



MACHADO DE ASSIS AND JORGE LUIS BORGES:
IMMORTALITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

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IN 1882, between July 15 and September 15, Machado de Assis published a story in six chapters in *A Época*, "O Imortal." In February 1947, Jorge Luis Borges published "El inmortal" in *Anales de Buenos Aires*. The coincidence of titles, the striking formal similarities, and the conceptual parallels between the two works invite a comparative reading, but Borges' ideas about individual identity, the reader's role in establishing meaning, and literary precursors inevitably vitiate the comparison.

To read Borges before reading Machado distorts our sense of chronological sequence because the present irrevocably alters our perception of the past: in other words, it is like an ironic inversion of the Fall or original sin, because in this version it is the past that is affected by the contagion of Borges' notions rather than the future. That is, Machado's contemporaries understood his story in their way, but readers of Borges will perceive it in his way. One consequence of this preconditioning is that we are likely to re-create Machado in Borges' likeness, so that the twentieth century generates a nineteenth century that bears a family resemblance. This despite the paradoxical fact that without the past the present could not exist.

Borges derives his ideas from his experience as a reader, specifically of Franz Kafka. On August 19, 1951, Borges published "Kafka y

sus precursores" in *La Nación*. Borges' relationship with Kafka was by then of long duration: in 1937 he published a brief, "synthetic," biography of Kafka in *El Hogar* (October 29) along with a translation of one of his parables. In 1938, when the first collection of Kafka's writings in Spanish, *La Metamorfosis*, appeared in Buenos Aires, it included a prologue and some translations by Borges.

The 1951 essay, an extrapolation, according to Emir Rodríguez Monegal, of T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1917), contains a corollary derived from Borges' notion of the reader's importance in the aesthetic transaction. In "Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*" (1939), Borges demonstrates that it is the reader who determines the meaning of the literary text; that, in effect, our reading transforms the text into a mirror in which we see ourselves, our times, and our other readings. The story also contains an almost invisible meditation on irony: if the writer is aware of the reader's decisive role in literary interpretation, he may capitalize on it by embedding a secret reader in the text. Thus, if Pierre Menard is only pretending to be dead and is actually playing the role of reader (of himself) in the persona of the story's narrator, the archetypal roles of reader and writer are fused, and any concept of literary intention or meaning is rendered ambiguous. (The same irony prevails in Nabokov's *Pale Fire* if we conclude that John Shade, following the model of Alexander Pope in *The Dunciad*, is playing the roles of both author and critic.)

In "Kafka y sus precursores," Borges pursues yet another facet of the reader's role. This relates to the reader's relationship to literary history. History is sequential, while reading is a perpetual present, although our memory of past reading experiences insinuates our personal chronological ordering into the mechanism. However, in general, our assimilation of texts, especially if we happen to be Borges, is haphazard so the texts we read first inevitably shape our vision of those we read subsequently, even if those later books date from an earlier historical period. In point of fact, such an inversion of historical influence is universally true, since few of us would be likely to read Greek tragedies before experiencing Mother Goose.

Borges opens his essay saying he once "premeditated" an examination of Kafka's precursors, that he thought (and this sentence sounds much like the voice of the narrator of "Pierre Menard," who detects Menard's style and voice in chapter xxvi of the *Quijote*) he recognized "su voz, o sus hábitos, en textos de diversas literaturas y de diversas

épocas" (*Ficcionario* 307). He presents a few examples in chronological order. That is, having read Kafka, he finds affinities between him and other authors, but to make his mental associations coherent (or so it seems) to the reader he puts them in chronological order. In this way, he parodies the idea of literary history by arbitrarily creating a pseudo-historical sequence out of a chaos of heterogeneous reading experiences. This history is, of course, nothing of the sort, since the only link between its elements is Borges as reader.

He starts with Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the tortoise (repeating a connection he had already made in the *El Hogar* note) to explain why the surveyor K. never reaches his goal in Kafka's *Castle*. His second example is a text he discovered in a French *Anthologie raisonnée de la littérature chinoise* (1948). Here Borges finds an echo of Kafka's tone in Chinese literature, in a statement by someone Borges identifies as "un apólogo de Han Yu, prosista del siglo ix" (*Ficcionario* 308), who states that while people know a great deal about unicorns from reading and hearsay they might not recognize one in the flesh. He then proceeds to Kierkegaard, Robert Browning, Léon Bloy, and, finally, Lord Dunsany. As if to underline the irony entailed in his grouping, Borges concludes: "Si no me equivoco, las heterogéneas piezas que he enumerado se parecen a Kafka; si no me equivoco, no todas se parecen entre sí" (*Ficcionario* 309).

From this he extrapolates: "En cada uno de esos textos está la idiosincrasia de Kafka, en grado mayor o menor, pero si Kafka no hubiera escrito, no la percibiríamos; vale decir, no existiría" (*Ficcionario* 309). This leads Borges to summarize:

El hecho es que cada escritor *crea* a sus precursores. Su labor modifica nuestra concepción del pasado, como ha de modificar el futuro. En esta correlación nada importa la identidad o la pluralidad de los hombres. El primer Kafka de *Betrachtung* es menos precursor del Kafka de los mitos sombríos y de las instituciones atroces que Browning o Lord Dunsany. (*Ficcionario* 309)

This word "future" is marked with a footnote that invites the reader to consult "T.S. Eliot, *Points of View* (1941), 25-26," a selection of Eliot's prose by John Hayward containing "Tradition and the Individual Talent." The relevant passage is this one:

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for

contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art towards the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities. (Eliot 25-26)¹

But in Borges' hands, Eliot's notion becomes ironic, because his reader creates connections between Kafka and authors or traditions unrelated to Kafka in exactly the same way the narrator of "Pierre Menard," whoever he is, transforms Menard's *Quijote* (textually identical to Cervantes') into a late-Symbolist text.² Where Eliot is

¹ This passage also elucidates an idea Donald Shaw includes in his interpretation of Borges' story: "In 'El inmortal' the epigraph from Bacon's *Essays* suggests a static universe like that of the Library of Babel, where everything exists already and for ever, rather than one in a process of constant evolution. Hence it is a universe where change can only mean ultimate repetition" (Shaw 96). Bacon's evocation of anamnesis at the outset of essay 58 "Of Vicissitude of Things" is ironic, since his theme is that "matter is in a perpetual flux, and never at a stay" (Bacon 147). Shaw leads us into a Borgesian paradox: an immortal, for Borges, possesses all possible human experiences from all times, but a new piece of writing—even if that writing is made up of pieces of writing from the past—may modify the existing order. The universe is static or mutable; for Borges, according to his mood, it could be either. Shaw's excellent analysis of "El inmortal" ends with a resolution of the Borgesian identity enigma—do we really have one?—namely, that any attempt to comprehend reality through language is doomed to failure because reality is not verbal.

² Gérard Genette calls this idea utopian: "Dans le temp réversible de la lecture, Cervantes et Kafka nous sont tous deux contemporains, et l'influence de Kafka sur Cervantes n'est pas moindre que l'influence de Cervantes sur Kafka. . . . Telle est l'admirable utopie que nous propose la littérature selon Borges. Il est permis de trouver dans ce mythe plus de vérité que dans les vérités de notre 'science' littéraire. La littérature est bien ce champ plastique, cet espace *courbe* où les rapports les plus inattendus et les recontres les plus paradoxales son à chaque instant possibles" (131).

concerned primarily with a European artistic tradition, Borges, already on the border of Western culture, feels free to incorporate China into his reading spectrum. In so doing, he expands Eliot's notion of tradition far beyond Europe and demonstrates that Latin Americans have a right to claim this universal tradition as their own. This culturally important idea—it confers dignity on Latin Americans as heirs to a tradition—reappears in "El escritor argentino y la tradición" (a 1951 lecture he published in *Sur* in 1955), which also derives from "Tradition and the Individual Talent."³

"Kafka y sus precursores" and "Pierre Menard," cautionary tales that challenge monolithic notions of literary meaning and authorship, transform Machado de Assis' story and Machado himself, making him a precursor of Borges. Machado never gathered "O Imortal" into any collection (he published seven books of short stories in his lifetime), though chronologically it appears in the same year he published *Papéis Avulsos*, which contains stories from the previous decade. His next collection of tales, *Histórias sem Data*, dates from 1884, but contains stories first published during that same year, so it would seem that "O Imortal" simply fell between two collections and was lost until the publication of Machado's complete works.

Machado's narrator is a chronicler or historian: he is not a witness of the action described in the story, but he knows virtually everything about the circumstances, the frame, under which the participatory narrator, Dr. Leão, tells the story of his father, the immortal. The story opens with a boutade: Dr. Leão announces: "My father was born in 1600 . . ." One of his interlocutors corrects him: "Pardon, in 1800, naturally . . .," but Dr. Leão insists on the earlier date. Then the historian narrator steps in:

Stupefaction on the part of his listeners, the two of them: Colonel Bertiooga and the town notary, João Linhares. The town was in the province of Rio de Janeiro; let's suppose it was Itaboraí or Sapucaia. With regard to the date, I have no doubts about saying it was in the year 1855, a night in November, dark as pitch, hot as an oven, after 9:00 p.m. Silence

³ In *Borges, hacia una lectura poética*, Emir Rodríguez Monegal examines the relationship between "Kafka y sus precursores" and T. S. Eliot, emphasizing the idea of the author's creation of his precursors. (N. B. the title of Rodríguez Monegal's collection of essays is incorrect as published. It should be *Borges, hacia una poética de la lectura*.)

reigned. The place where the three were was the veranda facing the yard. (886; translations mine; Portuguese quotations below)

To this scene-setting, the narrator-historian adds professional and personal information about Dr. Leão: he is a recently arrived and highly recommended homeopathic physician marked by sadness and reticence.

The enigma grows when Colonel Bertioiga asks if Dr. Leão's father is still alive. He isn't, which leads João Linhares to conclude that Dr. Leão's father can't be immortal because immortals don't die. Thus Machado follows all the formulas of classic storytelling: a frame containing an enigmatic narrator telling a mysterious tale to an audience seeking relief from a hot night.

Chapter II sets the story in motion: the narrator's grandfather, a Spaniard of noble family, his grandmother, of a prominent family from Alentejo, move to Brazil for mysterious, unexplained reasons. Though not especially religious, the narrator's father becomes a Franciscan at the age of twenty five and resides in a monastery in Iguaraçu until 1639, when the Dutch invade. They allow him to leave, and he wanders off, ultimately settling with a tribe of Indians. He marries a chief's daughter and lives happily until 1642. In that year, the moribund chief shows him a potion he says will make anyone immortal. The chief dies, the ex-Franciscan falls ill and cures himself with the potion. The years pass, he does not age, and eventually wanders off to seek his fortune.

He goes to Portugal, marries, has a child, loses both wife and offspring, moves on, studies Hebrew with Spinoza, has conflicts with Jews either because of his relationship with Spinoza or perhaps because of some mystery in his own past, and settles in England, where he is consulted as a savant. A paragraph about his various professions defines him and transforms the story into an adumbration of Borges' writings:

It's necessary to say that in all the countries he passed through he'd exercised the most contradictory professions: soldier, lawyer, sacristan, dancing master, business man, and book seller. He came to be a secret agent in the service of Austria, a papal guard, and an outfitter of ships. He was active, clever, but not very persistent to judge by the variety of things he set about; he, however, said it wasn't so, that luck was always against him. In London, where we see him now, he limited himself to the roles of man of letters and dandy. (891)

In 1925, in *Inquisiciones*, Borges publishes a short essay on Diego de Torres Villarroel (1693–1770) extolling him as a latter-day Quevedo. He points out that Torres Villarroel was a jack-of-all-trades (“Alcanzó tierra lusitana y sucesivamente fue en ella aprendiz de ermitaño, curandero, maestro de danzar, soldado y finalmente desertor” [*Inquisiciones* 7–8]), using exactly the same phrasing he will later use in “El inmortal” to describe his protagonist, a phrasing that seems modelled on Machado, whom he appears never to have read.

Aside from the myriad professions both have, there is little more in common between Machado’s immortal, Rui de Leão, and Borges’ Joseph Cartaphilus, whose name evokes the Wandering Jew⁴ and the idea of one enamored of maps or paper. Rui de Leão on the other hand is a Don Juan, according to the frame narrator:

For it was love, we must say it, that was one of the causes of the agitated and turbulent life of our hero. In terms of his person, he was a handsome, ingratiating man, gifted with a face filled with force and magic. According to what he himself told his son, he left the Don Juanesque number of *mille e tre* far behind. He couldn’t tell the exact number of women he’d loved in all latitudes and languages, from the savage Maracujá in Pernambuco to the beautiful Cypriot or the lady of Paris or London salons; but he calculated it could not be fewer than 5,000 women. (891–92)

Rui de Leão also has at least one homosexual experience, which takes place in Italy, while he is living with a Spanish widow: “The widow died in his arms; and, except for a passion he had in Florence for a young nobleman with whom he ran away and lived with for six months, he was always faithful to his lover” (898). Borges says nothing whatsoever about Cartaphilus’ love life, reinforcing the idea that his immortal is more the embodiment of an idea or, perhaps, more a self-portrait than a literary character.

Rui de Leão’s passage through history is also very different from Cartaphilus’. His winning ways get him involved in politics, and he

⁴ Yet another irony in the creation of precursors by writers of the present manifests itself in the figure of Ahasuerus, cursed to wander the earth for all time. In the maddening *Manuscript Found in Saragossa* by the enigmatic Jan Potocki (1761–1815)—a text neither Machado nor Borges mentions—the Wandering Jew appears as an unwilling storyteller who only tells his life story under duress. When the cabalist who has power over him loses that power, Ahasuerus vanishes from the text. Like the immortals of Machado and Borges, he too has myriad professions, but unlike either of them his story reaches no conclusion.

takes part in the abortive revolt (1685) of the Duke of Monmouth. Because his lover of the moment, Lady Ema Sterling, aspires to the British throne, he passes himself off as the Duke of Monmouth, saying that it was actually a friend of the duke who was executed. Barely escaping becoming king of England, he slips away, becomes a slave trader carrying Africans to Brazil, and in 1695, participates in extinguishing the Palmares republic, made up of escaped slaves. Deceived by a wife and a friend, he tries to commit suicide, fails, and simply moves on.

He travels to India, returns to Lisbon, writes such an excellent report of his findings that he becomes a candidate for the governorship of Goa, though he is ultimately cheated of the position by a devious competitor. He moves to Madrid, falls into the hands of the Inquisition, escapes, wanders through Eastern Europe, ultimately settling in Constantinople, where he studies Turkish and Arabic. He witnesses the French Revolution, meets Napoleon, and returns to Brazil with the Portuguese royal family in 1808. He remains in Brazil, ultimately entering politics and becoming a deputy under Pedro II.

Machado's immortal ultimately falls victim to ennui, the great affliction of the nineteenth century. His son, our witness-narrator, asks how he can be sad when he has escaped a universal curse, and then reports his father's response:

He'd seen all his loved-ones die; he would lose me as well as all the other children he would have through the centuries to come. Other loved ones, and not just a few, had deceived him; and both kinds, the sincere and the perfidious, he was obliged to repeat both, relentlessly, without even time to take a breath. Meanwhile, experience was of no value against the need to hold onto something in that rapid flow of men and generations. It was a necessity of eternal life; without it, he would succumb to madness. He'd tried everything, exhausted everything; now it was all repetition, monotony, with no hope, with nothing. (900)

Ironically, it is the mortal son—unless, of course, it is the immortal father standing in for his son as he stood in for the Duke of Monmouth—who provides Rui de Leão with access to mortality. The basic principle of the son's homeopathic medicine declares that *Similia similibus curantur*, and the immortal concludes that the potion that granted him immortality can also take it away. He drinks what remains of it and dies immediately. Now we understand the doctor's melancholy: he has indirectly killed his own father and feels guilty even though his father wanted nothing else. Later listeners to

the story express skepticism about the son: is he a madman? Is he merely trying to spread the homeopathic doctrine by means of sensationalism? The narrator concludes enigmatically:

I leave this problem to the savants. Such is the extraordinary case that years ago, under another name and in other words, I told to these good people who have probably forgotten both. (900)

Is the writer another immortal, is he Rui de Leão's now immortal son, or has becoming a writer conferred another kind of immortality on him? Even asking these questions in the context of Machado's characteristic irony swerves our reading toward Borges.

While agreeing that "El inmortal" is strongly related to Borges' biography, his English-language biographers differ on what specific links there are between life and literature. Rodríguez Monegal first brandishes then discards some literary antecedents and relegates the tale to Borges' insomnia:

The literary sources of this story are so obvious—Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" as well as Richard Burton's books of his journeys in the Near East and Franz Kafka's *The Castle*—that the reader may overlook how much of the story is based on Borges' insomnia, which he suffered from for years. It is the "atrocious lucidity of insomnia" (as he once called it) that the story tries to capture on its surface. But underneath that experience is Borges' nightmarish view of reality. The City of the Immortals is another version of the haunted, abandoned villa he calls Triste-le-Roy in "Death and the Compass," as well as the house where Asterion lives in the story of that name. That is, it is a labyrinth, a hideous place. These stories have at their root a recurring nightmare: the house that protects is also a prison. (*A Literary Biography* 68)

James Woodall sets aside insomnia and relates "El inmortal" to Borges' sexual impotence which he asserts weighed heavily on him in the mid '40s:

Nineteen forty-six was a crossroads for Borges. First, he was in love with a woman [Estela Canto] who didn't want to marry him; then he lost his job. He needed help.

A degree of solace came in the form of a certain Doctor Miguel Kohan Miller, a psychiatric doctor . . . Kohan Miller would have some influence on both aspects of Borges' strange, late-forties crisis, which was largely sexual in origin . . . What he [Kohan Miller] discovered was a man whose deep-rooted inhibitions, over coitus in particular, needed removing not

just for the sake of his psychological health, but also for the good of Argentine literature. The only evidence that Kohan Miller was right about the latter is in Borges's intense productivity the year following his visits to the doctor: in 1947, he published in *Anales de Buenos Aires* and *Sur* five of the great stories that make up *El Aleph*, including "El inmortal"; this is as long as the volume's title story, beginning with a Roman tribune's quest to join the City of the Immortals in desert sands—a parable full of labyrinths and hopes for endless life, for eternal escape from self. (Woodall 151)

Of the two interpretations, Rodríguez Monegal's is the more plausible. Borges himself never discusses Kohan Miller, who even Woodall seems to regard with considerable skepticism, so it does not necessarily follow that Borges' burst of productivity between 1946 and 1947 is the result of therapy.

Woodall quotes a memorable passage from "El inmortal," which he uses to document Borges' desire to escape from his own identity:

"I am god, I am hero, I am philosopher, I am demon and I am world, which is a tedious way of saying I do not exist." In abnegating his earthly self and embracing multiple identities, this narrator is also disclaiming, in "a tedious way," responsibility for writing the text we are reading. (162)

Woodall does not mention that Borges, constantly given to self-quotation, was actually recycling material he'd used in 1925, in the essay "La nadería de la personalidad" in *Inquisiciones*.⁶ The essay is an attack on the concept of the "I," as he says in his prologue: "Quiero abatir la excepcional preeminencia que hoy suele adjudicarse al yo" (*Inquisiciones* 84) after demolishing the ego in several different ways, he attacks it (87–88) by showing that the "I" we had years earlier in no way resembles the "I" we have today.

He uses as an example the Renaissance alchemist Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535) whose name also appears in "El inmortal," who discovered he was a cosmos, that is, many people: "Como Cornelio Agrippa, soy dios, soy héroe, soy filósofo, soy demonio y

⁶ Alejandro Vaccaro, in his *Georgie (1899–1930): una vida de Jorge Luis Borges*, points out that Borges had published "La nadería de la personalidad" in *Proa* in 1922 and that "La encrucijada de Berkeley" appeared in *Nosotros* in 1923. The point is that the 23-year-old Borges had been concerned with demolishing the monolithic ego for some time, just as the note to the reader that opens his first book of poems, *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), points out that "Nuestras nadas poco difieren; es trivial y fortuita la circunstancia de que seas tú el lector de estos ejercicios y yo su redactor" (*Fervor* 7).

soy mundo, lo cual es una fatigosa manera de decir que no soy" (*Inquisiciones* 88–89). In his 1925 attack on the ego, Borges quotes Agrippa, whose final sentence is "Soy filósofo, dios, héroe, demonio y el universo entero" (*Inquisiciones* 88). That Borges was fond of this idea in 1925 is clear from the fact that he repeats it both in the article on Torres Villarroel mentioned above and in this questioning of the ego, but it is equally clear that the multiple identities make the individual into a multitude—not Everyman but all men—which is exactly what being immortal entails for Borges.

Rodríguez Monegal's linking of T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and Individual Talent" to "Kafka y sus precursores" is relevant here as well because Eliot, too, was concerned with a need to go beyond the Romantic ego in order to concentrate on theme or style rather than self-expression. That is, Woodall's progression from sexual crisis to therapy to literary production to desire to lose personal identity lacks cohesion. Borges' problematic relationship with his own identity and with the identity of any narrator was of long duration, as the 1925 quotation demonstrates, and may or may not have had any relationship to his sexual problems. In 1925, he was at pains to reduce human identity to perception, while in "El inmortal" he wants to show that authorship is a matter of multiple identities, that to be an author entails absorbing—and being absorbed by—tradition. Again, Eliot summarizes the idea:

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. (Eliot 25)

To become an author means for Borges to die, albeit metaphorically. At the same time, it means becoming immortal, that is, inscribed on paper. This is why Borges is so fascinated with metamorphosis: the man becomes the author through transformation; by the same token, Borges' characters often become their opposite. For Borges, nothing can mean anything without its antitype, since all significance, all identity derives from difference.

In that, Borges' exploration of the idea of immortality⁶ differs

⁶ Immortality was certainly a theme Borges had pondered long before writing his story. In Adolfo Bioy Casares' prologue to the 1940 *Antología de la literatura fantástica* (which he edited with Silvina Ocampo and Borges), Bioy enumerates some of

radically from that of Machado de Assis. Machado takes the idea that becoming immortal means not dying and nothing more, which is why his immortal can amuse himself by learning new things. For Borges, becoming immortal involves a fundamental transformation of the person in question: to be immortal is to possess all possible human experiences, which, in the context of the story includes being Homer, Homer's translator Alexander Pope, and Giambattista Vico, who speculated that Homer was not one poet but many but whose combined voices speak for the Greek people. For this reason, the immortals Cartaphilus meets near the City of the Immortals are brutish troglodytes: immortality locks them inside history, which for them is a preestablished order, a completed text. Unlike God, they cannot stand outside history and create something from nothing. All they can do—and their city, a parody of the creative act, is the prime example—is constantly destroy in order to rebuild. It is in the City of the Immortals where Borges expresses his sense of the irony of the writerly identity most clearly. That is, where in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"⁷ he shows how the individual is subsumed into language, he uses immortality here to show that being a writer means constructing texts out of preexistent material—the concept of the new being merely a delusion.

Machado sends his immortal around the world on an essentially circular journey. He can be virtually anything, but he cannot cease to be himself, and that is where Machado and Borges intersect. Their characters are essentially actors, and their world is a stage. The

the devices ("recursos") of fantastic literature and then goes on to list some fantastic plots ("argumentos fantásticos"), among which he includes the "theme of immortality." Since Borges worked with Bioy and Silvina Ocampo on the anthology, it is not unreasonable to think Bioy's prologue would reflect ideas the three held in common. Another example is Bioy's 1940 novella *La invención de Morel* (for which Borges wrote an important prologue). In that text, a man on an uninhabited island finds himself surrounded by holographic images; he falls in love with one and interpolates himself into the provisional immortality of holographic existence even though the process kills him.

⁷ It is in a footnote appended to "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" that Borges repeats an idea he expressed earlier: "En el día de hoy, una de las iglesias de Tlön sostiene platónicamente que tal dolor, que tal matiz verdoso del amarillo, que tal temperatura, que tal sonido, son la única realidad. Todos los hombres, en el vertiginoso instante del coito, son el mismo hombre. Todos los hombres que repiten una línea de Shakespeare, son William Shakespeare" (*Ficciones* 26). This is yet another form of authorial immortality, one, to be sure, charged with irony since it entails loss of identity.

difference is one of accumulation versus simultaneity; that is, Machado's immortal gradually realizes the futility of being immortal, while Borges' Cartaphilus quickly grasps the idea that to be immortal is to be no one.

And here arises a paradox: Rui de Leão longs for death so he may escape the ennui of repetition. Cartaphilus seeks the river of mortality so that he may recover individuality, but is it not the case that both immortals retain their individuality despite having become immortal? They do, but the excess baggage of immortality seems too much to bear. Tired actors bored with play-acting, they pursue the only unique act left to them: dying. Machado, ever-ready to puncture the fads of nineteenth-century thought, uses homeopathic medicine to restore Rui de Leão's mortality, incidentally creating Oedipal guilt for the son, who unwittingly takes part in literature's first doctor-assisted suicide; Borges uses antithesis to kill off his immortal. Rui de Leão is a by-product of Machado's skepticism about science; Cartaphilus is a by-product of Borges' own longing for artistic immortality and his fear of paying its price.

Quotations from Machado de Assis

Estupefação dos ouvintes, que eram dous, o Coronel Bertioça, e o tebelião da vila, João Linhares. A vila era na província fluminense; suponhamos Itaboraí ou Sapucaia. Quanto à data, não tenho dúvida em dizer que foi no ano de 1855, uma noite de novembro, escura como breu, quente como um forno, passante de nove horas. Tudo silencio. O lugar em que os tres estavam era a varanda que dava para o terreiro. (886)

Convém dizer que em todos os países por onde andara tinha ele exercido os mais contrários officios: soldado, advogado, sacristão, mestre de dança, comerciante e libreiro. Chegou a ser agente secreto da Austria, guarda pontifício e armador de navios. Era ativo, engenhoso, mas pouco persistente, a julgar pela variedade das cousas que empreendeu; ele, porém, dizia que não, que a sorte é que sempre lhe foi adversa. Em Londres, onde o vemos agora, limitou-se ao mister de letrado e gamenho. (891)

Que o amor, fôrça é dizé-lo, foi uma das causas da vida agitada e turbulenta do nosso herói. Ele era pessoalmente um homem galhardo, insinuante, dotado de um olhar cheio de fôrça e magia. Segundo ele mesmo contou ao filho, deixou muito longe o algarismo dom-juanesco das

mille e tre. Não podia dizer o número exato das mulheres a quem amara, em todas as latitudes e línguas, desde a selvagem Maracujá de Pernambuco, até à bela cipriota ou à fidalga dos salões de Paris e Londres; mas calculava em não menos de cinco mil mulheres. (892)

A viúva morreu-lhe nos braços; e, salvo uma paixão que teve em Florença, por um rapaz nobre, com quem fugiu e esteve seis meses, foi sempre fiel ao amante. (898)

Tinha visto morrer todas as suas afeições; devia perder-me um dia, e todos os mais filhos que tivesse pelos séculos adiante. Outras afeições e não poucas o tinham enganado; e umas e outras, boas e más, sinceras e pérfidas, era-lhe forçoso repeti-las, sem trégua, sem um respiro ao menos, porquanto, a experiencia não lhe podia valer contra a necesidad de agarrar-se a alguma cousa, naquela passagem rápida dos homens e das gerações. Era uma necessidade da vida eterna; sem ela, cairia na demencia. Tinha provado tudo, esgotado tudo; agora era a repetição, a monotonia, sem esperanças, sem nada. (900)

Dou este problema aos estudiosos. Tal é o caso extraordinario, que há anos, com outro nome, e por outras palavras, contei a este bom povo, que provávelmente já os esqueceu a ambos. (900)

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