

Subtle Reflections of/upon Joyce in/by Borges

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"The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim" . . . [is] the tale of a kind of saint who spreads circles of diminishing splendor all around him, and is finally discovered by somebody who divines him through these many far-flung echoes of his influence.¹

Jorge Luis Borges' earliest work of short fiction, "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim" (1936), like several of the tales he collected for his first volume of stories *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941), presents itself as "a commentary" on a book that "already exist[s]."² "[B]oth a hoax and a pseudo-essay,"³ "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim" establishes the model for narrative compression that Borges announces in his "Foreword" to *The Garden of Forking Paths*: "composing vast books" is absurd, Borges asserts, "a laborious madness and an impoverishing one . . . —setting out in five hundred pages an idea that can be perfectly related orally in five minutes. The better way to go about it is to pretend that those books already exist, and offer a summary, a commentary on them" (p. 67). In another sense "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim" is a model Borges tale, as the author recognizes in his 1970 "Autobiographical Essay." This story of intense foreshadowing itself foreshadows his subsequent writing: "it now seems to me," Borges reflects, that "The Approach to Al-

¹ Jorge Luis Borges, "Commentaries With Norman Thomas di Giovanni," *The Aleph and Other Stories 1933-1969*, ed. and trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (Bantam, 1971), p. 192.

² Borges, "Foreword" to *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941), *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (Viking, 1998), p. 67. All subsequent references to Borges' fiction, unless otherwise noted, will be from this recent Andrew Hurley translation. In his "Autobiographical Essay," Borges gives the date of composition of "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim" as 1935, further remarking that he initially published the tale "in a volume of my essays, *Historia de la eternidad* (A History of Eternity)," in 1936, and claiming that "It was not until 1942 [sic] that I openly published it as a short story in my first story collection, *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*" (1941) ("An Autobiographical Essay," *The Aleph and Other Stories*, pp. 167-68). In fact, "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim" did not appear as one of his stories until the collected publication of *The Garden of Forking Paths* and *Artifices in Ficciones*, in 1944 (Hurley, "Notes to the Fictions," *Collected Fictions*, p. 532). For the publication dates of Borges writings cited in this essay, I have relied on the on-line bibliography of the *Jorge Luis Borges Center for Studies & Documentation* (www.hum.aau.dk/institu/rom/borges/).

³ "Autobiographical Essay," *The Aleph*, p. 167.

Mu'tasim" "foreshadow[ed] and even . . . set the pattern for those tales that were somehow awaiting me, and upon which my reputation as a story teller was to be based."⁴ Two stories immediately following "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim" in *Ficciones* (1944) confirm Borges' observation. "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" (1939) and "The Circular Ruins" (1940) directly descend from this early model. Their mutual indebtedness, however, does not reside in the "hoax and pseudo essay" strategy for compression, the theme of detection, or the interplay of the real and the ideal that Borges perhaps has in mind in his "Autobiographical Essay"—patterns that these two tales only partially illustrate. Rather, "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim," "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," and, most especially "The Circular Ruins" are joined by their common relationship to one of those "vast books" that cast their shadow on Borges' career: James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Borges and Joyce, despite their antithetically compressive and expansive methods of composition, share numerous incidental similarities, as many have noted: both writers belong more to world culture than to their national literatures; both labor heroically and, in their own terms, Homerically in the darkness of blindness; both aspire to represent in their writing the cities of their birth, Buenos Aires and Dublin; both construct Daedelian labyrinths, and so on. Among the several Joycean reflections within Borges' fictions, the most significant is the sense that Borges, particularly in his early stories, carries on a conversation of sorts with James Joyce, devoting his "five minutes" to the perfect oral relation of, reflection upon, and resistance to, some of Joyce's central ideas in *Ulysses* (1922), in accord with yet another model: Harold Bloom's paradigm of the "anxiety of influence."⁵

Recognizing Borges' agonistic relationship to Joyce, and most especially his repudiation of what he considered avant-garde excess in *Ulysses* (and *Finnegans Wake* as well), will clarify both the younger writer's conservative Modernism and his particular relationship to modern Anglo-European literature. Although often extricated from the literary milieu of Buenos Aires in the 1920s and 1930s and read as a kind of "proto-postmodernist," the Borges who would enshrine de Quincey, Stevenson, Shaw, and Chesterton among the writers whom he desired to emulate (p. 130) is more properly a representative voice of the "moderate . . . Argentine avant-garde" that resisted what they saw as "nihilism," gratuitous iconoclasm, and "bourgeois philistinism" in the excesses of the European high Modernism.⁶ Displacing Borges from his cultural context, however, does more than distort his relation to contemporary, and especially Anglo-European, literary movements. The Ultraism that he imported to Buenos Aires from Madrid in 1921 (and the excesses of which he later repudiated), was a direct reaction against

⁴ *The Aleph*, p. 168.

⁵ Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 1973) posits a theory of literary influence derived from Nietzsche ("the prophet of the antithetical" [p. 8]) and Freud, via the psychoanalytic patterns of the family romance. While skeptical of the generalizing thrust of Bloom's theory, I must admit that it works admirably in explaining Borges' responses to Joyce. Independent of Bloom's theory, Mary Lusk Friedman discovers a Freudian ur-narrative, a "paradigm" that "informs each of Borges' tales" with "the tenacity of obsession": "I argue that Borges returns again and again to his paradigm . . . because each time he rehearses it he attempts to resolve conflicts arising from his ambivalence for his father" (*The Emperor's Kites: A Morphology of Borges' Tales* [Duke University Press, 1987], pp. 6, vii). Michael Worton and Judith Still also suspect that Borges' anxiety of influence was primarily familial; although acknowledging Borges' manifold debts to a variety of literary "precursors," Worton and Still nevertheless observe that "he writes constantly from within his (father's!) library which he describes as the chief event in his life" ("Introduction," *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, ed. Worton and Still [Manchester University Press, 1990], p. 13).

⁶ Beatriz Sarlo, *Jorge Luis Borges: A Writer on the Edge*, ed. John King (London: Verso, 1993), p. 110.

the literary movement called *Modernismo* which flourished in Hispanic poetry from the late 1880s through the First World War and its chief exemplars, the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío and, in Argentina, Leopoldo Lugones.⁷ The nearest equivalent of *Modernismo* in English literature would be the works of the *fin de siècle* Aesthetes and Decadents who, like Lugones, wrote the kind of poetry that Borges—or for that matter Pound and Eliot—“loathed: rich rhymes, sumptuous images, highly wrought exoticism, decadent eroticism.”⁸ The literal translation of terms, then, imperils our recognition that we must distinguish Borges’ initial aesthetic ideals as an “anti-modernista poet” in the 1920s,⁹ and his identification by Federico de Onís as a representative of *postmodernismo* as early as 1934, in his *Antología de la Poesía Española e Hispanoamericana (1882-1932)*—the initial use of the term “postmodernism”—from the Anglo-European positions of “anti-” or “post-modernism.”¹⁰ In effect, Borges’ artistic convictions of the late 1930s, when he began his fiction-writing career, largely embrace the same attempts to maintain an ahistorical and asocial artistic autonomy, to achieve impersonality through ironic detachment, and to demonstrate an indebtedness to the literary tradition. His works illustrate the same turn toward self-reflexivity that Astradur Eysteinnsson identifies as the major “paradigms” of Anglo-European Modernism.¹¹ Yet in pursuing these ends, Borges resists what he saw as their perversion in the experimental excesses of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. “Delicate glimmerings or reflections” of this relationship to Joyce, moreover—which resembles that of the conscientious son who must own his father, yet reject his wayward prodigality—are clearly visible from the beginning of Borges’ career as short-story writer in “The Approach to Al-Mu’tasim” (p. 84).

In “The Approach to Al-Mu’tasim,” Borges synthesizes a novel of the same title, purportedly written by “the Bombay attorney Mir Bahadur Ali” and published, in two editions, in 1932 and 1934 (p. 82). Borges, or more properly the pseudo-critic *persona* who narrates this hoax essay, judges the later edition as decidedly inferior because Mir Bahadur Ali has refashioned his symbolic tale of an Indian student’s quest “into [an] allegory” (p. 85). The original version’s search for the omnipresent but elusive figure of Al-Mu’tasim thus becomes, in the second edition, an explicitly religious quest and the narrative an account of “the progress of the soul in its ascent to mystical plenitude” (p. 85). The gist of the original story, as summarized by the critic, is an unnamed student’s journey throughout the “vast geography of Hindustan” (p. 84), during which he gradually realizes that he is repeatedly encountering in others the subtle reflections of some ideal individual, a “man called Al-Mu’tasim” (p. 85). The student “comes to a mysterious conclusion: *somewhere in the world there is a man from whom this clarity, this brightness [which he fleetingly perceives in the masses of humankind] emanates; somewhere in the world there is a man who is equal to this brightness.* The law student resolves to devote his life to searching out that man. Thus, we begin to see the book’s

⁷ See Sarlo, p. 23, and George R. McMurray, *Jorge Luis Borges* (Ungar, 1980), p. xix.

⁸ Sarlo, p. 36.

⁹ Friedman, p. 121.

¹⁰ de Onís introduced the term “postmodernism” “into the vocabulary of Hispanophone criticism” twenty years before Arnold Toynbee’s coinage of “post-modern”—“as an epochal rather than aesthetic category”—in the eighth volume of his *Study of History*, published in 1954; see Perry Anderson’s *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 4–5.

¹¹ Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 8–49.

general scheme: The insatiable search for a soul by means of the delicate glimmerings or reflections this soul has left in others" (p. 84).¹² Just at the moment the student reaches the conclusion of his quest and approaches his discovery of Al-Mu'tasim, "the novel ends" (p. 85). But Borges' tale continues, and his critic-*persona* shifts to apparently miscellaneous bibliographical and philological issues raised by Mir Bahadur Ali's novel. This story's inconclusive ending, however, is only a seeming digression. Much as the Indian student glimpses the subtle reflections of Al-Mu'tasim in others, the reader of "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim" catches, in an oddly dismissive aside toward the tale's conclusion, the evanescent yet essential presence of James Joyce, the author's "Al-Mu'tasim." Borges' casual references to Joyce and *Ulysses* at the end of "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim" coalesce into a substantive and significant presence both in this tale and elsewhere within the Argentine writer's early fiction.

The pseudo-critic's aside in the final paragraph of "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim," like most of Borges' comments on Joyce, is equivocal. Noting a derivative strain in Mir Bahadur Ali's novel, the critic distances himself from those who celebrate the "mythical method"¹³ in contemporary works such as *Ulysses*: "It is generally understood that a modern-day book may honorably be based upon an older one, especially since, as Dr. Johnson observed, no man likes owing anything to his contemporaries. The repeated but irrelevant points of congruence between Joyce's *Ulysses* and Homer's *Odyssey* continue to attract (though I shall never understand why) the dazzled admiration of critics" (p. 86). Although this aside leaves open the question of Joyce's achievement—slighting the enthusiasm of such readers as T.S. Eliot, Valéry Larbaud, Stuart Gilbert, and Edmund Wilson, but leaving *Ulysses* untouched—Borges' own opinion of Joyce's "vast" book was undoubtedly mixed, consistently inconsistent.¹⁴ On the one hand, in a review of *Ulysses* which he published in the Argentine Ultraist journal *Proa* in January 1925, Borges praised the "cathedral-like grandeur" of the novel¹⁵ and enlisted Joyce for his own purposes as an illustration of the "anti-modernista" aesthetic championed

¹² Anthony Kerrigan's translation of this final sentence is, I think, more effective in his use of the doubly evocative adjective *subtle*: "The general argument is thus glimpsed: the insatiable search for a soul through the subtle reflections which this soul has left in others"; see Borges, *Ficciones*, ed. Kerrigan (Grove, 1962), p. 40. I have appropriated this phrase "subtle reflections" for my title and echoed it through this essay, to suggest the delicacy as well as the intellectual subtlety of Borges' reflections of and upon Joyce.

¹³ T.S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth," *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Robert H. Deming (Routledge, 1970), p. 271.

¹⁴ T.S. Eliot's "Ulysses, Order and Myth" (1923), together with Valéry Larbaud's influential lecture-essay on Joyce's new novel, "The *Ulysses* of James Joyce" (1922), firmly established the importance of understanding "Mr. Joyce's parallel use of the *Odyssey*" (Eliot, p. 270) for a full appreciation of his achievement in *Ulysses*: "The reader who approaches this book without the *Odyssey* clearly in mind will be thrown into dismay" (Valéry Larbaud, "The *Ulysses* of James Joyce," *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Robert H. Deming (Routledge, 1970), p. 258). (Borges published several review essays on Eliot and Larbaud in his biweekly columns in *El Hogar* from 1937 to 1939; see note 17.) Joyce's famous "schema" for the book, first published, together with the suppressed Homeric chapter titles, in 1930, in Stuart Gilbert's *James Joyce's Ulysses*, added support to the "mythical" reading of the novel. Borges refers directly to Gilbert's book as a guide to the novel's Homeric parallels in his and María Esther Vázquez' collaborative *Introduction to English Literature* (ed. and trans. L. Clark Keating and Robert O. Evans [University Press of Kentucky, 1974], p. 69), as well as to Edmund Wilson's 1939 essay on *Finnegans Wake*, "The Dream of H.C. Earwicker" (p. 78, n. 62), which both emphasizes the importance of the *Odyssey* as an underlying "structure" for *Ulysses* and anticipates Borges' assessment that Joyce's imagination "is almost entirely auditory and verbal" (*The Wound and the Bow* [Oxford University Press, 1947], pp. 204, 207-08).

¹⁵ Quoted by Friedman, p. 123.

by the *Proa* group.¹⁶ On the other hand, Borges never allowed the republication of this review during his lifetime, after its initial reprinting in his essay collection *Inquisiciones*, which appeared later in 1925.¹⁷ Elsewhere Borges is less equivocal. His two poems dedicated to Joyce, for example, suggest both his admiration for *Ulysses* and his strong indebtedness to its author. His sonnet "James Joyce" (1968), which praises Joyce's compression of lifetimes into the significant moment of one day—"In a man's single day are all the days/ of time from that unimaginable/ first day"¹⁸—also covertly acknowledges the power of Joyce's conception on Borges' own fiction. "A Biography of Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829–1874)" (1944), for instance, despite its epigraph from Yeats, owes more to Joyce. Borges writes of Cruz, as Joyce might have said of Bloom, or Stephen, or Molly:

There are many gaps in his dark and courageous story. . . . (In the future, secretly awaiting him, was one lucid, fundamental night—the night when he was finally to see his own face, the night when he was finally to hear his own true name. Once fully understood, that night encompasses his entire story—or rather, one incident, one action on that night does, for actions are the symbol of our selves.) Any life, however long and complicated it may be, actually consists of *a single moment*—the moment when a man knows forever more who he is. (p. 213)

In his second poem, "Invocation to Joyce" (1969), Borges testifies explicitly to his and his generation's indebtedness to Joyce's example:

We were imagism, cubism,
the conventicles and sects
respected now by credulous universities.
We invented the omission of punctuation
and capital letters,
. . . . [whereas] You, all the while,
in cities of exile,

¹⁶ See Friedman, p. 121; see also Borges' "Autobiographical Essay," *The Aleph*, pp. 150, 155.

¹⁷ Norman Thomas di Giovanni, Daniel Halpern, and Frank MacShane, *Borges on Writing* (Dutton, 1973), p. 130. di Giovanni recalls "I wanted Borges to discuss three books of essays he had written in the twenties and has never allowed to be reprinted. He said no, that he wanted to forget all about them. . . . I told him I didn't mind if he condemned the books, but I thought he had to speak of them [in his "Autobiographical Essay"]; then I read what he had dictated to me about them several days earlier. He liked what I read back and said he'd mention the books if he could leave their titles out" (p. 130). The disputed passage reads: "I feel only the remotest kinship with the work of these years [1921–30]. Three of the four essay collections—whose names are best forgotten—I have never allowed to be reprinted. In fact, when in 1953 my present publisher—Emecé—proposed to bring out my 'complete writings,' the only reason I accepted was that it would allow me to keep those preposterous volumes suppressed" ("Autobiographical Essay," *The Aleph*, pp. 159–60). Among other writings by Borges related to Joyce, also not to my knowledge subsequently reprinted, are his essays on Joyce, on Valéry Larbaud, and on the French translation of *Ulysses* by Stuart Gilbert and Auguste Morel, published among the hundreds of reviews in his essay-series *Libros y autores extranjeros* (1937–39) in *El Hogar* (5 February 1937, 19 February 1937, and 4 February 1938 respectively), his Bloomsday review of *Finnegans Wake* in this same series (16 June 1939), and his obituary tribute "Fragmento sobre Joyce" in *Sur* (LXXVII [February 1941], pp. 60–62).

¹⁸ Borges, *In Praise of Darkness*, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (Dutton, 1974), p. 29.

in that exile that was
 your detested and chosen instrument,
 the weapon of your craft,
 erected your pathless labyrinths,
 infinitesimal and infinite,
 wondrously paltry,
 more populous than history.

Although despairing of penetrating to the center of the Joycean labyrinth, "We shall die without sighting/ . . . the center of your maze," Borges admits the potency of Joyce's model:

What does our cowardice matter if on this earth
 there is one brave man, . . .
 what does my lost generation matter,
 that dim mirror,
 if your books justify us?

Shifting to the immediacy of the first person, Borges concludes by acknowledging his personal debt:

I am the others. I am all those
 who have been rescued by your pains and care.
 I am those unknown to you and saved by you.¹⁹

These final lines seem to reciprocate Borges' observation about the student's (and perhaps the reader's) similar plight in "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim": each "feels a presentiment or divines through B [Borges] the extremely remote existence of Z [Joyce], whom B does not know";²⁰ conversely, "Invocation to Joyce" states the obvious fact that "Z" (Joyce) does not know "B" (Borges): "I am those unknown to you."

If Borges seems guilty of sacrilege worthy of his mentor, claiming Joyce as his personal savior in "Invocation to Joyce"—"I am those . . . saved by you"—his scattered comments elsewhere on *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are at best equivocal as he distances himself from the Parisian "lost generation" that flirted with "imagism, cubism," and the "wondrously paltry" literary experimentation of James Joyce (or Gertrude Stein). In his *Introduction to English Literature*, co-authored with María Esther Vázquez in 1965, he invokes Virginia Woolf's judgment that *Ulysses* "is a glorious defeat" and remarks, reasonably, that both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are "untranslatable."²¹ Borges considers Joyce an "undeniable genius," but locates this genius in his "essentially verbal" gift. Given Borges' rejection of the

¹⁹ di Giovanni, Halpern, and MacShane, *Borges on Writing*, pp. 141–43.

²⁰ Borges, "Prologue," *Ficciones*, p. 16. Although both the Kerrigan edition of *Ficciones* and Hurley's *Collected Fictions* claim to use the 1956 Emecé edition of *Ficciones* for their translations, only Kerrigan's translation of the "Prologue," which is several sentences longer than Hurley's version, includes the passage quoted here.

²¹ Pp. 70, 69.

long form in principle, we should not be surprised by his conclusion that "It is a pity that he wasted [this verbal genius] on the novel, instead of devoting it, as he but rarely did, to writing good poetry."²² In part, Borges' resistance to Joyce may be simply a reaction to the hyperbolic critical acclaim of Joyceans, evident in his pseudo-critic's aside in "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim" or, much later in his career, in one of his and Adolfo Bioy-Casares' "private jokes," their sarcastic dedication for their collaborative parody of "a devotedly modern critic"²³ in *Chronicles of Bustos Domecq* (1967): "To those three forgotten greats—Picasso, Joyce, Le Corbusier."²⁴ Then again, Borges is hardly innocent of what he might otherwise see as excess; in the final sentence of his critical essay on Francisco de Quevedo (1948), he groups this "most noble Spanish stylist" with Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Joyce.²⁵ Beatriz Sarlo ably summarizes the anxiety of influence that moved Borges to temper his enthusiasm and even to claim, on occasion, only a distant understanding of Joyce's "vast" book, *Ulysses*:

On the subject of *Ulysses*, the touchstone of contemporary fiction and a watershed for young writers in the thirties, Borges would state that he valued Joyce's magnificent *écriture* but that he had not been able to follow it from beginning to end. He had read parts of it, but never read it through completely. The statement should not be taken at face value, but it has to be considered as an aesthetic position with regard to *Ulysses*, and more generally with regard to modern and avant-garde literature. We should add, however, that Borges' translation of the last pages of Molly Bloom's monologue is, without doubt, the best translation of Joyce ever achieved in Spanish.²⁶

I am in no position to judge the merits of Borges' translation of the end of "Penelope," nor the qualities of his Spanish competition, but it seems doubtful to me that any elegant translation, even of a fragment of *Ulysses*, would be possible for a reader who had been unable "to follow" the novel "from beginning to end" or had "never read it through completely." Yet we can better assess Borges' genuine intimacy with *Ulysses* from another aside in his fiction, this from his story "The Zahir" (1947), which concerns the haunting memory of "a common twenty-centavo coin" (p. 242). In a catalogue of famous coins in legend and literature, Borges' narrator lists "Leopold Bloom's unreturning florin" (p. 244): an allusion, as we learn in the seventeenth episode of *Ulysses*, to the coin that Bloom notched "in the summer of 1898" and unsuccessfully tendered into "circulation on the waters of civic finance, for possible, if circuitous or direct, return." ("Ithaca"'s catechetical response to the

²² P. 69.

²³ Borges, "Autobiographical Essay," *The Aleph*, p. 174.

²⁴ Borges and A. Bioy Casares, *Chronicles of Bustos Domecq*, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (Dutton, 1976), p. 7.

²⁵ Borges, "Quevedo," *Other Inquisitions 1937-1952*, trans. Ruth L.C. Simms (University of Texas Press, 1964), pp. 37, 42.

²⁶ Sarlo, p. 51.

question "Had Bloom's coin returned?" is "Never.")²⁷ This is a detail of *Ulysses* that no defeated or casual reader would reach or retain.

Coins cast upon the "waters of civic finance" may never return, yet Joyce's image, like the subtle reflections of Al-Mu'tasim, cycles and surfaces repeatedly through the career of Jorge Luis Borges.²⁸ Both in his life and particularly in his early work, Borges found himself often encountering the traces of Joyce's presence. Some of this is clearly accidental, although intriguing, such as both writers' apparent fondness for the "Eleventh Edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*," or the fact that Borges, still in his teens, like Joyce spent the war years from 1914 to 1919 living in Switzerland, albeit in Geneva rather than Zurich.²⁹ "At the same time, my father was to be treated by a famous Genevan eye doctor," he recalls in his "Autobiographical Essay."³⁰ (It would be nice to imagine Jorge Guillermo Borges and James Joyce sharing the same oculist, but evidently Joyce never sought out the medical specialists in Geneva.) Moreover, among the Borgeses, as J.B. Lyons has said of the Joyces, "Eye complaints were a family defect."³¹ And among other synchronicities, both authors suffered from weak eyesight through their childhoods, underwent recurrent eye operations through their adulthood (eight operations for Borges, ten for Joyce), ultimately descended into blindness, and wrote in their later years only with the assistance of amanuenses.³² These are coincidental connections, it is true, but the literary reflections of Joyce in Borges are less accidental.

Shortly after his return to Buenos Aires in 1921, nearly contemporaneously with the publication of *Ulysses* in 1922 and, I suggest, partly under the influence of Joyce's example,

²⁷ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (Random House, 1986), p. 571.

²⁸ L.A. Murillo suggests that just such a Joycean idea of cyclical return resides in Borges' poem "La noche ciclica" (1940), one of several "structural ideas of *Finnegans Wake*" that "acquire a dialectical form in some of Borges' stories, essays, and poems" (*The Cyclical Night: Irony in James Joyce and Jorge Luis Borges* [Harvard University Press, 1968], p. x). Although invoking Borges' Joycean poem as title for his study, Murillo disappoints any expectation that he will pursue more than a superficial relationship between these two writers. His book simply juxtaposes two studies in the ironic method, with little comparative analysis, contending that while Joyce's and Borges' "literary worlds have much in common as work of 'artists,' of practitioners of a fine art, some basic differences between them severely restrict the possibilities of a comparative study of their attitudes, their themes, and their craft" (p. x).

²⁹ Borges, "Autobiographical Essay," *The Aleph*, p. 162. Actually, their war years in Switzerland do not precisely coincide, since Joyce did not arrive in Zurich until "the end of June 1915" (Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, rev. ed. [Oxford University Press, 1982], p. 389); however, both the Borges and Joyce families departed in the same year, 1919. Borges recalls that in 1929 he used his first major literary prize "of three thousand pesos, which in those days was a lordly sum of money," to purchase "a secondhand set of the Eleventh Edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*" ("Autobiographical Essay," *The Aleph*, p. 162); perhaps, like Joyce, he used that work's essay on the Cabbala as a frequent source—for instance, in "Death and the Compass" (1942)—as did Joyce for the composition of *Finnegans Wake* (James S. Atherton, *The Books at the Wake: A Study of Literary Allusions in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake* [Viking, 1959], p. 47). Atherton claims that "internal evidence" suggests that the eleventh edition of this Encyclopedia was frequently a primary source for *Finnegans Wake*: "the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* sheds more light upon the *Wake* than do the more up-to-date editions" (p. 87). As Morton P. Levitt has further observed, "the Eleventh Britannica is famous not only as the supposed best edition but also for its several fraudulent entries; both would appeal to both writers" (personal correspondence with author).

³⁰ *The Aleph*, p. 145.

³¹ J.B. Lyons, *James Joyce and Medicine* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1973), p. 185.

³² For a good brief overview of Joyce's "Miltonic Affliction," see Lyons, pp. 185–210. Borges summarizes his inherited affliction in his "Autobiographical Essay": "My blindness had been coming on gradually since childhood. It was a slow, summer twilight. There was nothing particularly pathetic or dramatic about it. Beginning in 1927, I underwent eight eye operations, but since the late 1950's . . . for reading and writing purposes I have been blind. Blindness ran in my family; a description of the operation performed on the eyes of my great-grandfather, Edward Young Haslam, appeared in the pages of the London medical journal, the *Lancet*" (p. 177).

Borges took upon himself the role of the chronicler and cartographer of his native city. "Since 1923," Borges remarks in his commentary on his story "Death and the Compass" (1942), "I had been doing my best, and never quite succeeding, to be the poet of Buenos Aires. When, in 1942, I undertook a nightmare version of the city in 'Death and the Compass,' my friends told me that at long last I had managed to evoke a sufficiently recognizable image of my home town."³³ Borges' earliest fictional sketches, such as "Man on Pink Corner" (1933), collected in *Historia universal de la infamia* (1935) (*A Universal History of Iniquity*), present part of this picture, focusing on "the mythology of the old Northside of Buenos Aires," the Argentine equivalent of Dublin's Nighttown.³⁴ Not until "Death and the Compass," however, does Borges reveal that, like the young Stephen Dedalus, and like the Joyce of *Ulysses*, he worked from "a skeleton map of the city in his mind."³⁵ The central character of his story, the detective Erik Lönnrot, maps the city of Buenos Aires in a manner reminiscent of Ignatius Gallaher's journalistic stratagem in *Ulysses*,³⁶ although his mapping carries the code of his own, rather than another's, assassination. Borges' stated satisfaction with his successful reconstruction of Buenos Aires in "Death and the Compass" also reminds us of a Joyce who claimed about *Ulysses*, with less modesty than Borges, that if Dublin "one day suddenly disappeared from the earth it could be reconstructed out of my book."³⁷ Borges' own sense of the immodesty of his own and perhaps of Joyce's ambition to chronicle and map a city in art surfaces in his later story "The Aleph" (1945), in which he satirizes the monomaniacal project of the poet Carlos Argentino Daneri, who has attempted "to versify the entire planet" in his massive work-in-progress, *The Earth*. "[B]y 1941," Borges' narrator recounts, Daneri "had already dispatched several hectares of the state of Queensland, more than a kilometer of the course of the Ob, a gasworks north of Veracruz, the leading commercial establishments in the parish of Concepción, Mariana Cambaceres de Alvear's villa on Calle Once de Setiembre in Belgrano, and a Turkish bath not far from the famed Brighton Aquarium" (p. 277). Since all we have is this résumé, we will never know whether Daneri gives the reader a more exact location of his Turkish bath; Joyce, however, precisely locates the "Hammam" Turkish baths in Lotos Eaters "round the corner" from Sweny's chemists shop "in Lincoln place."³⁸

Other subtle reflections of Joyce in Borges' early fiction collected in *The Garden of Forking Paths* and in its expanded edition, *Ficciones* (1944), are more evanescent: glimpsed in the images of labyrinths and mirrors, in the allusions to one of their common inspirations, "Lewis

³³ "Commentaries," *The Aleph*, p. 193. Borges remarks similarly in "The Argentine Writer and Tradition" (1953): "For many years, in books now happily forgotten, I tried to copy down the flavor, the essence of the outlying suburbs of Buenos Aires. . . . Then, about a year ago, I wrote a story called 'La muerta y la brújula' ('Death and the Compass') . . . when this story was published, my friends told me that at last they had found in what I wrote the flavor of the outskirts of Buenos Aires. . . . I was able to accomplish, after so many years, what I had previously sought in vain" (Borges, "The Argentine Writer and Tradition," trans. James E. Irby, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby [New Directions, 1964], pp. 181-82).

³⁴ Borges, "Autobiographical Essay," *The Aleph*, p. 160.

³⁵ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Viking, 1964), p. 66.

³⁶ See *Ulysses*, pp. 112-13.

³⁷ Quoted by Frank Budgen in his *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses and Other Writings* (Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 69.

³⁸ *Ulysses*, pp. 69, 68.

Carroll"; in the companion stories on the matter of Ireland, "The Shape of the Sword" (1942) and "The Theme of the Traitor and Hero" (1944); and in Stephen Albert's conjecture, in the title story of *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941), that "a book could be infinite," were its author to adopt Joyce's method in *Finnegans Wake*: "I had wondered how a book could be infinite. The only way I could surmise was that it be a cyclical, or circular, volume, a volume whose last page would be identical to the first, so that one might go on indefinitely" (p. 125). While Albert's conjectural form slightly diverges from Joyce's example in the *Wake*, which completes its final sentence in its opening, more to the point is that Borges seems to respond in this story to Joyce's attempt to write an infinite, cyclic, circular book, as he understood it. Albert subsequently discovered that the Chinese writer Ts'ui Pen—who gave up a political career "in order to write a novel containing more characters than the *Hung Lu Meng* and construct a labyrinth in which all men would lose their way" (p.122)—had accomplished both Joycean goals simultaneously by writing a book of innumerable bifurcations, a garden of multiple *forking* destinies, a hypertext *avant la lettre*.³⁹

The strongest indications of Borges' anxious relationship to the influential figure of James Joyce are found in the two stories in *Ficciones* that follow his initial mention of Joyce in "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim": "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" and "The Circular Ruins." While each of these stories has prompted numerous interpretations by Borges' critics, particularly the justly famous, symbolic narrative of "The Circular Ruins," no one has suggested that they have much, if anything, in common; nor has anyone noticed their shared indebtedness to *Ulysses*. However, once we glimpse the subtle reflections of Joyce elsewhere in Borges' early fiction, it becomes clear that both "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" and "The Circular Ruins" address central concerns in *Ulysses*. These two stories revisit Joyce's novel in a similar manner, with skepticism bred of the anxiety of influence, for each story subjects a fundamental conception of Joyce's book to the *reductio ad absurdum*.

Borges has often confused the history of his composition of "Pierre Menard," claiming on several occasions that it "was the first story I wrote,"⁴⁰ whereas the fact, as he recounts in his "Autobiographical Essay," is that he wrote the story as a kind of therapeutic exercise after recovering from an episode of septicemia early in 1939.⁴¹ (This illness furnished the situation for his later story "The South" [1953].) Without explanation, in a 1972 interview he clarifies the matter a bit: "It was one of the first stories I ever wrote. I keep saying it was the first story, but in fact it was the second or third."⁴² Still, we are left to wonder why "Pierre Menard" so often claimed a position of such privilege in Borges' recall of his fiction-writing career. The answer, I suspect, lies in the story's central proposition, which questions the possibility of contributing originally to the literary tradition and reflects the contested entitlement of the literary work that troubled Modernist writers generally. (As Michael Tratner

³⁹ Read in conjunction with "The Garden of Forking Paths," Borges' earlier fiction concerning a writer of proto-hypertext, "A Survey of the Works of Herbert Quain" (1941), might also be seen as his parodic commentary on the "formal complexity" (p. 110) which he disdained in celebrated experimental writing, such as the then recently published *Finnegans Wake* (1939).

⁴⁰ Richard Burgin, *Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 21.

⁴¹ *The Aleph*, pp. 170-71.

⁴² di Giovanni, Halpern, and MacShane, p. 54.

has observed, Joyce does not hold clear title to *Ulysses*.⁴³) The distinction between the "honorably" derivative work, like Mir Bahadur Ali's *Approach to Al-Mu'tasim* (p. 86), and the uninspired imitation was a primary issue to a writer as indebted to books as Borges, the librarian, the author of stories about stories and fictions often self-referentially obsessed with their own creation. Thus, although post-structuralist critics have reason to see anticipations of Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum in "Pierre Menard," or parallels to Benjamin's observation of the end of originality in the work of art in an age of mechanical reproduction, such emphases obscure Borges' more immediate concern to qualify his response to Modernist renegotiations of the artist's relationship to literary and cultural traditions. In his later essay, "The Argentine Writer and Tradition" (1953), Borges makes explicit the covert "skepticism" of "Pierre Menard" by suggesting that attempts to define one's contribution or to claim indebtedness to a particular literary tradition are only ostentatious solutions to a non-problem: they "are dealing with an appearance, a simulacrum, a pseudo problem." The ultimate relation of any work to a given tradition lies beyond artistic intention: "all these *a priori* discussions concerning the intent of literary execution are based on the error of supposing that intentions and plans matter a great deal." In "the Arabian book *par excellence*," the Koran, Borges notes, "there are no camels" because "Mohammed, as an Arab, had no reason to know that camels were especially Arabian." Were the author of the Koran a "tourist," on the other hand, there would be "a surfeit of camels, caravans of camels, on every page."⁴⁴ Similarly, it appears that to Borges the artist's debt to literary tradition will be both more authentic and more evident by virtue of its invisibility, by its lack of explicit acknowledgment. In this light, "Pierre Menard" travesties both the artist and the work that intend to predetermine their place in literary history.

"Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" superficially resembles "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim" in two respects: like the earlier story, it is "both a hoax *and* a pseudo-essay,"⁴⁵ and it concludes, this time in its final sentence, with an aside concerning Joyce. The subject of Borges' essayist is both the "visible *oeuvre*" (p. 88) of the fictitious *fin-de-siècle* French writer Pierre Menard, which he lists in a bibliographical catalogue of nineteen precious, pedantic, or pedestrian entries (for example, the last entry is "a handwritten list of lines of poetry that owe their excellence to punctuation" [p. 90]), and the far more significant, invisible achievement of Menard's attempt to recreate verbatim, out of another culture and another era, the *Don Quixote* of Cervantes. As the critic announces, Menard's project seems "absurd," yet "the primary object of this note" is "justifying that 'absurdity'" (p. 90). Borges never resolves the basic questions raised by his story: whether his critic-*persona* is simply a pedant who is incapable of recognizing madness in Pierre Menard, or is either a fool or

⁴³ "Just as a title to a house usually indicates that the so-called homeowner is actually only a borrower . . . so the title to *Ulysses* indicates that Joyce is a borrower and that there is a hidden company that has a prior claim on the title—the company of all the versions of the Greek myth or perhaps the entire corpus of literature" (Michael Tratner, "Sex and Credit: Consumer Capitalism in *Ulysses*," *James Joyce Quarterly*, XXX-XXXI [1993], p. 708). Worten and Still remark that "in his complex writings of and on fictions, Borges challenges the *doxa* of writing as territorialism and demarcation of property, borrowing in order to subvert the concepts of authorial integrity and textual fixity" (p. 13). They argue further that "Pierre Menard," specifically, "problematizes the dominant and domineering European concept of origination" (p. 14).

⁴⁴ *Labyrinths*, pp. 177, 185, 181.

⁴⁵ Borges, "Autobiographical Essay," *The Aleph*, p. 167.

himself a madman who has, as he accuses a rival critic, "misheard or misunderstood" one of Menard's "droll jokes" (p. 90, n. 1).⁴⁶ Menard's supposed project, however, his *reductio ad absurdum* of the artist's debt to tradition to the creation of a text "verbally identical" (p. 94) to its inspiration, raises the more subversive questions of the literary status and achievement of a work such as *Ulysses* that employs the "mythical method"⁴⁷ to create "one of those parasitic books," disdained by the narrator-critic and Menard alike, "that set Christ on a boulevard, Hamlet on La Cannebière, or don Quixote on Wall Street. Like every man of taste, Menard abominated those pointless travesties, which, Menard would say, were good for nothing but occasioning a plebeian delight in anachronism or (worse yet) captivating us with the elementary notion that all times and places are the same, or are different" (pp. 90-91). Menard's absurd project mirrors Joyce's *Ulysses*, both reflecting and distorting its subject by the extreme *reductio* of indebtedness to verbatim reproduction.⁴⁸ This becomes clear in the final paragraphs of Borges' story. His critic's description of Menard's methods of composition, manuscript, and notebooks for his *Don Quixote* are subtle reflections of Joyce's procedures for *Ulysses*,⁴⁹ and his final sentences drive home one additional, reductive consequence of Joyce's example via less than subtle references both to a modern Homeric *Odyssey* and to Joyce himself:

⁴⁶ Although in *Borges on Writing* Borges seems to concede that Pierre Menard "was out of his mind" (di Giovanni, Halpern, and MacShane, p. 54), his story allows at least four plausible constructions of its two central figures, Menard and the critic-*persona*: both the author and the critic who takes his project seriously are insane; Menard is insane, but the critic is simply a foolish pedant who is incapable of recognizing madness; both writer and critic are sane and serious, and Menard's project, in ideal if not real terms, is an astonishingly ambitious, "interminably heroic" attempt at re-creation, "perhaps the most significant writing of our time" (p. 90); or Menard is a practical joker who has successfully hoodwinked a pedantic critic. While Borges' remark seems to authorize the first or second of these options, and my reading offers support for the third, the story's first footnote encourages the fourth possibility, suggesting that Menard was joking when he claimed to have composed an equally absurd "literal translation of Quevedo's literal translation of St. Francis de Sales's *Introduction à la vie dévote*" (p. 90, n. 1).

⁴⁷ Eliot, p. 271.

⁴⁸ Daniel Balderston similarly concludes that the critic's remark about "parasitic books" refers obliquely to *Ulysses*: "the reference is to a 'libro parasitario' that would have been more likely to come to Menard's attention [than the 'fragment by Novalis' mentioned in the story (p. 90)] because of its publication to great scandal and acclaim in Paris in that same year, 1922—Joyce's *Ulysses*" (*Out of Context: Historical Reference and the Representation of Reality in Borges* [Duke University Press, 1993], p. 21).

⁴⁹ The narrator-critic's description of Menard's methods of composition, his manuscripts ("His drafts were endless" [p. 95]), and especially his notebooks for his masterwork, his *Don Quixote*, are all clear allusions by Borges to Joyce's procedures for composing *Ulysses*: "I recall his square-ruled notebooks, his black crossings-out, his peculiar typographical symbols, and his insect-like handwriting" (p. 95, n. 3). Compare this with the several contemporary accounts of Joyce's note-taking, the most relevant and accessible (to Borges) of which is found in Frank Budgen's *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses* (1934): "As far as concerns the need for tablets, . . . in Zurich Joyce was never without them. And they were . . . little writing blocks specially made for the waistcoat pocket. At intervals, alone or in conversation, seated or walking, one of these tablets was produced, and a word or two scribbled on it at lightning speed as ear or memory served his turn. . . . The method of making a multitude of criss-cross notes in pencil was a strange one for a man whose sight was never good. A necessary adjunct to the method was a huge oblong magnifying glass" (pp. 176-77). In *The Art of James Joyce: Method and Design in Ulysses and Finnegans Wake* (Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 7-12 and *passim*, A. Walton Litz describes Joyce's methods of crossing out words after they had found their use on the notesheets for *Ulysses* which he compiled, in his own insect-like handwriting, from these notebooks which he subsequently destroyed, perhaps incendiarily like Menard: "In the evening, he liked to go out for walks on the outskirts of Nîmes; he would often carry along a notebook and make a cheery bonfire" (p. 95, n. 3). Borges refers knowledgeably to Stuart Gilbert's *James Joyce's Ulysses* (1930), Edmund Wilson's "The Dream of H.C. Earwicker" (1939), and Joseph Campbell's and Henry Morton Robinson's *Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* (1944) in his *Introduction to English Literature*; very likely he knew Budgen's critical work on Joyce as well.

Menard has (perhaps unwittingly) enriched the slow and rudimentary art of reading by means of a new technique—the technique of deliberate anachronism and fallacious attribution. That technique, requiring infinite patience and concentration, encourages us to read the *Odyssey* as though it came after the *Aeneid*. . . . This technique fills the calmest books with adventure. Attributing *The Imitatio Christi* to Louis Ferdinand Céline or James Joyce—is that not sufficient renovation of those faint spiritual admonitions? (p. 95)

Whereas Borges' references to Joyce and *Ulysses* in "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" are more or less explicit, Joyce and his novel would initially seem as remote from the following tale, "The Circular Ruins," as this story itself seems to be from the manner and matter of either "Pierre Menard" or "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim." Borges departs from the "hoax and . . . pseudo-essay" paradigm of the earlier two stories, drops their critic-*persona* to adopt an omniscient voice, abandons the satiric mode of "Pierre Menard," and writes a fable in "The Circular Ruins" which is precisely the kind of allegory that his critic in "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim" disdains. The Promethean allegory of "The Circular Ruins," in fact, turns out to be both a subtle reflection of the presence of James Joyce in Borges' creative imagination and a subtle reflection upon Joyce's conceptions of artistic creation, articulated by Stephen Dedalus in the "Scylla and Charybdis" chapter of *Ulysses*. "The Circular Ruins" tells of a "gray man" who arrives at a ruined temple in the "malarial jungle" of some unspecified land, having departed his home in "one of those infinite villages that lie upriver," knowing that his "immediate obligation was to sleep" (p. 96): "He wanted to dream a man. He wanted to dream him completely, in painstaking detail, and impose him on reality" (p. 97). The man embarks upon his premeditated and conscious project of androgynous creation, under the protection of the Promethean god whose "earthly name was Fire" (p. 99), and after an initial miscarriage and a few years of dedicated effort, dreams "a fully fleshed man—a stripling" (p. 98). The creator then educates this young man, still in his dreams, now explicitly conceiving him—in both senses of the word—as "*my son*. . . . *The son I have engendered*" (p. 99). After allowing his son to be born and sending him into the world to encounter the reality of experience, the dreamer suddenly fears "that his son would . . . somehow discover that he was a mere simulacrum" (p. 100). Borges concludes his fable ironically by having the dreamer realize that he is himself "but the projection of another man's dream. . . . [H]e realized that he, too, was but appearance, that another man was dreaming him" (p. 100). Thus, Borges both insinuates his own role as the creator, the dreamer, behind the handiwork of his own creation and realizes the main point of his allegory of artistic creation: "the concept of an endless series of speakers and dreamers, an infinite regress . . . lies at the root of my story."⁵⁰

Borges' particular resolution of his fable is less important for our present purposes than are

⁵⁰ Borges, "Commentaries," *The Aleph*, p. 192. As Borges adds in his notes to "The Circular Ruins," this idea of the creator created, the dreamer dreamt, or the "infinite regress" of dreamers, also functions in two of his sonnets "on chess, written years afterward" and in another of his poems, "The Golem" (1961) ("Commentaries," *The Aleph*, p. 193). In *A Personal Anthology* (ed. Anthony Kerrigan [Grove, 1967]), Borges groups "The Circular Ruins" together with the two sonnets "Chess" (1960) and "The Golem" (pp. 68-79).

his literalizations of Stephen Dedalus' apotheosis of the artist as "an androgynous angel, being a wife unto himself" and, through Stephen, Joyce's conception of literary creation as a kind of "Fatherhood, in the sense of conscious begetting . . . from only begetter to only begotten."⁵¹ In Borges' account of the dreamer's origins and conception of the consubstantial, dreamt father and son of "The Circular Ruins," readers of *Ulysses* will likely notice subtle reflections of Stephen Dedalus' account of the "greyedauburn" and "beautiful ineffectual dreamer" Shakespeare's journey downstream from his village of Stratford on Avon, to London—an urban jungle perhaps. They may notice as well Stephen's conception of Hamlet as "son of [Shakespeare's] soul," the engendered "son consubstantial with the father."⁵² (One is even tempted to wonder whether there is a parallel between the fiery destructions of the dreamer's circular temple and Shakespeare's "wooden O," although Stephen does not mention the fate of the Globe theater.⁵³) But it is equally important to point out that Borges' reductive literalizations of Stephen's conception of the androgynous and intentional artist are tainted by incredulity, that they take the derealized mode of the fable.⁵⁴ In a way, Borges both emulates and rejects his model in a manner not far removed from the mockery of Buck Mulligan's response: "Himself his own father, Sonmulligan told himself. Wait. I am big with child. I have an unborn child in my brain. . . . Let me parturiate!"⁵⁵

At the root of Borges' skepticism about Joyce's achievement, however, is his revulsion from what he sees as failures of impersonality, not simply in the conception of the author as "only begetter" in "Scylla and Charybdis,"⁵⁶ but in such self-indulgent excesses as the author's extravagant conception of "organic" form (each chapter of *Ulysses*, according to Gilbert, is "associated with a given Organ of the human body"⁵⁷), or his substitution of encyclopedic and "painstaking detail" for psychological complexity in his handling of character (p. 97). Borges expands upon this latter reservation about *Ulysses* in his conversations with Richard Burgin, finding Joyce's expansive and detailed presentation of his characters inadequate compensation for their lack of depth:

I think that *Ulysses* is a failure, really. Well, by the time it's read through, you know thousands and thousands of circumstances about the characters, but you don't know them. And if you think of the characters in Joyce, you don't think of them as you think of the characters in Stevenson or in Dickens, because in the case of a character, let's say in a book by Stevenson, a man may appear, may last a page, but you feel that you know him or that there's more in him to be known, but in the case of *Ulysses* you are told thousands of circumstances about the characters. You know, for example, well, you know that they went twice to the men's room, you know all

⁵¹ *Ulysses*, pp. 175, 170.

⁵² *Ulysses*, pp. 166, 151, 155, and 162.

⁵³ *Henry V*, "Prologue," line 13.

⁵⁴ See Friedman's extensive discussions of the modes of "irreality . . . *irrealidad*" (p. 110) in Borges' fiction, pp. 12-14, 95-106, 109-112, and *passim*.

⁵⁵ *Ulysses*, p. 171.

⁵⁶ *Ulysses*, p. 170.

⁵⁷ Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's Ulysses: A Study* (Knopf, 1952), p. 29. Borges echoes Gilbert's observation (with acknowledgment) in *An Introduction to English Literature* (pp. 68-69).

the books they read, you know their exact positions when they are sitting down or standing up, but you don't really know them. It's as if Joyce had gone over them with a microscope or a magnifying glass.⁵⁸

While Borges assumes in "The Circular Ruins" the skepticism, then, if not the mocking tone of Buck Mulligan, James Joyce assumed in Borges' life and early fiction the role of "Al-Mu'tasim," the man whose "faint trace" (p. 84) Borges would both pursue and resist. Joyce's *Ulysses* functions as a kind of *tertium quid* joining the otherwise very dissimilar fictions of "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" and "The Circular Ruins," much as Joyce the creator functions as the third person who joins Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, or who joins, in another trinity of *Ulysses*, his two chief progenitors, Homer and Shakespeare. Not accidentally, Borges ultimately reflects, indeed mirrors, Joyce in this as well. Beyond the relationship of the non-consubstantial "son" Borges to his literary "father" Joyce in his early fiction, Borges continued his conversation with Joyce intermittently throughout his career, never, it is true, forgiving Joyce for his chief sin, which he characterizes as "the vanity of overwriting" in the concluding sentences of his "Autobiographical Essay,"⁵⁹ yet never entirely ceasing to reflect Joyce's example. In a late collection of the works by which he claimed he "should like to be judged," his *Personal Anthology* (1961),⁶⁰ we see Borges once again emulating Joyce by placing himself at the center of his book, the consubstantial third person in a trinity with Homer and Shakespeare, as Joyce does in *Ulysses*. In his "Prologue" to *A Personal Anthology*, Borges states that he has organized this collection of his writings not in their chronological order, but in patterns of "sympathies and differences"⁶¹ among their subjects and themes. Directly at the center of this volume and central to his architectural intention, Borges places two brief literary parables, "The Maker" (1958) and "Everything and Nothing" (1958). Although ostensibly concerned with Homer, "The Maker" clearly works through some of Borges' own responses to the onset of his blindness, as he has admitted.⁶² Correspondingly, "Everything and Nothing," which contains frequent echoes of Stephen Dedalus' imaginative reconstruction of Shakespeare's character in the ninth and similarly central chapter of *Ulysses*, establishes a strong parallel between Borges and the Bard in its opening sentence: "There was no one inside him" (p. 319).⁶³ This statement that the artist's

⁵⁸ Burgin, p. 56; note the faint echo, at the conclusion of this quote, of Budgen's reference to Joyce's "huge oblong magnifying glass" (*James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses*, p. 177; see note 49 above). Borges' criticism of Joyce here sounds remarkably similar to Virginia Woolf's attack on Arnold Bennett, in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924), as a novelist who, "observ[ing] every detail with immense care," tries "to hypnotize us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there." Woolf, however, objected to *Ulysses* on the grounds of its "indecentcy," rather than its encyclopedic detail ("Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* [Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1950], pp. 106, 109, 116). Ironically, I might add, Borges has himself suffered from the same charge that he levels at Joyce: that his characters lack depth.

⁵⁹ *The Aleph*, p. 185.

⁶⁰ p. ix.

⁶¹ p. ix.

⁶² See Burgin, pp. 78-79.

⁶³ The Shakespeare of Borges' parable resembles Stephen Dedalus' construction in "Scylla and Charybdis" in many respects. Like Stephen, Borges notes that the young Shakespeare "allowed himself to be initiated by Anne Hathaway" and, subsequently, "went off to London" having in some sense lost his identity, his manhood, by this sexual initiation: "he had already trained himself to the habit of feigning that he was somebody, so that his 'nobodiness' might not be

identity exists only within his creations as a construction of language—a strategy for sustaining impersonality that he, strangely, does not recognize in Joyce—is a claim that Borges has often made, since the publication of his first essay “The Nothingness of Personality” (“La Nadería de la Personalidad” [1922]), and most directly in “Borges and I” (1957). Borges then, much like Joyce, situates himself as the *tertium quid* in a triangular constellation with Homer and Shakespeare at the center of the work upon which he hoped his literary reputation would rest, at the center of “the patient labyrinth of lines [which] traces the image of his own face.”⁶⁴ If the face mirrored in subtle reflections throughout Borges’ career is James Joyce’s, perhaps Borges is “son consubstantial” with the prodigal “father” Joyce after all.⁶⁵

discovered” (p. 319). Stephen, correspondingly, notes Shakespeare’s seduction by Anne: “He was chosen, it seems to me. If others have their will, Ann hath a way. By cock, she was to blame. She put the comether on him. . . . stooping to conquer . . . in a cornfield a lover younger than herself” (*Ulysses*, p. 157). Emasculated, “a ghost by absence” from Stratford and from his younger self, in London, Shakespeare becomes a “player,” “play[ing] the part of the spectre,” for example, in *Hamlet* (*Ulysses*, p. 155). Like Stephen, Borges works in “Local colour” (*Ulysses*, p. 154), noting that Shakespeare’s “body, in whorehouses and taverns around London, lived its life as body” (p. 319), while Dedalus remarks, “Belief in himself has been untimely killed. He was overborne in a cornfield first . . . and he will never be a victor in his own eyes after nor play victoriously the game of laugh and lie down. Assumed dongiovannism will not save him” (*Ulysses*, p. 161), although for “Twenty years” Shakespeare “dallied there between conjugal love and its chaste delights and scortatory love and its foul pleasures” (*Ulysses*, p. 165). John Eglinton “sum[s] up” Dedalus’ view of Shakespeare: “He is all [men] in all.” Both Stephen and Borges agree: “He is, Stephen said” (*Ulysses*, p. 174), “No one was as many men as that man” (p. 320). Finally in his brief parable, Borges describes Shakespeare’s last years in terms strongly reminiscent of *Ulysses*: “[He] returned to his birthplace. . . . He had to be somebody: he became a retired businessman who’d made a fortune and had an interest in loans, lawsuits, and petty usury. It was in this role that he dictated the arid last will and testament that we know today . . .” (p. 320). Compare Stephen’s account of Shakespeare’s “sense of property”: “he was himself a . . . moneylender”; “He sued a fellowplayer for the price of a few bags of malt and exacted his pound of flesh in interest for every money lent,” and he left his wife, in his last will, “his Secondbest Bed” (*Ulysses*, pp. 168, 167). While these parallels may prove nothing more than that both Joyce and Borges worked from the same limited historical and apocryphal accounts of Shakespeare, Borges’ selection of material in “Everything and Nothing,” which rarely strays beyond the information available in *Ulysses*, and his similar emphasis on Shakespeare as both a universal and empty signifier, “a ghost by absence” (*Ulysses*, p. 155), strongly suggest the influence of the “Scylla and Charybdis” chapter of *Ulysses* on his parable.

⁶⁴ Quoted by Kerrigan (Borges, *Personal Anthology*, p. 203). Compare Stephen Dedalus’ similar contention that the identity of artist, his self-portrait, is constituted by his career, “Every life is many days, day after day. We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love, but always meeting ourselves” (*Ulysses*, p. 175).

⁶⁵ *Ulysses*, p. 162.