a distinguishing mark that permits one to be identified: it is the promise of a story to be told. Upon Odysseus's return to Ithaca, his old nurse Eurykleia, without yet recognizing her master, prepares to bathe his feet. Richmond Lattimore's translation renders the ensuing scene in these words: "Now Odysseus / was sitting close to the fire, but suddenly turned to the dark side; / for presently he thought in his heart that, as she handled him, / she might be aware of his scar, and all his story might come out" (*Odyssey* 19.388–391). Not only does Odysseus's scar elicit the story of his own identity; it will later give rise to Erich Auerbach's ambitious telling of the story of mimesis in the Western literary tradition (3–23). Of course a scar may also be a mark of fame or infamy, a sign of pains inflicted, pains suffered, or both. As Daniel Balderston has observed, the scar is an inherently ambiguous sign (68).

The primary function of the scar in Homer is the facilitation of a moment of *anagnorisis*, or recognition, in which the identity of the hero is disclosed. But such recognition scenes need not appeal to any corporeal criteria of identity to acquire their force. Indeed, Aristotle considered revelations of identity based on external tokens such as scars ultimately inferior to discoveries that emerge naturally in the unfolding of a narrative's internal logic. In his view, the *anagnorisis* of Oedipus provides the example par excellence of how recognitions should be effected in a well-executed literary work (*De Poetica* 1454b19–1455a21). Material signs, Aristotle claims, are incapable of expressing the same logical necessity as that displayed by a carefully crafted narrative. They are paralogistic, encouraging an interpreter to engage in fallacious reasoning in order to make the identification in question.¹ Whatever the virtues of Homer's famous homecoming scene, Aristotle would nevertheless detect a blemish in the weaving of the fiction itself, the introduction of a *deus ex machina* to advance the plot by external means when a more suitable internal mechanism is unavailable (1455a16–21).

Of course when Aristotle maintains that external criteria of identification are not constitutive of narrative necessity and offer but a poor substitute for it, he is concerned with identification as a literary phenomenon and not a metaphysical one.² For him, physical marks of identification ultimately threaten to cancel the mimetic effect that a literary work should produce. Borges, an able

defender of Aristotelian literary theory in many respects, arrives at a similar conclusion but regards scars and other such tokens as invitations for a deeper interrogation of the pretensions of literary mimesis than anything Aristotle had envisioned. Borges's tacit critique of mimesis in his fiction raises the possibility that literary and philosophical modes of identification may not be sharply delineated, as it might at first appear, and that external tokens of identification such as the scar are structurally analogous with fictional discourse in general.

Though it by no means occupies a unique position among Borges's works, "La forma de la espada" provides a telling study of the complex relation between material signs of identity and the workings of internal narrative necessity, and thereby provides a suitable point of departure for the questions at hand.³ From the opening line, the story announces the pivotal role the scar is to play as a distinguishing facial feature. "Le cruzaba la cara una cicatriz rencorosa," the narrator reports, "un arco ceniciento y casi perfecto que de un lado ajaba la sien y del otro el pómulo" (*Obras* 1: 491). If, as Donald McGrady has suggested, the story belongs to the detective genre because "its object is to discover who committed a certain crime" (149), here we would seem to have a first clue. But as a hint for identifying a key player in the drama—and at this early stage it is unclear whether the scar belongs to the perpetrator of a crime or a victim—it is a curious one, because the narrator shows little interest in identifying its possessor by name: "Su nombre verdadero no importa" (491).⁴ At any rate, it is clear from the outset that the question of its bearer's identity is to be broached only by means of the scar. The distinguishing mark is not an accidental feature of its bearer, as it was in Odysseus's case. Indeed, it would be more appropriate to say that the bearer is to be identified solely in reference to the scar: "La forma de la espada" is, in an important respect, as much the story of the scar as the story of the protagonist ostensibly identified by it.

The tale on one level admits of a relatively straightforward telling. The primary first-person narrator, known simply as "Borges," finds himself obliged by inclement weather to spend the night at La Colorada ranch, and in the course of his conversation with *el Inglés*, the ranch's owner, he happens to mention his host's distinctive scar. After some initial hesitation, *el Inglés* agrees to tell the tale under one condition: "la de no mitigar ningún oprobio, ninguna circunstancia de infamia," a caveat whose importance only later becomes clear (491–492).

The warning is significant, for the tale that follows examines not only the theme of betrayal, but also an intimate relationship between treachery and the elaboration of fictions in general. According to *el Inglés*'s telling of the story, a zealous young Communist named John Vincent Moon had taken up the cause of Irish nationalism and associated himself with the narrator and his comrades in the fight for independence. Suffering from "una cobardía

irreparable" (493) and mortified by the prospect of hand-to-hand combat alongside his comrades, Moon remains in an unoccupied house, idly strategizing while exaggerating the effects of a minor wound. On one occasion, however, the narrator unexpectedly returns and overhears Moon making arrangements for his colleague's capture while securing guarantees of his own safety. Pursuing the traitor throughout the house, the narrator manages to slash Moon's face with a sword before being apprehended by the British soldiers that had been summoned.

At this point the embedded narrative breaks off, prompting "Borges" to inquire as to Moon's eventual fate. *El Inglés*, in turn, makes his own identity explicit with regard to the tale:

—¿Usted no me cree? —baluceó—. ¿No ve que llevo escrita en la cara la marca de mi infamia? Le he narrado la historia de este modo para que usted lo oyera hasta el fin. Yo he denunciado al hombre que me amparó: yo soy Vincent Moon. Ahora desprécieme. (495)

This reversal of identities—with the attendant ethical questions it raises—is by any account striking, and it is fitting that the morally ambivalent status of the protagonist/narrator has long received the attention of critics.⁵ A divided soul, Moon's narrative appears on the one hand to exonerate him through the performative aspects of confession while on the other to indict him anew for the crime; indeed, his guilt may even be compounded by the deception he has practiced on his audience, the readers of "La forma de la espada" as well as "Borges." As a result, the reader is confronted with a question as apparently unanswerable as it is unavoidable. As John Sturrock puts it, "should we admire [the narrator] or despise him all the more for the expertise of his deception?" (179).

Any possible response to the inquiry must hinge in part on the narrative stance Moon adopts as he begins to tell his story. The most obvious indication of this transition in the text is, of course, verbal: the first-person voice that had previously belonged to "Borges" is now assumed by Moon. But Moon's narrative is not framed solely by the shift from the grammatical first person to the third. The attention of his audience is initially directed toward the countenance of the speaker at the outset of the embedded narrative.

The bodily nature of this parenthesis becomes evident as Moon's tale is introduced. "Borges's" reference to the scar serves not only as a tacit invitation for his host to take up the role of storyteller; it also brings about a visible transformation in his interlocutor. Upon mention of the distinguishing mark, *el Inglés's* face immediately takes on a nearly indecipherable expression: "La cara del Inglés se demudó; durante unos segundos pensé que me iba a expulsar de la casa," the narrator reports (491). Only gradually does the tempest of emotion in his countenance subside, and, as if finally consenting to let the truth be told, *el Inglés* assumes, in effect, a straight face—his "voz habitual"—preparatory to the telling of his story (491).

The conclusion is similarly marked. Hearing his interlocutor's request to elaborate on its obscure ending, the protagonist's reaction is no less physically expressive in its closing of the narrative frame: "Entonces un gemido lo atravesó; entonces me mostró con débil dulzura la corva cicatriz blanquecina" (494).

It would certainly be curious if the inclusion of these details were but an empty rhetorical device, a gesture toward realism from a writer who was swift to criticize excesses in mimetic representation. Instead, the description of Moon's passionate response to the burden of his tale might better be regarded as a sublimation of the tension between the voluntary and the involuntary, an indication of an agonistic relationship between the speaker's intentions and his physical presence, as embodied in his countenance and the timbre of his voice. The contrast between the transformation of Moon's visage and the ordinary tone of voice that he assumes in narrating his story is the contrast between competing impulses toward truthfulness and dissemblance.

The philosophical itinerary of this idea in Borges's works may be traced back at least as far as the essay "El truco," published in *El idioma de los argentinos* (1928). In his analysis of the traditional Argentine card game, Borges draws important connections between fiction, the voice, and the face:⁶

La habitualidad del truco es mentir. La manera de su engaño no es la del poker: mera desanimación o desabrimiento de no fluctuar, y de poner a riesgo un alto de fichas tantas jugadas; es acción de voz mentirosa, de rostro que se juzga *semblanteado* y que se defiende, de tramposa y desatinada palabrería. (28)

The game's appeal is thoroughly corporeal: by controlling the tone of the voice or making the expression of the face resistant to analysis, successful players are able to exploit their opponents' natural tendency to conjecture about their intentions based on bodily cues. In short, they are led to engage in the sort of paralogistic reasoning that Aristotle would criticize. Talented players are endowed with observational skills more powerful than their opponents' ability to master their own bodies and voices. By positing a gap between voluntary and involuntary bodily movements, astute players are able to "read" their competitors physically. Bodies and intentions are locked in a struggle for control: to play *truco* well is to exploit this opposition. In the case of "La forma de la espada," to posit a gap between intentions on the one hand and their outward tokens on the other is at the same time to raise the possibility of exploiting that gap. Everything hinges on whether Moon's interlocutor is able to detect the tension between Moon's designs and his presumably involuntary facial expressions.

It may not at first be clear why Moon affirms that the narrative strategy he has adopted is necessary if "Borges"—and, by extension, the reader of "La forma de la espada"—is to hear the tale through to the end. The story is shock-

ing enough—all the more so when we realize that the narrator is himself the villain—but surely squeamishness on the part of his audience cannot explain why Moon feels obliged to adopt a third-person perspective in its telling.⁷ In light of his confession, we must take up a set of intertwined questions regarding the nature of the narrator's explicit self-identification as the story's protagonist as well as the relationship between self-identification in general and the narrative stances adopted in the telling of the story.⁸

The scar is the sign that transacts the passage from the primary to the embedded narrative and back again. The defining feature of the protagonist's physiognomy as well as of the story's plot appear to be the ultimate guarantor of its bearer's identity. Much as Odysseus's scar served as a uniquely identifying physical trait for his nurse Eurykleia, Moon's scar is an external token by means of which his identity is disclosed to "Borges" and the reader alike. But if Odysseus's scar could become an occasion for a learned excursus on mimesis—opening up a world, in Auerbach's words, of "externalized, uniformly illuminated phenomena" (11)—Moon's scar conceals as much as it reveals. "La forma de la espada" therefore weaves together these points: the face is the site where identity is disclosed, and its ostensibly pre-discursive character opens the possibility of deception or fraud, even as it appears to underwrite credible discourse.

One of the primary problems the story addresses is how the scar may be regarded both as an identifying mark of a particular fictional character and as a mark of what might be called an absence of character, provided this latter term is understood in all its moral and literary valences. Here is where the lines between self-disclosure and the duplicitous nature of narrative are most tightly drawn. Mary Louise Pratt's brief but insightful discussion of "La forma de la espada" brings these threads together in light of speech-act theory. In her view, the story's primary interest lies in its violation of the communicative maxim to avoid speaking falsely precisely in order to speak the truth: a knowingly deceptive speech act is embedded within a truthful one (192–193). The efficacy of Moon's confession is predicated upon the persuasiveness of the internal narrative.

In retrospect, it seems possible that an astute reader may have identified Moon with *el Inglés* well before the moment of his full disclosure.⁹ Nevertheless, as McGrady has noted, "if we are sincere with ourselves, each of us will probably be forced to admit that the ending [...] did indeed come as a surprise the first time we read the story" (146). As an empirical claim, this may well be true. But it does not go far enough in capturing what John Irwin, in a different context, has referred to as "the sense of the mysterious" that we may discern in the story, especially given that the tale, insofar as it partakes of the conventions of the analytic detective genre, should logically exhaust its meaning in its resolution (2).¹⁰ The real issue is not whether the readers of Vincent Moon's story are sufficiently adept at picking up clues to guess the secret rela-

tionship between narrator and protagonist before the story's end (and, correspondingly, whether Moon's self-explicit identification is superfluous). More to the point is Borges's framing of the problem of discerning between truthfulness and dissemblance. Unlike the mark that identifies the epic hero, in "La forma de la espada" the scar is not a self-interpreting sign, for not until the story's conclusion is the identity of the narrator fully disclosed, and then it is only done by Moon himself.

Critics who have faulted the text for saying too much, particularly at the moment when Moon reveals his own identity, have failed to appreciate one of the most salient lessons of the story.¹¹ The physical tokens presented as evidence of Moon's identity cannot be self-interpreting: their meaning must be narrated explicitly. The very nature of his infamy and its disclosure is such that he alone is able to do so. This, in part, must be the significance of the claim that his story could not have been told otherwise than it has been (*Obras* 1: 495). The nature of his offense both necessitates and undermines confession. To communicate fully a story of betrayal, one must be capable of betrayal in kind. The suggestion is unmistakable, if still obscure in the details: the continual threat of deception is somehow endemic to faces and fictions alike. How can the relationship between the two be clarified?

The problem may be brought into sharper relief by considering the aspirations of the pseudoscience of physiognomy in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹² Hegel devotes a number of pages of his *Phenomenology of Spirit* to the discipline's theoretical underpinnings, and even though its institutional prestige was short-lived, the issues physiognomy raised endure even now in other guises.¹³ In his discussion of the various stages of the history of self-consciousness as reason, Hegel examines the claims of physiognomy in its attempt to discover law-like correlations between the observable characteristics of a human face and a given set of otherwise unobservable psychological states. In its attempt to correlate the occult essence of an individual human being—including one's intentions and desires—with its tangible manifestations, reason, Hegel maintains, is led to posit a distinction between the inner and the outer. Physiognomy attempts to codify scientifically the relation between the two:

Physiognomy [...] considers specific individuality in the *necessary* antithesis of an inner and an outer, of character as a conscious disposition, and this again as an existent shape, and the way it relates these factors to each other is the way they are related by their Notion; hence these factors must constitute the content of a law. (188)

Hegel does not deny that we frequently bring to bear details of a person's appearance—including their visage—in judging their intentions, desires, and so forth. He is interested rather in historicizing and thus criticizing the tendency to seek causal connections between psychological states and facial ex-

pressions. As one might expect, he takes a dim view of the project. He observes that physiognomy misconceives facial characteristics and other external phenomena as signs referring to corresponding internal entities. The problem is not that such a relationship could yield nothing better than contingent or arbitrary associations; it would be mistaken in positing a crude metaphysical dualism in the first place. As Hyppolite puts it in his commentary on the *Phenomenology*, this formulation of the problem is already fatally flawed in that it presupposes "a pure exterior and a pure interior each distinct in its own right" (268).

The Hegelian criticism of physiognomy suggests a pair of related difficulties that Borges thematizes in "La forma de la espada." First, if we abandon traditional dualisms with their division of labor between pure interiorities and pure exteriorities, we must be prepared to provide other criteria by which persons may be individuated. That is, if the connections between intentions and external means of communicative expression—faces, voices, bodies, words—are neither causal nor arbitrary, their relationship must be accounted for in other terms. Furthermore, one must account for the frequent failure of intentions to be directly expressed by means of outward appearances or signs. It would appear that, as Michael Emerson observes, "speech and action fail as outer expressions of the inner because they express the inner and internal both too little and too much," and it is not immediately clear with what the traditional accounts are to be replaced (139).¹⁴

Hegel's solution to the problem is to deny that either supposed interiorities or external signifying mechanisms can be properly considered in isolation. Individuals, rather, are distinguished through their deeds, which are not so much combinations of discrete, observable physical phenomena as they are actions already essentially invested with meaning in a determinate historical context. Moreover, words typically inform and shape those deeds, supplementing them with, in effect, a contemporaneous self-narrative. Hegel puts it this way: "This is the speaking presence of the individual who, in expressing himself in action, at the same time exhibits himself as inwardly reflecting and contemplating himself, an expression which is itself a movement" (195). In this same spirit, he approvingly cites the following dictum of Lichtenberg, intended to undercut physiognomy's explanatory pretenses: "'Suppose the physiognomist ever did take the measure of a man, it would only require a courageous resolve on the part of the man to make himself incomprehensible again for a thousand years'" (191). In its broadest outlines, Hegel's account is not at all out of harmony with contemporary work being done on these and related problems: we are much more likely today to affirm that the meaning of human expression is located neither in any a priori interior realm, nor in a world of indifferent physical phenomena, but is rather constituted through complex webs of actions and narratives.¹⁵

Consistent with the contours of Hegel's thought, Borges dramatizes in "La forma de la espada" the failure of the inner/outer model with respect to phys-

ionomy and fiction alike, but he undercuts the primacy Hegel would accord to deeds in individuating the self. Hegel believes that a proper account of human action demonstrates that the "outward" expressions of "inward" psychological states are always realized in concrete historical circumstances, and this fact suffices to individuate persons without resorting to either a purely physical or a purely psychological set of concepts. Borges, for his part, idealizes and then brings up short the capacity of individuating deeds to remedy the failure of the dualistic model, suggesting instead a profound skepticism with regard to the integrity of the self in its first-person character. Where Hegel would reduce skepticism to a transitory moment in the history of self-consciousness, Borges regards it as a defining characteristic of fictional narrative itself.

In Borges's stories, the primacy of action—including its narrative component—in individuating the self typically takes the shape of a privileging of courageousness, often in view of a character's already determined destiny. Whereas "La forma de la espada" may not be so forthright in dramatizing its protagonist's resolve as several of Borges's other texts,¹⁶ it is nevertheless clear that Moon's telling of his story is meant in part to own up to his treachery, initially with reluctance and finally with an almost overbearing insistence. Returning again to the insights of speech-act theory laid out by Pratt, we are prepared now to recognize the import of Moon's confession. It is an illocutionary act, welding deed to narrative and dramatizing the protagonist's courage in its telling. It is not difficult to see what significance Moon would wish to associate with his disclosure. An act of confession would, by its very nature, be undertaken with a view to achieving some measure of redemption, no matter how small or fleeting. The tangible mark of Moon's infamy, forever engraven upon his countenance, would become, if not a quasi-religious stigma, at least a complex sign: a token of contrition as well as deceit.

But this exculpation of the first-person narrator is precisely what "La forma de la espada" will not allow. If the story Moon tells in proffering his confession would be an individualizing deed—a speech-act not only presupposing the agency of its utterer but in a sense guaranteeing it—the narrative itself collapses the first-person voice of the confessor into an impersonal, third-person voice of uncertain ownership. For Hegel a courageous deed might individuate persons by inscribing their "genuine being" (Hegel 194) into observable behavior—thereby making their "inner" qualities legible—in a way that the pseudoscience of physiognomy was incapable of grasping. In Moon's case, however, his confession effectively dis-individuates him, condemning him to a kind of metaphysical anonymity.

Given the complexity of the questions I have touched on, it is not surprising that many critical discussions have turned on the ontological significance of the story's mode of narration. Gérard Genette, for instance, regards "La forma de la espada" as a paradigmatic case of narrative transgression, finding

the concealment of the first-person narrator in the third-person narrative a move toward a more general disintegration of character typical of modern literature. I mentioned earlier his conclusion, which he states with panache: "The Borgesian fantastic, in this respect emblematic of a whole modern literature, does *not accept person*" (Genette 246–247).¹⁷ Genette may well be indulging here in a bit of hyperbole—the question of personhood in Borges's work is considerably more nuanced than he seems prepared to acknowledge—but his declaration draws support from a crucial passage in the text. Recalling his revulsion at discovering Moon's cowardice, the narrator goes on to explain:

Me abochornaba ese hombre con miedo, como si yo fuera el cobarde, no Vincent Moon. Lo que hace un hombre es como si lo hicieran todos los hombres. Por eso no es injusto que una desobediencia en un jardín contamine al género humano; por eso no es injusto que la crucifixión de un solo judío basta para salvarlo. Acaso Schopenhauer tiene razón: yo soy los otros, cualquier hombre es todos los hombres, Shakespeare es de algún modo el miserable John Vincent Moon. (*Obras* 1: 493)

If Moon's confession is initially offered as a means for clarifying his identity with respect to the scar that marks him, it can only be done if the grammatical first person is effaced by the third. The consequence is a literary embodiment of an avatar of philosophical skepticism, not in its most familiar form in which the subject is taken to be self-grounding while the existence of the world or other minds is held to be dubious, but rather the contrary: the uniqueness of the first-person perspective is itself called into question. By adopting the third-person narrative stance in place of the first-person voice, Moon effectively voids the distinction between the two, and as a result it becomes obscure how, if at all, that distinction is to be regained.¹⁸

The consequences of collapsing the first person into the third in "La forma de la espada" are profound. It initially appeared that the scar that marked the face of *el Inglés* was an identifying feature, a tangible sign of his unique identity. But the telling of the story of the scar could only be undertaken in such a way as to occlude that same person to whom it was thought to refer. The consequence is that the form of the tale itself embodies the same critique of the inner and the outer provided by Hegel but in such a way as to imperil any attempt to secure Moon's identity by virtue of his confession. For Borges, as for the narrator of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, "the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel, but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze" (Conrad 30).

The tendency of modern narrative to collapse the inner/outer model and to dissolve character into anonymity may be brought into sharper focus by Schopenhauer's very different appreciation of physiognomy's claims.¹⁹ To be sure, his treatment of the pseudoscience is far less rigorous than is Hegel's and

(perhaps consequently) far more generous in its appraisal of physiognomy's merits. According to Schopenhauer, our ordinary tendency to seek a correlation between intentions and the defining characteristics of the human face contains the germ of a profound insight: that the studied consideration and application of the tools of physiognomy can in theory insulate us from certain kinds of deception. He writes:

Moreover, as everyone is anxious to gain for himself esteem or friendship, so will the man to be observed at once apply all the different arts of dissimulation already familiar to him. With his airs he will play the hypocrite, flatter us, and thereby corrupt us that soon we shall no longer see what the first glance had clearly shown us. (637)

Much as dissimulation is a characteristic strategy employed by the players of *truco*—without it the game would be unimaginable—the interpretation of the human face implies an unavoidable element of risk on the part of the interpreter. To make sense of a face, to attempt to read off from it a set of unobservable motives and desires, one must expose oneself to the possibility of misinterpretation. Furthermore, if we are sometimes liable to be mistaken in judging talent and character, we have no one to blame but ourselves: “For a man's face states exactly what he is, and if it deceives us, the fault is ours, not his” (637).

Though the essay does no great credit to Schopenhauer's analytical skills—especially set alongside Hegel's more nuanced discussion—it does suggest a provocative way of thinking about the relationship between ordinary, off-the-cuff appeals to physiognomic observation and more rigorously philosophical treatments of the issue. “All tacitly start from the principle that everyone *is* what he *looks like*,” Schopenhauer notes in that same essay (635). As a bit of folk psychology, the claim is hardly noteworthy, but regarded as a hermeneutical principle, it offers an intriguing perspective on the relationship between faces and fictional discourse. Though naively positing a distinction between the inner and the outer may ultimately prove unacceptable for some of the reasons elucidated by Hegel, it does not follow that one's tendency to seek such a starting point may be obviated simply by being historicized. Following Borges, we might better regard it as a provisional posit, necessary for getting the project of interpretation off the ground, even if it is ultimately forsaken or found untenable.

In this regard, the shared qualities of faces and fictions explored in “La forma de la espada” are not fortuitous. As David Cockburn has argued, the face holds a place of the greatest importance for us as human beings, especially with regard to understanding other persons. We take one's countenance primarily to reflect genuine attitudes, held involuntarily, and only secondarily is it understood to aid in bringing off ulterior purposes, including deceptive ones (484–485). Not coincidentally, it is precisely this interpretive presupposition that raises the specter of skepticism that I mentioned earlier. If there are

no distinguishing characteristics of truth or identity—no fail-safe way of marking the first person, for example—we would seem to be obliged to accept a thoroughgoing skepticism with respect to the question of personal identity, especially as regarded from the first-person point of view. The dilemma is forcefully articulated in lines well known to every reader of Borges: “Así mi vida es una fuga y todo lo pierdo y todo es del olvido, o del otro. No sé cuál de los dos escribe esta página” (*Obras 2*: 186).

It is a corollary of this form of skepticism that, as “La forma de la espada” suggests, if the visage is the site where one’s inner being seems to receive its most definitive and most visible articulation, it may nevertheless be sufficiently vague as to preclude any substantial identity claim from being predicated upon it.²⁰ A consequence of this profound ambivalence—the face as the site where identity is both consolidated and dissipated—is that readers must remain open to the possibility that they themselves are reflected in the text; in a word, that the visage with which the text is concerned is in some respect their own, as the narrator of “La forma de la espada” comes to recognize. In this same spirit we may appreciate Balderston’s suggestion that the investigation of the theme of treachery in “La forma de la espada” transgresses an essential boundary between fictional characters and the story’s readers (72).

More than any other aspect of a person’s bodily presence, the face is the site where one’s identity is made apparent. But not only does the face, like fictional narrative itself, play upon an interpreter’s deep-seated propensity to seek meanings hidden beneath the surface; in a number of Borges’s texts it also becomes the emblem of a further possibility: an epiphanic moment in which one’s own true countenance is glimpsed and recognized, and one finally discovers, as it were, one’s own place. In this moment of *anagnorisis* the trajectories of skepticism and self-identification cross. It must fall to a future study to explicate more fully Borges’s examination of this possibility.²¹

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1. Terence Cave notes evidence to the effect that in the scholia “Aristotle was said to have criticized [...] the scene where Eurycleia recognizes Odysseus on the grounds that ‘according to the poet, by this reckoning everyone who has a scar is Odysseus’” (42).

2. Aristotle’s account of personal identity is complex and I shall not attempt to summarize it here. For a discussion of this and related issues, see Terence Irwin 279–302.

3. The scar figures prominently in a number of Borges’s texts, beginning with “El incivil maestro de ceremonias Kotsuké no Suké” in *Historia universal de la infamia* (*Obras 1*: 320–323) and culminating in “La forma de la espada” from *Ficciones* (491–495). While in Odysseus’s case the scar is found on the hero’s thigh, in Borges’s stories the scar is typically a feature of the protagonist’s face, thematizing an intimate connection between physiognomy and fictional narrative. In addition to the central or defining roles played by facial scars in the texts already mentioned, they also figure in more incidental descriptions of characters from stories such as “El proveedor de iniquidades Monk Eastman” (312) and “El muerto” (545).

4. The narrator’s lack of curiosity about the protagonist’s real name finds a parallel in the community’s lack of interest in identifying with any precision his place of origin: “Todos en

Tacuarembó le decían el Inglés de la Colorada" (*Obras* 1: 491). This ambivalence will become symptomatic of identificational difficulties of a different order: first, because the possibility of making a definitive identification by naming the protagonist is dramatically brought up short, even as he finally names himself; second, because his placelessness—an Irishman, taken for an Englishman, having come to Uruguay via Brazil—comes to assume metaphysical proportions.

5. Representative discussions of this aspect of the text may be found in Stabb 49–50 and Shaw 50.

6. It would be difficult to overstate the importance that Borges attributed to the conceit in his formative works. Not only does a poem from *Fervor de Buenos Aires* bear the same title and share a number of expressions with the essay, but the essay was later reprinted, unmodified, along with other miscellany in *Evaristo Carriego* (*Obras* 1: 145–147).

7. Moon's case in this regard bears comparison with that of Otto Dietrich zur Linde, the protagonist of "Deutsches Requiem." Linde nevertheless adheres to his first-person mode of confession in recounting his licensing of the death of David Jerusalem. And, as with Moon, the face is once again regarded as the site of self-identification: "Miro mi cara en el espejo para saber quién soy, para saber cómo me portaré dentro de unas horas, cuando me enfrente con el fin. Mi carne puede tener miedo; yo, no" (*Obras* 1: 581).

8. Balderston rightly notes that the question of Moon's trustworthiness helps to explain why he initially portrays himself as the hero (71): my purpose here is to address the broader question of why this must be so.

9. For a discussion of details that appear sufficient to guide the reader to infer *el Inglés's* identity with Moon, see McGrady 142–146.

10. Irwin's study of several issues closely related to the ones I address here is impressive, but he omits "La forma de la espada" from his discussion.

11. Shaw, for one, has questioned whether the final lines of the story are necessary at all, suggesting that Moon's explicit self-identification is provided simply "for the benefit of less attentive readers" (50). McGrady likewise wonders if Borges does not deprive "the careful reader of the pleasure of unraveling that problem [i.e., the mystery of the narrator's identity] for himself" (146–147).

12. For a brief sketch of the career and reception of physiognomy, as well as its role in the modern novel, see Tytler.

13. Alasdair MacIntyre, for one, finds successors to physiognomy and its companion, phrenology, in various strands of contemporary philosophical materialism (224–225).

14. Emerson elaborates on the difficulty: "The inner is expressed too much in speech and action because there remains no distinction within them between the inner intention and its outward expression [...]. But they also express too little of the interiority of the inner because in speech and action the inner motives, reasons, and intentions of the individual are turned into actualities of the world which are different and distinct from the inner. Both speech and action may fail to express and truly represent what is internal to the individual if a particular phrase or action, for example, leads observing reason to ascribe the wrong intention and meaning to the individual" (139).

15. Whether acknowledged or not, many of the insights won by Hegel have since helped to frame contemporary discussions of similar problems. Emerson, for instance, mentions some similarities to Wittgenstein's work in this regard (141–143). For a few general words regarding Hegel's continuing importance for contemporary thought, see Taylor 166–169.

16. This is an issue in Borges that still awaits its scholarly treatment. For a brief orientation, see Wheelock.

17. Others have followed the leads of narratology and structuralism in their interpretations of the text. McGrady's study, for instance, is informed by Genette's work; for a reading informed by Lévi-Strauss, see Weldt.

18. For an engaging study of the philosophical problems of reconciling these perspectives, see Nagel.

19. Though I am aware of no hard evidence that Borges consciously drew from his mentor in this regard, it should be noted that the source of Schopenhauer's essay "On Physiognomy" is *Parerga und Paralipomena*, a text that Borges has explicitly and emphatically acknowledged as a source of inspiration (cf. *Obras* 1: 279).

20. One might bear in mind here the oxymoronic characterization of Arthur Orton's facial fea-

tures as "rasgos de una infinita vaguedad" (*Obras* 1: 302) or the description of Joseph Cartaphilus in "El inmortal": "Era [...] de ojos grises y barba gris, de rasgos singularmente vagos" (*Obras* 1: 533).

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