

NEGATION IN BORGES'S 'THE SECRET MIRACLE': WRITING THE SHOAH

BEATRIZ PRIEL, BEER-SHEVA, ISRAEL

The author presents a psychoanalytic reading of Borges's 'The secret miracle' (1943), a short story about the Shoah, for which Freud's concept of negation (Verneinen) and recent psychoanalytic approaches to symbolisation and the functions of fiction form the theoretical background. She argues that the effects of negation, present in literary fiction, become forcefully magnified in the fiction of the Shoah, because of its specific inversion of the relations between life and art. This magnification increases the perplexing effect that is characteristic of Borges's heterotopies. The story is read as a metaphor of transformative processes that closely follow Freud's dual conceptualisation of negation as a defence and as allowing the repressed a way into consciousness. This study illuminates the conservation of the relations between external and internal realities as a basic difference between negation and related concepts such as disavowal (Verleugnung), and repression, in relation to creative imagination. The author relates the story's perplexing effect to its subversion of fundamental axioms such as temporality, questioning the existence of sense itself and suggests that the malaise the story produces may stem from the way in which its narrative structure negates time, the fabric from which narratives—and life—are woven.

At times in the evening a face
Looks at us out of the depths of a mirror.
Art should be like that mirror
Which reveals to us our own face

Arte Poetica (Borges, 1960a, p. 843).

In an unforgettable poem that Borges named 'The other tiger' (1960b) the narrator is searching for a fierce tiger. He first finds a tiger in the library, but that tiger consists of 'symbols and shadows, a series of literary tropes and memories of the encyclopedia' (p. 824). This is not the dangerous animal he is seeking. Next, there is the terrible tiger that inhabits Sumatra or Bengal but 'already the fact of naming it and of conjuring up its circumstances turns it into a fiction of art and not a living creature like those that stalk the earth' (pp. 824–5). Then we are told about the third tiger:

We shall search for a third tiger now
But like the others, this one too, will be a form
of my dream, a system of human words

and not the flesh and bone tiger
that, beyond mythologies
paces the earth. I know these things quite well, yet
something
keeps driving me into this vague,
senseless, and ancient adventure, and I persevere
in searching through the twilight hours
for the other tiger, the one that is not in the verse
(Borges, 1960b, p. 825).

This essay discusses the incompleteness, imperfection and inevitability of literary representations of the Shoah. Moreover, the mere possibility of literature, or art in general, in the context of the Shoah has been forcefully questioned, as in Adorno's often-quoted dictum that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (1962, p. 312). The question of a fictional literature on the Shoah created strong emotional reactions, especially during the first years after the end of World War II, as if the facts resisted a displacement and transformation through art (Langer, 1990). Fiction might even

appear obsolete, as language itself seemed to have been irreversibly affected, when everyday words acquired horrendous meanings: *gas, train, selection, shower, smoke, soap*. Adorno later qualified his statement that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, affirming that 'literature must resist this verdict' and added: 'It is now virtually in art alone that suffering can find its own voice, consolation, without being immediately betrayed by it' (1962, p. 313). Literature, and art in general, is seen here as a powerful voice, but as a conceivable deceiver too. And yet, art has not kept silent.

Psychoanalysis has explored the relations between art and the trauma of the Shoah mainly from its primary therapeutic perspective, studying, for instance, processes of creation among survivors of the Shoah and their offspring (Laub & Podell, 1995). The present study, however, assumes a psychoanalytic perspective on an art object itself—Borges's story 'The secret miracle' ('El milagro secreto', Borges, 1944a [1962])—and on the reader's response to it. 'The secret miracle' is one of those fantastic stories to which Foucault has referred as Borges's 'heterotopies', i.e. those narratives that subvert language, questioning myth and destroying conventions (Foucault, 1966). These are stories that disconcert the reader, creating a perplexity and 'malaise' that is the very opposite of the comfort and consolation produced by utopic narratives.

In what follows, I assume that the malaise that accompanies the reading of Borges's heterotopies in general, and 'The secret miracle' in particular, is the reader's acute awareness of the antithetical and paradoxical functions of negation (*Verneinen*). Moreover, negation is also the main theme in 'The secret miracle', a story that dramatises processes of defence and creativity *vis-à-vis* catastrophic trauma. The reading process effects an awareness of transformative processes that closely follow the conceptualisation of negation as both a rejection and an acknowledgement of basic aspects of psychic reality (Freud, 1925).

Freud ascribed to negation a double function: a restrictive and evasive function on one

hand—negation as defence—and, on the other, a creative, innovative function—negation as enriching thinking: 'The content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness, on condition that it is *negated*. Negation is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed' (1925, p. 235). Negation points to that which is repressed, as in Freud's comment that when the patient says, 'Now you will think I mean to say something insulting, but really I've no such intention', we realise 'that this is a rejection, by projection, of an idea that has just come up' (1925, p. 235). Repression persists, however: the repressed is only intellectually, but not affectively, accepted.

The thesis of Freud's paper on negation is, however, that the dialectics of affirmation and negation inherent to *Verneinung* offer a basis for a theory of judgement. The Freudian analysis of the function of judgement is based on the fundamental distinction between external and internal (Freud, 1925). These realms, as Freud wrote, are assumed to be undifferentiated at the beginning; their differentiation follows two sorts of decision. The first is related to the possession of attributes, according to which what is bad is ejected and what is good is introjected. The second is a judgement of existence, in which the question of reality versus non-reality, or outside versus inside, is posed (Hypolite, 1975). The loss of the satisfying object ('objects shall have been lost which once brought real satisfaction', p. 238) being the precondition for reality-testing. Freud concludes that the performance of the function of judgement, i.e. the act of differentiating between the subjective and the objective, is made possible by the creation of the symbol of negation. Towards the end of his work on negation, Freud considers negation to be a process, both affirming and negating the fusion of erotic (affirmation, introjection) and destructive (negation, expulsion) instinctual tendencies. To sum up, Freud developed in 'Negation' (1925) a conception of the origins and functions of intellectual judgement and, plausibly, of thinking in general, as based on the transformation

of lack or absence, and dependent on the creation of the symbol of negation.

A mechanism close to negation is disavowal, defined as the splitting between two attitudes where 'the attitude which fitted in with the wish and the attitude which fitted in with reality exist side by side' (Freud, 1927, p. 156). Two main differences between disavowal and negation, however, emerge. In the first place, disavowal and negation differ as to the relations between the two contradictory elements coexisting in each of them. The two aspects of negation—negation and affirmation—are related to each other by means of the symbol of negation. Moreover, the subject who negates points to, and speaks, to some extent at least, about the repressed. In disavowal, in contrast, two parallel attitudes coexist side by side, and the transformations of perceptual reality made possible by speech are lacking (Basch, 1983). Second, disavowal and negation differ as to the source of their specific contents: Freud tended to reserve the term disavowal for the refusal to perceive a fact imposed by external reality (e.g. sexual differences), while he termed negation the defence against aspects of internal reality, such as wishes, as when the Rat Man rejects the idea of having death wishes towards his father (Freud, 1909).

Moreover, the conservation of a relation with the negated brings the idea of negation close to the concept of repression. Negation may be considered a first stage in the lifting of repressed contents. Laplanche & Pontalis, for instance, underscored that for Freud negation indicates 'the moment when an unconscious idea or wish *begins to re-emerge* whether during the course of treatment or outside it' (1973, p. 263; my italics). Also Green has defined negation as an intellectual substitute for repression (1998, p. 660). Thus, it seems plausible that negation, like repression, and unlike disavowal, associates to, or allows for, processes of symbolisation. This possibility constitutes the theoretical basis for conceptualisations of fictional literature as akin to processes of negation. The conceptualisation of negation as involving *the beginning* of the re-emergence of

unconscious ideas may shed light on the difference between the perplexing reading effects produced by many of Borges's texts, and the feelings of uncanniness characteristic of the reading process of texts that, like Hoffmann's *The Sand-Man*, dramatise the return of repressed contents (Freud, 1919). The uncanny effect is produced when the distinction between reality and imagination collapses (1919, p. 244). In negation, however, the distinction between the objective and the subjective is kept through the symbol of negation.

Ricoeur (1979) defined fictional discourse as preserving reality through its self-definition as fiction, while at the same time it abolishes the ordinary vision of reality. Fiction thus 're-describes' reality mainly through the use of metaphors that bring together distant semantic fields (Ricoeur, 1979). That might be one of the reasons why Majorca storytellers caution their audience that what they are going to tell 'was *and* it was not' ('Aixo era y no era' [1979, p. 151]). Fiction is thus described as dramatising the basic affirmation and negation inherent to *Verneinung*. The affirmative and negative poles of negation are emphasised in psychoanalytic studies of art and literature, that tend to distinguish between the enriching and the defensive aspects of negation, suggesting different forms, or categories, of fiction. Britton (1995) refers to truth-seeking versus truth-evading fiction; the former is germane to the search in dreams for inner truth, while the latter is more akin to the wish-fulfilling function of day-dreams. These different forms of fiction are also seen as corresponding to the basic differentiation between infantile phantasies that accompany experience, and those conjured up in order to deny actual experience (Britton, 1999). Chasseguet-Smirgel (1995) distinguishes between creative processes that integrate diverse stages of development and the obstacles undergone, and creations that circumvent and disguise stages and obstacles. These conceptualisations of the different categories of fictional discourse are congruent with Green's structuring and destructuring modes of the 'work of the negative' (1999) and Segal's basic distinction between symbolisation as a

process of transformation intended to overcome loss, and symbolic equations as transformations used to deny absence (Segal, 1991, pp. 168–9).

Moreover, the distinction between art that seeks truth and art that evades it, following Britton's expression, implies also a differentiation between art that deals with and art that does not deal with ugliness, pain and death. An important aspect of this distinction is the complex relation with pleasure–displeasure to be found in serious art, i.e. art that does not avoid nor amend external reality, but that symbolises important, sometimes very unpleasant and disturbing, aspects of psychic reality. While discussing a painting on the Shoah, Chasseguet-Smirgel (1995) notices that the authentic work of art seldom fascinates and may even repel initially. Its attraction for the beholder, however, is related to the object's match with fundamental inner truth.

Negation, in the original Freudian dialectical sense, is to be found only in truth-searching fiction. While truth-evading fiction is seen as only fulfilling a defensive, escapist function, truth-searching fiction can be seen as fulfilling simultaneously both the defensive and the enriching functions of negation. Truth-searching fiction is a defence, as it avoids a painful aspect of psychic reality, and it is enriching as it creates a space–time in which psychic work can be done, that is, a space–time for symbolisation. Truth-searching fictional discourse can therefore be seen as the temporary avoidance of reality while 'keeping an eye on it'. This possibility is the dialectical opposite to Steiner's 'turning the blind eye' to reality (1985). By 'keeping an eye on reality', I refer to the awareness of reality's accessibility while temporarily ignoring it that is characteristic of negation. The time implied in the 'temporary' avoidance or suspension of reality is the time–place where psychic work can be done. Negation, as the mechanism of keeping an eye on the negated, may define some of the conditions for the creation of meaning.

Assuming that the awareness of the role of negation is a main reading effect in truth-searching fiction, my main thesis is that this

effect is magnified forcefully in the fictions of the Shoah, because of the specific inversion of the relations between life and art that characterise this literature. Moreover, fictional literature about the Shoah questions basic definitions of the fantastic as a literary genre. According to Todorov (1973), fantastic stories are those that present us with the world we know, as we know it, except that suddenly something impossible, unthinkable, happens that cannot be explained by the laws of this familiar world. We are then confronted with two main alternatives: we can define the event as not real, as an illusion or as fruit of imagination, leaving untouched the laws of our familiar world. Or we can see the event as possible but controlled by laws unknown to us, that is, as a different reality. We can read it either as an illusion or else as a different kind of reality. The uncertainty between these two exclusive possibilities is the realm of the fantastic in literature (Todorov, 1973).

However, this uncertainty acquires a different meaning when we speak about fantastic Shoah stories. In these stories there is no 'uncertainty' since the impossible, the unthinkable, has already happened in reality. Reality, not imagination, has overpowered the familiar. This unique relation between fiction and reality is poignantly described by Aaron Appelfeld, a contemporary creative writer and child survivor:

When it comes to describing reality, art always demands a certain intensification, for many and various reasons. However, that is not the case with the Holocaust. Everything in it seems as thoroughly unreal ... Thence comes the need to bring it down to the human realm ... That is not a mechanical problem but an essential one. When I say 'to bring it down' I do not mean to simplify, to attenuate, or to sweeten the horror, but to make the event speak through the individual and in his language (1988, p. 92).

Appelfeld's phrase, 'to bring it down to the human realm', suggests that Shoah fictions involve an inversion of the relation between the fictional and the real, between art and life. This inversion, characteristic of literary fictions on

the Shoah, may play an important role in strengthening the reader's awareness of the vicissitudes of negation, since the usual judgement of reality has been subverted: external reality has gone beyond the bounds of imagination. The fundamental testing of reality becomes bewildering when the answer to questions such as 'what is outside and what is inside?' or 'is the object still there?' spin back and forth between affirmation and negation.

The tension between reality and unreality, and the relations between fiction and art are the hallmark of Borges's creation. Borges's texts have been characterised as both fantastic and self-conscious textuality (e.g. Barrenechea, 1957; Ferrer, 1971) and as related to historical and political reality (e.g. Aizenberg, 1984; Balderston, 1993). Probably the most suggestive indication of the problematic of reality and unreality in Borges's texts is Molloy's notion of *vaivén* (a continuous movement to and fro, like sea waves going away and coming back) between reality and fantasy (1979, p. 194). In 'The secret miracle' the particularly complex relation between life and art that appears in Shoah fictions seems to add impetus to the *vaivén* that characterises Borges's creation.

'THE SECRET MIRACLE'—THE STORY

'The night of March 14th, 1939, in an apartment on Zeltnergasse in Prague ...' (Borges, 1943 [1962], p. 88). This realistic introduction to 'The secret miracle' is followed immediately by the description of a terrible dream dreamt by Jaromir Hladík, a Jewish poet and researcher of Jewish literary sources. *There is a game of chess between rival families that had begun centuries before. Both the pieces and the chess board had disappeared, and Jaromir Hladík runs through a stormy desert, unable to remember the forms nor the laws of chess; the sound of terrible clocks mark the passage of time, and the approaching of the end of the game.* When Jaromir Hladík wakes up, and the sounds of the rain and the terrible clocks come

to a halt, he can hear a rhythmic sound in unison, interrupted by occasional shouts of command, coming from the Zeltnergasse. It is dawn, 15 March 1939, the exact time when the armoured vanguard of the Third Reich entered Prague.

Hladík is a German-language writer in his forties. He has composed poems that were included in important anthologies and was the translator into German of the 'Sefer Hayetzira'—*The Book of Creation*—a Cabbalistic treatise on the creative power of Hebrew words and letters. While rather critical of most of his works, he considers that his best work is a history of man's concepts of time and eternity. He also has an unfinished drama entitled *The Enemies*, written in verse, in order to compel readers not to forget that 'unreality is the condition of art' (1944a, p. 510; my translation).

On 19 March, someone denounces Jaromir Hladík, who is arrested the same day, having been accused of having a Jewish mother, who used a Jewish name—Jaroslavsky. Moreover, Hladík's research seems conspicuously Jewish. The German officer in charge decides that Jaromir Hladík should be executed on 29 March, at 9.00 a.m. The officer explains that this postponement should make clear that his administration does not act impulsively or passionately, but slowly and impersonally 'after the manner of vegetables and planets' (1962, p. 89).

During the ten days left to him (from 19 March till 29 March) Hladík imagines time and again the details of his own execution, exploring infinite variations and possibilities, wavering between the need to imagine the worst so that it won't happen, and the need never to imagine the worst because then it might happen. However, on the night of 28 March, his last night, Hladík's attention turns to *The Enemies*, his unfinished drama. He had written the first act and conceived the idea of the plot, but two acts are still unwritten. In the darkness of his cell, Hladík prays to God:

If in any way I do exist, if I am not one of Your repetitions or mistakes, I exist as the author of *The Enemies*. To finish this drama, which can justify me and justify

You, I need another year. Grant me these days, You, to whom centuries and time belong (p. 92).

Hladík falls asleep and has a second dream. *Hladík learns from a blind librarian that God is hidden in one of the letters of one of the words of one of the books from the immense Clementinum library. Hladík succeeds, by pure chance, in recognising this letter, and he then hears God's promise to bestow the time he needs.*

Immediately before the execution, when the German guns are ready to fire, 'The physical world comes to a halt' (p. 93): external or clock time suddenly frozen: in a miraculous way, a drop of rain on Hladík's cheek and the shadow of a flying bee stay motionless. While speechless and also motionless, Hladík, to his own surprise, is absolutely free to think: mental time and thinking continued to unfold. 'The German lead would kill him at the appointed hour, but in his mind a year would transpire between the firing order and its execution' (p. 93).

Using the only document he has, that is, his memory (p. 93), Hladík finishes the mental composition of the unfinished play. He changes, summarises and extends the text, going back to the original version, or deleting symbols that were too obvious. During this process, Hladík is very much aware of his surroundings: he gradually becomes familiar with the yard and with the soldiers. The story even tells that one of the soldiers' faces convinces him to change aspects of the story's main character (p. 94). *The Enemies* evolves in Roemerstadt's library, one afternoon while the clock marks 7.00 p.m. Roemerstadt is repeatedly interrupted by strangers; but the audience, and later on he himself, understand that these are secret enemies who intend to destroy him. The name of Jaroslav Kubin is mentioned; he was once interested in Roemerstadt's fiancée, and is now a madman who believes he is Roemerstadt. Roemerstadt is obliged to kill one of the traitors in the second act. The third act of *The Enemies* is a repetition of the first act, but the play becomes more and more difficult to follow, and less and less coherent as when one of the characters, killed in the second act, reappears on

stage. Gradually, the spectator realises that Roemerstadt and Jaroslav Kubin are one and the same; the clock marks 7.00 p.m. Obviously, the drama has not taken place: it has been Kubin's circular nightmare. The moment Hladík finishes imagining the writing of the play, the flow of time is reassumed in external reality and a discharge is heard. Jaromir Hladík is murdered on 29 March 1939, at 9.02 a.m.

'THE SECRET MIRACLE'— AN INTERPRETATION

The agonising paradox of lawlessness and arbitrariness masked as order and lawfulness, or the opposition between brute force and the powers of human mind and intellect, are basic themes in the story. However, this story is also a problematisation of the powers of imagination to affect internal reality. The story dramatises a negation of temporality—the 'miracle'—as a psychological process in which negation and the negated are subtly associated, structuring a space for creativity. In what follows, I shall refer to the main contents involved in the story, and point out the dialectics of affirmation and negation inherent to them that might play a role in evoking the reader's perplexity.

The story is seemingly enclosed in a very realistic and accurate spatial and temporal frame. And yet, the limits between reality and fantasy, wakefulness and sleep, are slim and fragile. For instance the story's very realistic initial description of time and place ('The night of March the 14th 1939 in an apartment of the Zeltnergasse in Prague ...') leads to the immersion in an oneiric atmosphere, against a background of the noise made by threatening clocks and desert rain. This noise comes suddenly to a halt, and is replaced by rhythmic and ordered tones pertaining to the real army actually entering the town. The relations between reality and dream are confusing, and there is a nightmarish atmosphere.

Hladík's dreams bring to the fore pivotal Borgesian themes and symbols, which acquire unexpected meaning in the context of Shoah,

such as the game of chess, writing and time (Rodriguez-Monegal, 1973; Balderston, 1993). Moreover, the sequence of the dreams presented suggests a specific internal process of transformation. In the first dream, the game of chess represents, in Borges's writings, a perpetual struggle between opposite forces: white and black, good and evil, chaos and order. Some critics have also found in Borges's game of chess the need to rationalise these irrational conflicts (Mandlove, 1980). But, beyond that, the chess game provides Borges's main metaphor of the illusion of human freedom, a fateful issue in any meditation on the Shoah. In a poem entitled 'Chess', Borges elaborates on the meanings of the game. Referring to the chess pieces, Borges reminds us that they fight their war but

They don't know it is the player's hand
That dominates and guides their destiny.
They do not know an adamant fate
Controls their will and lays the battle plan.
The player too is captive of caprice
(Borges, 1960c, p. 813; translated by A. Reid).

In the chess dream of 'The secret miracle' the questioning of human freedom and rationality is infinitely magnified and expanded: not only is the idea of freedom to play illusory *per se*, but the rules of the game and its pieces are arbitrarily absent.

The second dream in the story, dreamt by Hladík during his last night, is on the creative power of letters and words. This dream encompasses a basic Cabbalistic myth that powerfully affects Borges's conception of creative writing. The Cabbalistic idea is that Hebrew letters were the instruments used by God to create the world (Aizenberg, 1984; Sosnowski, 1986), and Borges has seen the paradigmatic possibility of human creativity in the written word (Borges, 1944b). Thus, symbols of meaningfulness and creativity substitute in the second dream for the idea of the basic limitations of human freedom and its subordination to unknown fateful powers. The change seems to have begun with Hladík's prayer and God's answer. This internal scene dramatises basic aspects of creative

processes such as the creative artist's need to be involved in some sort of dialogue with another, beyond the illusion of being separate and in a unique contact with his or her own creativity (Steiner, 1999, p. 709). Moreover, Hladík's prayer, 'If in any way I do exist, if I am not one of Your repetitions or mistakes, I exist as the author of *The Enemies*', evokes Rorty's belief (based on Bloom's idea of the anxiety of influence) that the main characteristic of the creative poet is

the conscious need ... to demonstrate that he is not a copy or replica as merely a special form of an unconscious need everyone has: the need to come to terms with the blind impress which chance has given him, to make a self for himself by redescribing that impress in terms which are, if only marginally, his own (1989, p. 43).

Hladík's creative gesture affirms both the imminence of death and the continuity of his existence: he is who he was. The scene of mental creation is depicted against a background of different orders of temporality that affect each other, suggesting a conceptualisation of art as reconciliation between different levels of psychic organisation, images and words, fantasy and reality, timelessness and time. Moreover, even though according to the story time flows only for Hladík, and stands still in 'reality', the text tells us he was executed at 9.02, allowing for two 'real' minutes to pass, and creating the last, fleeting ambiguity: did the creative writer's work take place in real or in subjective time? The central metaphor of the story—the coexistence of subjective and external temporalities or realities—seems to provide an affirmative answer to Loewald's question: 'Could sublimation be both a mourning of lost original oneness and a celebration of oneness regained?' (1980, p. 81). Borges's intuition of the 'aesthetic event' or 'aesthetic deed' (*el hecho estético*) clearly points to the universal human experience of lack and absence (the precondition for reality testing in Freud) as both negated and acknowledged in the work of art. In 'The wall and the books', after defining music as pure form and therefore the ideal of art, Borges wrote:

Music, states of happiness, mythology, faces wrought by time, some sundowns and some places, want to tell us something, or have told us something we ought not to have missed, or are about to tell us something: this imminence of revelation that never comes, is, perhaps the aesthetic event (1952, p. 635).

The aesthetic deed is the awareness of the gap, the lack, that which almost is, and therefore is not.

The paradox of time and timelessness is also represented through the relations between the story and the story in the story, i.e. the relationships between 'The secret miracle' and *The Enemies*. The play Hladík writes in his mind is almost a parody of circular time, or timelessness, and the reproduction of the same. His play is not a process but the representation of a static, hallucinatory, world, where basic differentiations have collapsed, as we bear witness to the return of the dead and understand that Roemerstadt is Kubin. While Hladík's *The Enemies* is a clear instance of the disintegrating work of negation (Green, 1998), leading to reiterative symbolic equations (Segal, 1991), Borges's 'The secret miracle' dramatises time and timelessness as the background to self-identity and creativity (Priel, 1997).

Moreover, the vicissitudes of temporality play a main role in the story's perplexing effect on the reader. The oscillations between time and timelessness represent dialectical relations between inner, human linguistic reality and outer, brutal non-linguistic reality ('in the manner of vegetables and planets'). Time in the story is both real and non-real; it is both an affirmation and negation of death. However, the main perplexing impact on the reader stems not only from the vertiginous play with different aspects and orders of time, but from the subtle connections between them, as when a soldier's face 'convinces' Hladík to change aspects of Roemerstadt's character ...

In *The Secret Miracle* it is the reader's idiomatic plotting of very different ways of being in time and in reality—as reflected in the relations between time and timelessness, reality and dream, story and invented story in the story,

creation and annihilation, life and death—that produces the 'malaise' that Foucault defined as characteristic of Borges's heterotopies (Foucault, 1966). Moreover, this discomfort and perplexity might also relate to the fact that the play with time questions the most basic principles involved in the creation of meaning and in telling stories (Ricoeur, 1985). In this sense 'The secret miracle' does not only denounce a specific political or social system, but questions the possibility of system. The effect of the subversion of fundamental axioms, like temporality, is perplexing because it questions the existence of sense itself. It is an effect that stems from its narrative structure that negates time, the fabric from which narratives, and life, are woven.

This reading of 'The secret miracle' underscores a process through which the horrendous reality has been necessarily 'brought down' (Appelfeld, 1988) to the human realm, that is, to the individual, the idiomatic, the particular, and the idiosyncratic. Does mental creation, the power of the human intellect, have any reparative effect? A fantastic story has been told. This is a story that says about itself, 'I am not the (physical or psychical) reality', while pointing to this reality in a manner that bewilders the reader. 'The secret miracle' is an outstanding specimen of Shoah fiction that 'does not say the unsayable, but says that it cannot say it' (Lyotard, 1990, p. 47).

TRANSLATIONS OF SUMMARY

L'auteur présente une lecture psychanalytique du 'miracle secret' (1947) de Borges, une histoire se rapportant au Shoah, dont le concept de négation de Freud (*Verneinen*) ainsi que les approches psychanalytiques récentes à la symbolisation et les fonctions du roman forment la toile de fond théorique. Elle montre que les effets de la négation, présents dans le roman, s'amplifient avec force dans le Shoah, du fait de son inversion spécifique du rapport entre la vie et l'art. Cette amplification augmente l'effet de perplexité qui est caractéristique des hétérotopies de Borges. L'histoire est lue comme une métaphore des processus de transformation qui suivent de près la conceptualisation dualiste de la négation comme une défense et comme

permettant au refoulé de cheminer dans la conscience. Cette étude éclaire la conservation de la relation entre les réalités externes et internes comme une différence de base entre la négation et les concepts qui s'y rattachent tels que le déni (*Verleugnung*), et le refoulement, par rapport à l'imagination créative. L'auteur relate les effets de perplexité de l'histoire à sa subversion des axiomes fondamentaux tels la temporalité, le questionnement de l'existence du sens lui-même et elle suggère que le malaise de l'histoire prend peut être sa source dans la façon dont sa structure narrative nie le temps, tissu dont les récits—et la vie—sont tissés.

Die Autorin stellt eine psychoanalytische Interpretation von Borges' „Das geheime Wunder“ (1943) dar, einer Kurzgeschichte über die Shoah, für die Freuds Konzept der Verneinung und neuere psychoanalytische Vorstellungen zur Symbolisierung und zu den Funktionen der Prosaliteratur den theoretischen Hintergrund bilden. Sie meint, dass die Wirkungen der Verneinung, die in der literarischen Fiktion besteht, in der Literatur zur Shoah wegen der spezifischen Umkehrung der Beziehung zwischen Leben und Kunst massiv verstärkt werden. Diese Verstärkung erhöht den verwirrenden Effekt, der für Borges' Heterotopien charakteristisch ist. Die Geschichte wird als eine Metapher für transformierende Prozesse verstanden, die eng an Freuds doppelter Konzeption anlehnt, die Verneinung sowohl als Abwehr wie als Möglichkeit, dem Verdrängten Zugang zum Bewusstsein zu gestatten, sieht. Diese Studie beleuchtet das Bewahren der Beziehung zwischen äusserer und innerer Realität als einen grundlegenden Unterschied zwischen Verneinung und verwandten Konzepten wie Verleugnung und Verdrängung in Beziehung zur kreativen Imagination. Die Autorin bezieht die verwirrende Wirkung der Ges-

chichte darauf, dass grundlegende Axiome wie die Zeitlichkeit untergraben werden und dadurch die Existenz von Sinn und Verstand infrage gestellt wird. Sie meint, dass das durch die Geschichte hervorgerufene Unbehagen davon herrühren kann, wie ihre Erzählstruktur Zeit, den Stoff, aus dem Erzählungen—und das Leben—gewoben sind, negiert.

La autora hace una lectura psicoanalítica de 'El milagro secreto' de Borges (1943)—un cuento sobre la Shoah—cuyo sustrato teórico sería el concepto freudiano de negación (*Verneinen*) y los enfoques psicoanalíticos recientes sobre simbolización y el papel de la ficción. Sostiene que los efectos de la negación, presentes en la ficción literaria, se acentúan a la fuerza en la ficción de la Shoah, a causa de su inversión concreta de la relación entre vida y arte. Este incremento aumenta el efecto de perplejidad que es propio de las heterotopías de Borges. Se lee el cuento como una metáfora de los procesos transformativos, que tiene mucho que ver con la conceptualización dual freudiana de negación como defensa y que abre un camino para que lo reprimido pase a la conciencia. Este trabajo aclara cómo se conserva el nexo entre realidades externas e internas, en tanto que diferencia básica entre negación y otros conceptos cercanos tales como renegación (*Verleugnung*) y represión, en relación con la imaginación creadora. La autora relaciona el efecto de perplejidad que nos proporciona el cuento con su subversión de axiomas fundamentales tales como la temporalidad. Se cuestiona, incluso, el que tenga sentido y sugiere que el malestar que nos hace sentir este cuento puede ser causado por el modo en que su estructura narrativa niega el tiempo y el tejido mismo con el que se tejen los relatos y la vida.

REFERENCES

- ADORNO, T. (1962). Commitment. In *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. A. Arato and E. Gebhardt. New York: Continuum, 1982.
- AIZENBERG, E. (1984). *The Aleph Weaver: Biblical, Cabalistic and Judaic Elements in Borges*. Potomac: Scripta Humanistica.
- APPELFELD, A. (1988). *After the Holocaust. In Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. B. Lang, trans. J. M. Green. New York: Holmes & Meier, pp. 83–92.
- BALDERSTON, D. (1993). Prague, March 1943. Recovering the historicity of 'El Milagro Secreto'. In *Out of Context: Historical reference and the representation of reality in Borges*. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, pp. 56–68.
- BARRENECHEA, A. M. (1957). *La Expresión de la Irrealidad en la Obra de Jorge Luis Borges*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós.
- BASCH, M. F. (1983). The perception of reality and the disavowal of meaning. *Ann. Psychoanal.*, 11: 125–53.
- BORGES, J. L. (1944a). El milagro secreto. In *Jorge Luis Borges, Obras Completas, Vol. 1, Artificios*. Buenos Aires: Emece Editores, 1974, pp. 508–13.
- (1944b). La biblioteca de Babel. In *Jorge Luis Borges, Obras Completas, vol. 1, Ficciones*. Buenos Aires: Emece Editores, 1974, pp. 465–71.
- (1952). La muralla y los libros. In *Jorge Luis Borges, Obras Completas, Vol. 1, Otras Inquisiciones*. Buenos Aires: Emece, 1974, pp. 633–5.
- (1960a). Arte Poetica. In *Jorge Luis Borges, Obras Completas, Vol. 1, El Hacedor*. Buenos Aires: Emece, 1974, p. 843.
- (1960b). El otro tigre. In *Jorge Luis Borges, Obras Completas, Vol. 1, El Hacedor*. Buenos Aires: Emece, 1974, pp. 824–5.

- (1960c). Ajedrez. In *Jorge Luis Borges, Obras Completas, Vol. 1, El Hacedor*. Buenos Aires: Emece, 1974, p. 813.
- (1962). The Secret Miracle. In *Labyrinths: Selected stories and Other Writings*, trans. H. De Onís. New York: New Directions Books, pp. 88–94.
- BRITTON, R. (1999). *Belief and Imagination*. New York: Routledge.
- CHASSEGUET-SMIRGEL, J. (1995). 'Creative writers and day-dreaming': a commentary. In *On Freud's 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming'*, ed. E. Spector Person et al. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, pp. 107–21.
- FERRER, M. (1971). *Borges y la Nada*. London: Támesis.
- FOUCAULT, M. (1966). *Les Mots et les choses*. Paris: Gallimard.
- FREUD, S. (1909). Notes upon a case of obsessional neurosis. *S.E.* 10
- (1919). The 'uncanny'. *S.E.* 17.
- (1925). Negation. *S.E.* 19.
- (1927). Fetishism. *S.E.* 21
- GREEN, A. (1998). The primordial mind and the work of the negative. *Int. J. Psychoanal.*, 79: 649–65
- (1999). *The Work of the Negative*. Paris: Minuit.
- HYPOLITE, J. (1975). A spoken commentary on Freud's Verneinung. In *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I, Freud's papers on technique, 1953–1954*, ed. J. A. Miller, trans. J. Forrester. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988, pp. 289–97.
- LANGER, L. L. (1990). Fictional facts and factual fictions: history in Holocaust literature. In *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995, pp. 75–87.
- LAPLANCHE, J. & PONTALIS, J. B. (1973). *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*. London: Hogarth.
- LAUB D. & PODELL, D. (1995). Art and trauma. *Int. J. Psychoanal.*, 76: 991–1006.
- LOEWALD, H. A. (1980). *Papers on Psychoanalysis*. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press.
- LYOTARD, J. F. (1990). *Heidegger and 'the Jews'*. Trans. A. Michael and M. Robbers. Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press
- MANDLOVE, N. B. (1980). Chess and mirrors: form as metaphor in three sonnets. In *Jorge Luis Borges*, ed. H. Bloom. New York: Chelsea, 1986, pp. 173–83.
- MOLLOY, A. (1979). *Las Letras de Borges*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana.
- PRIEL, B. (1997). Time and self: on the intersubjective construction of time. *Psychoanal. Dialogues*, 7: 431–50.
- RIKOEUR, P. (1979). The function of fiction in shaping reality. In *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. F. J. Vales. London: Harvester, 1991, pp. 117–35.
- (1985). *Time and Narrative*. Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- RODRIGUEZ-MONEGAL, E. (1973). Symbols in Borges's work. In *Jorge Luis Borges*, ed. H. Bloom. New York: Chelsea, 1986, pp. 133–48.
- RORTY, R. (1989). *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- SEGAL, H. (1991). *Dream Phantasy and Art*. New York: Routledge.
- SOSNOWSKI, S. (1986). *Borges y la Cabala*. Buenos Aires: Pardes Ediciones.
- STEINER, J. (1985). Turning a blind eye: the cover-up for Oedipus. *Int. Rev. Psycho-Anal.*, 12: 161–72.
- (1999). Some notes on the 'heroic self' and the meaning and importance of its reparation for the creative process and the creative personality. *Int. J. Psychoanal.*, 80: 685–718.
- TODOROV, T. (1973). *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Trans. R. Howard. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press.

Beatriz Priel
 Department of Behavioral Sciences
 Ben-Gurion University
 Beer-Sheva 84105
 Israel
 bpriel@bgumail.bgu.ac.il
 (Initial version received 15/6/00)
 (Final revised version received 4/12/00)

Copyright © Institute of Psychoanalysis, London, 2001