

Towards Pierre Menard



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Nur dann zeig' ich, daß ich einen Schriftsteller verstanden habe, wenn ich in seinem Geiste handeln kann; wenn ich ihn, ohne seine Individualität zu schmälern, übersetzen und mannigfach verändern Kann.

—Novalis, *Kunstfragmente*, 2005

Critics have rightly warned us about the dangers entailed in studying Jorge Luis Borges' fiction without also studying his essays and poetry.¹ We must particularly heed their advice when studying those tales which are essayistic in nature, because they provide a link between these seemingly disparate forms of writing.²

Anyone who decides to review Borges' literary production in chronological order is inevitably faced with the paradoxical diachrony which Borges himself proposes for the study of literature in general and also with his own Borgesian versions of his career.

In his "Autobiographical Notes," Borges offers us a version of the series of experiments in narration which transformed him from a mere devoted

1 See, for example, Emir Rodríguez Monegal, *Borges par lui-même* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970).

2 In her doctoral dissertation (Bryn Mawr College, 1956), which was published as *La expresión de la irrealidad en la obra de Jorge Luis Borges* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1957), Ana María Barrenechea made one of the earliest systematic reviews of Borges' narrative works. The chronological bibliography which she included was a most important first attempt to compile Borges' vast collaboration in periodicals. See also James E. Irby's excellent, and still unpublished, dissertation "The Structure of the Stories of Jorge Luis Borges," University of Michigan, 1962, and Jaime Alazraki, *La prosa narrativa de Jorge Luis Borges* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1968).

reader into a writer of short stories.³ Appropriately, the circuitous route he followed during this development begins with an imitation of Cervantes, a rewriting of one of Don Quijote's first adventurous readings of his world. Borges says that he first read *Don Quijote* in English.⁴ Thus, it seems that his first tale is a retranslation into Spanish of a fragment of *Don Quijote*:

I first started writing when I was six or seven. I tried to imitate classic writers of Spanish—Miguel de Cervantes, for example. . . . My first story was a rather nonsensical piece after the manner of Cervantes, an old-fashioned romance called "La visera fatal",

("The Fatal Helmet")⁵

This story has been lost, but it obviously refers to the often-discussed moment when Alonso Quijano re-creates the knight's helmet.⁶ As the squire cleans his great-grandfather's rusty armor, he discovers that the helmet lacked a vizor. He makes one out of pasteboard and attaches it to the morion, but when he tests it, it collapses after a single sword blow. He then makes it over, reinforced this time with small iron bars, and feels confident enough to wear it throughout his adventures without even testing its strength again with his sword. Let's hold this first example in our minds and move on to Borges' second attempt—by his own account—to write a story.

This took place in Spain in 1919, where the Borges family moved after spending World War I in Switzerland. Recalling a moment of gothic inspiration, Borges notes: "I myself in those days wrote a story about a werewolf and sent it to a popular magazine, *La espera*, whose editors very wisely turned it down."⁷ Like the story taken from Cervantes, this tale of the supernatural is mentioned without further comment.

The first example of a Borges story in which we do have a text to examine is "Hombres pelearon," published in 1928 in a book of essays.⁸ But this story, like its phantom precursors, is also a false start:

In ["Hombres pelearon"], my first venture into the mythology of the old Northside of Buenos Aires, I was trying to tell a purely Argentine story in an Argentine way. This story is one I have been retelling, with small variation, ever since. It is the tale of the motiveless, or disinterested, duel—of courage for its own sake.⁹

3 Jorge Luis Borges with Norman Thomas di Giovanni, "Autobiographical Notes," *The New Yorker*, September 19, 1970, p. 78.

4 In his "Autobiographical Notes," Borges adds that: "When later I read 'Don Quijote' in the original, it seemed like a bad translation to me." (p. 42).

5 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

6 One must recall that this scene takes place in Chapter One, before Alonso Quijano (or Quijada, or Quesada or Quijana) gives himself the name Don Quijote.

7 "Autobiographical Notes," p. 56.

8 *El idioma de los argentinos* (Buenos Aires: M. Gleizer, Editor, 1928), pp. 151-54.

9 "Autobiographical Notes," p. 71.

This tale had had a previous venture into print. A version entitled "Leyenda policial" had appeared in the magazine *Martín Fierro* in 1927.¹⁰ The next retelling of this story is "Hombre de la esquina rosada," included in *Historia universal de la infamia*¹¹ and which had also been previously published under a different title, "Hombre de las orillas," in the literary supplement of *Crítica*.¹² Borges considers this work his first out and out short story but not the real point of departure for his fiction:

It took me six years, from 1927 to 1933, to go from that all too self-conscious sketch "Hombres pelearon" to my first outright short story, "Hombre de la esquina rosada" ("Streetcorner Man"). . . . Although the story became popular to the point of embarrassment (today, I only find it stogy and mannered and the characters bogus), I never regarded it as a starting point. It simply stands there as a kind of freak.¹³

"Hombre de la esquina rosada" ends a cycle of works in which Borges tried to imitate a local language. Its conversational narrative technique, however, does reappear in some of his later stories.¹⁴ The beginning of the next cycle does represent a resolute setting out to test the short story forms:

The real beginning of my career as a story writer starts with the series of sketches entitled "Historia universal de la infamia" ("A Universal History of Infamy"), which I contributed to the column of *Crítica* in 1933 and 1934. The irony of this is that "Streetcorner Man" really was a story but that these sketches and several of the fictional pieces which followed them, and which very slowly led me to legitimate stories, were in the nature of hoaxes and pseudo-essays.¹⁵

This collection of "hoaxes and pseudo-essays" were followed by what Borges considers a legitimate union of the hoax and the pseudo-essay:

My next story, "The Approach to al-Mu'tasim," written in 1935, is both a hoax and a pseudo-essay. It purports to be a review of a book published originally in Bombay three years earlier. . . . It was not till 1942 that I openly published it as a short story in my first story collection, "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" ("The Garden of Branching Paths"). Perhaps I have been unfair to this story; it now seems to me to foreshadow and even to set the pattern for those tales that

10 *Martín Fierro* ("Periódico quincenal de arte y crítica libre"), no. 38, February 26, 1927, p. 4.

11 *Historia universal de la infamia* (Buenos Aires: Colección Megáfono, 1935).

12 *Crítica, Revista Multicolor de los Sábados*, no. 6, September 9, 1933. Published under the pseudonym F[rancisco] Bustos. For a description of Borges collaboration in *Crítica*, see Jorge B. Rivera, "Los juegos de un tímido. Borges en el suplemento de *Crítica*," *Crisis*, May-June, 1976.

13 "Autobiographical Notes," p. 78.

14 In, among others, "La forma de la espada" and "Funes el memorioso" in *Ficciones* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sur, 1944).

15 "Autobiographical Notes," p. 78.

were somehow awaiting me, and upon which my reputation as a storyteller was to be based.¹⁶

Next we come to that fateful Christmas of 1938, and the beginning of 1939 when, according to Borges, his literary life was permanently affected by an accident. While running up a stairway, he hit his head against a window which had been left ajar.¹⁷ An infection developed and he spent a delirious stay in a local hospital. He has told (and retold) the story of the period of his recovery:

When I began to recover, I feared for my mental integrity. . . . A bit later, I wondered whether I could ever write again. I had previously written quite a few poems and dozens of short reviews. I thought that if I tried to write a review now and failed, I'd be all through intellectually but that if I tried something I had never really done before and failed at that it wouldn't be so bad and might even prepare me for the final revelation. I decided I would try to write a short story. The result was "Pierre Menard, Author of 'Don Quijote.'"

"Pierre Menard," like its forerunner "The Approach to al-Mu'tasim," was still a halfway house between the essay and the true tale.¹⁸

It is this hybrid form, a form that draws from and combines elements of both the essay and the short story, which is generally believed to be one of the main characteristics of Borges' fiction. As we have seen, Borges considers "the real beginning" of his career as a story writer to be the publication of the pseudo-essays of *Historia universal de la infamia*, which are in fact those preparatory timid experiments to which he refers in the "Autobiographical Notes."¹⁹

Critics who have studied this hybrid form have tended to focus upon "The Approach to al-Mu'tasim" (1936) and "Pierre Menard, Author of 'Don Quijote'" (1939). Undoubtedly, the period between 1936 and 1939 is crucial for an understanding of Borges' development as a creative writer; however, little attention has been paid to Borges' other literary activities during these years—namely, the biweekly literary reviews that appeared in the column "Libros y autores extranjeros" ("Foreign Books and Authors") of the Argentine magazine *El Hogar* (*The Home*).²⁰ These texts (reviews,

16 *Ibid.*

17 For a psychoanalytical study of this accident, see Emir Rodríguez Monegal, *Jorge Luis Borges. A Literary Biography* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1978), pp. 317-331.

18 "Autobiographical Notes," p. 84. The description of "Pierre Menard" as a "halfway house" seems very suitable because many of Don Quijote's adventures take place in and around halfway houses (or inns).

19 Borges had used the same word "timid" to refer to *Historia universal de la infamia* in the prologue to its second edition (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, S. A., 1954), p. 10: "Son el irresponsable juego de un tímido que no se animó a escribir cuentos y que se distrajo en falsear y tergiversar (sin justificación estética alguna vez) ajenas historias."

20 A good bibliography of Borges' writings in periodicals is yet to be compiled. Of the 68 entries of *El Hogar's* "Libros y autores extranjeros" only 29 are mentioned in Ana María Barrenechea's bibliography for *La expresión de la irreali-*

biographical sketches and literary gossip) contain materials and reveal techniques which reappear and contribute significantly to the esthetics of Borges' essayistic short story.

It is not surprising that the man who wrote the pseudo-essay review, "The Approach to al-Mu'tasim," about an imaginary book, a man who spent three years writing a biweekly column on foreign books and authors, should write "Pierre Menard, Author of 'Don Quijote,'" a story whose narrator is the reviewer of an imaginary author's life works. It is not surprising that Borges' intertextually-rich critical fictions are based rhetorically on the art of book reviewing.

A review is a clear example of the intertextual quality of all criticism.²¹ The form of the review provided Borges with an already mastered rhetorical starting point from which to develop his timid voice of a reader. The review represents a beginning of writing which immediately flees to another text, the review text, towards one's readings. Borges has expressed the opinion that instead of writing long books he prefers to feign that a book already exists and to offer his readers a summary or a commentary.²² The texts which Borges reviews most often are the creative works he never wrote, the fictional possibilities other books suggested to him. Conversely, Borges' literature represents a critical assessment of those literary projects he doesn't execute, and the readings which inspired those projects appear in the endless chain of allusions of his fictions.²³

El Hogar, then, is important because, in its pages, we find Borges arguing with himself about modern prose fiction, especially science fiction and detective fiction. We witness the beginning of his arduous "inquisition" of allegory and symbols. We recognize an early version of the argument which attempts to justify the famous phrase "Each writer creates his own precursors" which appears in the essay "Kafka y sus precursores."²⁴ Many

dad en la obra de Jorge Luis Borges (1957). Nodier Lucio and Lydia Revello include a mere 28 in their *Contribución a la bibliografía de Jorge Luis Borges*, Buenos Aires (1962). Horacio Jorge Becco's *Jorge Luis Borges. Bibliografía total*, Buenos Aires (1973), doesn't list any of Borges' writings for periodicals. For a complete list of Borges' collaboration in *El Hogar*, see appendix II of my doctoral dissertation "Borges: una literatura intertextual," Yale University, 1978. A list of all the books reviewed in "Libros y autores extranjeros," and an index of their authors, are also included in that appendix.

21 For many good comments on this topic, see Leyla Perrone-Moisés, "L'intertextualité critique," *Poétique*, 27, (1976), pp. 372-384.

22 See "Prólogo" to *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sur, 1942), p. 7: "Desvarío laborioso y empobrecedor el de componer vastos libros; el de explayar en quinientas páginas una idea cuya perfecta exposición oral cabe en pocos minutos. Mejor procedimiento es simular que esos libros ya existen y ofrecer un resumen, un comentario."

23 "El milagro secreto" is precisely, among other things, a play on words between literary *execution*, or the "death" of the author as he releases his creation, and the *execution* by a firing squad.

24 Included in *Otras inquisiciones* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sur, 1952).

observations about translation, language, and his ever-present irony are also found there, along with comments on time and atomistic space, the fourth dimension, reading as writing, and madness and literature. We discover how a double or triple intuition which operates, against Croce, in Borges' critical imagination, shifts traditions in order to make "rereadings" the truly modern heroic acts of literature.

Of paramount importance to Borges' esthetics are his commentaries in *El Hogar* regarding madness and literature (Don Quijote) and his review of Paul Valéry's *Introduction a la Poétique*.²⁵ This material is, of course, of great importance for the understanding of the creation of "Pierre Menard." One way to gain access to "Pierre Menard, Author of 'Don Quijote'" is from within Borges' critical writings in *El Hogar*. I don't object, as other critics do, to using what Borges says in his "Autobiographical Notes" about "Pierre Menard" in order to explain its creation. It is useful to understand how Borges justifies his creations to himself, regardless of whether the "Autobiographical Notes" themselves might be part pseudo-essays and part hoaxes. I don't expect to change your general beliefs about Borges' art of fiction. All I hope to accomplish here is to focus your perception within his text, his critical text, as it develops from within his subterranean library. Also, I hope to show how Borges' struggles with Paul Valéry and his comments about mad protagonists echo some of his childhood preoccupations.

The Value of Reading

I will first ask you to remember with me, tale IX from Don Juan Manuel's *El conde Lucanor*, which Borges translates from the medieval Spanish to modern Spanish in the section "etcétera" of *Historia universal de la infamia*.²⁶ Borges' title for this tale is "El brujo postergado."

In this tale, a dean from Santiago de Compostela travels to Toledo to see the famous magician Don Yllán, in order to ask Don Yllán to teach him the secrets of his art. After receiving the dean with a generous meal, the two descend a stone stairway and begin to eat again in a room filled with mysterious books. It is an ancient library. The dean begs Don Yllán to reveal his knowledge and promises him that in the future he will do whatever he asks of him. Don Yllán had already told his cook to have some partridges ready to roast, but, not to start roasting them until he ordered her to do so.

Unfortunately, their first session is interrupted when two emissaries bring a letter to the dean from his uncle, the Archbishop of Compostela. His uncle is very ill and he wants his nephew to return home immediately.

25 For an extensive treatment of these and the other topics mentioned, see my dissertation.

26 For an analysis of Borges' comments on translation and its relationship to allegory and the novel, see part II, sections V and VI of my dissertation.

The dean decides to answer the letter instead of going and a few days later a second letter informs him of his uncle's death and his own election to the Archbishopric. Thus, the dean and Don Yllán begin their journey towards Santiago, on the road to a very fortunate chain of events which culminates in the dean's becoming Pope. At each triumphant step of the way, Don Yllán asks the dean to remember his promise and to help his son obtain a good position within the Church. The dean prefers to share his fortune with his own relatives. The dean has, in fact, forgotten the promises of the past; he has forgotten his debt with the mysterious library.

Suddenly, Don Yllán tells the cook to start roasting the partridges. Ironically, this last supper destroys the dean's fictional journey. We know that the ending of the dean's story is not a happy one: "las perdicés no son felices." The reader has also come under the spell of the story's magic: the fantastic and constant eating with the imagination. The reader continues to read, to expect that the dean will ultimately be punished for not keeping his promise, but no one suspects that all his triumphs are imaginary. We do not suspect, we do not want to suspect, that the story is fantastic in nature; we want to believe that in some fallacious space an action of flesh and blood is being represented.

Let's reconsider, in this light, Cervantes' exemplary novel "El casamiento engañoso y el coloquio de los perros," which represents an oneiric variation of these fantastic chambers of reading and writing. Here, the two friends also eat before beginning their literary encounter. After the meal, Peralta reads the manuscript that his friend Campuzano wrote about an incredible conversation between two dogs, Berganza and Cipión, which he was fortunate enough to witness during his delirious stay in a local hospital. Peralta reads as we read along over his shoulder, while Campuzano sleeps. Peralta completes his reading of the manuscript at the exact moment when Campuzano, the author, awakens.

Magic authors not only dream their stories but their readers and authors as well. Narrative magic is the strategy which results from the interaction of implicit and explicit authors. A pen, a typewriter, a first person plural "we" is always present by the narrative fireplace. We might remember here Miguel de Unamuno's *Niebla*, a work which also dialogues with this tradition of dialogues, and which is characterized primarily by a famous case of philosophical indigestion.

"To feed," "to nourish," was the action behind the scenes in the exemplary tale which Borges rewrites from *El conde Lucanor*. But who receives the nourishment, who can consume *El conde Lucanor*, "El casamiento engañoso y el coloquio de los perros," and *Niebla*? A possible answer would be the reader according to Paul Valéry.

Borges summarizes the history of the powerful *spirit*, to whom Valéry gives credit for all real creations and consumptions of literature, at the beginning of his essay "La flor de Coleridge."

Hacia 1938, Paul Valéry escribió: "La Historia de la literatura no debería ser la historia de los autores y de los accidentes de su carrera o de la carrera de sus obras sino la Historia del Espíritu como productor o consumidor de literatura. Esa historia podría llevarse a término sin mencionar un solo escritor."²⁷

Borges doesn't tell us here which work of Valéry he is quoting from. In fact, Borges had already printed his translation of those same words in 1938, in the column on "Foreign Books and Authors" of *El Hogar*. Borges is quoting from Valéry's *Introduction a la Poétique*, a book he reviews in *El Hogar*. Borges quotes extensively from Valéry in his review:

Valéry escribe: "La Historia de la Literatura no debería ser la historia de los autores y de los accidentes de su carrera o de la carrera de sus obras, sino la Historia del Espíritu como productor o consumidor de literatura. Esa historia pondría llevarse a término sin mencionar un solo escritor. Podemos estudiar la forma poética del Libro de Job o del Cantar de los Cantares, sin la menor intervención de la biografía de sus autores, que son enteramente desconocidos."

No menos técnica, no menos esencialmente clásica, es la definición que propone de la literatura. "La Literatura es y no puede ser otra cosa que una especie de extensión y de aplicación de ciertas propiedades del Lenguaje." Y luego: "¿No es acaso el Lenguaje la obra maestra de las obras maestras literarias, ya que toda creación literaria se reduce a una combinación de las potencias de un vocabulario determinado, según formas establecidas una vez por todas?" Eso, en la página 12. En cambio, la página 40 señala que las obras del espíritu sólo existen en acto, y que ese acto presupone evidentemente un lector o un espectador.

Si no me engaño, esa observación modifica muchísimo la primera y hasta la contradice. Una parece reducir la literatura a las combinaciones que permite un vocabulario determinado; la otra declara que el efecto de esas combinaciones varía según cada nuevo lector. La primera establece un número elevado pero finito de obras posibles; la segunda, un número de obras indeterminado, creciente. La segunda admite que el tiempo y sus incomprendiones y distracciones colaboran con el poeta muerto.²⁸

Valéry was fascinated by his first observation, the one reducing literature to a combination permitted by a given vocabulary. Valéry was primarily interested in the question: What happens, what do I do, when I write a poem? Borges is more interested in Valéry's second observation. He is concerned with another question, the question he has been asking himself all his life: What happens, what do I do, when I read a book?

A truly complete exploration of literature is impossible, according to Valéry, "si l'on n'examine pas ses conditions d'existence, tour à tour dans l'intime travail de l'auteur et dans l'intime réaction d'un lecteur, et si l'on ne considère pas, d'autre part, les milieux de culture, où elle se dével-

²⁷ *Otras inquisiciones*, p. 19.

²⁸ *El Hogar*, June 10, 1938, p. 24. This is also an obvious commentary on T. S. Eliot's ideas about tradition in literature and also, perhaps, a comment on Harold Bloom's misreadings.

oppe.”²⁹ His *Poïétique* proposes to study that which is accomplished in the art of making “oeuvres de l’esprit.” It also considers, with equal importance, the created work itself. It recognizes the significance of both “l’action qui fait” and “la chose faite,” the production and consumption of literature. According to Valéry, a mind’s work secures an eminent place in the annals of Literary History by: “la production même de l’oeuvre [et] la production d’une certaine *valeur* de l’oeuvre, par ceux qui ont connu, goûté l’oeuvre produite, qui en ont imposé la renommée et assuré la transmission, la conservation, la vie ultérieure.”³⁰ Valéry cautions, in turn, that the interrelation of “le producteur, l’oeuvre et le consommateur” should be considered with great care:

Nous ne pouvons considérer que la relation de l’oeuvre à son producteur, ou bien la relation de l’oeuvre à celui qu’elle modifie une fois faite. L’action du premier et la réaction du second ne peuvent jamais se confondre. Les idées que l’un et l’autre se font de l’ouvrage sont incompatibles.³¹

“Pierre Menard, Author of ‘Don Quijote’” consists of an article written by an anonymous narrator in defense of Pierre Menard, his recently deceased literary precursor. Other members of Menard’s circle had already kept alive the memory of the insignificant details of his literary activities, which the narrator calls his “visible” works—the works Menard published. The narrator attacks that exclusively material view of the deceased’s works and reveals what he considers to be Menard’s most important plans, his “subterranean” activities.³² Menard’s secret project was to rewrite *Don Quijote* word for word, but only a few passages of Menard’s *Don Quijote* survived him. The narrator recognizes the work of a genius in its comparison to the original:

El texto de Cervantes y el de Menard son verbalmente idénticos, pero el segundo es casi infinitamente más rico. (Más ambiguo, dirán sus detractores; pero la ambigüedad es una riqueza).

Es una revelación cotejar el don Quijote de Menard con el de Cervantes. Este, por ejemplo, escribió (Don Quijote, primera parte, noveno capítulo):

. . . *la verdad, cuya madre es la historia, émula del tiempo, depósito de las acciones, testigo de lo pasado, ejemplo y aviso de lo presente, advertencia de lo por venir.*

Redactada en el siglo diecisiete, redactada por el “ingenio lego” Cervantes, esa enumeración es un mero elogio retórico de la historia. Menard, en cambio, escribe:

. . . *la verdad, cuya madre es la historia, émula del tiempo, depósito de las acciones, testigo de lo pasado, ejemplo y aviso de lo presente, advertencia de lo por venir.*

La historia, *madre* de la verdad; la idea es asombrosa. Menard, contemporáneo de William James, no define la historia como una indagación de la realidad sino

29 *Introduction a la Poétique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), p. 15.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

32 Borges’ adjectives “visible” and “subterranean” contrast with Valéry’s “visible” and “l’intime.”

como su origen. La verdad histórica, para él, no es lo que sucedió; es lo que juzgamos que sucedió. Las cláusulas finales—*ejemplo y aviso de lo presente, advertencia de lo por venir*—son descaradamente pragmáticas.

También es vívido el contraste de los estilos. El estilo arcaizante de Menard—extranjero al fin—adolece de alguna afectación. No así el del precursor, que maneja con desenfado el español corriente de su época.³³

Valéry has already warned us not to confuse the *actions* of producers and the *reactions* of consumers. Pierre Menard insists, however, on a creative reaction, not one which inspires a new creation based on a master's model but a creative repetition of the identical words within a different context, a different milieu. This amounts to a new instance of consumption of a classical text as it moves on, rivalling time, towards new readers' worlds.³⁴ Menard's contribution, as his narrator recognizes, is a new awareness of the act of reading:

Menard (acaso sin quererlo) ha enriquecido mediante una técnica nueva el arte detenido y rudimentario de la lectura: la técnica del anacronismo deliberado y de las atribuciones erróneas. Esa técnica de aplicación infinita nos insta a recorrer la Odisea como si fuera posterior a la Eneida . . .³⁵

To be initiated into literary competence requires a recognition of different modes of reading, of literary traditions, the dialogue of texts within our text. A historical sense, as T. S. Eliot has indicated, compels poets to write within the whole of literature.³⁶ A significant reading, a reading that recognizes relative values, must be formulated within the interstitial polyphony of literature.³⁷ Readers, as Valéry states above, become the producers of the value of the literary work, the producers of the value of an author during one of the instances of literary history. All the possible

33 "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote," *Sur*, no. 56, May, 1939, pp. 14-15.

34 The narrator of "Pierre Menard, Author of 'Don Quijote'" says that Novalis' *Kunstfragmente* inspired Menard to rewrite *Don Quijote*. He mentions fragment 2005 (of the Dresden edition, 1929) and its theme of the total identification with a given author. What he does not mention is that Novalis speaks of *translating* an author, changing him, without decreasing his individuality. Novalis goes on to say in fragment 2006 that the true reader must be the expanded author.

35 *El Jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*, p. 60.

36 As stated in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950), p. 4: ". . . the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. . . . No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism."

37 Julia Kristeva explains her notion of intertextuality and comments on the "polyphonic novel" in her prologue "Une poétique ruinée," to Mechain Bakhtine's *La Poétique de Dostoievski* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970).

forms this history can take are already present, potentially, in the work. The critics receive the words and masticate them in their mind in order to keep the work alive, in order to keep themselves alive. If those words, in turn, act as stimulants, the critics cover them with the words of another text, their critical text. It's Valéry's opinion: it's a matter of eating, like Don Yllán, and Berganza, like everyone. Valéry says:

Artistes, savants, tous s'identifient dans le détail de cette vie étrange de la pensée. On peut dire qu'à chaque instant la différence fonctionnelle des esprits en travail est indiscernable. Mais si l'on porte le regard sur les effets des oeuvres faites, on découvre chez certaines une particularité qui les groupe et qui les oppose à toutes les autres. Tel ouvrage que nous avons mis à part se divise en parties entières, dont chacune comporte de quoi créer un désir et de quoi le satisfaire. L'oeuvre nous offre dans chacune de ses parties, à la fois *l'aliment* et *l'excitant*.³⁸

Readers in the Library

Words feed and excite the imagination. Jorge Luis Borges would, in fact, like to be present at every banquet in the history of his favorite books, in a subterranean manner. He would have enjoyed being present in a library in La Mancha where Alonso Quijano read through the night. In truth, he has imagined such a visit in one of his poems, entitled "Readers":

De aquel hidalgo de cetrina y seca
Tez y de heroico afán se conjetura
Que, en víspera perpetua de aventura,
No salió nunca de su biblioteca.

It is very probable that Borges identifies himself with Alonso Quijano, the reader-creator of adventures, for according to his own description, he has not stepped out of his library either:

Así, durante muchos años, yo creí haberme criado en un suburbio de Buenos Aires, un suburbio de calles aventuradas y de ocasos visibles. Lo cierto es que me crié en un jardín, detrás de un largo muro, y en una biblioteca de ilimitados libros ingleses. . . . Han transcurrido más de treinta años, ha sido demolida la casa en que me fueron reveladas esas ficciones, he recorrido las ciudades de Europa, he olvidado miles de páginas, miles de insustituibles caras humanas, pero suelo pensar que, esencialmente, nunca he salido de esa biblioteca y de ese jardín.⁴⁰

In *El Hogar*, Borges wrote about mad protagonists. He mentions Ras-kolnikov, Macbeth, Hamlet and Don Quijote. About Cervantes' treatment of madness, he says that we only know that Alonso Quijano went mad because he slept little and read too much, that Cervantes doesn't attempt to

38 *Introduction a la Poétique*, p. 52.

39 "Lectores," in *Obras completas de Jorge Luis Borges* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, S.A., 1974), p. 892. This poem was originally collected in *El otro, el mismo* (1964).

40 *Sur*, no. 129, July, 1945, pp. 20-21.

show us the origin and the development of the squire's illness. Borges adds that: ". . . no asistimos al tránsito del mundo cotidiano al mundo alucinatorio, a la gradual deformación del orden común por el mundo de los fantasmas."⁴¹ Towards the end of this review Borges describes himself precisely during one of those moments of nocturnal reading. With reference to himself, he tries to show us what Cervantes chooses not to show us about the imaginary writer Alonso Quijano:

El horror es gradual en esta novela [*The Pursuer* de Louis Golding], como en las pesadillas. El estilo es límpido, quieto. En cuanto a su interés . . . De mí puedo decir que la empecé después de almorzar, con intención de hojearla, y que no la dejé hasta la página 285 (la última) y las dos de la mañana.⁴²

Borges' review records the hours when literary fantasy and a reviewer's imagination meet. During these years, Borges was working in a municipal library, where he read most of the books reviewed in *El Hogar*: "I would do all my library work in the first hour and then steal away to the basement and pass the other five hours in reading and writing."⁴³ This subterranean chamber of books is linked to the memory of the library of Borges' childhood. Reading, rereading and writing remained the only adventure. The poem "Readers" concludes with the following verses:

Tal es también mi suerte. Sé que hay algo
Inmortal y esencial que he sepultado
En esa biblioteca del pasado
En que leí la historia del hidalgo.
Las lentas hojas vuelve un niño y grave
Sueña con vagas cosas que no sabe.

By imitating Cervantes in "The Fatal Helmet," the seven year old boy had written his first story; he had rewritten the moment of the creation of the knight's helmet by Alonso Quijano, the squire. By writing "Pierre Menard, Author of 'Don Quijote,'" Borges is nourished by many readings and by the literary adventures of his childhood. He creates a reviewer whose words remember the words of other books, words which also remember and repeat the words of a precocious rewriter of *Don Quijote*—within Borges as one text always the same and everchanging.

Borges had the child's helmet on his mind. Perhaps, now somewhat dented by the man's unfortunate accidents of life, but also reinforced by many newer readings and stacks of mysterious books, the library of his readings. We are all readers in the library, the library of our life's experiences, the experiences of our readings.⁴⁴

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41 *El Hogar*, December 11, 1936, p. 26.

42 *Ibid.*

43 "Autobiographical Notes," p. 83.

44 An earlier version of this essay was presented at the University of Virginia's symposium on "The Early Writings of Jorge Luis Borges" (October 21, 1978).