

Pessimist Metaphysics and Ontology in the Work of Jorge Luis Borges

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ABSTRACT:

This dissertation analyzes the metaphysics elicited from the ontology of the work of art in Jorge Luis Borges. It does so by first questioning what worldview is evinced from the text at the level of the sentence, analyzing recurrent words such as *atroz* and *maravilla* as indicating a preoccupation with metaphysics. It is then shown that this preoccupation with metaphysics is indebted to the philosophy of Schopenhauer, and how he conceives of the Will as metaphysical, and therefore also as the cause and justification of pessimism, as the Will produces suffering in a striving toward completion which remains ever inchoate. Of particular import is an analysis of the story “Undr” and its correlation to philosophical *Verwunderung* as expressed in Schopenhauer’s essay “On Man’s Need of Metaphysics” in the second volume of the *World as Will and Representation*. After establishing this metaphysical relation with pessimism, it is shown how this worldview is manifested in various texts of Borges, in particular “Utopía de un hombre que está cansado,” whose resolution corresponds to Schopenhauer’s analysis of how subjects should interact with the Will if they are able to discover it. Lastly, it is argued that this preoccupation with metaphysics as something atrocious is built into the structure or formal ontology of interpretation, which posits that both precursors and successors to a given author are hermeneutically related to this author as inaccessible event and *arche* (ἀρχή). Here a discussion of “Kafka y sus precursors” is indispensable, as well as a reading of some of Borges’s

successors, such as Pablo Katchadjian and Agustín Fernández Mallo. What makes Borges a particularly useful case study of this is the fact that his writing takes this dynamic into account and manifests it in the worldview presented in the very individual pieces of his writing.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alexander Gannuscio specializes in twentieth century Spanish language literature, particularly in its intersections with German pessimism, phenomenology, and metaphysics.

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For my parents

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BT — Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward

Robinson, New York, Harper Perennial, 1962.

OC — Borges, Jorge Luis. *Obras completas*. 3 vols. Edición crítica, edited by Rolando Costa

Picazo e Irma Zanguara, Buenos Aires, Emecé, 2011.

PLT — Heidegger, Martin. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York, Harper & Row, 1971.

TM — Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and

Donald G. Marshall, New York, Continuum, 2004.

WWR — Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation*. 2 vols., Translated by

E.F.J. Payne, New York, Dover Publications. 2018.

Prologue

1. Metaphysical Prolegomenon

The present inquiry is a discussion of the literary work of Jorge Luis Borges. As such, it is predominantly critical in scope. Nevertheless, the point of departure of this investigation is the question of metaphysics, namely, the metaphysics elicited by the work of art and the metaphysics of the work of art itself. In pure philosophy it seems like most theoretical paths stemming from post-Kantian metaphysics have been exhausted. All *Denkwege*, to borrow the term, are well-trodden and therefore most post-Kantian and post-metaphysical philosophizing have their terminus in praxis: social critique, cultural studies, etc. There is simply so little pure theory left to explore that if one wishes to devote oneself to such a path, one must be willing to dedicate inordinate quantities of time to small and often insignificant correctives, and even then to mixed results.

However, I do not mean to diminish the way to pure philosophizing as an otiose path. To the contrary, I wish to affirm that it has the highest of functions, as pure philosophy is the way to understand the logical underpinnings of our ideology, which is often obfuscated by the dogmatic rhetoric and sophistry that abound in our current cultural atmosphere. One need only recall the etymological roots of dogma and doxology to make this point salient. Indeed, the pure metaphysician or ontologist—without referencing a single historical event of the past century—has more to say about our current culture than many proponents of so-called cultural critique and literary criticism. The problem with pure metaphysics and ontology is that precisely because their paths are well-trodden and lead to little or no new knowledge, no one wishes to embark upon them. In other words, their lack of novelty has meant their death. The purpose of the present investigation is to reinvigorate them by means of literature.

To understand whence such a reinvigoration may come, it is helpful to reflect briefly upon the current state of metaphysics. For our purposes, let us follow the tradition that Heidegger outlines, which, although by no means definitive, may allow us to orient ourselves. He ties the end of metaphysics with Nietzsche's reiteration of the death of God, which signifies more than merely a scientific atheism: it signifies the end of a tradition beginning with Plato in which the suprasensory world infuses the phenomenological world with vitality.¹ By expanding the idea of God to the idea of a suprasensory world that acts as ground for any sort of phenomenological inquiry, Heidegger finds himself recurring to the idea of metaphysics as Onto-theo-logy.

The possibility of metaphysics as Onto-theo-logy also finds itself within the tradition of the Kantian transcendental critique of metaphysics.² For context, this mention of ontotheology comes from the third *Hauptstück* of the transcendental dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. These *Hauptstücke* form a tripartite critique containing the Paralogism, the Antinomy, and the Ideal of pure reason, which are a critique of the metaphysics of the soul, the world, and God, respectively. For our purposes, it is most important to note what the refutation of speculative metaphysics means for the greater philosophical tradition, namely, that the classical ground for any epistemology has been thrown into the air. It may be more apt to use the word gnoseology rather than epistemology, as gnoseology better captures the metaphysical dimension of the grounding of transcendent knowledge. Truth is no longer an ontological form, but a contingent category, intended to give context to an unordered world. In the realm of fiction, we see a turn

¹ "Das Wort »Gott ist tot« bedeutet: die übersinnliche Welt ist ohne wirkende Kraft. Sie spendet kein Leben. Die Metaphysik, d. h. für Nietzsche die abendländliche Philosophie als Platonismus verstanden, ist zu Ende. Nietzsche versteht seine eigene Philosophie als die Gegenbewegung gegen die Metaphysik, d. h. für ihn gegen den Platonismus." (*Holzwege* 217)

² "Die transzendente Theologie ist entweder diejenige, welche das Dasein des Urwesens von einer Erfahrung überhaupt (ohne über die Welt, wozu sie gehört, etwas näher zu bestimmen,) abzuleiten gedenkt, und heißt *Kosmotheologie*, oder glaubt durch bloße Begriffe, ohne Beihülfe der mindesten Erfahrung, sein Dasein zu erkennen, und wird *Ontotheologie* genannt." (*KRV* A632/B660)

toward the fantastic, the detective story, and paranoia, each of which posit an insufficient metaphysics.

One could therefore reasonably reinterpret Nietzsche's phrase "God is dead" as "metaphysics is dead," as Heidegger intimates. Yet this end of metaphysics (*Vollendung der Metaphysik*) of which Heidegger will oft reference when speaking of Nietzsche³ is not so much an overcoming (*Überwindung*) of metaphysics as it is a deformation or distortion (*Verwindung*) of metaphysics, as Gianni Vattimo is keen to point out.⁴ Historically speaking, this end of metaphysics may be perceived as the completion of the project begun by Kant. Kant inaugurated the end of metaphysics by arguing against the possibility of a speculative metaphysics, that is to say a metaphysics dealing with the knowledge or investigation of the natural world. Yet he left room for a metaphysics of morals in the domain of practical philosophy. From this perspective Nietzsche may be seen as ending the metaphysics of practical philosophy and thereby leaving no place for metaphysical reflection.

Broadly speaking, Heidegger's reading of Kant's first *Critique* is metaphysical in that it questions whether the true purpose of the *Critique* is establishing the conditions of possibility of empirical knowledge or whether its purpose is the inquiry into the ultimate condition of

³ For instance in "Nietzsches Wort »Gott ist tot«" Heidegger writes: "So wie in Nietzsches Metaphysik der Wertgedanke fundamentaler ist als der Grundgedanke der Gewißheit in der Metaphysik bei Descartes, insofern die Gewißheit als das Rechte nur gelten kann, wenn sie als der oberste Wert gilt, so erweist sich im Zeitalter der Vollendung der abendländischen Metaphysik bei Nietzsche die einsichtige Selbstgewißheit der Subjektivität als die Rechtfertigung des Willens zur Macht gemäß der Gerechtigkeit, die im Sein des Seienden waltet." (*Holzwege* 246)

⁴ "The lexical meaning of the word in German contains, on the other hand, two additional dimensions: that of convalescence ('eine Krankheit verwinden' means to cure or heal, to recover from an illness) and that of distortion (tied secondarily to *winden*, to wind or twist) and 'deviating alteration,' one of the meanings of the prefix *ver-*. 'Resignation' is also tied to the connotation of convalescence; one overcomes, recovers from, gets over (*verwindet*) not only an illness but also a loss or a defeat, sorrow or pain. If we return with these points in mind to the terms *Verwindung* and *Ge-Stell*, or to the term 'metaphysics' (whose final form is *Ge-Stell*), we find the possibility of a change that could lead us toward a more authentic *Ereignis*. The possibility of an event that is outside or beyond metaphysics is tied to its *Verwindung*. In other words, metaphysics is not something 'which one can brush aside like an opinion. Nor can one leave it behind oneself as though it were a doctrine that no one believes in anymore.' It is something one retains in oneself, like the traces of an illness or a sorrow to which one is resigned." ("Verwindung" 12)

possibility of metaphysics. Heidegger, of course, takes the latter position. Karin de Boer and Stephen Howard expound upon the influences leading up to this interpretation in their essay “A Ground Completely Overgrown: Heidegger, Kant, and the Problem of Metaphysics,” in which it is argued that Heidegger’s reading of Kant claims that the ultimate purpose is “the question concerning the ultimate ground for of any a priori objectification” (Boer and Howard 372).⁵

A different path into ontology after Kant is proposed by Nicolai Hartmann. Hartmann argues that the Kantian categories may only be derived from an analysis of principles (*Analytik der Grundsätze*), and that the table of judgements is derived from this. In other words, one must first have knowledge of the object insofar as it is empirically disclosed in order to then derive the pure concepts of understanding. This is not necessarily a refutation of Kantian transcendental idealism, but it does posit a preexisting knowledge of the world of objects. In other words, a transcendental idealism presupposes an ontological structure to the world of objects. Even if it remains unclear what these ontological categories may be (perhaps they are only disclosed to us indirectly as traces), they nevertheless form the basis from which cognitive categories are later derived.⁶ This theory is developed to a much greater extent in Hartmann’s book *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, in which Hartmann endeavors to demonstrate how the core metaphysical question of knowledge rests in ontology, at which we arrive through a multifaceted

⁵ “In line with Kant’s notion of a natural metaphysics carried out by the human mind as such, Heidegger holds that any metaphysics is grounded in, or rests on, the preliminary understanding of the being of beings, which he equates with ‘ontological knowledge in the broadest sense.’ Thus, on Heidegger’s account, a judgment such as ‘the sun causes the stone to become warm’ relies on an a priori principle—the principle according to which all objects of experience are connected according to cause and effect—that itself is primarily a piece of ontological knowledge: it reveals something about the very constitution of beings as such, and this ‘transcendental truth’ has a significance that neo-Kantian theories of knowledge fail to grasp.” (Boer and Howard 372)

⁶ “Aus alledem ist nun eine grundsätzliche Lehre zu ziehen: soweit wir überhaupt zu einem Wissen um Kategorien kommen, gewinnen wir dieses nicht auf apriorischem Wege, auch nicht durch innere Bewußtmachung von Verstandesprinzipien, sondern durch Analyse der Gegenstände, soweit sie uns jeweilig erfaßbar sind. Auf diesem Wege aber erfassen wir in erster Linie stets nur Seinskategorien, nicht aber die Erkenntniskategorien als solche. Die letzteren werden vielmehr erst von den erfaßten Seinskategorien aus rückwärts (durch Reflexion auf die Erkenntnisfunktion) erschlossen“ (*Neue Wege* 17)

aporia. Though not my principal reference, Hartmann has the advantage over Heidegger in that he approaches the question of metaphysics more directly from a Kantian or Neo-Kantian background. Heidegger's interpretation of Kant, despite the book *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, seems to be almost entirely mediated by Husserl's phenomenology. Husserl's phenomenology, in turn, despite appropriating many Kantian terms such as "transcendence" and "immanence," does so in such a way that departs quite acutely from their original use in Kant. Nevertheless, all respond in their own way to a supposed crisis at the ground of philosophizing; a certain fundamental aporia and subsequent fragmentation of knowledge.

In the wake of this fragmentation of knowledge, a myriad of different philosophical paths arose, all with the intention of theories of knowledge and truth-production in the wake of the death of metaphysics. An excellent introduction to this turning-point may be found in Jürgen Habermas's book *Nachmetaphysisches Denken*, in which he identifies and analyzes four different philosophical paths emerging from this turning-point: Post-analytics, Post-structuralism, Post-Marxism, and Phenomenology. Of these four Phenomenology seems to hold a special place, as it is the only tradition that forgoes the prefix "post." Habermas's division of post-metaphysical thought (which is for all intents and purposes synonymous with post-Kantian thought) is by no means definitive, yet it is helpful in orienting the present inquiry, which shall predominantly follow the path of phenomenology and, more specifically, hermeneutics as a subset of phenomenology.

No book is born of a vacuum, and it is worth emphasizing that the rebirth of metaphysics is itself hardly a novelty. Many of the books that have informed my thought on the matter have been taken from the German tradition.⁷

⁷ "Schädelbach erinnert an einige Buchtitel: 1907 verkündet Karl Stumpf *Die Wiedergeburt der Philosophie*. D.H. Kerler spricht 1921 von der *Auferstandenen Metaphysik*, Peter Wurst 1925 von der *Auferstehung der Metaphysik*.

This tradition, principally through Hans-Georg Gadamer, has found fertile grounds in Italy in the second half of the twentieth century, and is taken up by such philosophers as Graziano Ripanti, Gianni Vattimo, Franco Volpi, Federico Vercellone, Maurizio Ferraris, and Tonino Griffero.⁸ Even among this short list of philosophers there is too much scope in thought to attempt to summarize even the broadest conclusions of their work, yet we might afford to venture a central question that can be found in these sundry works, namely: How does hermeneutics allow for the rebirth of ontological and metaphysical questions? Moreover, one might ask: What are the existential consequences of the posing of such questions? Books such as that of Giancarlo Penati, *Alienazione e verità: Husserl, Hartmann, Heidegger e l'ontologia come liberazione* (1972) might be of interest. An important point to note is that even though the modern hermeneutics tradition I am following stems from the existential phenomenology of the aforementioned names such as Husserl, Hartman, Fink, and Heidegger, it is always like a true hermeneutic circle looking backwards, asking the question of how investigations in hermeneutics

Ein »Wiedererwachen der Metaphysik« stellt Nicolai Hartmann mit seiner 1935 erscheinenden *Grundlegung der Ontologie* in Aussicht.“ (Habermas 268-269)

⁸ This is not to mention that the hermeneutics of Gadamer is a synthesis of Heidegger's existential phenomenology and the hermeneutic tradition of German romanticism, culminating in Friedrich Schleiermacher. Maurizio Ferraris summarizes here the turning-point that separates Schleiermacher from his influences and contemporaries, such as Friedrich August Wolf and Georg Anton Friedrich Ast:

“Per tutta l'ermeneutica precedente, la comprensione era il punto de partenza dell'interpretazione, mentre il fraintendimento appariva come un incidente da evitare con tecniche acconce. Per Schleiermacher, la prospettiva va capovolta: il punto di partenza è il fraintendimento, l'estraneità, l'oscurità del testo e dell'interlocutore (che nell'ermeneutica schleiermacheriana, come si è detto, prende il posto della distanza temporale); muovendo da questa estraneità, l'interpretazione deve stabilire la comprensione superando l'iniziale fraintendimento che separa esseri diversi.” (Ferraris 137)

Ferraris also then continues to describe a key development that differentiates Gadamer from Schleiermacher, namely, that for Schleiermacher, hermeneutics is not concerned with the question of truth, merely reconstructing understanding:

“Tuttavia, come ha rilevato Gadamer, lo statuto epistemologico dell'ermeneutica secondo Schleiermacher non è ancora pensato come propriamente filosofico. L'interpretazione ha piuttosto lo *status* dell'arte nella *Critica del giudizio* di Kant, e non della filosofia. Vale a dire che la comprensione coglie il senso, ma non verifica la verità della cosa (il che resta compito della dialettica filosofica: la dialettica si occupa dei contenuti e formula giudizi di realtà; l'ermeneutica interpreta le forme e i significati senza chiedersi se siano veri o no. E si capisce facilmente perché, se si tien conto del concetto schleiermacheriano dell'interpretare: che è 'la ripetizione di un atto del discorrere, la ricostruzione di una costruzione'.” (Ferraris 139)

might lead to the reemergence of the very matters of metaphysics, ontology, and phenomenology from which it was born.

2. Philosophical Background of the Fantastic

Too much has been written about Jorge Luis Borges. Indeed, so much has been written that we now find ourselves mired in our own library of Babel, with each of its hexagonal rooms another footnote to the work of the mysterious writer that left no code to decipher the riddle he left behind. A true disciple of Schopenhauer, it is indeed the riddle of existence itself that Borges wishes to articulate, not the answer to it. In his *Autobiographical Essay* he confirms this: “At some point in Switzerland, I began reading Schopenhauer. Today, were I to choose a single philosopher, I would choose him. If the riddle of the universe could be stated in words, I think these words would be in his writings” (*Autobiographical Essay* 216-217). This riddle presupposes a particular ontology, which itself can only be articulated after the riddle is posed. After Heidegger, it is no longer ontology that produces our language, but rather our language that presupposes ontological framework.

As such, the principal task of this investigation is to arrive at philosophical reflection by means of Borges’s work. The challenge is clear. Since so many have written about Borges and philosophy, it is difficult to trace an argument that falls neither into redundancy nor esotericism. Additionally, the structure of any work that deals with philosophy inheres difficulty, as often it happens that concepts introduced at the beginning of a thesis are only made clear when held simultaneously with concepts introduced towards the end. This is articulated well in “El Aleph:” “lo que vieron mis ojos fue simultáneo: lo que transcribiré, sucesivo, porque el lenguaje lo es. Algo, sin embargo, recogeré” (*OC* 1: 1068).

In the essay “Sobre ‘The Purple Land’,” Borges recalls that, “mejorando hasta la perfección una frase divulgada por Boswell, Hudson refiere que muchas veces en la vida emprendió el estudio de la metafísica, pero que siempre lo interrumpió la felicidad” (*OC* 2: 102). Commenting on this sentence, Zulma Mateos muses that “Borges, evidentemente, no tuvo la misma suerte” (78). This alone justifies investigations into the metaphysics of Borges. Oft quoted is also the phrase from “Tlön,” that “la metafísica es una rama de la literatura fantástica” (*OC* 1: 836). Sometimes, however, this is misinterpreted as assuming that Borges understood metaphysics, and also philosophy, as valuable only insofar as it is capable of producing compelling fiction. Yet the expanded quote reveals something more: “Los metafísicos de Tlön no buscan la verdad ni siquiera la verosimilitud: buscan el asombro. Juzgan que la metafísica es una rama de la literatura fantástica. Saben que un sistema no es otra cosa que la subordinación de todos los aspectos del universo a uno cualquiera de ellos” (*OC* 1: 836) In this expanded context it becomes clear that Borges’s view of metaphysics, far from restricting it to a branch of fantastic literature, is profoundly aligned with Schopenhauer’s view of metaphysics, particularly in its emphasis on “asombro,” wonder or *Verwunderung*. Schopenhauer expounds a similar thesis in his essay of the second volume of *Will and Representation*, “On Man’s Need of Metaphysics.”

Still, even if metaphysics is merely a branch of fantastic literature, its origins date back to the origins of language and it has itself many branches and subdivision to explore. One such is the problem of time. David E. Johnson tackles this problem, saying that “Borges underscores the importance of the problem of time and identity by repeatedly insisting that time is the fundamental problem of metaphysics” (*Kant’s Dog* 25). As such he elaborates upon Kant’s theory of transcendental apperception as it relates to Funes, ultimately reaching the conclusion

that Borges problematizes the formal unity of consciousness of transcendental apperception. The following passage demonstrates this:

Insofar as time can be located neither inside nor outside, and thus insofar as there can be no place beyond time from which to determine time, there is no opposition between the inside and the outside, no fundamental distinction, say, between the form of inner sense (time) and the form of outer sense (space)... Because the interior, in closing itself off from the exterior, necessarily exposes itself to the outside and thus disrupts and displaces itself, there is no possibility for the unification of time's constitutive ecstasy. (*Kant's Dog* 118)

Time is of course central to the question of metaphysics. And as we shall see Borges, against Kant, prioritizes time even over space as the fundamental *Form der Anschauung*, writing in “La penúltima versión de la realidad:” “vuelvo a la consideración metafísica. El espacio es un incidente en el tiempo y no una forma universal de intuición, como impuso Kant” (*OC* 1: 379).

A related argument about time in Borges can be found in Silvia Molloy's *Signs of Borges*, in which she differentiates between “chronometric Funes” and “Funes el memorioso” (74-75). The difference between these two is a matter of their existence within time.

Chronometric Funes, because he is capable of forgetting, requires a metaphysics of time in order to perceive the world causally and also in order to perceive himself as a continuous consciousness within it (transcendental apperception). Funes el memorioso, by virtue of his perfect memory, exists outside of this metaphysics of time. What Schopenhauer's metaphysics may be able to add to this argument is that “Funes el memorioso” and “chronometric Funes” both disprove any metaphysics of time *and* prove that man necessarily perceives the world through a metaphysics of time, respectively. Metaphysics may not be determinate, but man

perceives the world *as if* (*Als Ob*) it were, to borrow the phrase from Hans Vaihinger, another of Borges's philosophical points of reference.

This dichotomy between “chronometric Funes” and “Funes el memorioso” is taken up in a different way by Katherine Hayles who analyzes the differentiation between continuous time and serial time in “Nueva refutación del tiempo.” The two metaphysical frames of reference are, naturally, Schopenhauer and Zeno, but here they are opposed to one another. Schopenhauer, presumably because of the Kantian influences in his understanding of causality, opts for a continuous causality, in which time is united into a totality by the mind. Opposed to this is Zeno, who interprets times as always discrete serial points. Borges inevitably finds himself caught between these two metaphysics, and his response is not to arbitrate, but rather to exploit these tensions. While for many (Cordua, Balderston, Gingerich, etc) this exploitation is done for fictive poeisis, Johnson's view that there is genuine philosophical potential in this exploitation hits closer to the mark. In the confrontation of these two systems of metaphysics, we see take stage a philosophical battle similar to the one Kant staged in his antinomies. The point there, as in Borges, was never to establish the unassailable truth of one metaphysical system (i.e. that the world does/does not have a beginning in space and time; things do/do not have their ontology grounded in atomism; the world is causal/spontaneous; being is/is not necessary). The purpose is instead to explore the philosophical and epistemological consequences if it should turn out that all metaphysics contradicts itself. That the Kantian antinomies are rich in philosophical weight despite not asserting metaphysical truth—indeed precisely because they do not assert it, or more accurately and radically, that by in asserting a truth of speculative metaphysics, they show that entire notion of metaphysical truth may require a sort of transvaluation—, this is exactly the same way in which Borges can be brought into philosophical debates. It is not the particular

philosophical argument that Borges adopts that ought to be analyzed, but rather the presupposition that underpin it—the underlying reasons why it is possible (or desired) to make such an argument in the first place.

Borges's metaphysical background is not only occupied by German pessimists, as indicated by his interest in Hudson. Yet the largest figure of the Argentine tradition of metaphysics looming over him is without a doubt Macedonio Fernández. He is the main subject of the early essay "La nadería de la personalidad," and his influence can be felt across the entire corpus of work. Of particular note is the short piece in *El Hacedor*, "Diálogo sobre un diálogo," in which the subject of death is brought up, with Macedonio proposing that it is the most insignificant event to happen in the course of the life of man. To resolve this Borges proposes that they commit suicide, and the final line is a reflection that the narrator cannot remember whether in the end they committed suicide or not. The metaphysics that underlies Macedonio's indifference to suicide is one that supposes the world is contingent upon a nothingness. One of the metaphysical tensions in Macedonio that carries through to Borges is that of the universal and particular, as discussed by Mónica Bueno (14-15). It is one of those paradoxes that is generally only resolved by the negation of both.

Julio Prieto also writes about the philosophical influences and implications of the Macedonio-Borges relationship. Commenting on the aforementioned excerpt from "Tlön," he writes that "el gesto de devaluar la metafísica y subordinarla a la literatura invierte con exactitud el hecho de que la literatura fantástica de Borges es fácilmente concebible como una ramificación de la metafísica de Macedonio" (Prieto 198). In this way Prieto suggests that there is something dialogic and even perhaps dialectic about the relationship between metaphysics and fantastic literature, linking this tradition to philosophers from Plato to Sartre. What seems to be

most important is that for the two Argentines, metaphysics is never regarded as the cause of the world of appearances, and yet it is always present in how the world is processed. In their writings is contained the paradoxical awareness of the impossibility of any and all metaphysics, yet simultaneously the awareness that it is impossible to perceive the world in a manner that is not ineluctably filtered through the matrix of metaphysical presupposition. Despite the assertion by Cordua that “el estudio de la obra de Borges confirma que allí no se trata de filosofía” (*Luces Oblicuas* 118), a point of view shared by Balderston but rejected by Johnson, the text itself is only made possible through its engagement with metaphysics.

Like Prieto, Floyd Merrell finds a way to avoid the trap of either dismissing the philosophy behind the work or of attempting to subordinate it to fiction. When explaining that pesky passage from “Tlön,” he writes that

The inhabitants of Tlön are absolute idealists in the Berkleian sense. ‘Existence’ begins with the postulate that the universe has no materiality and is nothing more than a projection of the subjective mind. Hence there are no nouns in the Tlönians’ language, only verbs and adjectives. Since reality is wholly mental, there can be no legitimate science except psychology... From this it might even be inferred that there are no ‘pseudosciences’ in Tlön, but such an inference would be erroneous, for ‘pseudosciences’ and metaphysical doctrines abound. That is to say, all hypothetical ‘realities’ necessarily ‘exist’ in simultaneity; they are conceived as a sum total of self-falsifying, *mutually cancellatory* affirmations and negations. It is judged, consequently, that metaphysics is a branch of fantastic literature; this must be so because the Tlönians have discovered that each system is no more than a reduction of all aspects of the universe to a handful of aspects. (Merrell 26)

Merrell avoids this trap of claiming Borges would subordinate metaphysics to fiction by exploring how the statement itself that metaphysics is a branch of fantastic literature emerges only out of an intimate understanding of how metaphysics operates, particularly in the context of Berkeley. Even here we see shades of Kantian antinomies, especially in understanding these hypothetical realities as mutually cancelling out. Equating metaphysics with such mutually cancelling out fictions is not a dismissal or subordination of metaphysics. It acknowledges that in order to evolve epistemologically, we must move beyond metaphysics, but also that we are incapable of moving beyond metaphysics. This paradox is at the heart of the Borgesian text and is itself a metaphysical theory worthy of philosophical inquiry. With this in mind it should also come as no surprise that *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* is referenced in “Tlön,” as Vaihinger’s philosophy is in many ways a precursor to this theory, especially considering how deeply he draws from Schopenhauer. According to Vaihinger, we perceive the world through necessary fictions, always *as if* (*als ob*) they describe reality, even all the while knowing that they do not.

This metaphysical proclivity is undoubtedly influenced by philosophical idealism. Hans Vaihinger terms his philosopher “Positivist Idealism,” or also “Idealistic Positivism;” Schopenhauer departs from Kant’s transcendental idealism. As noted, Merrell references Berkeley as central to Borges’s thought. Even though it is proper to classify Borges as an idealist in this regard, he will at times take the contrary position. Carlos Ulises Moulines explains how, although Borges’s metaphysics of time is drawn from Schopenhauer (and through Schopenhauer, Calderón de la Barca), he will also take up the mantle of a radical empiricist in order to deny the world of ideas, showing that both positions negate one another, resulting in antinomy and aporia (182-187). Whether or not one can say with certainty that these positions must necessarily negate one another, or that in their mutual negation the end result is necessarily antinomy and aporia, is

difficult to say. What can be said, however, is that Borges writes *as if* (als ob) this were the case. It is his point of departure and point of terminus, because once it is taken for granted that the world ends in aporia, no matter the path one takes, the end always leads back to the beginning. But in here is something interesting: what are the pragmatic causes of setting off from this point, and what are its effects? The world may abound with metaphysical doctrines, but what if they are all just different articulations of this same impasse?

Not surprisingly, Ivan Almeida catalogues the use of the word “entonación” when explaining the influence of Schopenhauer on Borges, and vice versa, of Borges on Schopenhauer (“Borges a Schopenhauer 109). One such use of “entonación” comes in “La esfera de Pascal,” in which Borges risks the phrase “Quizá la historia universal es la historia de la diversa entonación de algunas metáforas” (OC 2: 17). At first glance it would seem that there is suggested a variety of intonations; a polysemous in its being and interpretation. But upon closer look this polysemy is undercut by the notion that there are only but a few metaphors that are articulated. The polysemy that we perceive in the world is a false polysemy; really it masks the fact that we subscribe to a more fundamental, concealed metaphor or worldview.

Almeida suggests reading Schopenhauer through Borges, just as Borges suggests reading *El Quijote* through William James. Important for us, he points out the ways in which Borges diverges from Schopenhauer while not merely asserting that this is due to a misreading of the German. Indeed, even if some of Borges’s divergences are due to misreading or misinterpreting, the philosophical consequences that follow are still worthy of discussion. It is my claim that only through such mutual readings and misreading can we uncover or disclose the concealed worldview. This worldview belongs not to any one particular, but exists between them, like some apeiron out of which their writings are forged. As such, it is hard to pin down the definite

qualities of this fundamental worldview, but it may be possible to signal a few quintessential aspects. The first has already been stated: aporia as *arche* and *telos*. A second, I will venture, is pessimism. The two lead into and flow from one another, like the Ouroboros. Another image could be the amphisbaena, taken from “There Are More Things.”

Alfonso de Toro (“Borges/Derrida/Foucault”) discusses the role of Borges regarding twentieth century metaphysics. His claim is that one of the defining aspects of the twentieth century is its lack of particular metaphysics, as since Plato the role of metaphysics has been to establish an Arche, Eschaton, or Telos. This is resoundingly absent from the current approach to metaphysics. Indeed, it would seem patently ridiculous if one tried to argue for metaphysics in this way. It would seem entirely anachronistic and doomed to fail. De Toro holds that the radical uncertainty towards these metaphysical concepts is a defining feature of postmodernity, and indeed much of his thesis can be felt to be influenced by Vattimo, who writes that the history of western thought is the gradual weakening of metaphysics. The palimpsest, the *Hrönir*, are all incarnations of this thought that evades designating a metaphysical origin.

This problem of positing a beginning, or Arche, through metaphysics leads nicely into the role of pessimism in Borges, and it is here that I wish to add to Alfonso de Toro. The specific connection I see to pessimism is the fundamental idea that the world is contingent upon some unknown origin or ontology, whose very unknowability colors life in a negative shade. In this way, pessimism is eminently compatible with the metaphysics of the twentieth century that Alfonso de Toro outlines. The world’s contingency presupposes the unknowability of this origin, and thus the groundwork for the futility of life is laid. This has also laid the groundwork, I would venture, for the futility of what de Toro designates as postmodern philosophy, as the validity or

correctness of this philosophy, which I do not at the present moment question, is not in the least contradicted by its impotence.

3. Subject/Object

Another important contribution of Schopenhauer is the obfuscation of the subject/object dichotomy that is typical in Borges (Almeida 115-116). Who is the dreamer and who is the one being dreamt? Who is the writer and who is the one being written? Who perceives the world and who is a product of that perception? One of Schopenhauer's primary efforts in *Will and Representation* is to overcome the dichotomy between subject and object, a dichotomy as old as philosophy itself but particularly representative of post-Cartesian philosophy. The reason Kant was unable to overcome this dichotomy, Schopenhauer would argue, is because he did not conceive of both subject and object as being contingent manifestations of the Will. The *Ding-an-sich*, which for Kant is inaccessible, is for Schopenhauer the Will. As we are products of this Will, so too are we united with the object of our representation. One can best think of it like the dreamer in "Las ruinas circulares:" he believes the world he dreams up is the objective world, perceived by him, the subject. However, at the end it is revealed that he too was being dreamt. This means that both the dreamer (the subject) and his dreamt-up world (the object) really form two parts of a unified whole, united by the will of the meta-dreamer (the Will). Charles Li puts it this way: "The dreamed man is identical to a real man in every way, except in being impervious to fire. When, at the end of the story, the ruins are engulfed in flames, the dreamer is not burnt, and he realizes that 'él también era una apariencia, que otro estaba soñándolo', just as Schopenhauer's narrator realizes that the perceiving subject is but a phenomenon" (118). This is of course an over-simplification of Schopenhauer's theory of the Will, but still one can see that it

is a speculative theory by its very nature (i.e. involving speculative metaphysics). There is elegance to this speculation, no doubt, but this elegance does not make it immune to philosophical criticism. Yet somewhere in between Schopenhauer's speculation and Borges's prose lies a plausible interpretation. Specifically, by expanding on what Almeida signals about the Schopenhauerian subject-object dichotomy (118-120), it becomes possible to suggest a plausible account metaphysics that operates subterranean in the texts of both Borges and Schopenhauer, even if this most plausible account is not wholly orthodox to either author. As is so often the case, the most productive reading of two authors comes from misreading, a *deslecutra*; in such a misreading, new philosophical theories are suggested that edit away some previous inconsistencies, or, at the very least, disclose the origin of those inconsistencies.

In a different way, Mireya Camurati includes Schopenhauer in the metaphysical genealogy of Borges. She traces Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the animal in "Historia de la eternidad" and "Nueva refutación del tiempo" by means of Schopenhauer's cat. Schopenhauer's cat is derived from a passage in *The World as Will and Representation* in which Schopenhauer muses that the cat playing in his patio is in effect the same cat that traversed the earth centuries ago. His point, Camurati notes, is that the animal is thought of as having no consciousness of death, and thus enjoys indestructibility and immortality (Camurati 227). Johnson also makes mention of this cat as a subsection of *Kant's Dog*. His analysis compares the animal, which lives without a presence, to Funes, who likewise exists in the same interstitial realm between life and death (*Kant's Dog* 121). One may additionally suggest a Heideggerian thesis, that death is the horizon of being, and that the animal does not pertain to the realm of Dasein because it does not exist with the same consciousness of death. Whether or not this consciousness is truly particular to man is another matter. Derrida suggests that it might not be, and it is improper to refer to the

animal in the singular, but that is a different matter of discussion. What is relevant is the role that the discussion of the animal plays in the explication of Schopenhauer's metaphysical system, at the center of which we are beginning to see is the concept of death. Shlomy Maulem hits this point home:

Thus it is important to elucidate the link between death and such an abstract metaphysical feeling. Schopenhauer deals with this question in his essay "On Man's Need of Metaphysics." Here he claims that it is the awareness of death that leads man to the metaphysical stance: "And its wonder is the more series, as here for the first time it stands consciously face to face with death, and besides the finiteness of all existence, the vanity and fruitlessness of all effort force themselves on it more or less." ("Borges and Schopenhauer" 131)

But there is an additional importance to the metaphysics of Schopenhauer's cat. Namely, that it is the same cat as all previous cats because the idea of the cat is an idealist perception that is projected onto the particular. Thus it is impossible, metaphysically, for this cat to be distinct from previous incarnations; man beholds it as just the same ideal species *cat*.⁹

4. The Role of Language

Whilst Shlomy Mualem does hit on the importance of Schopenhauer's essay "On Man's Need of Metaphysics," particularly in its importance to the Heideggerian thesis that death is the horizon of being, he either misses or does not have time to develop two important addendums. These two things that he does not mention are 1) reading Schopenhauer's essay in the context of

⁹ This problem, it might be noted, is no stranger to philosophers. One reasonable response can be found in Husserl's ontology, which combines idealized species with "moments" in which the idealized species is instantiated in a substrate, thus allowing for a reconciliation of some aspects of Platonism and Aristotelianism.

Borges's story "Undr," and 2) analyzing the relation between language and the sense of wonder that Schopenhauer argues produces an ineluctable need for metaphysics.

Again, I would argue that the most productive way of reading Schopenhauer with Borges is by using Borges to articulate a coherent interpretation of Schopenhauer's philosophy, ironing out some contradictions when necessary. In this process, one cannot overlook the story "Undr," as it presents many of Schopenhauer's metaphysical considerations. The first thing to stand out is the title. The word *Undr* is almost certainly a direct reference to *Verwunderung*. Etymologically *Undr* shares its roots with the English *Wonder*, and the German *Wunder*. *Wunder*, in turn is the root of *Verwunderung*, the philosophical emotion that Schopenhauer claims leads to man's need of metaphysics. Where Borges diverges from Schopenhauer, however, brings us to the second point, the presence of language. In "Undr" it is not only death that triggers the sensation of wonder, but language itself. By understanding this relation, I think it is possible to tie in Heidegger and Derrida in exploring how language itself discloses the imminence of death through wonder or *Verwunderung*, and how metaphysics is contingent upon this.

The scholarship on Borges and the role of language is vast, but to limit its scope I would like to focus on his relationship to one philosopher in particular: Fritz Mauthner. Without a doubt Silvia Dapía is the most valuable voice regarding the philosophy of Mauthner in Borges. One of Dapía's most important contributions for this investigation is that she successfully puts Borges into dialogue with the German tradition of the critique of language through Mauthner. By way of this tradition of the critique of language, she also (re)introduces Borges into the discussion of the German tradition of metaphysics. She does this by first identifying the philosophical tradition that Mauthner draws upon, listing the medieval nominalists, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Johann Gottfried von Herder, Johann Georg Hamann, Giambattista Vico, and Friedrich Heinrich

Jacobi (“Metaphor of Translation” 25-26). So after sketching this philosophical tradition, Dapía continues:

Mauthner cites Jacobi’s characterization of the history of philosophy as a Greek drama in which reason and language play the role of twins (*Menächmen*) (*Beiträge* 1: 335); even though in some people’s eyes Kant sees the end of this drama, Jacobi points out that one thing “still missing was a critique of language that, as a metacritique of reason, would allow us to become of one mind about metaphysics (Mauthner, *Beiträge* 1: 336). Indeed, although Mauthner is greatly influenced by Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, he believes that Kant falls into the error common to all philosophical inquiry: Kant, in Mauthner’s view, fails to question the very premises on which his speculations are based because he does not analyze language itself. (“Metaphor of Translation” 26)

By means of Mauthner, one arrives at a critique of metaphysics through language, and this is a key missing piece of the puzzle in understanding how Borges reworks the Schopenhauerian metaphysics. This leads Mauthner to suggest something about metaphysics that has been hinted at in Schopenhauer, namely, that it is contingent upon reason. Dapía makes note of this, highlighting how Mauthner employs the terms “Zufallssinne” and “Zufallsvernunft” (“Metaphor of Translation” 27). These terms, according to Bedreck (*Metaphors of Knowledge*), are in part indebted to Nietzsche, but it is not a stretch to see how there are also indebted to Schopenhauer, not only because Schopenhauer speaks about the world itself as contingent to something outside of our faculty of reason (Vernunft), but also because this very idea is presumably the same one that arrived at Mauthner by way of Nietzsche. Drawing from Hobbes, he holds that truth is not a category of the extrinsic world, but of language. We might be able to add that this fortifies the link between language and metaphysics. Indeed, metaphysics *is* the truth that is presupposed in

language. Language employs metaphysics to establish truth. For much of the history of western philosophy the etymology of metaphysics has hidden the fact that it is contingent upon language.

In Borges, this contingency of metaphysics upon language is what leads to confusion and aporia, because even though it recognizes the fallacy behind all metaphysics, it cannot escape its need.

Interestingly, the doctrine that claims that we are led to confusion by means of language can be found also in Schopenhauer, whose impact on Mauthner was acknowledged by Mauthner himself (Janik, 123-24). Thus, in a way that reminds us of Mauthner, Schopenhauer contends that we are held captive by linguistic fictions because we ingeniously suppose that “there must be some meaning in words.” (“Metaphor of Translation”35)

Again, we can arrive at that pesky quote from “Tlön,” that metaphysicians of Tlön judged metaphysics to be but a branch of fantastic literature. If this is true, it shows not a subordination but an inevitable emanation. Metaphysical thought is the inevitable outcome of the existence of fiction in the world, and fiction is man’s inevitable response to the unknowability of the world, which is itself predicated on its contingency.

That Borges should have this position ought not to come as a surprise, because it is very similar to the position held by Hans Vaihinger, whom Borges cites in the very same story. “For Vaihinger, only what is perceived is real; however, in order to give presence to things that cannot be perceived otherwise, Vaihinger introduces three types of ideas: dogma, hypothesis, and fiction” (“Metaphor of Translation” 36). The passage in which Vaihinger elaborates this thesis is entitled “The Law of Ideational Shifts,” and although it may not be the most revolutionary or even the most thoroughly argued philosophical thesis, it nevertheless does seem to be practically

useful. His main intent is to trace the evolution of ideas: how fictions become promulgated as dogma and the converse, how dogma may once again become fiction. To begin with he lays out his terms: “On one side we have groups of ideas which are without hesitation regarded as the expression of reality; on the other, ideas as to whose objective validity there is doubt. The former are dogmas, the latter hypotheses” (Vaihinger 125). Hypotheses, he goes on to explain, inhere some amount of doubt. This is disturbing to the psyche, which has the tendency “to transform every hypothesis into a dogma” (125). Fiction is a different stage, differentiated from hypothesis and dogma in that it does not claim to explain objective reality. Nevertheless, it is very common, claims Vaihinger, for fiction to pass into hypothesis and then to dogma, or even directly to dogma. There does not necessarily exist a linear progression that states fiction must pass through hypothesis to become dogma. Any can become the other, so long as the conditions are apposite. “Every historian can give numerous examples where what were at first conscious myths (and such myths are built up psychologically in the same way as fictions) become transformed into historical hypotheses and then into historical dogmas, or the reverse” (128). The direct example given by Vaihinger is the following: “This historical law was enunciated by Zeller in his address on ‘Literary and Historical Criticism.’ Conscious fables and myths first became historical hypotheses, then dogmas, and vice versa. Zeller quotes the legend of the ‘Four hundred and sixty Pforzheim burghers’ as an instructive instance. This was first a fable, then an hypothesis and then a dogma” (128).

Religion is also given as an obvious example of this process, and Vaihinger makes a fascinating argument about the stages of myth (fiction), hypothesis and dogma that traces nicely onto not only “*Tlön*,” but also the metaphysics of modernity in general. He begins by arguing

that in general, religious myth passes straight into dogma. No doubt is permitted regarding the objective validity of the dogma.

On the other hand, during the decline and break-up of a religion all three stages stand out very clearly. At first all religion consists of general dogmas (the dogma has itself perhaps developed from an hypothesis or even from a fiction). Then doubt appears and the idea becomes an hypothesis. As doubt grows stronger, there are some who reject the idea entirely, while others maintain it either as public or private fiction. (Vaihinger 129)

As philosophers sought to prove dogma, rather than merely repeat it *doxologically*, the dogma became hypotheses. It is true that many of the pre-enlightenment philosophers sought to prove their validity, but the fact that they felt that they had to prove them conceded the possibility that they could be doubted. No matter how small this doubt was, it was doubt nevertheless and transformed the dogma into a hypothesis. “We find the same development in Christianity. Its original dogmas became hypothesis for the philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But what were they to men like Kant or Schleiermacher? Merely fictions!” (129-30).

Alejandro Riberi takes up this thread. He explains “Tlön” in the context of Vaihinger’s renewal of Kant. “Although Kant had denied epistemological value to metaphysical notions like the soul as a simple substance, he concluded that they serve as a regulative idea: we must act *as if* the soul were indivisible” (Riberi 210). This poses a problem in epistemology that echoes even to this day. Metaphysics acts as a ground to epistemology but is itself ungrounded. The simple solution to this would be to deny metaphysics altogether and adopt an empirical approach to epistemology. The issue with this, points out Riberi, is that the results gleaned from such an approach to epistemology are prefigured by the metaphysical bias preceding it.

TUOT posits a similar conception: odd and even series of facts make up the real.

Idealism, realism, or any system of thought gives pre-eminence to a certain series, while suppressing others. The world's intelligibility is depended upon these suppressions. If fiction compresses all the series into one account, making different worlds meet, reality becomes extremely dense to the extent that a tiny cone increases its weight unbearably.

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What Riberi is here saying can, I believe, be easily explained if grounded in something that is eminently present all the time: ideology. The general idea is that in a world that abounds in information, in an encyclopedic world, the subject can only perceive so much information at a given time. Therefore, a choice, presumable subconscious, must be made as to what information is going to be assimilated into one's episteme. This choice is not made by some free will, but rather born of biases—biases that filter out certain pieces of information and retain others. Riberi cites "Tlön," but the theme recurs in many of Borges's stories. "La biblioteca de Babel" is an obvious example. In such a library every combination of letters possible is postulated to exist. In this way it is absolute knowledge. The narrator himself admits that there must necessarily be a book that contains the code for deciphering the totality of this information. And yet the reality of the library to those who inhabit it is that it is a complete chaos. It is even mentioned that if the book containing the deciphering code were found, there would be no way of verifying that it was not an exact copy but for one error. There is no objective empirical manner to wade through the sea of information without getting lost. Thus, any order imposed on the information contained within the library is superimposed by the subject; it does not emerge naturally from the information the subject has at his disposal.

The question then becomes: what is the relevance of such theorizing? One possible answer, which will be dealt with at length in later chapters, is ideology. Does not ideology, particularly as conceived of by philosophers like Althusser and Žižek, operate in exactly this way? In a sea of information, it filters out information that contradicts it, and assimilates only that which proves it. In the realms of psychology this is starkly clear as well, as it has been found that the brain has ways of shutting down when receiving information that contradicts one of its beliefs, so that it simply always reaffirms its biases. Likely, this problem is not surmountable on a societal scale. Yet perhaps fiction can assist in understanding the epistemological, metaphysical, and indeed ontological factors at play. It is my belief that if there is any way of confronting these ideological constraints or biases, it is only through sustained ontological inquiry. Regrettably, this is probably only attainable by a very small percentage of society, and so it seems that the dominant global ideology, capitalism, shall maintain its thralldom over the masses.

This larger argument is beyond the scope of this investigation. What I shall focus on is how the Borgesian text engages with these metaphysical problems, and, as mentioned, how this all feeds into his pessimism. Comparisons may be drawn with the philosophy of Gianni Vattimo, however an addendum must be added. The breakdown of Western metaphysics, or *pensiero debole*, reaffirms the pessimist notion that the contingency of the world creates an insurmountable crisis in epistemology. Whether or not this crisis is surmountable in other frames of reference or thought is irrelevant. What concerns me is whether or not it is presented as surmountable in Borges, and consequently if this same insurmountability has infiltrated the thought of those who depart from Borges, both fictively and philosophically.

The question is then: how does Borges understand these fictions of *als ob*? How does he engage with the metaphysical framework (*Gestell*) presupposed in them?

Borges uses language to unveil these fictions. “Mauthner rejects nouns because they encourage us to think that there are things “out there,” and, in his view, there is nothing in our senses identifiable as a sensation of a thing” (“Metaphors of Translation” 43). This leads to the civilization of Tlön lacking nouns (44). Perhaps strangely, Mauthner also seeks to apply the empirical principles of Hume to language (“La presencia de Fritz Mauthner” 193). Silvia Dapía writes: “Efectivamente, si las palabras son articulaciones de nuestras sensaciones, están también sujetas a la confirmación o descrédito de una futura experiencia sensorial” (193). Mauthner goes on to argue that the things that we name with nouns are in effect always changing through time, and that with the passage of time we may find that a noun we once used is now insufficient, just as how the Humean sensory impressions may be undermined by future, contradictory experiences. It is not hard to see how Borges appropriated this idea into the writing of “Tlön,” as it is a civilization which lacks nouns for precisely this reason. By virtue of the fact that nouns do not transcend their circumstance, they become verbs. The word “tree” does no longer describes the Platonic idea of a tree, but rather it describes the sensation of a tree by a particular subject at a particular moment in time. That is to say, it can be say that the word “tree” is really expressing is the action of being presented and perceived as a tree to a particular subject: “tree-ing.” One would also suspect that the language of Tlön would furthermore lack any tenses that imply completion, known to us as preterit or perfect tenses—no “did” or “have done,” but only the imperfect or progressive, “was/is doing;” “hacía,” “está haciendo.”

This lays the groundwork for theorizing about how there is no way to access the empirical world directly; it is always mediated by language, and there is no way to conceive of it

that does not fall back upon language (Echavarría 187). In many ways this is an extension of Schopenhauer's theory of the world and its representation. Yet there are some crucial differences. Firstly, Mauthner is concerned with how the world is represented through language. Secondly, although Mauthner is, like Schopenhauer, disturbed by the dualism of the world of the *Ding-an-sich* and the phenomenological world, he does not try to resolve this dualism by positing the existence of a Will that spawns both the noumenal and phenomenological. He is much closer, in this sense, to Berkeley, or at least to what Berkeley might have been, were he not encumbered by religion. All that exist are the linguistic articulation of sense-impression. Borges takes on Mauthner in "Tlön," explains Dapía, when he describes how the Tlönians "deny the existence of the nine copper coins from the instant they were lost to the moment they were recovered," as, according to Mauthner, "the object is nothing if it is not in me" ("This is not a Universe" 97-98). Accordingly, the very idea of a noun—the tree, the coin, etc.—is metaphysical. Everything known about it is expressed in adjectives, and so the actual thing is something of a metaphysical apperception, if such a term can be employed.

5. Organization

With this as a background, I turn to the organization of this inquiry.

The first chapter of this dissertation will concern pessimism. More specifically, it will concern the ways in which the language Borges uses is imbued with pessimism and how the worlds imagined through Borges's fictions are always contingent upon a pessimistic *Weltanschauung*. Of course, pessimism is not always a singular coherent philosophical doctrine. From Arthur Schopenhauer to Philipp Mainländer to Julius Bahnsen, each philosopher holds a particular worldview. It should seem that in the context of Borges, the answer should obviously

be that he is a disciple of Schopenhauer and therefore his pessimism most closely resembles his. However, this is not necessarily the case. One of the tasks of this chapter will be to analyze Borges's pessimism as a doctrine heavily influenced by—yet nevertheless distinct from—these pessimists. To arrive at this point, an analysis of Borges's language will be introduced. Alchemy will also be discussed in order to determine the metaphysical processes through which the Borgesian lexicon becomes encoded with pessimism, and how it, when reproduced, encodes pessimism into our worldview. In short, it is an analysis of all the ways in which the language of pessimism is encoded into Borges's writings and thought.

The second chapter builds upon this. Using the pessimism established in the preceding chapter as its point of departure, it begins an inquiry into the philosophical implications of this doctrine. Namely, it seeks to interpret the writings of Borges in light of the metaphysics of pessimism or how it produces a metaphysics of pessimism. This means a detailed discussion of how metaphysics operates in the philosophy of those philosophers that influenced Borges, Schopenhauer above all else. Nevertheless, in order to fully understand Schopenhauer's metaphysical influence, it will also be necessary to discuss the wider philosophical context of these precursors, particularly Kant and Nietzsche, in order to understand how the metaphysics in Borges emerges from the transcendental idealism of Kant through to the existentialism of Nietzsche. The key figure mediating these two philosophers is, naturally, Schopenhauer and the key texts to be discussed are "Undr" and "La biblioteca de Babel."

The third chapter expands upon the philosophical investigations of the second chapter but shifts the focus to philosophy which exists in contemporary discussion with the writings of Borges, rather than that which had influenced him. As such, a main focus of the chapter will be a discussion of Heidegger and the move from metaphysics to ontology, or *metaphysica generalis*,

which Heidegger will further reformulate to *onto-theo-logy*. Key texts to be discussed in this chapter are “Utopía de un hombre que está cansado,” through which various Heideggerian terminology will be introduced, along with a continued discussion of “La biblioteca de Babel” and other texts which stand out for a similar vocabulary and show a cohesive worldview which cannot be easily dismissed by fragmenting Borges’s work into disparate texts.

The fourth and last chapter of this dissertation sets its focus on the successors of Borges and of the philosophy that his writings enact. As such the discussion shall begin with a novel analysis of the famous text about Kafka and his precursors, turning the question to what it means to write after Borges. The chapter will then avail itself of an interpretation of two authors writing after Borges: Pablo Katchadjian and Agustín Fernández Mallo. In analyzing these two authors, a reformulated question of precursors and successors shall arise, namely: is it now impossible for an author as event to occur which recontextualizes all preceding texts? Each part of this question will need special attention given to it, such as the nature of an event, in order to fully understand its consequences. A tentative conclusion is the following: the metaphysics of pessimism discussed in the preceding chapters may make such an event impossible and writing after Borges is condemned to a gradual stagnation and atrophy. Any new event would require a revolution in metaphysics, and yet this revolution is precisely that which the philosophy imbued in Borges’s writings prohibits.

Chapter I: The Pessimistic Worldview

1. Alchemy and Oblivion in the Life and Death of the Poet

In a minor essay entitled “Sobre el ‘Vathek’ de William Beckford,” Jorge Luis Borges repeats a biographical joke attributed to Thomas Carlyle:

Una biografía de Miguel Ángel que omitiera toda mención de las obras de Miguel Ángel. Tan compleja es la realidad, tan fragmentaria y tan simplificada la historia, que un observador omnisciente podría redactar un número indefinido, y casi infinito, de biografías de un hombre, que destacan hechos independientes y de las que tendríamos que leer muchas antes de comprender que el protagonista es el mismo... La broma de Carlyle predecía nuestra literatura contemporánea: en 1943 lo paradójico es una biografía de Miguel Ángel que tolere alguna mención de las obras de Miguel Ángel. (*OC* 1: 97)

An individual’s history is so multiform that no one biography can claim to be an accurate representation of it. Rather, the biography focuses in on a particular detail, born of the bias of the author writing it. Does one explain Michelangelo’s life through the framework of his art, or does one use Michelangelo’s life to explain his artwork? The tension brought to light by Carlyle’s joke is that although one might wish to explain the artwork of Michelangelo from the basis of his biographical data, the reality is that Michelangelo’s biographical data is reconstructed only *a posteriori* the perception and interpretation of his artwork. To write a biography of Michelangelo without including any mention of the artwork he produced over the course of his life is as futile as it is ridiculous, because knowledge of his artwork already completely permeates any interpretation a reader of his biography could imagine. Yes, the artwork was produced by the man, and is in this way he is the historical basis for his art, yet when one casts his or her eye toward the biographical data of Michelangelo, he can only be perceived through the lens of his

artwork. Such is to say that while it may be true that the historical basis for the artwork were the experiences, intellect, psychology, etc. of the man, our ability to reconstitute these conditions is entirely mediated by his artwork. By this strange way is the life of the artist interpolated and subsumed by his or her art. If one speaks about biography, then it must always be with the knowledge that the biographical data ought not be interpreted as the grounds for a particular work of art, but itself as a product of that work of art; itself *as* a work of art; itself subject to the same hermeneutics as art.

Nevertheless, biographical data has long held a critical role in philological research, regardless of whether or not those conducting that research have been conscious of it or not. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the question of biography occupies a prominent role in the understanding of Borges, whose writing has always been exemplary in blurring the lines between the author and the fictionalized self that appears in many of his writings. Naturally, any sort of biographical data that one seeks to reconstitute is not without its complexities. Since the philosophical developments of Gadamer in particular, biographical data must be understood as occupying the historical horizon as projected by the interpreting subject; the hermeneutical method by which one approaches biographical data fore-grounds a particular understanding of it. We do not understand the past as it was, but always project into it our own presuppositions. Biography was important in this revelation of Gadamer, as one ought not to forget that many of his most insightful analyses of hermeneutic method were made by reading Dilthey's monographs on Schleiermacher which, even if philosophically oriented, blend inevitably into biography. Derrida also contributes to the philosophy of biography, arguing in his book *Otobiographie* that every biography discloses a thanatography; an inscription also of death. Implicit in this is the idea that the understanding of a life cannot be linear, it is always reflexive, understanding early

moments already in the context of that ineluctable death. Perhaps it is appropriate, then, that in understanding Borges we begin with a scene of his death.

The most remarkable “scene” of Borges’s death was first written down by Adolfo Bioy Casares, and already from an authorial standpoint is layered with complexity, as Bioy Casares was not with Borges when he died. The scene had to first be recounted to him by Jean-Pierre Bernès so that he could later write it down:

Una de las últimas bromas. Bernès mencionó *La moneda de oro*. Borges corrigió: *de hierro*. Bernès se mostró disgustado por su error. Borges le dijo: “No se contraría. Usted hizo lo que la alquimia no pudo”. (*Borges* 1596)

These lines occupy one of the last entries in Bioy Casares’s journals on Borges. An analysis of these short lines provides a solid ingress into the metaphysical and aesthetical concerns of Borges.

First for a metatextual analysis. As noted, the authorial presence in the scene is immediately complicated by the fact that we are already presented with a secondhand narration. Borges may be the author of the last line, but our experience of it is mediated first by Bernès, then by Bioy Casares, and finally by our own presuppositions, which may or may not account for the presence of Bernès and Bioy Casares. Indeed, the psychology of Bioy or Bernès is, in following Gadamer, a historical horizon that is itself project by our own fore-grounding of the text, and synthesizing it with our own interpretation completes the hermeneutic circle.

It is noteworthy that in Bioy’s writings, the last words of Borges are a joke about language. Bernès, through his catachresis, has transmuted *hierro* into *oro*, a transmutation of which Borges immediately takes note. Language, more specifically an error in language, has allowed Bernès to accomplish something that generations of alchemists have tried and failed to

do. For a life devoted towards language and writing, this is the embodiment of poiesis: a creative production; transmutation; transfiguration of the banal (*hierro*) into the sublime (*oro*). Yet it is also melancholic because one cannot avoid the feeling that not only has Bernès achieved something that alchemy never could, but that he has also achieved something that Borges himself strived to achieve but never could.

By calling Borges's book of poetry *La moneda de oro* in place of *La moneda de hierro*, Bernès has done something that is ostensibly quite simple and also central to Borges's corpus of work: he has forgotten the original name of the book. To say that this is impossible for alchemy to do says something about the ontology of the alchemical substance, namely, that an alchemically transmuted substance never loses its referent to its original substance; that it is still, in some way, bound semiotically to that original substance and through this semiotic connection it is bound ontologically. This is even seen in words such as transmute, transform, transmogrify. All of these words may well be used in relation to alchemy, yet the prefix trans discloses that the new substance is still locked in a sign relation with the substance it has ostensibly ceased to be. The transformation of one thing (*hierro*) into another (*oro*) requires that the referent for *hierro* disclose what it is not (*oro*), and then that it become the thing from which it has differentiated itself.

This perspective on alchemy may be supported by Jung's writings on alchemy. Borges refers to Jung's theorization of alchemy. In a footnote to "Kafka y sus precursores" he references the final chapter of *Psychologie und Alchemie* for how we might be confronted by a thing (in this case an animal) and not be able to properly recognize it because our perception conceals what it truly is. Nevertheless, the concealed animal is still present. Any sort of alchemical sign, we may therefore add, presupposes a constant recalling to mind (*anamnesis*) of what is left behind.

This perspective is further fortified by Karen Pinkus. In her book on alchemy, she confirms that the processes that would transmute two substances always supposes the possibility that these two substances can be re-transmuted. That is to say that the resultant substance never ceases to contain traces of the original matter from which it was derived. In any theory of semiotics, this would mean that the alchemical substance would have two referents, for instance both gold and iron. Pinkus appropriately identifies this as ambivalence. It exists in a state of almost quantum uncertainty, in which only one substance may be perceived at a time, but this is only possible insofar as the absence of the missing substance is felt. An electron's velocity may be measured, but this masks its position, and this absence cannot be forgotten. It is much the same with alchemical substances. The perception of one discloses the absence of its other referent.

We know that Borges must have been of a similar mind concerning alchemy when we read "La rosa de Paracelso." This story, although admittedly not one of his more notable fictions, nevertheless reveals that one of the key aspects of alchemy is that the transformed substance always contains traces of anterior forms. The plot is rather simple: a would-be disciple comes to Paracelsus's door one night and asks of him that he reproduce a rose from its ashes as proof of his abilities. To this Paracelsus responds that once a rose has existed, not even fire can erase its existence. Even the ashes contain the traces of what once was. Alchemy presents itself as the doctrine that transmutation is possible, but when one analyzes the metaphysical logic of alchemy, one finds that in fact the opposite is revealed to be true: alchemy is supported by the Eleatic premise that change is impossible.

We may consider the following excerpt from Gadamer in reference to the idea that the mind and remembering functions in a similar way to the alchemist bringing forth that which has always been latent:

Keeping in mind, forgetting, and recalling belong to the historical constitution of man and are themselves part of his history and his *Bildung*. Whoever uses his memory as a mere faculty—and any “technique” of memory is such a use—does not yet possess it as something that is absolutely his own. Memory must be formed; for memory is not memory for anything and everything. One has a memory for some things, and not for others; one wants to preserve one thing in memory and banish another. It is time to rescue the phenomenon of memory from being regarded merely as a psychological faculty and to see it as an essential element of the finite historical being of man. In a way that has long been insufficiently noticed, forgetting is closely related to keeping in mind and remembering; forgetting is not merely an absence and a lack but, as Nietzsche in particular pointed out, a condition of the life of mind. Only by forgetting does the mind have the possibility of total renewal, the capacity to see everything with fresh eyes, so that what is long familiar fuses with the new into a many leveled unity. “Keeping in mind” is ambiguous. As memory (*mneme*), it is connected to remembering (*anamnesis*).

(*TM* 14)

In the context of Bernès, we must distinguish between these two faculties of memory (*mneme*) and recalling to mind (*anamnesis*), as it is not for lack of memory that Bernès misquotes “*La moneda de oro*.” In fact it is quite the opposite. Rather than having recalled a vacuity, a lack, Bernès mis-recalls or misremembers. This misremembering does not happen because there is a lack of memory (*mneme*), but rather it produces memory. It produces the very thing it purports to

“recall.” Our ability to experience memory as the recalling to mind (anamnesis) of historical memory (mneme) is predicated on an all-too-often unnoticed forgetfulness. But then again, how can one make forgetfulness noticed, which by its very nature operates behind the scenes and covers up the traces of its presence?

Alchemy is language imbued with memory. If one translates a word echoes or traces of the original word still remain. Santiago Juan-Navarro suggests that in the context of “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” the world is always already transformed by the alchemical properties of the word (*el verbo*) (Juan-Navarro 76). Yet regardless, my purpose is not to offer an exhaustive interpretation of Borges’s work from the theoretical framework of alchemy, but rather to show how that when alchemy does appear in Borges, its function is almost always linked to how language functions. This is what makes it all the more remarkable when language and alchemy diverge, as in the Bioy Casares quote, because from these divergences can be perceived a linguistic break from the metaphysics of alchemy. So, when Bernès accomplishes something that alchemy never was able to accomplish, one immediately understands that the forgetfulness in language is the ingredient that has allowed it to break with the metaphysics of alchemy which yearns, like all systems of metaphysics, for permanence and eternity.

In the poem “El alquimista,” Borges makes specific reference to the tension between alchemy and forgetfulness; *olvido*. After reflecting on Proteus, Thales of Miletus, and Spinoza, the poem arrives at its last stanza:

Y mientras cree tocar enardecido
 El oro aquel que matará la Muerte,
 Dios, que sabe de alquimia, lo convierte
 En polvo, en nadie, en nada y en olvido. (*OC 2: 477*)

The irony here is that the alchemist, who himself has been trying to learn the secrets of transmutation, is himself transformed at the end of the poem. True, the alchemy that transforms him is not sudden or even supernatural. The process by which God employs alchemy is in fact entirely in line with the natural decomposition of bodies. The reference to Spinoza earlier in the poem emphasizes this, as Spinoza's God is fundamentally pantheistic and would not distinguish supernatural and natural transformation. Additionally, as an aside, the mention of Proteus and Thales emphasizes the aforementioned discussion on how alchemical substances do not entirely cease to contain semiotic reference to their original substance, as Proteus, though he may transform, never fully loses the ability to transform back into previous forms, and Thales, in asserting that all is fundamentally water, would also maintain that it is possible for substance to revert back to this primordial matter. But again, one looks at the irony of this last stanza. The alchemist hopes to use alchemy to conquer Death, but Death is the philosopher's stone used by God that transmutes the alchemist, and this is why the alchemist will forever be unsuccessful: the very thing he seeks to destroy with alchemy *is* the means by which alchemy may be realized.

In this context we return to the lines penned by Adolfo Bioy Casares, here reprinted for convenience:

Una de las últimas bromas. Bernès mencionó *La moneda de oro*. Borges corrigió: *de hierro*. Bernès se mostró disgustado por su error. Borges le dijo: "No se contraría. Usted hizo lo que la alquimia no pudo". (*Borges* 1596)

These last spoken words in Bioy's account serve as a sort of epitaph for Borges, and yet the irony is that if indeed they function as an epitaph, then they fall into contradiction. The epitaph serves to recall to mind, but Borges praises *forgetfulness* (*olvido*). By writing an epitaph for Borges, one denies him *oblivion* (*olvido*).

There is a compelling short text that appears in the *Textos recobrados* entitled “Si le quedaran cinco minutos de vida, ¿qué haría usted?” in which Borges which signals this exact paradox.

¿Qué haría si me quedaran cinco minutos de vida?... Lo que yo trataría de hacer, si tuviese valor, sería olvidarme de todo mi pasado, incluso de mi abuelo y su final de suicida; olvidarme de mí mismo, y observar cómo es el principio de la muerte, cómo la muerte se va apoderando de la vida hasta aniquilarla. Posiblemente, mi experimento resultaría tan vano como cuando, de niño, quería ver el momento en que uno pasa de la vigilia al sueño: siempre que estaba a punto de asistir al milagro, me quedaba dormido.
(*Textos recobrados* 3: 321)

The moment of transformation is made possible by his death, here explicitly linked with *olvido*, and yet it is concomitantly death which prohibits the observation of the moment of its own realization. The moment of death and *Olvido* is an annihilating moment in which something becomes what it is by forgetting what it is not. It is therefore central to the question of being in Borges, as the promise of being is disclosed through the looming presence (or its opposite) of oblivion.

2. Death and the Riddle

In his essay “El primer Wells,” Borges writes “Como Quevedo, como Voltaire, como Goethe, como algún otro más, Wells es menos un literato que una literatura” (*OC* 1: 70). By this he means that the totality of Wells’ literary production is boundless; it is not bound to what he, as a *literato*, would have known or thought. The same can be said of Borges. The purpose of including this biographical data is not, as I have mentioned, to somehow ground the

interpretation of Borges's work in what he would have thought or known, in fact it is exactly the opposite. The biographical data of Borges's life is itself a literature, and Borges's life is grounded in his literature, much like how the construction of the map in "Del rigor en la ciencia" establishes the ground for what we would presuppose to be "the real." Borges's life draws from his literature and is reflexively produced by it. Again, the very fact that this biographical data was encountered through the journals of Bioy reinforces this point that one's life is subsumed by the horizon of literature. In the context of the totality of his literary production, this singular moment at the end of his life is transfigured into the poetic culmination of a life lived for letters. This meaning is not inherent in what was said, and it is certainly possible that neither Borges nor Bernès nor Bioy Casares was ever conscious of what it had the potential to be. This potentiality was added only later, through obsession and extrapolation, through a reader that seeks to subordinate the life of the poet to his poetry. And it is this which raises Bioy Casares's journal entries to the rank of literature.

Bioy Casares's entry is a perfect riddle that becomes decipherable through the study of Borges's life and literature, as it is the study of his life and literature that give any meaning to the riddle at all. The riddle in itself is meaningless; it only acquires meaning through the hermeneutic activity of the subject. Much the same can be gleaned from Borges's appreciation for Schopenhauer's philosophy. He affirms that Schopenhauer's philosophy is the riddle of the universe put into words, not that Schopenhauer's philosophy is the answer to this riddle. Philosophy is just this: the posing of the question of the riddle, not the attempt to answer it. All of the great philosophers since Socrates have recognized this, although it has perhaps not been equally valued across all epochs of history. Why is the way in which the question is posed crucial to our understanding? One may consider *Being and Time* which, more than an inquiry

about the nature of Being, is an inquiry on the way in which the question of Being is formulated and made possible. Flowing from this are the metaphysical (onto-theo-logical) consequences of the posing of the question of Being. Philosophy tries to pinpoint an origin: an *archē*, but this origin is influenced by the questions that are asked that try to uncover it. What, then, are the forces that compel us to ask such-and-such a question as opposed to another? The answer that I would tender is that it is grounded in aesthetic circumstance and bias. This does not mean that aesthetics in itself is the ground of the question of being, and that one can build an ontology on top of aesthetics, but merely that aesthetics occupies a crucial role in the hermeneutic circle as conceived by Heidegger and Gadamer, and that one cannot answer the riddle posed by any writing, in this case that of Borges, if one does not immerse oneself in the aesthetic dimensions that imbue it with meaning.

The aesthetic dimension of Bioy Casares's journals has been built-up, but the network that has been built-up does not stand on ontological grounds. The true value in the building-up of this network comes in the phenomenological encounter with it as an aesthetical event which reveals the ontological nothingness underpinning it. Since Heidegger such a phenomenological approach to aesthetics that leads into aporia has been popularized by Gadamer, Derrida, and Vattimo, to name but a few, but its importance in relation to the work of Borges is crucial to emphasize, as at its heart the gesture of *olvido* within the work of Borges is a gesture towards a nihilating nothingness, *ein nichtendes Nichts*.

3. The Aesthetic Dimension and Contingency of the Borges's Text: Imitation, Citation, and Incarnation

In order for any discussion of aesthetics to be fruitful, it must first be established what the term aesthetics intends. The logical place from which to depart is the philosophy of Alexander Baumgarten, as he is the father of modern aesthetics. Although aesthetics often is understood as the science of the beautiful, this definition is perhaps a disservice to aesthetic theory and its importance. Aesthetics, more than just the science of determining what is beautiful, is principally conceived of by Baumgarten as the relation of the immaterial to the material as mediated by human cognition. For Kant, aesthetics is returned to its Greek origins meaning perception, and the Transcendental Aesthetic concerns the forms of intuition or *Formen der Anschauung*. When speaking about the aesthetic dimensions of the Borgesian text, however, the fundamental question to which I will be responding is how the text itself mediates the material and immaterial through processes of imitation and citation, the interpretive response this prompts in the reader, and thereby the ontological presuppositions of such interpretation.

What concerns us here is the relation the text claims to have with abstract categories such as history, truth, metaphysics. The way in which our understanding of this relation is mediated falls into the realm of aesthetics. As such the primary tools employed by the text to guide our interpretation of it are imitation and citation. An example to make this clear: “Debo a la conjunción de un espejo y de una enciclopedia el descubrimiento de Uqbar” (*OC I*: 831). This line, which will immediately be recognized as the first sentence of “Tlön,” establishes the aesthetical framework of the Borgesian oeuvre: the mirror and the encyclopedia. The mirror reflects the world, and the encyclopedia cites the world. The conjunction of these two things leads to the discovery (or creation) of Uqbar. These two things—the mirror and the encyclopedia—, which represent imitation and citation, respectively, form the aesthetical tapestry to Borges’s oeuvre, which prompt the reader to interpret it in such-and-such a way.

Upfront one feels compelled to clarify that saying that Borges's literature imitates or cites the world is not really that straightforward. His literature gives the impression that it imitates and cites the world, but in doing this underscores the fallacy that is imitation and citation. One of the reasons for this is the temporal structure of imitation and citation. Both of these always presuppose an event temporally prior. A man's reflection appears in the mirror only after he himself stands in front of it. An encyclopedia archives the events of the world, implying that they must already have transpired in order to then be written. In a similar way has writing been considered secondary to speech. A phrase is spoken (or thought, which was considered internal speech), and only later is it written. "Tlön" shatters this temporality and thereby problematizes the aesthetics of imitation and citation, leading to what I would term an aesthetics of incarnation, following Gadamer's analysis of the problem of incarnation and the Verbum.

Alfonso de Toro writes that

La literatura de Borges nos quiere hacer creer que imita al mundo (lo cual ya no hacía Cervantes en el *Don Quijote*) o que imita la literatura (también *Don Quijote*), pero en realidad sólo cita al mundo y a la literatura, produciendo textos virtualmente rizomórficos, que son una deconstrucción sutil de los modelos citados, no una parodia de éstos como era el sistema de deconstrucción en *Don Quijote* lo que conlleva a una transtextualidad. (*Borges infinito* 228)

Imitation is simply that which ostensibly represents the world as it is. As such it was the futile goal of the realist and even naturalist authors of the 19th century. From the exponents of realism such Charles Dickens, Benito Pérez Galdós, to the more radical naturalism of Thomas Hardy, Émile Zola, Emilia Pardo Bazán, and Eduardo López Bago, the project of representing the world "as it is" has been influential in the approach to fiction. The geniality of the works by these

authors, of course, is how the representation of the world as it ostensibly is reveals the incongruence between the plurality of ways in which the world is perceived, debasing the notion that there is an authentic world to which art can conform. Any literary tradition emerging from Schopenhauer will always elicit a world tempered by the will and by subjectivity. The great ontological advantage that imitation can claim is that in presupposing that art imitates the world, it presupposes too that the will that has produced that art is a reflection of something ontologically grounded.

Citation, on the other hand, has roots that go back farther than realism. De Toro situates it primarily in the *Quijote*, due to the fact that it is a book born from the reading of countless books of knight-errantry. One of Don Quijote's most defining characteristics is his ability to quote from any of the meticulously categorized books of knight-errantry that he owns, particularly *Amadís de Gaula*, a book which, it may be remembered, presents its own interesting thesis in its introduction on the categories of literature and the representation of truth in literature. Additionally, the *Quijote* is a book built upon citation because its text is supposedly extracted from the biographical writings of the Moor Cid Hamete Benengeli. According to de Toro, since Borges cites the history of the world just as he cites literature, the two terms are shown to both be mediated by the narration of the author and the internal narration of the reader of the text.

De Toro also uses this schema of citation to expound upon what he terms “*ficción externa*” and “*ficción interna*,” which in turn lead to the rhizomatic construction of the labyrinth in Borges. In part expanding upon the criticism of Ruth Fine, he labels *ficción externa* as that which seeks to establish a pact with the reader. It is the metadiscursive or metanarrative; that which comments upon the presented text and seeks to justify, rectify, or mediate it. *Ficción interna* is, consequentially, the narrative of the internal world and its underlying logic. Simply

put, it is the narrative base of the story, oftentimes fantastic in character. One of the examples that de Toro gives is “Tlön.” Everything that refers to the discovery of Tlön, from the first-person justification at the beginning of the story “Debo a la conjunción de un espejo y de una enciclopedia el descubrimiento de Uqbar...”, to the *posdata* at the end belongs to the realm of external fiction, as it communicates with the reader how the story came to be and what perspectives mediate it. Alternatively, the internal fiction is the narration of the history and culture of Uqbar.

Las ‘ficciones externas’ e ‘internas’ no tienen en los cuentos de Borges la función tradicional de estabilizar el marco narrativo ni de explicar lo narrado a continuación, sino crear un laberinto en el nivel del significante, que enreda al lector y lo obliga a tomar una actitud lectoral alta y radicalmente activa y, a la vez, de deconstruir su propia narración, de borrarla como tal. La metamorfosis del narrador es un medio de superar definitivamente los límites entre ficción y realidad, entre el productor y el recipiente del texto, en cuanto el narrador es siempre un lector que edita o informa sobre un texto determinado... (*Borges infinito* 228)

Citation makes possible the rhizomatic spread of points of reference; of nodes that spread out into an infinite web of interconnected ideas. To add to de Toro’s idea, it may be termed a metaphysical *Gestell*, a framework, that is projected by the mind of the reader. It is metaphysical insofar as the connections are not bound by necessary relation; the connective tissue is the network of relations the reader may draw. This metaphysical *Gestell* becomes the labyrinth because, in true Heideggerian fashion, the reader is thrown (*geworfen*) into it and must parse out a system of meaning.

Moreover, this framework becomes the aesthetic grounding for the Borgesian text. The clear advantage that Borges's fictions have in the realm of ontology is that they are often structured in such a way that constantly questions the causal relationship between history and the historical text. It constantly confuses and inverts this relationship. In "Tlön," for instance, the problem of the underlying ontology of the text is situated in the interpretation of the reader and can only be glimpsed through subtle contradictions in the aesthetic framework of the text.

El hecho se produjo hará unos cinco años. Bioy Casares había cenado conmigo esa noche y nos demoró una vasta polémica sobre la ejecución de una novela en primera persona, cuyo narrador omitiera o desfigurara los hechos e incurriera en diversas contradicciones, que permitiera a unos pocos lectores—a muy pocos lectores—la adivinación de una realidad atroz o banal. Desde el fondo remoto del corredor, el espejo nos acechaba. (OC 1: 831)

Regarding the language employed, two phrases in particular strike me as quintessentially Borges. The first is "incurrir en diversas contradicciones," and the second is "permitir... la adivinación de una realidad atroz o banal." The word "incurrir" occurs in one other notable line extracted from "Pierre Menard:" "El *Quijote* es un libro contingente, el *Quijote* es innecesario. Puedo premeditar su escritura, puedo escribirlo, sin incurrir en una tautología" (OC 1: 845), and also in "La biblioteca de Babel:" "Nadie puede articular una sílaba que no esté llena de ternuras y de temores; que no sea en alguno de esos lenguajes el nombre poderoso de un dios. Hablar es incurrir en tautologías" (OC 1: 865). These three implementations of the verb "incurrir" appear to be two sides of the same coin; when taken together they reveal a paradox about the nature of contradictions and tautologies. The first, in "Tlön" and also "Babel" describes a narrator that "falls into," "commits," or "runs towards / into" contradictions purposefully; the second, in

“Menard,” is a narrator who cannot fall into tautology, even if that were his purpose. This means that for both narrators, writing is never wholly consistent with itself; contained within it are always the clues that lead to sundry interpretations, oftentimes contradictory interpretations, even of identical texts.

4. *Incurrir* and *Recurrir*

Incurrir itself is notable because it is a verb of motion. It is simply composed of the component parts of *to run* (*currere*) and the prefix *into* or *towards* (*in*). A possible equivalent in German could be *verfallen* (*in einen Fehler verfallen / incurrir en un error*), from which one better understands the English translation *fall into*. The English word *commit* or the German word *begehen* do not seem to capture the kinesis of the verb as well as *fall into* or *verfallen*, although *begehen*, unlike its English counterpart (derived from the Latin *com-mittere*), retains *gehen*, giving it a sense of kinesis. However, it is the German *Verfallen* that is used by Heidegger in various places to designate the type of everydayness into which Dasein is cast: “Idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity characterize the way in which, in an everyday manner, Dasein is ‘there’—the disclosedness of Being-in-the-world... In these, and in the way they are interconnected in their Being, there is revealed a basic kind of Being which belongs to everydayness; we call this the ‘*Verfallen*’ of Dasein” (BT 219). He stresses that this is not to be interpreted negatively, but merely that it is the account on which inauthenticity might be defined for precisely.

Of course, Borges does not choose to write *caer en contradicciones* or *caer en una tautología*, which would have also been possible. He chooses *incurrir*. The difference is subtle but perceptible when one considers that the motion of *incurrir* is volitional; the running is, on

some level, the will of the subject, whereas to fall is not born of this volition. Falling is an undesired state of being—so much so that man wishes to forget that he is falling. The *Verfallen* is inauthentic because it has not yet confronted the nothingness that underlies everydayness. The fact that its everydayness is ungrounded, and, moreover, that this ungroundedness is not confronted, is what makes its Being inauthentic.

The phenomena we have pointed out—temptation, tranquillizing, alienation and self-entangling (entanglement)—characterize the specific kind of Being which belongs to *Verfallen*. This ‘movement’ of Dasein in its own Being, we call its “*downward plunge*” [*Absturz*]. Dasein plunges out of itself into itself, into the groundlessness and nullity of inauthentic everydayness. But this plunge remains hidden from Dasein by the way things have been publicly interpreted, so much so, indeed, that it gets interpreted as a way of ‘ascending’ and ‘living concretely’. (*BT* 223)

Falling into, therefore, is differentiated from *running into* (*incurrir*), on the basis that it is non-volitional: it does not consciously intend to define itself by its inauthentic everydayness, and if it fell into contradiction or tautology, it would probably not even recognize that it has done so. One might perceive that another has fallen into contradiction, but the subject that is falling would fail to recognize this. The two examples from Borges prove this. In “*Tlön*” the narrator of the imagined story would “[*incurrir*] en diversas contradicciones” purposefully, with the intention of leaving behind these contradictions so that the assiduous reader will discover them and use them to transform his or her reading of the text (*OC* 1: 831). In other words, the reader uses the aporia inherent in the text to question its inauthenticity, which is to say the fact that it is not grounded in an apodeictic logic. In the second use of *incurrir* in “*Pierre Menard*,” the action of “*incurrir en una tautología*” is again purposeful (*OC* 1: 845). The writer volitionally attempts to “run into”

tautology, as is shocked to find out that he cannot. It is not a tacit accepting of the linguistic confines of the text, rather, it is the attempt to run into the walls of this framework and to see where they may break. One can imagine that if the narrator of “Pierre Menard” *did not* realize that he could not write a tautology, even though that would be what is presumably logical, that Borges would not have written *incurrir*, but instead *caer*. But this is Menard’s testimony and as such he is aware that he *has not* written a tautology and is consequently also aware that he *cannot* “incurrir en una tautología.”

As opposed to the inauthenticity of *Verfallen*, *incurrir* is an attempt to become authentic. Becoming authentic is made possible precisely by confronting the places (in a text) in which its everydayness (the logic of the text into which the reader is thrown, presented as natural and unquestioned) breaks down, and the interpreting subject comes face to face with its groundlessness.

Lastly, *incurrir* is differentiated from *recurrir*: *to fall back upon*, or, more literally, *to run back to*. This word (*recurrir*), although not present in the examples given, provides a third possible relationship to the logical contradictions or tautologies that underlie a text. Again, let us imagine what the text would look like if it read that someone “recurre a contradicciones” or “recurre a una tautología.” This would describe a Dasein that is become aware of the inauthenticity of its Being, but has, in the face of this inauthenticity, chosen to flee back into the abyss of meaninglessness that grounds these contradictions and tautologies. It would describe a Dasein that appeals to a groundless tautology as the ground for its Being-in-the-world, despite implicitly knowing that it cannot authentically do so. To argue in favor of any ontological principle, we always run back to, appeal to—*recurrimos a*—fundamental ontological statements which are themselves *ungrounded*. Juxtaposing the implications of “recurrir” with “incurrir” thus

supports the claim that “incurrir” contains a volitional struggle towards authentic Being: specifically, a struggle attained by *running towards* the aporia—the points of logical contradictions—of a text. Springing out of this juxtaposition or differentiation is also the tension between authentic and inauthentic Being.

5. *Un Libro Contingente*

Moreover, the passage from “Menard” — “El *Quijote* es un libro contingente, el *Quijote* es innecesario. Puedo premeditar su escritura, puedo escribirlo, sin incurrir en una tautología”— drives right at the heart of the question of being because of the use of the word “contingente” (*OC* 1: 845). Here is one of many places in which Borges invokes Schopenhauer’s pessimism to present forth his conception of what Schopenhauer calls “das Rätsel des Daseins,” *the riddle of existence*. Beginning all the way in his essay *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, Schopenhauer poses the question he thinks has been lost since Greek philosophy: the question of why the world exists at all, particularly in light of the superabundance of evil and dearth of goodness. In it, he proposes that the world itself is *contingent*, or that it is logically possible for the world to both exist and to not exist. He claims that the principle of sufficient reason applies only within the world but can do nothing to explain the ontological grounds for the existence of the world. However, at the end of the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer does call into question what it means to world the world as contingent. When Borges writes that “El *Quijote* es un libro contingente, el *Quijote* es innecesario,” what the *Quijote* is actually standing in for the world itself. There is no overarching logic that necessitates the existence of the book as such. It is contingent upon this Will. But why

this Will? The Will itself is beyond our logic because our logic operates in the world of phenomena and representation, not in the world of the noumenon, Will, or metaphysics.

Following the existential question: “Why does the *Quijote* exist at all?” is the moral question: “Is it good for the Quijote to have existed at all?” Just as “el *Quijote* es un libro contingente,” so too is the moral quality of the *Quijote*. We exist, for better or for worse, within the world structured by the *Quijote*, and so it is only natural for us to wish to affirm that this world—and our being in this world—is enriched by that which structures our existence. But we must search for a justification to this Panglossian assumption. By acknowledging the contingency of the *Quijote*, we are acknowledging that its objectification is not regulated by any purposiveness. Any purposiveness would be regulated by some metaphysical absolute, whether it takes the form of causal necessity or moral goodness. But these are lacking. The desire to write the *Quijote* is the desire to recover this metaphysical absolute and the inability to attain it discloses the ever-unsatisfied striving that characterizes both Schopenhauer’s Will and Borges’s writing. It is this unsatisfied striving that forms the basis of Schopenhauer’s pessimism.

What this demonstrates is that many of the words upon which Borges falls back (*a las recurre*) disclose a worldview marked by a certain yearning for an absolute which is left ever unfulfilled and unsatisfied. One remembers that Pierre Menard never actually completes his composition of the *Quijote*; the objectification of this manifestation of the Will never finds its completion. It is this basic formula which elicits the pessimistic realization that much of how we orient ourselves in life and in literature serves only to enhance our suffering. Borges does not claim this in such definitive terms as Schopenhauer does and it is unlikely that he would ever make such an absolute claim. This does not prevent us from attempting to understand Borges’s universe as subliminally appropriating many of these pessimistic gestures and encoding them

into the language used to give life to his world. The remainder of this chapter shall be dedicated to deciphering exactly the way in which the words that Borges chooses incorporates a Schopenhauerian pessimism into his world, weaving it into the very fabrics of its tapestry. This will also demonstrate how this pessimism is foundational in any incorporation of the Borgesian text into late modern and postmodern literature and philosophy. The latent ideology underpinning any post-Borges literature that departs from a view of art as contingent is the pessimistic premise that we are striving for an inaccessible absolute, giving existence a negative shade.

6. *Lo atroz*

What are the adjectives used by Borges when making ontological judgements about the world? Borges cites the world, but what is the existential character of the intentional content of the world as it is cited? In analyzing the specific words employed by Borges, we here hope to understand the fundamental way in which the subject relates him or herself to and beholds the world.

Returning to the excerpt from “Tlön,” the other phrase that stands out is, as mentioned, “la adivinación de una realidad atroz o banal.” This word *atroz* calls one’s attention, particularly in its pairing with *banal*. Seeming at first to be a contradiction, the reality that is disclosed by these two words is actually atrocious in its banality, its emptiness and lack of grounded being. There is something about its everydayness that is horrifying.

The word *atroz* does not appear with the regularity of *olvido* in the Borgesian oeuvre, but it is often employed to convey this sense of existential dread experienced when confronted with a reality that seems speculative, ungrounded. Implementation of the word seems to fall into these

two categories: first, an adjective simply expressing disgust; or, second, an adjective describing the ontological character of the world. It is where these two uses meet that we see the influences of pessimism most clearly.

Implementations of *atroz* in this first way are rare and almost seem atrociously out of place given the existential weight with which the word is generally employed. Examples include “Guayaquil:”

Tratativas fue la atroz palabra que usó. (*OC 2: 738*)

Or even “Las ruinas circulares,” although the following does not entirely lack ontological or existential character:

Ese crepúsculo soñó con la estatua. La soñó viva, trémula: no era un atroz bastardo de tigre y potro, sino a la vez esas does criaturas y también un toro, una rosa, una tempestad.
(*OC 1: 850*)

The second category is much more representative of how Borges uses the word to establish the ontological-existential character of his writing. The following is by no means an exhaustive list; however, it does provide an overview.

“La lotería en Babilonia:”

Como todos los hombres de Babilonia, he sido proconsul; como todos, esclavo; también he conocido la omnipotencia, el oprobio, las cárceles... Debo esa variedad casi atroz a una institución que otras repúblicas ignoran o que obran en ellas de modo imperfecto y secreto. (*OC 1: 852*)

“El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan:”

Preveo que el hombre se resignará cada día a empresas más atroces; pronto no habrá sino guerreros y bandoleros; les doy este consejo: ‘El ejecutor de una empresa atroz debe imaginar que ya la ha cumplido.’ (OC 1: 869)

“El milagro secreto;”

Luego reflexionó que la realidad no suele coincidir con las previsiones; con lógica perversa infirió que prever un detalle circunstancial es impedir que éste suceda. Fiel a esa débil magia, inventaba, *para que no sucedieran*, rasgos atroces; naturalmente, acabó por temer que esos rasgos fueran proféticos. (OC 1: 901)

“Tres versiones de Judas:”

[L]a puntual profecía no de un momento sino de todo el atroz porvenir, en el tiempo y en la eternidad, del Verbo hecho carne. Dios totalmente se hizo hombre pero hombre hasta la infamia, hombre hasta la reprobación y el abismo. (OC 1: 907)

“El sur:”

Dahlmann logró dormer, pero a la madrugada estaba despierto y desde aquella hora el sabor de todas las cosas fue atroz (OC 1: 915)

“El inmortal:”

La atroz aldea de los bárbaros (OC 1: 992)

A la impresión de enorme antigüedad se agregaron otras: la de lo interminable, la de lo atroz (OC 1: 993).

“El muerto:”

Esa vida es nueva para él, y a veces atroz (OC 1: 1000)

“Los teólogos:”

[C]uando quiso escribir la tesis atroz de que no hay dos instantes iguales, su pluma se detuvo. (*OC* 1: 1006)

“Historia del guerrero y de la cautiva:”

...el peculiar contraste que se advertía entre la figura atroz de aquel bárbaro y su simplicidad y bondad. (*OC* 1: 1009)

“La busca de Averroes:”

Entonces como ahora, el mundo era atroz; los audaces podían recorrerlo, pero también los miserable, los que se allanaban a todo. (*OC* 1: 1033)

“El Aleph:”

En ese instante gigantesco, he visto millones de actos deleitables o atroces; ninguno me asombró como el hecho de que todos ocuparan el mismo punto, sin superposición y sin transparencia. (*OC* 1: 1067-1068)

Vi la reliquia atroz de lo que deliciosamente había sido Beatriz Viterbo... (*OC* 1: 1068)

This list occupies the most notable uses of the word in *Ficciones* and *El Aleph*. There are more from the later fictions and poems, but already these examples occupy sufficient space. The question is: what does the word *atroz* disclose about the world of Borges’s fictions? Moreover, how does it relate to the aforementioned problem of imitation, citation, and incarnation?

Foremost, atrocious reveals a certain terrible ineffability of the world. As a predicate, it cannot form part of any judgment regarding the categories of the mind. It is an interpretive judgement, regarding aesthetics and even teleology. In many of the aforementioned citations, *atroz* even seems to indicate a vastness, innumerability, or ineffability (see, for instance “La lotería,” “Tres versiones de Judas,” “El inmortal,” “Los teólogos,” “El Aleph”). It is as if the manifold itself of the world and Will instill a sense of wondrous dread. It is not a specific aspect

of the world which is atrocious, but the very fact that specification always fails. *Atroz* thus stands in for and discloses a certain ineffability, and it is this ineffability itself which is atrocious. Take the example from “La lotería en Babilonia:” the variety of lives that the protagonist has led is described as “*casi atroc*” because it undermines the constancy of the world and its metaphysical order. The only response to this is the supposition that this lack of order is secretly subordinated to the will of another metaphysical institution, the lottery. The fact that the word is often paired with fleeting concepts that cannot be easily grasped with an appeal to empiricism further suggests that “*atroz*” describes the lack thereof. In “Judas” is it paired with “el porvenir;” in “El inmortal” with “lo interminable;” in “Los teólogos” with the metaphysical idea of “dos instantes iguales.” As these concepts belong to the realm of logic and metaphysics, it is difficult to grasp them through words alone. They are the stuff in-between words; the metaphysical tapestry presupposed by those words that makes them decipherable, yet which cannot themselves be easily grasped. And this is what makes such concepts *atrocious*. To formulate this in another way, one can say that these uses of the word *atrocious* do not refer to ontic qualities within the world, but rather that it describes the ontological basis upon which the world comes to be.

Simultaneously, if we think on the description from “Tlön” of “una realidad atroc o banal,” it is immediately clear that both *atroz* and *banal* are disclosing the same basic concept, that of a world which *in its ineffability* does not exist. It is banal in that it lacks any definite defining qualities, and atrocious because the lack of such qualities reveals its ontological groundlessness, as when these qualities are removed, so too is any way to access said reality.

7. Pessimism as Worldview

Here one begins to note the depth of the pessimistic roots of Borges's worldview. The world is atrocious not only because it is cruel and indifferent, but because it is contingent; because outside of the representations that incarnate it, it is nonexistent. When these representations (*Vorstellungen*) vanish or are revealed to be just that—representations projected over an abyss, the subject has nowhere to turn but to a pessimism that terminates only with his or her own nonexistence. One recalls the last line of “Las ruinas circulares:” “Con alivio, con humillación, con terror, comprendió que él también era una apariencia, que otro estaba soñando” (*OC* 1: 851). The word *apariencia* could potentially be a translation of *Vorstellung*, although a more accurate translation could be *Erscheinung*. Regardless, *Vor-stellung* is not only a representation but also a putting-forth, a presentation, as indicated by more recent translations of Schopenhauer's magnum opus that opt for *Presentation* in place of *Representation*. Regardless, implicit in *Vorstellung* is also *imagination*, and already the lines between *appearance*, *presentation*, *Vorstellung*, and *Erscheinung* grow blurry. In any case, the line demonstrates an intimate knowledge, if not complete incorporation, of the pessimistic worldview.

This brings me to a further elaboration on de Toro's assertion that Borges cites, rather than imitates, the world, namely, that in citing the world he discloses the points at which it is uncitable. By showing certain facets of the world as uncitable, the ontological basis of the world is shown to exist not outside of language, but consubstantially with it, and, in this way, language becomes the incarnation of the ontology of the world.

Gadamer, taking up the strands of Saint Thomas Aquinas, argues that the verbum of incarnation, in contrast to Greek logos, is pure event (*verbum proprie dicitur personaliter tantum*) (*TM* 418). The event of the verbum; the event of incarnation, is crucial in understanding

language as the horizon of being because it moves beyond the notion that language mirrors the world or indeed cites it.

The perfect word, therefore, is formed only in thinking, like a tool, but once it exists as the full perfection of the thought, nothing more is created with it. Rather, the thing is then present in it. Thus it is not a real tool. Thomas found a brilliant metaphor for this: the word is like a mirror in which the thing is seen. The curious thing about this mirror, however, is that it nowhere extends beyond the image of the thing. In it nothing is mirrored except this one thing, so that the whole mirror reflects only the image (similitudo). What is remarkable about this metaphor is that the word is understood here entirely as the perfect reflection of the thing—i.e., as the expression of the thing—and has left behind it the path of the thought to which alone, however, it owes its existence. (TM 424)

The perfection of such a mirror problematizes the very nature of the mirror. The mirror multiplies what is before it (as in Tlön), but at the same time leaves behind that which does not perfectly match the image. Perhaps for this reason copulation is juxtaposed to mirrors in the mythology of Tlön, as in copulation the number of men are multiplied but the path that has led up to the production of those men—the parents—are cast into oblivion; they do not fit within the frame of the mirror. What is left is the pure, ungrounded thing, incarnate in the word.

Citation operates under a similar logic. It takes the thing, the idea, the concept, the word, and repeats it, cutting off all strains of thought that have led to its inception. It is therefore always an insufficient ersatz if one considers it as a supplement for going through the pains of reading the entirety of the text. Again, we may consider Menard: to read the *Quijote* does not give us knowledge of all the paths of thought that produced it. The same is true of understanding

Michelangelo's life through his painting, just as it is true of understanding Shakespeare's memories through any process other than living Shakespeare's life, as is the plot of "La memoria de Shakespeare." There is no reading that is not citation, yet this does not mean that all reading is merely an ersatz of secondary calibre to creation. Citation allows for recontextualization and reinterpretation, and it would be platitudinous to claim that it lays the groundwork for a free play of ideas, as Derrida suggests. This may very well describe the functioning of language, but does not answer the ontological question regarding why such an approach to language is necessary, namely, that the ontological nihilism of Being can be glimpsed through such an approach to language, specifically through the points in which imitation and citation disclose that they are neither imitation nor citing anything, and the employment of such a productive language breaks down altogether, revealing the *atrocious* abyss of Being. The purpose of such a hermeneutic in relation to the Borgesian text is to force the confrontation with the abyss; with nihilism.

Following from this, the problem of Tlön is: what happens when the object of imitation or of citation is not the origin to the imitation or citation, but rather itself contingently produced by it? This is the same problem regarding the biography of Michelangelo that opened this chapter: What if Michelangelo's artwork were not dependent upon his life, but the other way around? What if Michelangelo's life were dependent upon his artwork and—especially—the interpretation surrounding his artwork? It is an age-old question of hermeneutics, dating back at the very least to the works of Friedrich Ast and Friedrich Schleiermacher, whose discussion on the matter acknowledged the circularity of how interpretation is grounded (the particular grounded in the whole and the whole grounded in the particular).

From here the notion of incarnation reemerges. It seems to solve—at least at the outset—the issue of grounding. As the word (*verbum*) is spoken, it becomes manifest in all of its infinite variance. However, for the word to be truly infinite, it cannot be restricted by spoken phonetics, or anything similar. It must transcend entirely human language so that it may become manifest at any time or point, without the need to ground itself in language or experience. Two passages, first from Borges and then from Gadamer, shall hope to elucidate the problem of incarnation of the *verbum* regarding this discussion.

The problem of incarnation parallels the problem of the spoken versus the written word. In one of his most provocative essays, “Del culto de los libros,” Borges suggests that we can pinpoint almost the exact moment when written language became entirely independent of spoken language.

Clemente Alejandrino escribió su recelo de la escritura a fines del siglo II; a fines del siglo IV se inició el proceso mental que, a la vuelta de muchas generaciones, culminaría en el predominio de la palabra escrita sobre la hablada, de la pluma sobre la voz. Un admirable azar ha querido que un escritor fijara el instante (apenas exagero al llamarlo instante) en que tuvo principio el vasto proceso. Cuenta San Agustín, en el libro VI de las *Confesiones*: “Cuando Ambrosio leía, pasaba la vista sobre las páginas penetrando su alma, en el sentido, sin proferir una palabra ni mover la lengua. Muchas veces—pues a nadie se le prohibía entrar, ni había costumbre de avisarle quién venía—, lo vimos leer calladamente y nunca de otro modo, y al cabo de un tiempo nos íbamos, conjeturando que aquel breve intervalo que se le concedía para reparar su espíritu, libre del tumulto de los negocios ajenos, no quería que se lo ocupasen en otra cosa, tal vez receloso de que un oyente, atento a las dificultades del texto, le pidiera la explicación de un pasaje oscuro o

quisiera discutirlo con él, con lo que no pudiera leer tantos volúmenes como deseaba. Yo entiendo que leía de ese modo por conservar la voz, que se le tomaba con facilidad. En todo caso, cualquiera que fuse el propósito de tal hombre, ciertamente era bueno”. San Agustín fue discípulo de San Ambrosio, obispo de Milán, hacia el año 384; trece años después, en Numidia, redactó sus *Confesiones* y aún lo inquietaba aquel singular espectáculo: un hombre en una habitación, con un libro, leyendo sin articular las palabras. (OC 2: 83)

Augustine’s notes regarding Ambrose’s custom of reading silently has the potential to carry just as much theological weight as any of his more theologically explicit writings. Borges recognizes this as a turning point in the appreciation of the written word that segregated it from spoken language and elevated it to sacrosanct status. Indeed, it seems to mark something even more profound: a shift from pagan philosophy to Christian theology. With it came a shift from *Logos* to *Verbum*. The core of this shift is in the different estimations of interpretation.

The *Logos* (word, logic, reason, etc.) was estimated by the Greeks to convey truth but did not necessarily incarnate truth. This is easily explainable by the fact that Plato’s dialogues emphasized that truth was ever-inchoate and could be developed through dialogue. He did not wish to ever have the final “word” in philosophical matters, because this word could go on to be misinterpreted. Therefore, the process of speaking-aloud inherently implied the idea that words convey ideas of truth, but concomitantly that this truth can be misinterpreted. Truth was not so much in the word, but in the dialogue that surrounded it.

Contrast this with Christian theology. The word must embody/incorporate/incarnate truth. Truth, in the Christian sense, cannot be grounded in dialogue, as dialogue is always changing. Christianity was perturbed by the shifting sands upon which the ontology of the word was

grounded, and its response was to do away with this ground altogether; to propose instead that the truth was consubstantial with the word. This led to the phenomenon of incarnation.

To precisely conclude: The reason is because the Verbum, unlike the Greek Logos, could not merely be interpreted as being true—it must be truth incarnate. Together with this is also the fascination with the Septuagint: seventy translations of the Bible that all miraculously coincided. This supposedly eliminated the potentiality for human error. The reason to eliminate human error (error=interpretation) is to eliminate the possibility of heretical misappropriations. The word is truth incarnate; truth ungrounded in interpretation.

A wonderful irony to prove this point is the fact that many monasteries and places of theological learning during the Middle Ages promoted the study of hagiography over biblical hermeneutics. The reason for this was simple: before reading the Bible, one had to first be inducted into its proper interpretation through the study of the lives of the saints. In other words, it was far too dangerous to allow someone to read the Bible without first regulating his interpretation of it. This is why the revolution of Martin Luther—that the average person ought to read the Bible—was so outrageous (and politically reactionary and conservative), because it reaffirmed the truth-incarnate hypothesis of the Bible, which hagiography had ironically done so much to destabilize.

We have so far discussed why the word must incarnate truth but have yet to discuss ways in which such an incarnation might be made believable philosophically. One of the greatest ways to make truth incarnate in the word was to separate written language from spoken language. In this way might it become more self-sustained, ungrounded; less restricted by ostensible grounding limitations of phonetics.

The external word, and with it the whole problem of the variety of languages, was explicitly devalued by Augustine, though he still discusses it. The external word—just like the word that is reproduced only inwardly—is tied to a particular tongue (*lingua*). The fact that the *verbum* is spoken differently in different languages, however, means only that it cannot reveal itself through the human tongue in its true being. In a depreciation of sensible appearance that is entirely Platonic, Augustine says, “We do not say a thing as it is but as it can be seen or heard by our senses.” (*TM* 419-420)

In other words, truth becomes only incarnate in the word through the process of silent, inward reading, as only then is it liberated of the phonetic restriction that might lead to heretical interpretation. The outward meaning of a word might change, but its inward meaning—the feeling that it manifests beyond linguistic interpretation of it—is true. In this way the shift from spoken *Logos* to written *Verbum* was essential in the shift from pagan philosophy to Christian theology. At the heart of this shift was incarnation.

Gadamer goes on to elaborate that the act of forming the word is concomitant with the formation of knowledge. In the context of Borges this means that as Borges goes about citing a text, there is something more to this than mere rhizomatic citation. The text that is being referenced is concomitantly created through Borges’s literature. It becomes incarnate in it. Incarnation means, according to Gadamer, that they are consubstantial, indelibly linked. The text being referenced is no longer dialogic, which is to say in that it exists in reference to the Borgesian text as some sort of interlocutor. It is fully incarnate in Borges’s text.

We are not here arguing that texts in question do not accomplish a sort of creation out of nothing. This is not to say that such an interpretation is untrue *per se*, but one ought to be skeptical of the deeper philosophical significance of this claim. To do so would be to run back to

(*recurrir*) Christian theology and justify a religious turn in ontological and hermeneutical thought. Rather than argue this, I hope to show that Borges is a turning point in modernity towards a pessimistic worldview, in which creation itself does not come *ex nihilo* but rather emerges from the hermeneutical structure of citation which in turn sets forth the original text as an object of metaphysics. The inaccessibility of this original text lays the groundwork for interpretation as the voracious and ever-unsatisfied Will. Hence, pessimism lies at the heart of what we might call the ontology of Borges's text, disclosed to us by the *atrocious* reality of the metaphysics of citation.

Pessimism is an approach. It is a judgement about the existential character of the world as it is represented, particularly to a subject capable of judgement. It may not be inherent in metaphysics or ontology but springs forth from the union of these with value judgements. It should not therefore be surprising that it rests at the base of the existential turn in philosophy (from Schopenhauer through Nietzsche to Heidegger *et al.*). Borges is one of these writers for whom pessimism serves as bedrock. In rediscovering this pessimistic bedrock, we hope to push against the more optimistic reading of Borges which do hope to create something of nothing or forge a way forward or even assert the positive function of literature (where positive is understood to mean having some productive function).

Many if not most post-Heideggarian philosophers (or even post-Nietzschean, postmodern philosophers) are well versed in skepticism. This may be skepticism of the episteme in the form of post-structuralism, moral skepticism, linguistic skepticism following Derrida and Paul de Man, skepticism of the metaphysics of narratives (Lyotard, Baudrillard), etc. The list is long. However, this skepticism does not always yield to pessimism. In regard to this ontological nihilism underpinning modernity, many consider a way forward, a productive byproduct, a

redemptive facet of free-play of ideas. Out of this nihilism emerges a creation literally *ex nihilo*, which in its essence is a return to Judeo-Christian cosmogony and Christian hermeneutics of incarnation. The only “way forward” is no way at all. Borges exists as the central figure in this analysis because he is the bridge between the pessimists and Schopenhauerians of the nineteenth century and the post-Heideggerians, postmodernists or post-Nietzscheans of the latter half of the twentieth century. The only issue is that these pessimist roots are almost always understood in an historically isolated context, meaning that post-Borges writing is pessimistic, but does not call itself so. In other words, the resulting post-Borgesian approach to philosophy and literature is *grounded* in pessimism, but refuses to acknowledge that grounding; incarnated as if by immaculate conception.

8. “La esfera de Pascal,” Pessimism, and the Genealogy of the Metaphor

Otras inquisiciones is a motley assortment of essays. It is also Borges’s most sustained attempt at outlining a system of thought outside of his fictions. This may be controversial because he was, first and foremost, concerned with the art of writing fiction and poetry and neither considered himself nor would want to be considered a philosopher. Lima-Hincapié provides a discussion on whether or not it is appropriate to consider Borges a philosopher; it is not my purpose to do so. Nevertheless, by reading the essays, it becomes clear that there are many philosophical themes to which Borges always returns (*recurre*), even if he has no intention of elaborating upon them exhaustively. The *recurring* theme that is here relevant is best boiled down to those Nietzschean apothegms that truth is a movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms; and that there are no facts, only interpretations. What I do *not* wish to do is to suggest that Borges’s fictions and essays provide an elaboration of these Nietzschean

theses. What I instead suggest is that for Borges these theses lead always towards pessimism. If they do lead beyond Nietzsche and into post-Heideggerian philosophy, my contention is that this philosophy goes back to a fundamental pessimism; a pessimism which is all too quickly forgotten. The following hopes to show how Borges envisions the evolution of the metaphor, but also how this evolution has pessimism as both its *causa efficiens* and *causa finalis*. In other words: the path into postmodernity is a circle whose starting and ending point is pessimism.

Strange though it may seem, there has not been much specific attention allocated to pessimism in modern academic discourse. Lüdger Lütkehaus's *Nichts* and Michael Pauen's *Pessimismus: Geschichtsphilosophie, Metaphysik und Moderne von Nietzsche bis Spengler*, along with Frederick C. Beiser's *Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German Philosophy* rank among the few studies that take pessimism and its legacy as a somewhat serious predecessor to the contemporary age. This is particularly true in the case of contemporary literary criticism and philology, which is a shame because the legacy of pessimism extends far beyond those *fin de siècle* decadents suffering from Weltschmerz. To be sure, there is no dearth of writers influenced by Schopenhauer or his philosophical disciples who are still in discussion: Turgenev, Zola, Proust, Maupassant, Gautier and any of the followers of Parnassianism all markedly bear his influence. In Spanish literature perhaps none more fully embodied (incarnated) pessimism more than Ángel Ganivet, who futilely hoped to prove that through art the individual could sublimate the harshness of existence. He committed suicide in 1898. Also notable is Azorín, whose pessimism led to both a remarkable literary production but also towards political conservatism. What interests me is not so much pessimism in the historical context in which it is already explicit, but rather the ways in which a fundamentally pessimistic Weltanschauung has infiltrated modernity and so-called postmodernity principally through Borges, oftentimes tacitly.

Zulma N. Mateos's fundamental essay about the philosophy of pessimism as a root of Borges's work points out that Borges's pessimism is the reason for which his chaos, uncertainty, and discord prevail over order in his work (Mateos 68). Mateos also signals that "en forma recurrente Borges pide en sus versos que el olvido prevalezca sobre la memoria" (69). Here Mateos is one of the first to explicitly link this concept of olvido with a pessimistic worldview, and in many respects, this work bases itself in this claim and seeks to expand upon it and follow it to its logical conclusions. This is in contrast to the position of Rodrigo Zuleta, who suggests that Borges's work is an overcoming of pessimism, a position with which I am strongly disinclined to agree. At no point—with the possible exception of "Ulrica" and a few scattered poems—does Borges confront his pessimism in a way that can be seen as overcoming it, and even "Ulrica" embraces a tragic worldview that resolves itself in resignation and is therefore contingent upon a more foundational pessimism. Mateos mentions Eduard von Hartmann as another possible source of pessimism, although von Hartmann may in fact be too *optimistic* to rightly be considered a predecessor to Borges's pessimism. In contrast to Zuleta, it is here argued that the way metaphor is employed by Borges reinforces his connection to the pessimism discussed in the earlier parts of this chapter.

Borges develops his rather Nietzschean interpretation of the metaphor primarily in a few essays from *Otras inquisiciones*. The first essay is "La esfera de Pascal." The premise is recognized from the first sentences: "Quizá la historia universal es la historia de unas cuantas metáforas. Bosquejar un capítulo de esa historia es el fin de esta nota" (*OC* 2: 15). Over the course of the essay, this phrase will itself become transformed. The last line of the essay reads: "Quizá la historia universal es la historia de la diversa entonación de algunas metáforas" (*OC* 2: 17). It is clear that Borges is purposefully manipulating the sentence in such a way that it

becomes unclear whether or not it is intended to disclose the same information as the sentence that initiated the essay. If it were intended to disclose the same information, then surely it would have been reprinted, word for word. As is, it could conceivably be interpreted in the same way as the first sentence, but its difference leaves the reader feeling as if this is impossible. Moreover, even if the sentence were an exact reprint of the first one, we know from Pierre Menard that even two identical texts can have different “intonations.”

The matter of the evolution of the metaphor in Borges hinges upon the interpretation of very few words. Borges does not present a theory of the metaphor, he enacts it (just as Heidegger does not think *about* a thing, he thinks the thing). The understanding of the metaphor can only be understood through words, which are themselves the thing of the metaphors. Some words are repeated, some are left out. Some words are repeated but their intentional content is different. Some intentional content may be rendered ambiguous because of indexicality. Some words which are left out haunt other articulations of the metaphor and their absence continues to be felt. To uncover the phenomenological and hermeneutical structure of the metaphor, Borges constructs a genealogy.

The first pair of words that must be deciphered is “historia universal.” Not only is “historia universal” important in the context of the metaphor, but also because it is a concept to which Borges will recur again and again. But what is universal history, and how is it known?

Borges begins his genealogy with Xenophanes of Colophon, who claimed that there was a single divine entity, that was an “esfera eterna.” This sphere is the metaphor whose evolution Borges will sketch over the centuries. He briefly cites Plato’s *Timaeus*, in which “se lee que la esfera es la figura más perfecta y más uniforme, porque todos los puntos de la superficie equidistan del centro.” (*OC* 2: 15). After this, he references Olof Gigon, the classical Swedish

philologist, that “entiende que Jenófanes habló analógicamente.” Despite this being the only idea of Olof Gigon that he cites from *Ursprung der griechischen Philosophie*, I cannot help but think that there is something more to Gigon’s influence. Gigon also believed that all of the problems of modern philosophy could be found in a reading of ancient Greek philosophy and literature, and he was therefore a key figure in positing a continuity of thought evolving from that primordial moment. That is to say, modern philosophical debates are somehow disclosed through reflection upon the primordial debates that the Greeks imagined or set forth. However, the question behind any sort of genealogy of thought—for that is what Borges endeavors to propose in his sketch of the history of the metaphor of the eternal sphere—has always been the extent to which that history describes a natural, sequential, evolution of the concept that can simply be traced back to its origin, or if this genealogy imposes a logic on continuity on the history of the concept.

From this perspective the very idea of a universal history becomes complicated. It is no longer necessarily the synthetic totality of history, but instead potentially the extrapolation of a single, victorious idea onto the tapestry of history, which reinterprets everything in its retrospective. But what is this victorious idea?

“La historia universal continuó su curso.” Borges then goes on to cite another fragment from Alain de Lille: “Dios es una esfera inteligible, cuyo centro está en todas partes y la circunferencia en ninguna,” and one from the last chapter of *Pantagruel*: “esa esfera intelectual, cuyo centro está en todas partes y la circunferencia en ninguna, que llamamos Dios” (*OC* 2: 15-16). Borges notes that here there is a clear theological shift towards representing this sphere as the intellect or *nous*, or at the very least as having characteristics of the intellect.

Following this history, the theological shift is surreptitiously carried forward into the scientific thought of Giordano Bruno: “Podemos afirmar con certidumbre que el universe es todo

centro, o que el centro del universe está en todas partes y la circunferencia en ninguna” (OC 2: 16). Here God is replaced by the universe. Although this surely would not have disturbed Bruno, who was himself a theologian, it nevertheless demonstrates how theological premises are assimilated, often unknowingly, into ostensibly non-theological discourse. The theological premise concealed by the scientific statement allowed Bruno to feel liberated and content with this view of the universe. The fact that the infinity of the universe was assimilated into the infinity of God removed the dread of it. Its onto-theo-logical grounding prevented its vastness from feeling *atrocious*.

All of this changed in the decades and centuries that followed.

En aquel siglo desanimado, el espacio absolute que inspiró los hexámetros de Lucrecio, el espacio absolute que había sido una liberación para Bruno, fue un laberinto y un abismo para Pascal. Éste aborrecía el universo y hubiera querido adorar a Dios, pero Dios, para él, era menos real que el aborrecido universo. Deploró que no hablara el firmamento, comparó nuestra vida con la de náufragos en una isla desierta. Sintió el peso incesante del mundo físico, sintió vértigo, miedo y soledad, y los puso en otras palabras: “La naturaleza es una esfera infinita, cuyo centro está en todas partes y la circunferencia en ninguna”. Así publica Brunschvieg el texto, pero la edición crítica de Tourneur (París, 1941), que reproduce las tachaduras y vacilaciones del manuscrito, revela que Pascal empezó a escribir *effroyable*: “Una esfera espantosa cuyo centro está en todas partes y la circunferencia en ninguna”. (OC 2: 17)

The length of this passage leaves much to be deciphered. First is the matter of God and how this concept has transformed in the time between Giordano Bruno and Blaise Pascal. Pascal could see no reason how or why God could exist within or beyond the universe. Yet he could not conceive

of any meaning in life without God, so he went to great lengths to justify belief, even if he himself could never truly believe. Confronted with the plausible nonexistence of God, the universe became “aborrecido,” “espantoso,” “*effroyable*.” But we must remember that the term universe had been imbricated with the term of God by Bruno. The implausibility of God therefore also became the implausibility of the universe. For this reason does Borges claim that God was, for Pascal, “menos real que el aborrecido universo,” as if the very universe itself participated in this nonexistence and were for this reason abhorrent.

Resultant from the plausible nonexistence of both God and universe, Pascal becomes infused with vertigo, fear, and solitude. Had he been born in the era of Schopenhauer, it would be easy to imagine him as a proponent of pessimism. Again, this pessimism is born out of the notion that the world is contingent, unnecessary. In light of this groundlessness, the pessimistic question of whether or not it is better for the world to exist at all takes root. It is so deeply ingrained in this worldview that it need not even be explicitly stated; moreover, it *cannot* be explicitly stated. The clue that points to this is the mention of the sole adjective “*effroyable*” that Pascal saw fit to delete. As Borges points out, just because he deleted this adjective, does not mean that it is nevertheless present in his reiteration of the metaphor of the “eternal sphere.” Borges rewrites the sentence as Pascal had first conceived but was too afraid to publish: “Una esfera espantosa cuyo centro está en todas partes y la circunferencia en ninguna.”

This view of the world in its *atrocious* contingency is pessimistic. Variations of the adjective arise: *aborrecido*, *atroz*, *espantoso*, *effroyable*, but what they disclose remains the same. Pascal’s attempt to erase *effroyable* is his attempt to re-conceal the contingency of the world and the groundlessness of Being. Borges does not allow him to do this, and by reintroducing it, he shines into the abyss of Being the light that Pascal had in fear sought to

douse. Julius Frauenstädt recounts that he once asked Schopenhauer how the intellect rises itself above the will to negate it. Schopenhauer responded that the will could be thought of as carrying a lantern, which is the intellect. As it progresses, it comes to an abyss; seeing that it can go no further, it must turn around and head back. In deleting this word *effroyable*, Pascal can be seen as trying to douse this lantern, to hide from himself the abyss of Being. In palimpsestically reviving the word, Borges raises the question of Being in all of its pessimistic nakedness.

Simultaneously, in resurrecting Pascal's deleted *effroyable*, Borges is hermeneutically inscribing it into the genealogical record that came before it. Just as Kafka's precursors can no longer be read without consideration of Kafka or as the *Quijote* cannot be read without James's conception of history, the whole history of this eternal sphere of God and universe cannot be read without the consideration that it is *effroyable*. *Effroyable*, despite its concealment, becomes inextricable to this universal history.

So what, then, is universal history? In light of this interpretation, universal history is the history of the question of Being. The question of Being must always take the form of a metaphor because it is nothing in its essence and can only be understood through literary circumnavigation. These literary circumnavigations—these orbits which language take around the abyss of Being—presuppose a history of the world in which the essence of Being can find its home. Yet in these orbits, Being itself is concealed; one does not look directly at the sun, or, in this case, into the abyss. Yet Borges recognizes that this is insufficient: we must shine our light into the abyss. As Borges is initiated by Schopenhauer into the question of Being and of the contingency of the world, pessimism is encoded into his approach to it. The following sections will be devoted to revealing the ways in which such a pessimism into this conception of Being and of universal history.

9. Literature and the Terrible Infinite

It is no coincidence that the essay directly following “La esfera de Pascal” is “La flor de Coleridge.” Aside from the parity in their titles, this second essay can itself be seen as a diverse intonation of the same metaphor. To open the essay Borges writes, “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’.” (OC 2: 18). He will later in the essay go on to surmise that this position is like “el panteísta que declara que la pluralidad de los autores es ilusoria” (OC 2: 19). As such, it is easy to compare Borges’s perspective to those that would declare “the death of the author.” Yet, it cannot be so easy to make such a judgement about Borges’s position. Much closer to the mark is the notion that individual authors create something—in this case create an image—that then later becomes incorporated into universal history, and by this incorporation transcends the circumstance of the author, in very much the same way that Pascal’s metaphor of the eternal sphere transcends Pascal to exert its influence on the universal history of that metaphor. The subtle position that Borges expresses is neither that literature is entirely bound to its interpretation relative to the context in which it was produced, i.e. the author; nor is it that the interpretation of literature is entirely transcendent, independent of circumstance, rather, he seems to suggest that the particular is born in a given circumstance but then becomes sublimated or transfixed into what he calls universal history, and it is through the lens of universal history that we encounter the literary image. In this sense it is more of a phenomenological hermeneutic position that goes beyond any nominalist/idealist dispute.

In the context of the essay “La flor de Coleridge,” the image in question is the following, quoted from one of Coleridge’s texts: ““Si un hombre atravesara el Paraíso en un sueño, y le dieran una flor como prueba de que había estado allí, y si al despertar encontrara esa flor en su mano... ¿entonces, qué?”” (*OC* 2: 18). Much like how he traced the genealogy of Pascal’s metaphor, Borges goes on to provide two other examples in which this image appears. The first is in H.G. Wells’ *The Time Machine*, in which the protagonist, to prove he had been to the future, brings back with him a flower that had not yet evolved in the present. The other example is from Henry James’s *The Sense of the Past*, in which the protagonist travels to the past due to his fascination with a portrait. As it happens, his journey to the past is necessary for the creation of the portrait; “la causa es posterior al efecto, el motive del viaje es una de las consecuencias del viaje” (*OC* 2: 19). With this last example are we confronted with the complexity that Borges sees behind the idea of a “universal history,” both internally within the text of Henry James and externally in Borges’s decision to group it together with the texts of Coleridge and Wells.

First is the internal significance of James’s text. It is clear enough that the problem of *The Sense of the Past* is the reflexive way in which we are oriented towards history. The protagonist’s search for the painting produces the painting which produces his desire to search for the painting. It is a classic *regressus in infinitum*, as Borges points out, and also a tautology. The painting is something particular to the protagonist, but in his search for it he elevates it to the status of universal history. The confusion of cause and effect, or more precisely the consideration that cause can be posterior to effect, speaks to the genealogical position that the universality of history is generate not from history itself but from the particular methods of interpreting history.

Second is the significance of grouping these three examples together under the totality of the image of the “flower out of time.” Borges speaks to this: “Wells, verosímilmente, desconocía

el texto de Coleridge; Henry James conocía y admiraba el texto de Wells. Claro está que si la doctrina de que todos los autores son un autor, tales hechos son insignificantes” (OC 2: 19).

Unlike the genealogy of Pascal’s metaphor, where it is plausible that each author of the various intonations was aware of previous ones, the genealogy of the image of Coleridge’s flower does not have necessary continuity within history. The links between the various articulations are subjective judgements. The two texts which ostensibly have the strongest reason to be linked in terms of imagery—Coleridge’s and Wells’—are the two which most plausibly are not.

Conversely, Henry James’s text, which is the most dissimilar in terms of its imagery, is assuredly linked to Wells’ text. The question implicit in this association then becomes: Can James’s text be connected to Coleridge’s, as Coleridge’s text can be *identified* (idem; same) with Wells’? If we assume that the imagery in both Coleridge and Wells is equal to the variable A, then it should make no difference which text informed James. We can almost imagine the texts of Coleridge and Wells as having the same intentional content—if we were to very loosely appropriate Husserlian terminology. We are capable of imagining them as having the same intentional content only because we are viewing them from an external Ego that in every noetic moment beholds them as having indistinguishable noematic content. This situates any sort of cause and effect not between the texts themselves, but rather within the subjective consciousness that both perceives and interprets their content.

In typical fashion, the essay does not make any definitive claims about the nature of authorship. Borges’s interests are never in proving a given hypothesis, but rather in exploring the poetical (poiesis; creative) potential of it. Were he to attempt to prove this position rigorously, he would find that it only holds true given his method of interpretation. As if to signal this aporia, he concludes the essay by saying he once believed the following. “Durante muchos años, yo creí

que la casi infinita literature estaba en un hombre. Ese hombre fue Carlyle, fue Johannes Becher, fue Whitman, fue Rafael Cansinos Assens, fue De Quincey” (*OC* 2: 20). Although utilizing the preterit to describe his belief and the prominent authors in whom were contained “la casi infinita literatura,” one cannot but think that Borges is not fully ready to give up on these names. Indeed, as so much of his writing is built upon citation, it would be impossible to get rid of the names without also changing the fabric of his own work. Hence, by forming a poetic of citation, the work itself becomes transcendent in the Husserlian sense: its very essence discloses a vastness that goes beyond its perception.

Another, final consequence of the question of authorship of the imagery is the following: if the origin of a specific image or idea cannot be traced back to its author, where, then, can its origin be placed? Even considering it to be possible to sketch all of the historical circumstance that lead to the production of a certain text, the question still remains as to the ontological nature of the text, or of the work of art in general. And if these historical genealogies are reflexively imposed from the present, what then? The very ontological nature of the work of art becomes tautological and infinite in its circularity. Again, we see what is terrifying about Pascal’s *Sphere*. The only difference is that *nature* is substituted with *literature*. “La naturaleza literatura es una esfera infinita espantosa, cuyo centro está en todas partes y la circunferencia en ninguna.”

10. Pessimism as Connective Tissue

As mentioned, the axiological relationship that Borges has with this worldview is pessimism. Nowhere is this pessimism more strongly linked with the above notion of “universal history” than in the “Biathanatos.” The central idea of the Biathanatos comes from John Donne, but Borges discovered it first through De Quincey, whom he paraphrases: “El suicidio es una de

las formas del homicidio; los canonistas distinguen el homicidio voluntario del homicidio justificable; en buena lógica, también cabe aplicar al suicidio esa distinción. De igual manera no todo homicida es un asesino, no todo suicida es culpable de pecado mortal” (*OC 2: 71*). After a brief reflection on the content of Donne’s text, which consists mostly in the problem of Samson’s death (Judges 16:30), Borges arrives at a subtler conjecture which he believes to be the fundamental purpose of the text: to indicate that Christ himself committed suicide. The references to this are short, Donne invokes only two lines of scripture, cited by Borges in Spanish: “doy mi vida por las ovejas” (Juan 10:15), and “Nadie me quita la vida, yo la doy” (Juan 10:18). The implicit conclusion of this is that suicide is central not only to the Christian Pasion, but also to all of Christian cosmogony.

Antes que Adán fuera formado del polvo de la tierra, antes que el firmamento separara las aguas de las aguas, el Padre ya sabía que el Hijo había de morir en la cruz y, para teatro de esa muerte futura, creó la tierra y los cielos. Cristo murió de muerte voluntaria, sugiere Donne, y ello quiere decir que los elementos y el orbe y las generaciones de los hombres y Egipto y Roma y Babilonia y Judá fueron sacados de la nada para destruirlo. Quizá el hierro fue creado para los clavos y las espinas para la corona de escarnio y la sangre y el agua para la herida. Esa idea barroca se entrevé detrás del *Biathanatos*. La de un dios que fabrica el universo para fabricar su patíbulo. (*OC 2:73*)

Already we can see how suicide is woven into the fabric of the universe. Whether or not this is an accurate appraisal of Christian cosmogony is a matter better left to theologians. The important thing is that it definitely *does* factor into Borges’s appraisal of the cosmos, or, at the very least, does not contradict it. As we shall see, this form of Gnosticism directly informs his pessimism and conception of “universal history.”

The passage which unites all of these concepts is the final paragraph of the essay. Like all of Borges's essays, it does not present a conclusion but rather a poetic manifestation of the preceding ideas.

Al releer esta nota, pienso en aquel trágico Philipp Batz, que se llama en la historia de la filosofía Philipp Mainländer. Fue, como yo, lector apasionado de Schopenhauer. Bajo su influjo (y quizá bajo el de los gnósticos) imaginó que somos fragmentos de un Dios, que en el principio de los tiempos se destruyó, ávido de no ser. La historia universal es la oscura agonía de esos fragmentos. Mainländer nació en 1841; en 1876 publicó su libro *Filosofía de la redención*. Ese mismo año se dio muerte. (OC 2: 73)

Here again we are confronted with “universal history.” Zulma Mateos claims that Borges's speculation about universal history is influenced by the metaphysical speculation of Swedenborg and Carlyle. “Tomás Carlyle había asimilado [la idea que la creación es una escritura secreta, una criptografía que debemos interpretar] de Swedenborg y de ahí que sostuviera que la historia universal es una escritura que tenemos que leer y que escribir continuamente. En esta misma línea, Borges afirma que presenciamos y actuamos continuamente en la historia universal” (Mateos 74-75). Taking into account the above text from the “Biathantos,” we can add to this that universal history is paradoxically always tending towards fragmentation and agony, precisely because of the breakdown of metaphysics.

To better understand this, it is valuable to turn to the life and philosophy of Mainländer. His magnum opus, entitled *Die Philosophie der Erlösung*, elaborates on Schopenhauer's pessimism but also departs from it. Unlike Schopenhauer, Mainländer maintains that there is no redemption in the true aesthetic experience of art, but rather that any redemption comes in the complete negation of life through what he terms the death wish, which is to say suicide. His

soteriology can be described as a Christian paganism, sharing the Christian worldview that life consists of suffering whilst simultaneously affirming that there is no God to give meaning to it (Beiser 202). More than any other philosopher—even the stoics and epicureans—Mainländer lived and *died* by his philosophy. He committed suicide shortly after the publication of his doctrine advocating suicide.

As indicated by Borges, there is a Schopenhauerian and a Gnostic influence in Mainländer's writings, but Mainländer also diverged from Schopenhauer in crucial ways, which led to the emergence of his entirely different soteriological doctrine and his eventual suicide. The two main areas that Mainländer diverges from Schopenhauer are in his metaphysics and ethics. In metaphysics he departs from Schopenhauer's transcendental idealism—the idea that the external world consists of representation—and also in his monism—that the cosmic will exists in all individual wills. He diverges from Schopenhauer's ethics in that he does not believe the criterion of morality consists in selfless action (Beiser 205). Moreover, Mainländer argues that Kant and Schopenhauer go too far in their assertion that forms and functions of the mind are necessary for the creation of the world, rather, they are only necessary for knowledge of the world. “They confused... *ratio cognoscendi* with *ratio essendi*” (Beiser 214). The result of this is to reintroduce a quantity of realism to the idealism of Schopenhauer, all with the effort to affirm a plurality of subjects and a plurality of wills. The important of this plurality is to explicate the tension between a primordial unity of being i.e., God, and the plurality of individuals that now populate the world. The only reason there are now a plurality of individual wills, he claims, is because this primordial cosmic will or primal unity—God—has died. “God is dead and his death was the life of the world” (Mainländer 108). Furthermore, the passion and death of the Christ is the crucial moment for this cosmological theory. God could not kill himself, so he devised a way

in which he could become man and thereby be killed. In *Mainländer* we therefore see the explication of the theory that Borges claims lies latent in John Donne—that “dios...fabrica el universo para fabricar su patíbulo” (*OC* 2: 73).

As for the gnostic influences of this theory we shall limit ourselves to one main observation contrasting the death of God in this context presented by Borges and in the context of another great Argentine writer, Ernesto Sabato. Sabato, both in his fictions *Sobre héroes y tumbas* and *Abbadón, el exterminador* and also his essays is fascinated by the gnostic idea of a God who is defeated by the forces of evil and whose legacy is continually mocked by the prince of darkness. “Una vez derrodató Dios, Satanás hace circular la versión de que el derrotado es el Diablo. Y así termina de desprestigiarlo, como responsable de este mundo espantoso” (*Abbadón* 340). And then later:

Según los gnósticos, el mundo sensible fue creado por un demonio llamado Jehová. Por largo tiempo, Dios deja que ese demonio obre libremente, pero al fin envía al Hijo para que temporariamente habite en el cuerpo de un judío. De ese modo propone liberar al mundo de las falaces enseñanzas de Moisés, ese profeta de Jehová, es decir del demonio. De paso, recordá lo que Papini dice del Moisés de Miguel Ángel. ¿Estaría Miguel Ángel en el secreto? ... La conclusión de Fernando es inevitable. Sigue gobernando el príncipe de las Tinieblas. Y ese gobierno se hace mediante la Secta de los Ciegos. (*Abbadón* 341).

In Sabato's Gnosticism, the various demiurges succeed in defeating God or at the very least blocking him from the world of appearances, which is our world. The Gnostic Gospels provide wonderful material to articulate this sort of cosmogony. But here is the important difference between Sabato's Gnosticism and the cosmogony of *Mainländer* and potentially Borges: in Sabato, God is somehow defeated by the forces of evil and this is what allows evil to reign; in

Mainländer, God is confronted by the suffering or evil of the universe and chooses to kill himself. In *Sabato*, there existed at least the possibility for good to triumph over evil; in *Mainländer*, evil is not only woven into the fabric of existence—it is the fabric itself. There is no potential for redemption through victory over it. The only redemption is suicide. So, God commits suicide. If we truly aspire to be Christlike, for *Mainländer*, then we too should aspire to suicide.

But to return to the topic of universal history, we are again presented with a new articulation of the metaphor. To review, if in “*La esfera de Pascal*” we are confronted with how universal history is the gradual process of disclosing how the nature of the world is “*effroyable*,” and in “*La flor de Coleridge*” we are confronted with how the history of this world is conflated with the history of literature, then in “*El ‘Biathanatos’*” we are confronted with how the ineluctable telos of this world and literature is fragmentation and suicide. What makes it universal is that it marches toward one ineluctable end, and that at every preceding moment this end is disclosed by both the content of literature and the ways in which it is produced.

This is, perhaps, an overstatement. In some respect, it takes Borges too literally as a disciple of *Mainländer*. In reality Borges was far more influenced by Schopenhauer than he ever was by *Mainländer*, and Schopenhauer explicitly rejects suicide. As with most of his other essays, it is most probable that Borges tells the philosophy and death of *Mainländer* more for the potential it brings to fiction than as a philosophical doctrine to be endorsed. Naturally, it is impossible to say whether or not Borges himself believed that suicide is justifiable, as he in no place declares his thoughts explicitly on the matter as do Schopenhauer and *Mainländer* (he does play with the literary possibilities of it though, in pieces such as “*Diálogo sobre un diálogo*”). Borges remains stoic in judgement and ambivalent about its literary possibilities. What can be

affirmed is that this uncertainty about suicide is woven into his prose and poetry, especially as a logical consequence of the contingent world of appearances which is a constant presence in all his writings. But regardless, in true fashion of Pierre Menard, let us take the liberty of allowing his life to inform the philosophical background of the work.

In that interview with Soler Serrano which celebrated eighty years of Borges's life, there is a curious moment that occurs right as Serrano is lauding Borges, wishing him many more years of life. Borges, with his *sonrisa de siempre* interjects: "Yo soñé esta mañana que me moría." In a comical moment that follows, Serrano defiantly asserts "No!" as if he were a petulant child, to which Borges calmly explains that the dreamt sensation of dying filled him with a "gran alivio" and sense of "libertad." He promptly follows this up by saying that his advice to any students or disciples would be "que se olviden de mí." The facile interpretation of this exchange is to say that Borges was merely being humble. Yet considering the pessimistic roots of Borges's worldview and literature, this cannot be the case. Compare, for instance, to last line in *Die Philosophie der Erlösung*: "Der Weise aber blickt fest und freudig dem absoluten Nichts in's Auge" — "The wise man gazes fast and joyfully into the eye of absolute Nothingness" (358). Joy for nonexistence is expressed in both, and one can easily interpret Borges's use of the word "libertad" as meaning "freedom from the suffering of existence." Additionally, freedom takes the form of nothingness. In Borges this is manifest in the phrase "que se olviden de mí," and in *Mainländer* in the word "Nichts." A line can be drawn connecting these, as "olvido" is "Nichts." It is oblivion which annihilates Being in its essence. To be forgotten is the final suicide for which Borges yearns. More remarkable is the notion that upon his death, fragmentary variations of him persist in the memory of others. This directly harkens *Mainländer's* theory of God, who is not fully dead upon his suicide, as fragments of him live on

in those who hold his memory. Only when these who hold memory of God forget him (commit suicide) is God's final annihilation realized. Respectively, Borges's death is only fully realized when he is forgotten—when those fragments of his memory pass into oblivion.

Despite the similarities with him, I am not suggesting that Borges's pessimism be read entirely in the context of Mainländer's. Nevertheless, it is clear that his pessimism extends beyond that of Schopenhauer's. It is a synthesis and expansion upon the pessimism of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Still, it is tempting to look for other philosophers that express a similar worldview. If there is one, it is probably Julius Bahnsen.

A brief survey of Bahnsen's major ideas reveals why. First is his view of life as *Galgenfrist*—a brief pause before the gallows. Unlike Mainländer, however, he is a tragic pessimist, believing that one should hold on to one's ideals and avoid becoming a cynic, even knowing he or she shall fail. These ideas were circulating around the time of the latter half of the nineteenth century, so it should come as no surprise that there are similarities with Nietzsche. Beiser argues, however, that we should not read Bahnsen in the context of Nietzsche, as his pessimistic views are all his own (Beiser 263). The next major thesis developed in his magnum opus, *Der Widerspruch im Wissen und Weses der Welt*, is his *Realdialektik*.

As Bahnsen explains it there, the real dialectic makes three central claims: (1) that contradiction exists in the very heart of reality itself and that it is not merely an attribute of our thought about reality (2, 5-6, 59, 62, 103); (2) that contradiction cannot be resolved and its result is entirely negative (5, 6, 23); and (3) that the source of contradiction lies in the will, which is the basis of all reality (2, 46, 49). (Beiser 271)

Effectively, Bahnsen uses a reading of Hegel and Schopenhauer to suggest that reality is at its base ontologically contradictory. The term he uses is *Ur-widerspruch*, a sort of primal

contradiction that forms the basis of the world. Therefore, this riddle of existence mentioned by Schopenhauer is fundamentally irresolvable. No story or poem or essay authored by Borges exists that is not made possible by this *Ur-widerspruch* belonging to the riddle of existence. Naturally, this leads Bahnsen to reject the possibility of progress. The *Realdialektik* is not like the Hegelian dialectic that progresses towards *cultivation* or *Bildung*, rather it always marches towards uncovering—disclosing—the primal contradiction underpinning the world of appearances. It drives towards the point in which the fundamental contradiction and tautology of the world merge together into aporia.

The last contribution of Bahnsen that is particularly relevant to the preceding discussion on Borges regards hermeneutics. He writes after the development of Boeckh, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Droysen, and thus his philosophy is at least in part informed by hermeneutics. In many ways he prefigures Gadamer, stating that hermeneutics as has been developed so far fails because it presupposes a rational and consistent author. In direct contrast to this, his proposal for hermeneutics is to “strive for just the opposite goal: to find contradiction” (Beiser 273).

In summation, Borges’s text stands in for the world that it cites. As it cites outside texts, it reveals its contingency. As these outside texts are shown to be themselves fabrications, the Borgesian text incarnates a certain truth that it cannot hope to ground outside of itself. This groundlessness of the text is the atrocity of the world of appearance, whose reality is generated from a transcendental idealism. The only axiological relation a subject can have to this world is pessimism because the existential relation of the subject to the world is perpetually unfulfilled striving, which can only be resolved in resignation, *olvido*, annihilation. The universal history of the world is the realization of this and the gradual tendency towards annihilation.

The following chapter will be devoted to how Borges assimilates Schopenhauer's system of metaphysics. Contrary to those who would claim that Borges would categorically reject any systematic metaphysics—usually referencing “Tlön:” “la metafísica es una rama de la literatura fantástica” (*OC* 1: 836)—, Borges's fictions do contain a metaphysical framework based in Schopenhauer, and this metaphysical framework is crucial for the understanding of the philosophical and literary consequences of Borges's writing for both himself and those whom he has influenced.

Chapter II: In Search of Metaphysics: Detective Narrative and *Verwunderung*

1. Program

The original program of this chapter was to provide an analysis of the pessimistic metaphysic of Schopenhauer in the work of Borges. This would entail a philological analysis of the moments in Borges's oeuvre in which he directly invokes Schopenhauer in addition to those moments in which his prose betrays a silent influence, such as in the story "Undr," as well as in his discussion of overtly philosophical themes, which are all almost invariably shaded with hues of the great German pessimist. The result of this investigation was thus understandably oriented towards a discussion of Schopenhauer's philosophy and an understanding of his system of metaphysics. Although this remains the central focus of this chapter, I have decided to situate it within a genealogy of Argentine metaphysics. At the center of this genealogy is the influence and philosophical tension between Macedonio Fernández and Borges. The overarching argument of this comparison is to demonstrate that 1) Borges accepts Macedonio's thesis that any liberation of Being requires a rejection of a transcendental subject (Macedonio's "*almismo ayoico*") along with all the trappings of such a transcendental subject (i.e. a transcendental consciousness of time), but that 2) Borges cannot bring himself to fully accept Macedonio's thesis, likely because Borges, ever the skeptic, can neither bring himself to dogmatically accept any of the metaphysical doctrines rejected by Macedonio, nor fully accept Macedonio's ungrounded refutation of them. Macedonio's refutation is ungrounded insofar as he explicitly locates his discussion of metaphysics in the ruins of philosophy—outside of classical and post-Kantian metaphysics and ontology. At no point does he intend to provide another meaningless philosophical disquisition on the theme of metaphysics. The conclusion of these two propositions leads to a tension from which a pessimistic approach to metaphysics is manifested, namely, that

life has a fundamentally negative value as it can neither reject the transcendental subject nor find a way to meaningfully engage with metaphysics as a transcendental subject (one recalls that one of the most foundational claims of Kant's transcendental idealism is the rejection of any metaphysics of speculative philosophy, which entails *metaphysica generalis*, or metaphysical ontology. This is differentiated from practical philosophy, which entails ethics). The result of this essential contradiction is a pessimistically oriented transcendental phenomenology, something of a synthesis of Schopenhauer and Husserl.

With this theoretical anticipation established, a general overview of the division of this chapter may be set forth. The first part of this chapter shall be devoted to a discussion of the work of Macedonio Fernández, specifically his engagement with—and rejection of—certain philosophical traditions. Particular attention will be given to how his fictions, especially the enigmatic *Museo de la novela de la eterna*, attempt to realize his critique with these traditions. This will provide a textual basis to demonstrate the ways in which Borges attempts to follow in the legacy of Macedonio, but also the ways in which he is not able to give himself over entirely to the *almismo ayoico* of Macedonio, and consequently how this unwillingness or inability sets up a pessimistic turn in his approach to metaphysics. From there, the discussion shall turn toward a more philosophical analysis of this pessimistic turn in metaphysics and the justifications and consequences thereof.

It is itself significant that Borges seeks to provide a philosophical ground (however cursory it may be) to a refutation of time. Whereas Macedonio begins by already having presupposed a refutation of the transcendental consciousness of time, Borges feels the need to provide some justification. By the end even he is not convinced. The project of “Nueva refutación del tiempo” is significant not as a philosophical treatise—such was never its

purpose—rather, it is significant as a demonstration of Borges’s intention to reject time in order to approach Macedonio. The irony of the piece, as mentioned, is that whilst trying to give some philosophical justification to a rejection of time (specifically a transcendental consciousness of time), he distances himself from Macedonio, who would reject the project of trying to provide such a justification on the basis that such a justification against metaphysics is in fact part of metaphysics.

2. Philosophical Background of Macedonio

The figure of Macedonio Fernández is just as much a character as he is historical person. His very name, often repeated merely as Macedonio, without reference to any surname, affirms this. He even appears as a mysterious presence in Ricardo Piglia’s novel *La ciudad ausente* as a metaphysician and engineer who transforms his terminally ill wife into a machine that translates and transforms stories, imbuing them both with mythology and personal memory, blurring the lines between the two. Much like Adolfo Bioy Casares’s *La invención de Morel*, it is a story which uses the idea of technology to arrive at the question of Being.

Yet Macedonio the person is often misclassified in his later representations, particularly when he is remembered as a mystic, giving the impression of someone fascinated with spirituality, even if in an ecumenical manner. The reality is that Macedonio does transcribe texts which seem to embrace a spirituality—particularly his doctrine of *almismo ayoico*, which shall be expounded upon later—, but this apparent spirituality is just that: apparent. In reality, it is a purely intellectual endeavor, disassociated from mystification and mysticism. This is an important note because excessive mystification makes Macedonio’s thought more difficult to

incorporate into any meaningful analysis or genealogy. It is true that his thought purposefully rejects systematization, but this is another matter altogether.

What is true is that Macedonio's principal project throughout his writings is the decentralization and critique of the subject, particularly the *cogito* of Descartes and Kant's later development of apperception. This naturally leads to a critique of metaphysics and of being, as the debasement of the subject logically invokes the question of the ontological basis of experience. Ana María Comblong, for instance, considers in her annotations on the ALLCA edition of *Museo de la novela* that "el logro máximo de la novela macedoniana es metafísico" (en *Museo* 18). Macedonio himself writes "He escrito la novela para alegrar a la Eterna que la quiere concluida y cree que la hallará apasionante. Seré así el autor de una metafísica fantaseada y de una novela metafísica" (*Museo* 210). But what exactly is this metaphysics? Is it, like Heidegger's classification of the concept of Being in the opening pages of *Sein und Zeit*, the most general and emptiest concept (*der allgemeinste und leerste Begriff*) (2)? Macedonio's approach to metaphysics is most apparent in the book *No toda es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos*, a collection of reflections on the topic. However, to truly understand his approach, one must look at how he employs these considerations in the very structure of his prose—both macroscopically in terms of structure of the work as a whole, and also on the level of the sentence and word. This discussion will first be situated within existing criticism to better give it scope and direction.

One of the first observations that one can make regarding the work of Macedonio is that the considerable amount he published during his lifetime—including *Papeles de Recienvenido* (1920), *No toda es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos* (1928), *Una novela que comienza* (1941), *Muerte es beldad* (1942) y *Papeles de Recienvenido y continuación de la nada* (1944)—is dwarfed by the posthumously published work of the author, among which is included *Museo de*

la Novela de la Eterna. With his work only gaining a more widespread recognition after his death, he is mostly remembered in conjunction with friends and disciples that overshadow him. Nevertheless, Macedonio is a nexus of disparate names and references. In his *Epistolario*, names such as Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Jules Supervielle, Carlos Astrada, and Miguel Ángel Virasoro stand out. The last two of this list are particularly important for our current discussion, as they contributed greatly to the dissemination of the phenomenological work and thought of Husserl and Heidegger in Argentina. Yet the name that perhaps most stands out is William James, with whom Macedonio claimed to maintain an epistolary relation. This relation, however, is not without its problems. Carlos García, for instance, finds this epistolary relation with James exceedingly difficult to corroborate, insinuating that it may be apocryphal—another invention of the author.

The classic philosophical interpretation of Macedonio, like that of Waltraut Flammersfeld, affirms that he held “Spencer y Kant como adversarios, James y Schopenhauer como modelos agotan la formación filosófica de MF en aquel momento” (400). This seems to orient him towards pessimism and pragmatism, but Flammersfeld also notes that only “recién en 1938 lee la obra fundamental *Pragmatism* (1907), según afirma en una carta a J.L. Borges” (Flammersfeld 400). In one of his letters to Carlos Astrada, Macedonio writes “Para despedirme noticiolo de que estoy leyendo a Virasoro en su obra sobre Hegel, que me parece fuerte, muy superior a la primera, y me acicatea mucho a pensar” (*Epistolario* 137). This places the depth of Macedonio’s philosophical erudition in question. Whilst he read widely and reflectively, it is unclear how sedulously, making it hard to pin him to a particular tradition.

In another letter Macedonio writes “[t]ornando a la metafísica, creo que el único pensamiento claro (pero ni completo, ni realmente honesto siempre, algo teatral) es el de

Schopenhauer... A mí me parece que Schopenhauer posee plena la percepción metafísica; ningún otro nos puede auxiliar en el problema y *Cuádruple Raíz* es lo que nos basta de él” (*Epistolario* 152). Schopenhauer is clearly a point of departure for Macedonio, as he is for Borges. Macedonio accepts the way in which Schopenhauer problematizes metaphysics, particularly insofar as it is perpetually insufficient for the acquisition of knowledge of Being beyond perception, but the extent to which his knowledge of Schopenhauer’s philosophy beyond this preliminary work is unclear. Schopenhauer sees the Will as the manifestation of the *Ding-an-sich*, which both can be known and must also be negated, yet how this was to be achieved was confusing even for his most devoted disciples. Macedonio is much more explicitly concerned with rejecting the transcendental subject and apperception than he is the Will, as the Will in Schopenhauer seems to transcend subjective boundaries. The mystical elements of Schopenhauer also reinforce the perception of Macedonio as a mystic, particularly his writings on *Verwunderung* and θαυμάζειν, which mean something like consternation or wonderment, as the way into metaphysics. This shall be analyzed in depth later in the section on Borges’s story “Undr.”

In his most systematically critical text, *No toda es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos*, Macedonio writes “La Metafísica es el conocimiento del ser, no de las leyes, relaciones o modos del ser; precisamente es la consideración del ser con eliminación de toda relación o ubicación. Es el esfuerzo de la Visión no-aperceptiva de la Realidad. Ciencia y Filosofía son Apercepción; Metafísica es Visión” (*No toda es vigilia* 36). With this small excerpt, Macedonio introduces no less than five distinct terms, each imbued with a critical tradition: Metaphysics, Being, vision, apperception, and reality. Macedonio is clearly trying to link the tradition the transcendental subject (from Descartes’ *cogito* to Kant’s *Apperzeption*) to the analysis of laws, relations, and

mode of being in such a way as does not permit any knowledge outside of subjectivism. This claim should be fairly uncontroversial. He then connects this mode of knowledge to the entire tradition of the sciences and philosophy, as contrasted to a type of immanent perception that he calls vision. It would seem that he views metaphysics and vision as ontologically empty sensation that produces a subject rather than being produced by a subject. Engelbert comments that “la Metafísica, como él la escribía siempre, con mayúscula, no era para él ni filosofía ni ciencia sino algo infinitamente más amplio,” but this does little to elucidate Macedonio’s critique of Kant (Engelbert 374).

In his essay “Naturaleza y anti-Naturaleza o Macedonio contra Macedonio,” Daniel Attala attempts to trace an argument about Macedonio’s “metafísica de la afección,” in which he corroborates the ontological emptiness of Macedonio’s approach to metaphysics. He writes:

La hipótesis contiene tres momentos. El primero, la afirmación de que las representaciones simples son anónimas; es decir que su especificidad es un producto adventicio sin valor ontológico. El segundo, que mientras la sensación es anónima y da por lo tanto lugar a dudas sorprendentes sobre su contenido específico, la afección no presenta dudas: en toda circunstancia (aun ante sensaciones anónimas) la conciencia sabe con certeza si goza o sufre. El tercero es la aclaración de que las dos afirmaciones anteriores permiten pensar que finalmente es la misma representación que es adventicia y por lo tanto se reduce por completo a la afección. Las representaciones—sensaciones o imágenes de color, sonido, olor—en el fondo no son más que cierto dolor o cierto placer. (Attala 239)

The influence from Schopenhauer here is palpable, representations, devoid of ontological value, are the basis of reality. The totality of these representations may well be like the Will in Schopenhauer, from which we are alienated by our transcendental subjectivity.

In another passage of *No todo es vigilia*, Macedonio defines what Being means to him: “El Fenómeno, el Ser en su plena realidad, es decir el color, el sonido, el contacto, el frío, el fenómeno, ocurriendo en el ser, es decir, ni en mí ni exteriormente a mí. Fuera de esto nada existe...” (*No todo es vigilia* 15-16). Again, we see similarities with Schopenhauer. We should avail ourselves of this moment to emphasize both what Schopenhauer is attempting to do and how Macedonio is using Schopenhauer as a point of departure to go beyond him. The pessimist sees life as fundamentally negative. For Schopenhauer, this negativity is connected with the metaphysics of the Will. The subject, for Schopenhauer, is somehow alienated from knowledge of the Will. This is broadly because he conceives of the Will as the *Ding-an-sich*, which, as Kant argues, is unknowable to the transcendental subject. To arrive at the Will, one might be able to argue, one would first necessarily overcome the limitations of the transcendental subject. The goal of Schopenhauer’s philosophy is to arrive at a negation of the Will (which presupposes the overcoming of the transcendental subject). A modified reading of Schopenhauer’s pessimism could therefore reasonably be rendered: Supposing all these premises to hold, but adding to them one more premise, namely, *that it is impossible to reject the transcendental subject*, one could then also reasonably agree with the pessimistic worldview. In other words: *So long as the rejection of the subject is necessary for the negation of the Will, and this rejection is impossible, then life has an indelibly negative disposition*. This is, of course, a somewhat modified thesis from what Schopenhauer would say, but it seems to be more consistent with the writings of Borges. It is also for this reason that Macedonio *does* propose ways to reject the transcendental

subject. This is, in my estimation, the great difference between Macedonio and Borges and also the grounds for a pessimistic reading of Borges, especially when compared with Macedonio.

Macedonio agrees with the first premises that I have extracted from my modified interpretation of Schopenhauer's pessimism. What he disagrees with, however, is the premise that this rejection is impossible. On the contrary, his entire corpus of writing is designed precisely to manifest such a rejection of transcendental subjectivity. If we return to the aforementioned quote from *No todo es vigilia*, we see that the Argentine writes that "el fenómeno" is "el Ser en su plena realidad." This is a rejection of the idea of an ontology behind or beyond the phenomenon. There is no differentiation between phenomenon and noumenon because there is no subject to make this demarcation.

With this for context, it is easy to see why Macedonio rebels against the thesis of apperception with singular resolve. As Kant writes in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, "Das Bewußtsein seiner selbst (Apperzeption) ist die einfache Vorstellung des Ich. Und, wenn dadurch allein alles Mannigfaltige im Subjekt selbsttätig gegeben wäre, so würde die innere Anschauung intellektuell sein" (*KRV* B68-B69) [Consciousness of itself (apperception) is the simple representation of the I, and if all the manifold in the subject were given self actively through that alone, then the inner intuition would be intellectual] (*Critique of Pure Reason* B68-B69). If apperception is the consciousness that a subject has of itself, this is what makes possible the reproduction of sensory impressions in the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) and their synthesis under the categories of the mind (*Verstand*), subsumed under a logic (*Vernunft*). It is central to the thesis of transcendental idealism, because it is what allows for a reflective analysis of the functions of the mind and reason.

Auf solche Weise sind synthetische Urteile a priori möglich, wenn wir die formalen Bedingungen der Anschauung a priori, die Synthesis der Einbildungskraft, und die notwendige Einheit derselben in einer transzendentalen Apperzeption, auf ein mögliches Erfahrungserkenntnis überhaupt beziehen, und sagen: die Bedingungen der Möglichkeit der Erfahrung überhaupt sind zugleich Bedingungen der Möglichkeit der Gegenstände der Erfahrung, und haben darum objektive Gültigkeit in einem synthetischen Urteile a priori. (*KVF* B196/A157-B197/A158)

[In this way synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible, if we relate the formal conditions of *a priori* intuition, the synthesis of the imagination, and its necessary unity in a transcendental apperception to a possible cognition of experience in general, and say: The conditions of the possibility of experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience, and on this account have objective validity in a synthetic judgment *a priori*.] (*Critique of Pure Reason* B197)

Furthermore, in the *Prolegomena* Kant defines the importance of the word transcendental: “Das Wort transcendental aber, welches bei mir niemals eine Beziehung unserer Erkenntnis auf Dinge, sondern nur aufs Erkenntnisvermögen bedeutet, sollte diese Mißdeutung verhüten”

(*Prolegomena* 55) [The word transcendental, however, which with me never signifies a relation to our cognition to things, but only to the *faculty of cognition*, was intended to prevent this misinterpretation] (*Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* 45). The very word transcendental refers to the faculties of knowledge, and therefore is connected to an *ego* or a *cogito* in which these faculties of knowledge manifest. Macedonio’s rejection of apperception, we are now able to conclude, is also a rejection of the transcendental tradition. In the great struggle between idealism and realism, Macedonio may still be an idealist, but certainly cannot be classified as

part of the transcendental tradition. The reason for making note of this may not yet be apparent, but it does set him up against later philosophers like Husserl, who does employ the word transcendental in his phenomenology, even if he at times will later regret it.

I have here endeavored to provide an explanation for Macedonio's rejection of Kant, specifically a metaphysical explanation of it. It does not deviate from the mainstream interpretation of many critics, however I have sought to reify it with a more concrete terminology. I leave a summation on Macedonio's relationship with Kant to the interpretation of Engelbert:

Codear fuera a Kant" es el tema, subtema y *leitmotiv* de *No toda es vigilia*; descifrando, el detestado Kant es la filosofía occidental por antonomasia; codearlo fuera equivale a exorcizar de la mente las "impuras sombras"—la nociva noción de que existe detrás del fenómeno, un elemento inconocible, el noúmeno, "peor obra de la inteligencia" en opinión de Macedonio, porque niega a la humanidad 'la plena conocibilidad del Ser'.
(381)

Reintegrating his interpretation into my above exegesis, we again see a rejection of any sort of noumenon or *Ding-an-sich* that is beyond the transcendental subject, to which we in turn arrive by means of apperception.

3. *Estética no-Kantiana and Almismo ayoico*

Building off this background, Samuel Monder elaborates upon an "estética no-kantiana" that emerges from Macedonio's writings. This aesthetic takes place in the ruins of philosophy, not in discussion with it. "Fernández da por supuesto, desde el principio, que la liquidación del discurso filosófico es una tarea ya acabada. Trabaja con *restos*, se mueve entre *ruinas*; escribe

después de la filosofía, en una lengua ajena, perdida e irrecuperable.” (Monder 58). It may be interesting to note a certain preoccupation with the end of philosophy in Macedonio similar to the end of metaphysics which every generation seems to herald anew. According to Monder’s interpretation, *No todo es vigilia*

se propone un proyecto de crítica radical a la metafísica de la representación, o de la presentación (tal como él suele denominarla) en la persona de Kant. Porque la obra de éste ofrece para Fernández la conclusión lógica, el desarrollo último y monstruoso de un proyecto filosófico que comienza con Descartes. Lo que tanto lo perturba es el desarrollo de una metafísica perversa a la que denomina *noumenismo*. (Monder 67)

Representation or presentation, as Monder and Macedonio employ the words, is to be understood similar to how Schopenhauer uses it, as an extrapolation of Kant’s discussion of phenomenon, which presupposes a noumenon. This dichotomy is, at least for Macedonio, the logical end of the philosophical tradition since at least Descartes. Anyone who writes after Kant is therefore writing in the ruins of philosophy.

Opposing this dichotomy, Macedonio embraces a metaphysics of *Passion*, which is an attempt to enunciate a decentralized subject.

A la metafísica de la representación, Fernández opone una metafísica de la Pasión. Se trata de encontrar un modelo alternativo al del sujeto moderno: el sujeto de pasión, que es un sujeto descentrado; aunque de difícil conceptualización, se supone que todos sabemos lo que éste es en el momento en que amamos, cuando dejamos de ser un sujeto de conocimiento (entendido como sujeto de representación) y nos convertimos en algo que ya no se define sino en términos de un *yo ajeno*. (Monder 72)

Already we can glimpse an aspect of Macedonio's aesthetic that is important in differentiating him from Borges. His attempt to decentralize the subject is founded in his attempt to lay bare perception and experience. Everything in *Museo de la novela*, for instance, is experienced immanently, as an immediacy. Nothing is concealed and nothing is transcendent, in the Husserlian sense. The detective is antithetical to this mode of writing. The detective presupposes a mystery beyond the immanent perception of the subject. He presupposes a dichotomy between that which is known or knowable, and that which is unknown and unknowable. The figure of the detective is something that permeates Borges's writings, not just those which are explicitly detective fictions, and this in itself marks a departure from Macedonio's non-Kantian aesthetic. Concealment lies at the heart of his detective fictions. But in Macedonio nothing is veiled, dissimulated, or intuited to exist beyond an immediate sensory totality, in which is included the very sense of self.

If Monder is correct in his assertion that Macedonio endeavors to establish an "estética no-kantiana," we may claim that this does not describe Borges's aesthetic, and that consequently this paves the way for a meaningful discussion of the role of some form of transcendental subjectivism in relation to Borges's pessimism.

Another important recent vein of criticism that is necessary to address is that of Luis Othoniel Rosa, particularly his discussion of Macedonio's *almismo ayoico*, which serves as a welcome appendix to the current discussion. Rather than call Macedonio's aesthetic an "estética no-kantiana," as does Monder, his program develops an anarchist aesthetic. Despite the difference in name, much of the groundwork for these two aesthetic doctrines overlaps. In his book *Comienzos para una estética anarquista*, he begins with the observation that "En su tratado metafísico, *No todo es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos*, Macedonio utiliza la idea anarquista de la

‘acción directa’ para explicar cómo no hay mediación entre la sensibilidad y el mundo externo al yo” (Othoniel Rosa 27). For Othoniel Rosa, much of this project is shared with Borges, and he cites “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” as an example of this. Othoniel analyses the famous line that the language of this civilization lacked nouns, and that in order to express an idea such as “the moon,” verbs such as “lunar” or “lunecer” must be used. According to him, this exemplifies an attempt by Borges, similar to Macedonio, to complicate the subject an object dichotomy.

It is again here that we must emphasize the nuance of the current analysis. Agreeing with Othoniel Rosa, it is true that Borges attempts to break down this dichotomy of sensibility and external world, and this may well even be a direct influence of Macedonio. However, my position differs from Othoniel Rosa insofar as I do not think that Borges fully realizes this breakdown of the subject-object dichotomy (and by extension the phenomenal-noumenal dichotomy of transcendental idealism) in his aesthetic. The attempt to break down the dichotomy is presented quite often in Borges as noble or desirable, even as the goal of aesthetics. And yet Borges has misgivings about possibility of its absolute realization. These are misgivings that Macedonio does not have.

Macedonio views the function of literature as a “sofocón” which deprives the continuity of subjectivity of sustenance. Othoniel Rosa confirms:

La literatura de la sensibilidad está pensada para producir emociones que cuestionen la certidumbre de continuidad personal. La literatura es un ‘sofocón’ mediante el cual el individuo, el yo, se desencuentra, siente claustrofobia ante los límites de su individualidad y se sale de sí. La literatura del sofocón es entonces una gran píldora contra la soledad. (120)

This conclusion is optimistic, although probably faithful to Macedonio's project. The way in which Macedonio writes is itself an attempted realization of this "sofocón." Characters are named as archetypes, their actions are explicitly contrasted to the will of the reader and author, who may also appear integrated into the novel. In Borges such ideas are often presented as intellectual games but are nevertheless subordinated to a more classical style of narration. Without Macedonio's radical style of narration, it cannot be claimed that Borges' narrative project attains the same ends.

For Othoniel Rosa's reading of Macedonio, the question of subjectivity, and the refutation of subjectivity, is based upon the notion of sensibility (*sensibilidad*).

Dice Macedonio que es ayoica porque siendo la Sensibilidad la única productora de subjetividad, no hay subjetividades fuera de ella, y por lo tanto el yo equivale a un 'nadie'. 'Yo' es el producto de una sensibilidad en un momento preciso y ese momento preciso es pleno, 'yo', pues, es 'cualquiera'... El 'yo' es una categoría de individualidad y de distinción (el yo está en oposición a otro, a una pluralidad) que no es necesaria una vez se comprueba que no hay afuera de la sensibilidad que lo produce. (Othoniel Rosa 139)

A few pages later, he elaborates further: "Macedonio construye sobre la idea de *ese est percipi* como fundamento de su idea de Sensibilidad, pero para refutar al sujeto (el sujeto es una percepción más)" (Othoniel Rosa 144). The work done by Othoniel Rosa is excellent for situating Macedonio's *almismo ayoico* within a critique of the Kantian tradition of the transcendental subject, as has been our discussion. What it does not do, however, is argue whether or not this is a philosophically valid argument to make, outside of Macedonio.

4. *Museo de la novela de la eterna*

Within Macedonio's writings, the central figure whom Macedonio sees as opposing Kant is William James. Biagini explains some reasons why: "La concepción macedoniana del 'yo' también tiene puntos de contacto con la posición de James. Ambos descartan la idea de una sustancia personal por resultar perceptualmente inaprehensible y por ser ajena a la conciencia mística, que permite el acceso a las profundidades últimas de la vida" (Biagini 106-107). In accordance with this observation, we can make the following claim about metaphysics for Macedonio, namely, that metaphysics, being incapable of deciphering the world (world, in the sense of that which is given to us; i.e. *die Welt*), instead plays the role of ciphering the world in riddles incapable of being unwound. These riddles, in turn, infuse us with a mystic or quasi-mystical experience of unlimited presence (again, unlimited meaning not limited by the transcendental subject). Philosophy and science, as Macedonio mentioned, attempt to decipher the world—and this is precisely contrary to the potential function he sees in metaphysics, which is to imbue the world with a sense of wonder: *Verwunderung* or *θαυμάζειν*, as we shall later see.

If we turn to *Museo de la novela de la eterna*, we can see a further engagement with Kant, particularly in the many prologues. Macedonio writes:

Existir es un hecho, pero nunca *yo* existo puede ser un juicio "sentido"; no conteniendo un *momento* de creencia es una mera yuxtaposición de palabras; ocurre que palabras se juntan. Esto os lo asegura uno que lamenta, a diferencia de todos los grandes lectores de Kant, haberlo entendido demasiado, es decir haberse quedado sin ilusión ninguna de que Kant fuera metafísico. (*Museo* 37)

Macedonio anticipates Derrida when he writes that the "yo" is a mere juxtaposition of words, as in each juxtaposition of words metaphysics emerges. A generous reading of what Macedonio is

trying to say here could be the following: he senses, much like Derrida, that the metaphysical tradition of speculative philosophy does not end with Kant, but rather that Kant paves the way for a metaphysics of language, ever as incomplete as the very medium which it analyses.

Este pensador [Schopenhauer], el más grande metafísico quizá, publica un borrador de investigador como gran libro solidario y definitivo. La distribución de Kant en la compleja *Crítica de la Razón Pura* es como un batido de números dentro de una bolsa.

Tal vez Spencer realizó libros verdaderos sin un raciocinio interrumpido, sin una palabra inútil. ¿Husserl es hoy más metódico? (*Museo* 96)

We again see that Macedonio's fascination with Schopenhauer bases itself in Schopenhauer's non-systematized way of approaching philosophical discourse. Let us compare this to a passage that Borges writes in "Nota sobre (hacia) Bernard Shaw:" "[L]as filosofías de Heidegger y de Jaspers hacen de cada uno de nosotros el interesante interlocutor de un diálogo secreto y continuo con la nada o con la divinidad; estas disciplinas, que formalmente pueden ser admirables, fomentan esa ilusión del y que el *Vedanta* reprueba como error capital" (*OC* 2: 114). In both passages we understand that the very act of philosophizing, as rigorous as it may be, cannot help but suppose a subject that is doing the philosophizing. The very form of writing sets forth certain inevitable conclusions which Macedonio rejects, and which Borges plays with without explicitly committing to rejecting it. We understand that the solution to the problem lies not as much in the factual content of what is written, but in the very manner in which it is articulated. This also has the effect of making the literary critic or philosophical commentator always feel a step behind the text, as if he or she were being swallowed by a quagmire of signification, often produced by one's own rampant speculation. Macedonio's very approach to

philosophy is to produce a hermeneutic frustration in his reader, who, voraciously awaiting resolution, finds him or herself further mired in the writing.

Whilst reading *Museo de la novela de la eterna*, we must first ask ourselves what the eponymous museum is. It is not an archive of physical artefacts, rather the museum itself is the ruins of metaphysics. Julio Prieto even goes so far as to classify the novel as “utópico” in the etymological sense of “carente de lugar” (Prieto 278). This is taken a step further with the characters of the novel, if they may even be classified as such. With names like Dulce-Persona, Deunamor, and El Presidente, they are less characters than they are archetypes. The novel is an archive of these archetypes, each of which strives after realization in the world. But they are forever disappointed; they cannot break free of the metaphysical world which they inhabit. Perhaps none have understood this better than Ricardo Piglia in his novel *La ciudad ausente*.

Regarding the museum, Camblong writes

He aquí el museo macedoniano: un cúmulo de discursos no clasificados ni jerarquizados; un discurso en discontinuidad, con fronteras equívocas, abusador de la repetición, explotador desatento del pleonasma y, simultáneamente, elíptico, reticente, críptico... el museo que alberga *colecciones de maravillas*, esto es, paradojas de todo tipo disparando el sentido por itinerarios laberínticos... (“Otra lectura del texto” 460)

Camblong’s style attempts a reproduction of Macedonio’s unrelenting style. The museum zigzags and fold back on itself and registers “*maravillas*,” which could easily be understood as metaphysical speculation that leads to paradoxes. She also draws upon the idea of a labyrinth in her description. But this is no physical labyrinth just as it is no physical museum. It is a labyrinth precisely because it evades systematization; because systematization is the goal of logic and metaphysics. These are the tools by which the physical is subordinated to an order.

If we had to describe this labyrinth within Macedonio's own vocabulary, the word "extraviado" seems to be a good nexus of concepts. In the prologue entitled "Presentación para la Eterna," we see a variant on this word appear.

Como esos días invernales de tormenta y sol, que temblorosos se apagan por instantes y hacen del mundo espectáculo del torcedor de la Indecisión, tuve algunos míos, luego de conocer a la Eterna, en que entre ella y el Arte y el Misterio, vacilé, en tanta oscuridad y apocamiento venía yo. Del todo desextraviado, vivo desde entonces en el hallazgo.
(*Museo* 20).

The contemplation of art and the consternation experienced when beholding art seem to be the process by which one becomes "desextraviado." In the footnote annotations Ana María Camblong comments that,

El *bricolage* lexical aparece para apoyar emergencias discursivas que tienen gran dificultad en explicar acontecimientos muy particulares, concienenciales o metafísicos: "desextraviado" liga un prefijo anómalo, para indicar la condición de aquel que volvió o tuvo que desandar el extravío; el neologismo macedoniano, generalmente, no tiene un objetivo puramente estético, no es un juego formal, sino una búsqueda conceptual.
(Camblong, en *Museo* 20)

But it is also more than this. To feel oneself *extraviado* is the first step toward a *Verwunderung* that provokes metaphysical reflection. It is the *smarrimento* that Dante the pilgrim feels which sets him on his path. But to be *desextraviado* implies the awareness of having been *extraviado*. Based on the preceding discussion of scholarly criticism about Macedonio, we might be able to suggest that to be *extraviado* is to be lost in this labyrinth of metaphysical archetypes, compiled

in the museum, lacking order. Against this is to live in the *hallazgo*, or the rejection of this tradition of systematization.

We can compare *desextraviado* with Macedonio's use of the word *extraviado* and its variants. He writes "es la novela a la que le ocurren percances y aventuras, indecisiones de arte, extraviarse en él, callar, ignorar, mientras se está contando sucesos es arrollada por otros, contiene accidentes y sufre accidentes..." (*Museo* 27). One becomes lost in the mishaps, adventures, and indecisions of art. This is the *sofocón* to which Othoniel Rosa refers. To *desextraviarse* is to recognize this *sofocón* and leave behind the artifice of the novel, which stands in for the possibility of metaphysical order.

In the prologue to "Nueva refutación del tiempo," Borges reflects on his argument and its position in the history of the philosophy of time:

Publicada al promediar el siglo XVIII, esta refutación (o su nombre) perduraría en las bibliografías de Hume y acaso hubiera merecido una línea de Huxley o de Kemp Smith. Publicada en 1947—después de Bergson—, es la anacrónica *reductio ad absurdum* de un sistema pretérito o, lo que es peor, el débil artificio de un argentino extraviado en la metafísica. (*Otras inquisiciones* 757)

This passage is worth mentioning because of the fortuitous use of the word *extraviado*. There may be no demonstrable philological connection between Borges's use of the word and Macedonio's, but there are some intuitive similarities. *Uno se extravía* in metaphysics because metaphysics lacks topos; it lacks empirical base and substantiation. It is, as a consequent, the labyrinth *par excellence*.

The feeling of being *extraviado* permeates not only Macedonio's reader, but also his very characters, who experience this sense of being lost as a yearning for existence. "El anhelo que

me animó en la construcción de mi novela fue crear un hogar, hacerla un hogar para la no-existencia, para la no-existencia en que necesita hallarse Deunamor, el No-Existente Caballero...” (*Museo* 22). Macedonio creates his museum as does the dreamer in “Las ruinas circulares.” It is to be the home of non-existence, which itself begs the question of what the judgement *no-existencia* means. Is it the negative judgement *inexistent* (where proposition is negated; *id est*, it is not the case that Deunamor is existent) or the infinite judgement (*unendliches Urteil*) (where the predicate is negated; *id est*, Deunamor is non-existent)? Likely it is the latter, in which the predicate existence cannot be applied to the character Deunamor or any of Macedonio’s characters, either in the affirmative or negative. Otherwise Macedonio would have written *inexistent*, like Calvino does in *Il cavaliere inesistente*. They are outside of the predicate *existence*; in other words, they *are* outside of the realm of existence.

So, who are these non-existent characters that populate Macedonio’s museum? We receive a description from the author himself:

Presidente: La Alucinación del pasado como culminación en Novela; poder de una situación y escena igual sobre sentimientos que hayan cambiado, como tiranía o confusión.

Eterna: Olvido absoluto; olvido por gran presente; olvido de la persona a que se habla o mira.

Dulce-Persona: Queremos distintamente, a veces encendemos, a veces apagamos luz; ver y no ver; que se nos vea, que no.

Quizagenio: Prueba de arte en el novelista; trasuntar los estados emocionales de un boxeador a quien se cuentan los diez segundos.

Deunamor: Lucha entre pasión actual, amada actual (su imagen) y recuerdo de persona muerta. (*Museo* 175)

These are the most prominent characters of “la primera novela buena,” as Macedonio calls it, but they are by no means the only ones. Among others are “el Autor,” “el Lector” (sometimes written also “Leyente”) and “el Metafísico,” described as “personaje relámpago y teórico” (*Museo* 79). This last one comments in a crucial passage:

Es mucha enredada fantasmagoría de personajes, lector, autor. Y no es que finjan enredarse; no saben qué son. Esto se resuelve todo así: son todos reales; cualquier imagen en una mente es realidad, vive; el mundo, la realidad es toda mera imagen en una mente. Lo que no es imagen es la Afección, placer, dolor. El existir no es pre-deseable; en el pre-deseo de ser ya hay ser; lo que no hay es el comenzar, el no haber sido, en el cual situaríamos el deseo de ser.” (*Museo* 208)

The words “deseo de ser” stand out, as one can only desire that which one consciously lacks. As Plato teaches in the *Symposium*, Eros is born of Penia and Poros, and as such is an interstitial being, between poverty and wealth, and for this reason yearns for that which he does not possess.

The character that best represents this desire for being is Dulce-Persona, who holds a particularly special relation to the Novela. She asks at various points: “¿Qué hay hoy en la novela?” (*Museo* 139); “¿Qué tenemos hoy en ‘La Novela’?” (*Museo* 167). She yearns for reality and also that the novel itself become real, because in the novel develops the love between herself and Quizagenio. “Dulce-Persona y Quizagenio habían conversado dos horas en un coloquio feliz de hablar cada uno más que el otro. Estas dos horas son las únicas que hubo verdaderamente felices en el amor de Quizagenio...” (*Museo* 142). Dulce-Persona and Quizagenio then have another conversation in which the latter says, “Estoy triste, al contrario, Dulce-Persona: siento el

desmayo de ser sólo escrito, cuando pudiera no escrito sino real estar así... Dile al señor autor, Dulce-Persona, que quedamos sólo escritos cuando nos tenga sufriendo” (*Museo* 168).

Quizagenio feels the vertigo of being written, and contrasts this with the yearning for being real. The differentiation between real and non-real, once made, forever condemns the characters to the realm of the non-real. One can understand this as a rejection of the Kantian differentiation between the phenomenon and noumenon, which, once acknowledged, paves the way for a transcendental idealism. Macedonio, rejecting this Kantian division, allows the drama to play out among his characters who yearn for the inaccessible real just as the Kantian division presupposes the inaccessible noumenon. The disquietude experienced by Quizagenio is metaphysical disquietude precisely because it is directed toward a reality beyond (i.e. *meta*) the perceptible.

The alienation from the *real* is an alienation from Being, brought about through metaphysics. Hence, he presents Dulce-Persona as “la expectativa de ser. Está hacia el ser, pobrecita,” and as he writes her into existence, he does so with a certain pity and plaintiveness, understanding his impotence to concede Being upon her (*Museo* 32). On the next page he writes: “No creo que la Metafísica sea el placer directo de una explicación: es un trabajo que tiene el placer reflejo de una perspectiva de poder; es un poder lo que se busca; un poder directo del amor: que éste pueda ser causa inmediata” (*Museo* 33). The power after which metaphysics is searching is Being; it is the ontological realization and objectification of love—the very same yearned for by Eros in Plato’s *Symposium*. Insofar as this power (ontological realization) remains inaccessible, metaphysics is a trap—a labyrinth—which cannot deliver on its promises. It must instead be forgotten. It is no coincidence that Macedonio repeatedly returns to the theme of forgetting—and also no coincidence that Borges shall take up these reins. Regarding la Eterna he writes: “Quien pasa delante de ella pierde el don de olvido. Y si puede olvidarla es un lisiado”

(*Museo* 84); much later El Presidente comments: “yo viví dos horas de su olvido; tuve el ‘Olvido de la Eterna’, la inolvidable...” (*Museo* 145-146). Finally, we have the direct description of her: “Eterna: Olvido absoluto; olvido por gran presente; olvido de la persona a que se habla o mira” (*Museo* 175). She is the character that most approximates Being because she is the character that forgets her own subjectivity.

We see the otiose struggle for reality in the famous passage of the conquest of Buenos Aires. “Por eso cuando andan por calles de Buenos Aires se sienten reales y ansían volver a latir en la novela; van a la ciudad como a la Realidad, vuelvan a la Estancia como al ensueño; cada partida es una salida de personajes a la Realidad” (*Museo* 140). Buenos Aires is the locus of reality, and yet it is not home, it is not where the characters *dwell*. In the chapter entitled “La Conquista de Buenos Aires,” the antagonism of two gangs is narrated. The one, *los Eternecientes* and the other, *los Hilarantes*, attempt to dominate the city with a certain aesthetic. Eventually “la lucha entre ambos bandos desaparecería y Buenos Aires quedaría eternamente conquistada para la Belleza y el Misterio” (*Museo* 200). This truce is achieved “por milagro de novela” (*Museo* 200). If *no-existencia* dwells in the novel, then the conquest of Buenos Aires by the novel can be read as the conquest of reality by *no-existencia*, where *no-existencia* is the logical negation of the predicate. That is to say neither existence nor inexistence are valid predicates because both presuppose an acceptance of some form of transcendental idealism.

5. The Encyclopedia and Metaphysics¹⁰

One of the central questions of Borges’s oeuvre is of the possibility of an encyclopedic episteme. Each essay, story, and poem serves as an entry into this encyclopedia—a fraction of an

¹⁰ Fragments of the following sections have been previously published in *Variaciones Borges* in the article “Metaphysics and Contingency.” What follows is a recapitulation and expansion of the argument of that essay.

inconceivable whole—which fractures into references that give rise to a world. Existence is woven together by a web of reference, and the question of being in this world becomes intertwined with the possibility of knowledge to the structure of this web, seen from beyond the confines of those trapped within it. In other words, existence is a labyrinth of references which can only be understood from beyond existence. Hence, upon us is thrust one of the oldest formulations of the problem of metaphysics.

This is exemplified many times over. We may consider “El Aleph,” in which a single point branches out into the universe, which is revealed to the observer not in its entirety but rather as a camera choosing specific scenes to present. It is through the single point—both of the Aleph and of the image presented through it—that the entirety of the universe is brought into disclosure or unconcealment. Likewise, in “La Biblioteca de Babel,” the systematic ordering of the letters of the Latin alphabet may indeed be able to record the totality of the world—albeit in a very different fashion than the visual Aleph—, but will still only ever be disclosed in fragments, revealed by the seemingly aleatory caprice of the reader. Similarly, the meeting between Stephen Albert and Yu Tsun in “El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan” is but one instancing of many contingent worlds, each of which is somehow disclosed through the negation of one presented to us by Borges, leaving the supposition that the reality of one universe is but the fiction of another. In each of these stories the encyclopedia is infinite, reflexive; it is incapable of distinguishing reality from fiction.

In one of the aforementioned stories, “La biblioteca de Babel,” this infinite library necessarily contains—at least according to the librarians of the library—an encyclopedia that then contains all of the veridical histories of the world. However, since the library is ostensibly infinite (and also since the very encyclopedia would also be ostensibly infinite), it also contains

all possible apocryphal histories of the world, which are, unnervingly, also infinite.¹¹ These apocryphal histories of the world would be just as verisimilar as the veridical histories of the world because there exists no metaphysics that may be used to separate the veridical from the apocryphal. Therefore, the episteme of the encyclopedia contains not only the sum of historical knowledge, but also all potential or fictional knowledge. Yet, merely since some of these histories chronicle something that has never occurred, something that an omniscient demiurge would consider false, these histories still pertain to the infinite set of knowledge.

Of the many versions of infinity that influenced Borges over his life is, as some critics such as Floyd Merrell point out, Set Theory developed by mathematician Georg Cantor. The simplification of his theory is that any two infinite sets of numbers must be equally infinite, even if it would seem that one set should have more numbers than the other. Thus, the set of all integers (1, 2, 3, 4...) is equally infinite as the set of all even number integers (2, 4, 6, 8...) even though one might think it should contain twice the amount of numbers. And thus, one infinite set may contain within it an infinite number of likewise infinite sets. For this reason, an (ostensibly) infinite library may contain an infinite number of encyclopedias, each with an infinite number of histories, and so forth. One can also then claim that the set of items registered in the library contain the sets of all that is real along with the set of all that is fictional or apocryphal, and that these two sets, the real and the fictional, precisely because they are both infinite, become indistinguishable. In the Borgesian oeuvre, one cannot then dichotomize these two concepts of

¹¹ William Goldbloom Bloch states that given the parameters established by Borges, one can easily calculate the number of books of the library which, whilst vast, is not infinite. Though this is undoubtedly true, it is useful to remember that Borges draws upon a tradition in which the inconceivably large is meant to represent infinity. See “El otro Whitman:” “Cuando el remoto compilador del *Zohar* tuvo que arriesgar alguna noticia de su indistinto Dios—divinidad tan pura que ni siquiera el atributo de *ser* puede sin blasfemia aplicársele—discurrió un modo prodigioso de hacerlo. Escribió que su cara era trescientas setenta veces más ancha que diez mil mundos; entendió que lo gigantesco puede ser una forma de lo invisible y aun de lo abstracto. Así es el caso de Whitman. Su fuerza es tan avasalladora y tan evidente que sólo percibimos que es fuerte.” (*OC* 1: 384)

the real and the fictive, as each of these infinite sets is contained within the likewise infinite set of the encyclopedia. The real just as the fictive is contingent. This same playfulness regarding the real and the fictive being subsumed by an infinite encyclopedia appears also in “Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” in which the curious history of the eponymous lost civilization crops up in the “Cyclopedia” mentioned by the fictionalized version of Bioy Casares.

One of the paradoxes of Georg Cantor is the following: does a set containing all sets contain itself? The answer is that it cannot, and this answer has implications for metaphysics in Borges. One can imagine the *Biblioteca* containing (in theory) all possible sets. Yet it is logically impossible for it to contain itself. Therefore, there will always be some information that cannot be contained within this set purporting to contain all information. This information is metaphysical because it refers to the very structure of the set of all sets, to which we do not have access from within the set. From within the library, we do not have access to the structure of the library. From within our world of references, we do not have access to the order of this world.

We may again arrive at this problem through the following question: how does one navigate an infinite encyclopedia? At the end is it not empirical data that allows us to navigate an infinite encyclopedia, but rather an underlying logic discovered or presupposed by the reader of that encyclopedia. This presupposed logic—which we might call transcendent logic—is the heart of metaphysics. Since Kant, it is no longer possible to conceive of metaphysics as a structure from without that gives order to the physical world, as one might imagine in Plato, but rather it is something that is presupposed by necessity of language to occupy this role, without being extant. How metaphysics is conceived—far from being that which orders our physical reality—is instead contingent upon it. The roles have seemingly been reversed. One would think

that this would spell the end of metaphysics, as it has lost its privileged status. Any yet, curiously, it lives on, zombified.

Borges once quipped by means of his metaphysicians of Tlön that metaphysics is but a branch of fantastic literature. Metaphysics, being but a branch of philosophy, must surely then fall under the genealogy of the fantastic. The full quote is even more revealing: “Los metafísicos de Tlön no buscan la verdad ni siquiera la verosimilitud: buscan el asombro. Juzgan que la metafísica es una rama de la literatura fantástica. Saben que un sistema no es otra cosa que la subordinación de todos los aspectos del universo a uno cualquiera de ellos” (*OC* 1: 836). There are those who claim that by means of this quote Borges was playing with or mocking attempts at a systematic philosophy. However, this cannot be an accurate reading. What Borges is truly developing is a system of metaphysics, derived from Schopenhauer, that refutes systemic categorization, and which works to also layer itself in riddles. As shall be elaborated, one important word is *asombro*. This word appears in crucial passages across Borges’s most philosophical and metaphysical work and is connected to the genealogy of both metaphysics and oblivion, but such explanation must be reserved for a later time. In the meanwhile, we shall analyze the question of how language both presupposes and encrypts metaphysics. This question may therefore be reformulated into the following: What is the metaphysics that allows for such a system to be decipherable? Or also: How does such a system generate metaphysics for the purpose of becoming-decipherable?

What, then, is the way out of this quagmire of reference and also the way into the question of metaphysics? The answer, felicitously, may be one and the same: *Olvido*. This word, in Greek, is *Lethe*. Although this word may not share the etymological routes of the Spanish *Olvido*, it does share the semantic meaning of its Spanish equivalent, signaling both forgetfulness

and oblivion. From the word *Lethe* the Greeks then derived the word *Aletheia*, which is one of Heidegger's most important Greek terms, as it is a word that is fundamental in beginning to understand his philosophy. *Aletheia* means truth in Greek, but, as Heidegger himself notes many times, the word is derived from *a-lethe*, meaning the negation of *Lethe*. This is a term that will lead Heidegger to his notion of truth in being as that of unconcealment, a word that appears across his oeuvre, but which he develops with particular aplomb in the essay "The Origin of the Work of Art," which will be further discussed in the fourth chapter of this inquiry. Truth is not something that exists primally in the world, rather it is emergent from the negation of oblivion and forgetfulness.

6. "Undr" and *Verwunderung*

"Undr" begins in a way that is very familiar to a lector of Borges: a commentator, who identifies himself as "un mero aficionado argentino," "a mere Argentine fan," takes on the task of translating into Spanish a document which is both apocryphal and palimpsestic. The original document—which is of course apocryphal—is, like all apocryphal documents in the works of Borges, at least as verisimilar as any historic document. This particular document was, according to the narrator, originally to be found in the *Libellus* of Adan de Bremen, but comes to the narrator not through the original document, supposedly conserved in Oxford's Bodleian Library, but rather through a republication by Johann Martin Lappenberg in the *Analecta Germanica*. As with the other stories produced using this technique, the more uncertain the veracity of this original document becomes, the more its verisimilitude is augmented.

The story of Adán de Breman begins with a reflection on a nation in which there exist specific urns, tied to the poetic tradition of the people that populate those lands. An interlocutor

named Ulf Sigurdarson explains to the narrator: “Soy de estirpe de *skalds*, me bastó saber que la poesía de los urnos consta de una sola palabra para emprender su busca y el derrotero que me conduciría a su tierra” (OC 3: 50). The mystery that ensues has to do with the nature of these singular words that occupy the urns as well as a central role within the poetic culture of these Skalds, these poets. As the narrator continues, he finds himself in a situation in which he must perform a poem for the king, Gunnlaug. Knowledgeable in more structured poetry, he composes and memorizes a *drápa*, a “laudatory composition” of complex poetic structure, consisting of stanzas known as *dróttkvaett*, which themselves are comprised of eight lines of trochaic meter with internal rhyme. However, after performing his panegyric, the king perfunctorily gives him a token for his troubles and proceeds to listen to another poet’s encomium, which is strangely hushed and consists of a single word. The narrator describes the scene thus: “La guarda me empujó hacia el fondo. Un hombre tomó mi lugar, y lo hizo de pie. Pulsó las cuerdas como templándolas y repitió en voz baja la palabra que yo hubiera querido penetrar y no penetré. Alguien dijo con reverencia: ‘Ahora no quiere decir nada’.” (OC 3: 50)

Suddenly, however, the narrator is tapped on the shoulder by one Bjarni Thorkelsson who tells him that he is marked for death because he has heard the Word, *la Palabra*, but he also declares that he will save him. “Soy de estirpe de *skalds*. En tu ditrambo apodaste agua de la espada a la sangre y tejido de hombres a la batalla. Recuerdo haber oído esas figuras al padre de mi padre. Tú y yo somos poetas; te salvaré. Ahora no definimos cada hecho que enciende nuestro canto; lo ciframos en una sola palabra que es la Palabra.” (OC 3: 51). One can once again glimpse through this passage Borges’s fascination with kennings as a poetic and aesthetic device. The poet mentions how the kenning “water from the sword,” which following how kennings are formed in Germanic languages should probably better be translated as sword-water or

swordwater, is used for blood and how “weaving of men” signifies battle. This old fascination dates back to some of the earliest of Borges’s writing, notably “Los Kenningar” which appears in *Historia de la eternidad*.

From there the fictional Adán de Bremen flees and undertakes a myriad of adventures, some in which he must kill, others in which he must betray, but other than these cursory details the narration skips over these events. The nodal point of these adventures is that mysterious word that he was never able to decipher, and how he always comes back to thinking about it, even if it is to say he disbelieved in it. Surely it is facile to say that the word has biblical connotations, particularly because of its capitalization throughout the story, and surely it is true that one cannot talk about the Word without being influenced by the Gospel of John. However, it would also be a mistake to think that Borges is here only referencing the Gospels, as instead of using the word “*Verbo*,” which is the most common translation of the original Greek “*Logos*” in Spanish editions of the Bible—such as the *Reina Valera*, which Borges preferred—, Borges uses the word “*Palabra*” as if to distance himself from the Bible. He also offers the preemptory sentence: “Un misionario me propuso la palabra Dios, que rechacé,” which essentially amounts to saying that the Word to which Borges is referring cannot be conflated with God.

In any case, it is clear that this Word or *Palabra* is a loaded concept, and it is not until many years later that the narrator of the story returns to the home of the poet that saved him, Thorkelsson, to learn about its nature.

—¿Qué te dio la primera mujer que tuviste? — me preguntó

—Todo — le contesté.

—A mí también la vida me dio todo. A todos la vida les da todo pero los más lo ignoran. Mi voz está cansada y mis dedos débiles, pero escúchame.

Dijo la palabra *Undr*, que quiere decir maravilla.

Me sentí arrebatado por el canto del hombre que moría, pero en su canto y en su acorde vi mis propios trabajos, la esclava que me dio el primer amor, los hombres que maté, las albas de frío, la aurora sobre el agua, los remos, Tomé el arpa y canté con una palabra distinta. (*OC 3: 52*)

I wish to elucidate two things from this last scene of the story. The first is the melancholic beauty with which the narrator responds to the question “What did the first woman that you had give to you?” The response: “Everything” poignantly describes an aesthetic perception of romance in which the single moment of the romantic act becomes in itself justification for all of the suffering that has preceded it as well as for all of the suffering that will follow in its wake. In this way it is a very Nietzschean conception of love: a single moment that justifies the poetic return of all moments. Such a theme is to be found elsewhere in Borges, particularly in the story “Ulrica,” in which the lector cannot help but feel that the existence of one beautiful night justifies the labyrinth of maddening solitude that is otherwise carries the name of life.

Returning to the aforementioned passage from “Undr,” the most important aspect of it that I wish to highlight is the simple description of the word *Undr* as something that means marvel or wonder. Etymologically, the word stems from the same root as the English *wonder* and the German *Wunder*, where it is further the root of *Verwunderung*, a concept that appears with great importance in Schopenhauer, particularly his essay “On Man’s Need of Metaphysics,” in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*.

To begin his essay, Schopenhauer immediately sketches a history of metaphysics and *Wonder* as *Verwunderung*. He writes that the will-to-live in its objectification (that is to say, reflective human consciousness)

marvels at its own works, and asks itself what it itself is. And its wonder is the more serious, as here for the first time it stands consciously face to face with *death*, and besides the finiteness of all existence, the vanity and fruitlessness of all effort force themselves on it more or less. Therefore with this reflection and astonishment arises the *need for metaphysics* that is peculiar to man alone; accordingly, he is *animal metaphysicum*.
(*WWR* 2: 160)

It merits being mentioned that when Schopenhauer speaks of man as fundamentally an *animal metaphysicum*, he does not have in mind a specific metaphysical doctrine, or even that any specific doctrine could be determined. It is the need for metaphysics in any worldview—regardless of its possibility—that is particular to man.

Nevertheless, at the risk of further digression, I must point out the historical sources that Schopenhauer draws upon to foment his thesis regarding the metaphysical impetus *Verwunderung* unlocks in man. Aristotle says in the introduction to his *Metaphysics*: “For on account of wonder and astonishment men now philosophize, as they began to do in the first place.” Plato in his *Theaetetus* has the phrase spoken: “Astonishment as a very philosophical emotion.” In both of these cases the Greek is *θαυμάζειν*, the etymological root for words such as thaumaturgy, which express a sense of wonder or miracle. But for both Schopenhauer and for Borges the Germanic word *Wunder*, *Undr* is where the main inquiry into metaphysics begins. Some critics comment on Wonder in Borges’s fictions and poetry. For instance, Floyd Merrell explains:

If Borges uses mathematical constructs and metaphysical doctrines primarily to satisfy his aesthetic purposes, the theoretical scientist uses them to get her own results. Ultimately the scientist’s ‘facts’ are inseparable from her metaphysical ideas, and

Borges's metaphysics is intimately linked to the shape of his essays, prose, and poetry... But this is only one perspective of the Janus-faced scientist. First and foremost, she must possess the capacity for wonder at the very fact that the universe exists at all, and this sense of wonder inevitably leads to the construction of problem situations, the solutions to which help explain the universe. (87)

Additionally, on the very first page in his book about Borges and philosophy, Andrés Lema-Hincapié notes "Esa pasión hacia ciertas filosofías parece responder a una doble necesidad existencial de Borges: frecuentar filósofos es encender sin descanso la deseable *perplejidad* ante el mundo, es decir, vivir por completo asombrándose – el *thaumachein* que según Aristóteles es el origen mismo de la filosofía" (27). And yet, in both of these critics there is an inexplicable lack of mention of Schopenhauer, or, if Schopenhauer is mentioned, it is only obliquely or perfunctorily, without much serious consideration given to his philosophy.

Other critics that mention Schopenhauer are similarly disappointing. Ana Sierra catalogues various quotes by Schopenhauer and juxtaposes them to texts by Borges, but any rigor in her work stops there, as if juxtaposition does the labor of synthetic analysis. Perhaps a better article about the German and the Argentine and the metaphysical *Weltanschauung* that they share is authored by Roberto Paoli. Its merits are that it gives a large survey of references to Schopenhauer and a semi-critical examination of how Schopenhauerian concepts such as the Will and the dreamlike fabric of reality emerge in the Argentine's fiction whilst also expounding upon the ways in which Borges diverges from the German, such as his penchant for pantheism and the influence that cosmogonies such as Nietzsche's eternal return have upon his work.

But for us the question here is: what is the relation between *Verwunderung* and metaphysics in Schopenhauer and Borges, and how does this lead to the postulation of a

metaphysical principle of fiction? It is helpful to ground the terms in the language of Schopenhauer, who writes that

by *metaphysics* I understand all so-called knowledge that goes beyond the possibility of experience, and so beyond nature or the given phenomenal appearance of things, in order to give information about that by which, in some sense or other, this experience or nature is conditioned, or in popular language, about that which is hidden behind nature, and renders it possible. (*WWR* 2: 164)

He then goes on to say, in accordance with what I have expounded regarding the possibility of a single metaphysical system, that “as soon as a nation has extricated itself from the uncultured state, no *one* metaphysical system can suffice for all.” This is also evident in Schopenhauer’s criticism of Kant. According to his interpretation of Kant, the difference between metaphysics and physics

rests on the Kantian distinction between *phenomenon* and *thing-in-itself*. Just because Kant declared the thing-in-itself to be absolutely unknowable, there was, according to him, no *metaphysics* at all, but merely immanent knowledge, in other words mere *physics*, which can always speak only of phenomena, and together with this a critique of reason which aspires to metaphysics. (*WWR* 2: 173)

This metaphysics is always triggered by an inexorable sense of causal relation and sequence to the universe, balanced with an inability to understand such a causal structure. For Kant, metaphysics would correspond to that which is beyond the phenomenon. It may be beneficial to recall some of the terms Kant uses across the first *Critique*, but with succinctness in the chapter introducing the “Transcendental Dialectic.” There, he famously differentiates between “*transzendental*” and “*traszendent*.” The former, *transcendental*, categorizes his idealism: it

describes the limitations that the subjective mind is faced with in its perception of the world; adhering to the categories of the mind (*Verstand*). *Transcendent*, on the other hand, refers to any logical deductions that do not adhere to the limitations and borders of the subjective mind (B 351/A 295-B 353/A 297). It would be this theoretical knowledge, which goes beyond the limitations of the categories, that would correspond to metaphysical deductions, which Kant explicitly qualifies as invalid.

Causality, in any transcendental idealism, is a category of the mind. As such, it describes the necessary way in which a mind perceives phenomena but cannot be applied to the nature of noumena. The brevity of this observation regrettably does not capture the complexity of Kant's thought, and as such shall inevitably be prone to criticism, yet it does allow for a transition into the problem of causality in Borges.

7. Causality and Metaphysics

The problem of causality is the central problem of the detective story. Causality is always implicit in the world of the detective narrative, but the search for it is the search for a secret gnosis concealed deep within some labyrinth. For this reason, the last spoken line in "La muerte y la Brújula" is spoken by Scharlach who, about to murder Lönnrot, says "le prometo ese laberinto, que consta de una sola línea recta y que es invisible, incesante." This labyrinth that consists of a single line, and which is invisible and incessant, may be many things. On the one hand, it is very likely that this is an iteration of Zeno's paradox of the Achilles and the turtle. In this paradox the turtle also moves a determined distance during each interval of time, and it is Achilles who is condemned to always travel half of the distance between himself and the turtle during each such interval. As Scharlach fires his weapon, Lönnrot takes a step back, ensuring

that the bullet will never reach him and also ensuring that he will be trapped in the paradox forever.

It is well known that for Kant, the fundamental *a priori* forms of intuition are time and space. It may be noted that Borges's idealism privileges time as the initial form of intuition, *sine qua non*, opposing Kant, who enumerates both time and space as *Formen der Anschauung*. In "La penúltima versión de la realidad" he writes: "Pienso que para un buen idealismo, el espacio no es sino una de las formas que integran la cargada fluencia del tiempo. Es uno de los episodios del tiempo y, contrariamente al consenso natural de los ametafísicos, está situado en él, y no viceversa." And then again: "Vuelvo a la consideración metafísica. El espacio es un incidente en el tiempo y no una forma universal de intuición, como impuso Kant" (*OC* 1: 379).

Schopenhauer also seems to wish to modify Kant's forms of intuition in the first volume of *World as Will*. Rather than subtract space, he seems to wish to elevate causality to nearly the same status that Kant affords to intuition.

In Kantian language modified to fit Schopenhauer, this matrix of cause and effect is one of the *a priori* pure intuitions of the mind, or *Anschauung*. This means two things: first, that the laws of causality are not inscribed in the fabric of the universe, but rather in the mind of he or she who perceives the universe; second, it allows Schopenhauer to refute Hume's claim that cause and effect is derived from experience: it is rather an *a priori* structure of the mind that allows for experience to be possible.

All perception is not only of the senses, but of the intellect; in other words, *pure knowledge through the understanding of the cause from the effect*. Consequently, it presupposes the law of causality, and on the knowledge of this depends all perception, and therefore all experience, by virtue of its primary and entire possibility. The converse,

namely that knowledge of the causal law results from experience, is not the case; this was the skepticism of Hume, and its first refuted by what is said here. (*WWR* 1: 13)

When Schopenhauer speaks about refuting Hume, he means to critique him in the same way as Kant, whereby he inducts causality as a form which transcendental idealism takes, and not a property of the objective world in itself. Later in the first volume, Schopenhauer writes,

The real foundation of all truths which in this sense are called metaphysical, that is, of abstract expression of the necessary and universal forms of knowledge, can be found not in abstract principles, but only in the immediate consciousness of the forms of representation, manifesting itself through statements *a priori* that are apodictic and in fear of no refutation. (*WWR* 1: 67)

We again see an acceptance of the transcendental turn in metaphysics which sees a refutation of the classical metaphysics of speculative philosophy and an attempt to reground metaphysical truths in an analytic of consciousness. The resultant problem is naturally the consolidation of consciousness with the objective world. What if the objective world were merely a hallucination or dream? Do we suppose a certain *thetic* component to act of consciousness and the correlate noema, as does Husserl, or do we take a different route?

The subordination of cause and effect to the aesthetic of transcendental subjectivity seeks to establish it as prior to experience and a necessary prerequisite of experience.

The only genuine and convincing proof that we are conscious of the law of causality *prior to all experience* is actually found in the very necessity of making a *transition* from the sensation of the senses, given only empirically, to its *cause*, in order that perception of the external world may come about. I have therefore substituted this proof for the *Kantian*, whose incorrectness I have shown. (*WWR* 2: 37)

The effect of this is to formalize causality within the structure of intuition, but the content of this causality is left to empiricism. The dichotomy between form and content implies that form does not inhere content. In the context of fiction, we might be able to better understand this. The form of the story remains the same (as this is what is determined by the structure of subjective consciousness), but the content is variable. This is what gives an uncanny feeling to many of Borges's fantastic stories. Indeed, it is one of the hallmarks of the fantastic. The causal flow of the story follows the structure set forth by Schopenhauer's transcendental idealism, yet the content does not always seem to be subjected to this same rigor. Hence is the pattern of murders in "La muerte y la brújula" formed within the mind of Lönnrot, and likewise are the empirical perceptions of "Tlön" retrofitted to a causal chronology. The feeling of the fantastic is a feeling of *Verwunderung* in beholding the objective world, produced precisely because the immanence of the objective worlds discloses a transcendence to which the transcendental subject does not have access.

Thus, to return to Schopenhauer's essay "On Man's Need of Metaphysics," we see that he writes regarding man's wonder at the world:

The philosophical wonder that springs from this is conditioned in the individual by higher development of intelligence, though generally not by this alone; but undoubtedly it is the knowledge of death, and therewith the consideration of the suffering and misery of life, that give the strongest impulse to philosophical reflection and metaphysical explanations of the world. If our life were without end and free from pain, it would possibly not occur to anyone to ask why the world exists, and why it does so in precisely this way, but everything would be taken purely as a matter of course. (*WWR* 2: 161)

We note some striking similarities with many of Borges's fictions, such as "El inmortal," to name one in particular. "Ser inmortal es baladí; menos el hombre, todas las criaturas lo son, pues ignoran la muerte; lo divino, lo terrible, lo incomprensible, es saberse inmortal" (*OC* 1: 995). This conception of immortality, in which to be immortal is to be liberated from the tyranny of the successive; to be free of any memory and therefore also of cause and effect, is entirely in line with Schopenhauer's notion of man as *animal metaphysicum*. To be *animal metaphysicum* is precisely to have knowledge of the successive (*lo sucesivo*), and to then try to impose order onto the successive according to some metaphysical structure. As if to mock this futile attempt, Borges then gives a description of Homer as the composer of both order and chaos: "Ello no debe sorprendernos; es fama que después de cantar la Guerra de Ilión, canto la Guerra de las ranas y los ratones. Fue como un dios que creara el cosmos y luego el caos" (*OC* 1:995). These simple sentences, which relate the creation of the cosmos (order) with that of the *Iliad*, and that of chaos (disorder) with that of the *Batrachomyomachia*, the parody of the *Iliad* also often attributed to Homer, it is revealed that the force that interprets transcendental order from the universe is likewise the very force that discloses its disorder.

Some last thoughts on "El inmortal" before continuing with Schopenhauer: There exist two rivers in the fantastic world of Marco Flaminio Rufo: one that grants immortality, and another that takes it away – it would be entirely appropriate for the poetic mind to imagine both as the river Lethe; the river that at the end of Plato's *Republic* grants new life by infusing souls with a forgetfulness of the past. The potency behind the river Lethe at the end of Plato's masterwork lies in that it grants eternal life—by means of metempsychosis; this very potency concomitantly destroys the individual identity of the one who drinks from it by sending all of his or her memories into oblivion. What makes new life possible in Plato's myth is precisely the fact

that all memories are cast into oblivion. In the words of the dreamer in Borges's "Las ruinas circulares:" "Le infundió el olvido total de todos sus años de aprendizaje" (*OC* 1: 850). Imbibing oblivion is the other side of the coin of immortality, just as the disorder of the *Batrachomyomachia* is the correlative of the *Iliad*.

What we have so far shown is how the feeling of *Verwunderung* is produced when one adopts the transcendental idealist attitude against the experience of the world.¹² What we shall now do is show how this influences the form of fiction as labyrinth or cryptogram.

As discussed, Schopenhauer is concerned with the faculty of the intellect and its ability to generate understanding of the world, particularly when this understanding is not derived from external, metaphysical laws, but from the structure of the intellect itself operating in tandem with the Will.

In this respect, all kinds of systems and doctrines of faith, in so far and as long as they are held in esteem, certainly also serve as a substitute for such speculation. But that a fundamentally false view thrusts itself automatically on man, and must first be ingeniously removed, is to be explained by the fact that the intellect is not originally destined to enlighten us on the nature of things, but only to show us their relations in reference to our will. (*WWR* 2: 176)

Schopenhauer repeats and expands upon this idea later in the same volume of *Will and Representation*:

Such a faculty of knowledge, existing exclusively for practical ends, will by its nature always comprehend only the relations of things to one another, not their inner nature as it

¹² Although it does not fit into the present discussion, it is worth mentioning that one of the cornerstones of Husserl's phenomenology is a shift in attitude or approach (*Einstellung*) toward the world. It is the phenomenological attitude that makes phenomenological reflection possible.

is in itself. But to regard the complex of these relations as the inner being of the world, which exists absolutely and in itself, and the manner in which they necessarily exhibit themselves according to laws preformed in the brain as the eternal laws of the existence of all things, and then to construct ontology, cosmology, and theology on this pattern – all this was really the ancient fundamental error, which Kant's teaching brought to an end.

(*WWR* 2: 285)

The metaphysics from which ontology, cosmology, and theology is derived is something that is not intrinsic to the world as it is perceived, but rather projected onto it by the subjective intellect in an attempt to satisfy the Will. Again, we may stress the idea it seems like the satisfaction of the Will lies in metaphysics, but this is inaccessible to the intellect. A transcendental idealism allows us knowledge only of the form of the intellect, but not of the objective world that it attempts to understand.

Therefore such knowledge, far from leading us beyond experience, gives only a *part* of this experience itself, namely the *formal* part that belongs to it throughout and is thus universal, consequently mere form without content. Now since metaphysics can least of all be limited to this, it too must have *empirical* sources of knowledge... Supported by this, Kant then comes and shows that all such knowledge is nothing more than the form of the intellect for the purpose of experience, and that in consequence it cannot lead beyond experience, and from this he then rightly infers the impossibility of all metaphysics. But does it not rather seem positively wrong-headed that, in order to solve the riddle of existence, in other words, of the world which alone lies before us, we should close our eyes to it, ignore its contents, and take and use for our material merely the empty forms of which we are *a priori* conscious? (*WWR* 2: 180-181)

We see the use of the phrase “riddle of existence” here, and it is precisely this riddle that is also posed to us by fictions which employ labyrinths and cryptograms. The most compelling labyrinths are those which cannot be deciphered from within but can be deciphered from without. These labyrinths are the world as conceived of by Schopenhauer. Stepping outside the labyrinth is equivalent to understanding the metaphysical order of the world. But of course, this is impossible, and we are left only with the faculties of our intellect to attempt to decipher it from within.¹³ Schopenhauer describes this perfectly:

Kant proved the impossibility of a system of metaphysics on this path by showing that, although those laws were not drawn from experience, they had validity only for experience. Therefore he rightly teaches that we cannot soar in such a way beyond the possibility of all experience; but there are still other paths to metaphysics. The whole of experience is like a cryptograph, and the philosophy is like the deciphering of it, and the correctness of this is confirmed by the continuity and connexion that appear everywhere. (*WWR* 2: 182)

The continuity and connexion that appear everywhere call us to take up the role of the detective and calling experience a cryptograph confirms that we are somehow epistemologically alienated from it. This epistemological alienation is the result of the lack of a metaphysics that would unify the intellect with the objective world. We might term such a metaphysics gnoseology insofar as it corresponds to a unified theory of epistemology. It is this alienation that produces the feeling of the fantastic as well as the role of the reader-detective. Schopenhauer reflects on this alienation in relation to writing:

¹³ In *Il nome della rosa* by Umberto Eco, it is precisely for this reason that Guglielmo da Baskerville and Adso da Melk cannot decipher the structure of the *aedificium*’ labyrinth when they are inside of it. Only once they step outside can they deduce how it is ordered

If we find a document the script of which is unknown, we continue trying to interpret it until we hit upon a hypothesis as to the meaning of the letters by which they form intelligible words and connected sentences... Similarly, the deciphering of the world must be completely confirmed from itself. It must spread a uniform light over all the phenomena of the world, and bring even the most heterogeneous into agreement, so that the contradiction may be removed even between those that contrast most. (*WWR* 2: 184)

It is here that we see the most profound influence of Schopenhauer on the formal ontology of writing as citation. Citation captures only fragments of the world and does not permit knowledge of the world in its totality. The role of the reader is the same as the role of the detective—to piece together a comprehensive whole based on the fragmentary evidence before us. When Borges cites the world—be it in “Tlön,” “Pierre Menard,” “El Aleph,” “Del rigor en la ciencia,” “La memoria de Shakespeare,” or any of the other myriad stories built around citation—he is disclosing a formal ontology which relates the world to the subject only in encrypted fragments, which alienates the subject from the world, transforming him into a detective searching for an ultimate proof that can never be attained. In other words, the reader is transformed into an instantiation of the Will.

8. *Historia de la eternidad* and “Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain”

We have so far given a purview of the theoretical interpretations of Schopenhauer in Borges, citing various pieces of fiction. Yet arguably the first sustained engagement with Schopenhauer’s philosophy by Borges himself comes in *Historia de la eternidad*. The actual essay “Historia de la eternidad” is vast in its scope—too vast to be presented thoroughly in a fifteen-page essay. To begin, the basic structure of the essay seems to be influenced foremostly

by Nietzsche and secondarily by Schopenhauer. The endeavor to write a “history” in the sense that it is presented is very much similar to a Nietzschean genealogy. The Nietzschean genealogy is novel for philosophy because it asks the question *why* as opposed to the question *what*, which is occupied by most previous philosophy. For instance, instead of asking *what is moral*, Nietzsche would ask *why we consider something to be moral* (implying a history conditioning us to perceive morality such-and-such a way). Borges’s history seeks to ask a similar question: What are the historical reasons that have conditioned us to perceive time in the way that we do?

In addition to an interesting philosophical genealogy, we also can derive an understanding of what the significance of the sunset really is in Borges and why he seems to “return eternally” to it. He reflects upon a version of eternity present in the fifth book of the *Enneads* which does not explicate time as a sequence of events. “Es una cosa más sencilla y más mágica: es la simultaneidad de esos tiempos. El idioma común y aquel diccionario asombroso *dont chaque édition fait regretter la précédente*, parecen ignorarlo, pero así la pensaron los metafísicos” (*OC* 1: 692). Eternity cannot be thought of as a sequence without end, with each moment coming after some cause and preceding some other moment for which it is cause. It is this division of time into subsequent parts that emerges from language and recalls to mind the scene in “El Aleph” in which Borges is tasked with transcribing the sundry items that he has just observed by means of the aleph. “Lo que vieron mis ojos fue simultáneo: lo que transcribiré, sucesivo, porque el lenguaje lo es” (*OC* 1: 1068). This conceptualization of eternity, surely influenced by Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal return, takes the form of the sunset in the world constructed by Borges.

Paso a considerar esa eternidad, de la que derivaron las subsiguientes. Es verdad que Platón no la inaugura – en un libro especial, habla de los “antiguos y sagrados filósofos”

que lo precedieron – pero amplía y resume con esplendor cuanto imaginaron los anteriores Deussen lo compara con el ocaso: luz apasionada y final. Todas las concepciones griegas de eternidad convergen en sus libros, ya rechazadas, ya exornadas trágicamente. Por eso lo hago preceder a Ireneo, que ordena la segunda eternidad: la coronada por las tres diversas pero inextricables personas. (*OC* 1: 692)

What is most poignant about the imagery about the sun sinking into the horizon is that it is the aesthetic representation of how time is the horizon for being in the world. This imagery is carried through throughout the entire essay (indeed, it is carried through throughout much of Borges's corpus of work) and is continually made more poignant by the addition of philosophical points of reference, without which the imagery would ring as hollow platitude.

Borges then references Schopenhauer and one of his most common formulations: that the cat that plays in the patio is effectively the same cat that played on similar or disparate patios five-hundred years ago. Schopenhauer says the same about the lions of today, that they partake in the same “lion-ness” as the lions of the past, and that the particularity of these animals is contingent upon their form, viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*. In this way each cat partakes in the totality of cat-ness and all lions partake in the totality of lion-ness, and in this way share a nominalist relation to all other cats and lions. Bearing this in mind, Borges writes:

El hombre enternecido y desterrado que rememora posibilidades felices, las ve *sub specie aeternitatis*, con olvido total de que la ejecución de una de ellas excluye o posterga las otras. En la pasión, el recuerdo se inclina a lo intemporal. Congregamos las dichas de un pasado en una sola imagen los ponientes diversamente rojos que miro cada tarde, serán en el recuerdo un solo poniente. (*OC* 1: 701)

One sunset becomes the manifestation of all the other sunsets which it subsumes under its veil. This itself becomes a powerful metaphor for the conception of time and eternity that Borges is here promulgating: one that is reflexive and in which the parts and the whole are locked in a reciprocal relation, in which both are co-dependent.

The last imagery that Borges registers in the essay “Historia de la eternidad” is an excerpt that he quotes from a previous book that he had written, *El idioma de los argentinos*, and his decision to duplicate this image instead of writing a new scene shows how deadest he is on this particular metaphor. “Se trata de una escena y de su palabra: palabra ya antedicha por mí, pero no vivida hasta entonces con entera dedicación de mi yo” (*OC* 1: 702). Similar to “Undr,” Borges will correlate a scene of wonder with a Word that acts as a cipher that encrypts the same as it reveals.

Realicé en la mala medida de lo posible, eso que llaman caminar al azar... La marcha me dejó en una esquina. Aspiré noche, en asueto serenísimo de pensar. La visión, nada complicada por cierto, parecía simplificada por mi cansancio. La irrealizaba su misma tipicidad. La calle era de casas bajas, y aunque su primera significación fuera de pobreza, la segunda era ciertamente de dicha. Ninguna casa se animaba a la calle; la higuera oscurecía sobre la ochava; los portoncitos – más altos que las líneas estiradas de las paredes – parecían obrados en la misma sustancia infinita de la noche...Me sentí muerto, me sentí percibidor abstracto del mundo: indefinido temor imbuido de ciencia que es la mejor claridad de la metafísica. (*OC* 1: 702-703)

The scene, although the word is omitted, is one of wonder and astonishment, and this wonder is the sensation of being confronted with a breakdown of temporality, something that one would perhaps call a confrontation with the sublime. If the sensation of the sublime can cause a rupture

in the way a subject perceives the universe, then it is because of the way in which it ruptures the nominal structure of causality and chronology projected by the mind onto the universe.

It would feel incomplete to reference *Historia de la eternidad* without also referencing Borges's later essay on the matter, "Nueva refutación del tiempo," which appears in *Otras inquisiciones*. In this later essay we are presented with a Borges immediately recognizable, but somewhat more matured, and who in his maturation seems much more content to write with the purpose (telos, *Zweck*) of aporia in mind. He does not claim anything novel, proposing only "un sistema pretérito o, lo que es peor, el débil artificio de un argentino extraviado en la metafísica" (*OC 2*: 121). Again the refrain is invoked: "Todo lenguaje es de índole sucesiva; no es hábil para razonar lo eterno, lo intemporal" and hereafter Borges cites the same aforementioned passage from *El idioma de los argentinos*, that he also cites at the end of the essay "Historia de la eternidad." Although perhaps not his best prose, it is indisputably one of the most personal pieces of prose that Borges has written.

Another moment of *wonder* or *asombro* in Borges comes in the story "Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain," which is notable for how it connects this sensation with the idea of detective fiction and the metaphysical system that it presupposes. Whilst speaking about Quain's literary proclivities, the narrator writes,

Le parecía que la buena literatura es harto común y que apenas hay diálogo callejero que no la logre. También le parecía que el hecho estético no puede prescindir de algún elemento de asombro y que asombrarse de memoria es difícil. Deploraba con sonriente sinceridad "la servil y obstinada conservación de libros pretéritos"... Ignoro si su vaga teoría es justificable; sé que sus libros anhelan demasiado el asombro. (*OC 1*: 857)

This small excerpt is a microcosm of the aesthetics and philosophy that the entirety of Borges's prose and poetry occupies itself with. Aesthetics is the way into this philosophy because aesthetics is wonder that yearns for the sublime.

In the context of Borges this is the driving tension behind his best detective fiction. Let us continue to think, for instance, about "Herbert Quain." Describing the plot of the apocryphal Quain's equally apocryphal *The God of the Labyrinth*, he writes,

Hay un indescifrable asesinato en las páginas iniciales, una lenta discusión en las intermedias, una solución en las últimas. Ya aclarado el enigma, hay un párrafo largo y retrospectivo que contiene esta frase: *Todos creyeron que el encuentro de los dos jugadores de ajedrez había sido casual*. Esa frase deja entender que la solución es errónea. El lector, inquieto, revisa los capítulos pertinentes y descubre otra solución, que es la verdadera. El lector de ese libro singular es más perspicaz que el *detective*. (OC 1: 857-858)

The role that the detective serves is both as etiologist and teleologist; the role of the detective is to subordinate the stochastic events and to metaphysical (albeit nominal) order. But this way of writing detective fiction would not be Borgesian were it not for the inclusion of the role of the reader, who in his or her own right takes up the mantle of detective and becomes the driving force behind subordinating the series of events to an etiology or teleology. A detective fiction is etiological insofar as it seeks to explain the causality of past event leading up to the present; it is teleological insofar as it seeks to preempt a future event by understanding the causality as it proceeds into the future, as in "La muerte y la brújula." But of course, it is not within the characters' capacity to apply this order to the sequence of events: they are a part of the sequence

of events and cannot separate themselves from them sufficiently. It requires an outside eye, privy to information that could not possibly be known to the characters of the drama.

“Herbert Quain” marks the intrusion of language into man’s search for metaphysical order, and the apocryphal detective narrative that emerges from that interplay of language and order lies at the heart of the tribulations of modernity. The significance of the text proper, what is written and what would be perceived by any of the characters within the text, is itself incomplete. Its incompleteness derives from a lack of causal order, as if causal order is indeed perceived by the characters of the narrative, it is itself apocryphal. Therefore, order does not belong to the text proper but can arise only when the reader, prompted by the text, undertakes the task of rereading, and then projects a newfound order upon what has been perceived. Although it would be tempting to state that this order is entirely a function of the reader, one must also bear in mind that this readerly metaphysics would not have even been possible were it not for a moment of rupture that caused the reader to reassess his or her knowledge of the etiology of the events internal to the text. This moment of rupture is of course when the text prompts the reader by subtly revealing that the encounter between the two chess players was not in fact by chance, despite the fact that all within the novel believed it to be. This moment of in which the text prompts a reading that is incongruous with the structure that has hitherto been perceived is a moment of consternation and *Verwunderung*. The text, insofar as it rejects chronological and causal ordering, prompts the sensation of wonder and of the sublime.

9. The Heresiarchs of Babylonia

If “Herbert Quain” emphasizes the perspective of the reader who is ostensibly outside of the text, then what might this mystery appear as to those characters still within the text? One

might imagine that such characters would be lost in a quagmire of possible truths and speculations. Many exemplary stories could here be mentioned, but we will limit ourselves to just one exemplary story: “La lotería en Babilonia.”

The lives of its citizens of Babylonia are determined, even down to their smallest aspects, by a mysterious lottery. Whether an individual is regarded as a slave, a proconsul, a prisoner, or invisible the lottery determines.

Debo esa variedad casi atroz a una institución que otras repúblicas ignoran o que obra en ellas de modo imperfecto y secreto: la lotería. No he indagado su historia; sé que los magos no logran ponerse de acuerdo; sé de sus poderosos propósitos lo que puede saber de la luna el hombre no versado en astrología. Soy de un país vertiginoso donde la lotería es parte principal de la realidad hasta el día de hoy, he pensado tan poco en ella como en la conducta de los dioses indescifrables o de mi corazón. Ahora, lejos de Babilonia y de sus queridas costumbres, pienso con algún asombro en la lotería y en las conjeturas blasfemias que en el crepúsculo murmuran los hombres velados. (OC 1: 852)

The sensation experienced by the narrator is first and foremost identified as one of *asombro*, *Verwunderung*. We also note the use of the word *atroz*, which has been discussed in the preceding chapter. It is clear from the onset of the story that the lottery serves as a large metaphor for metaphysics (and also its cousin theology). One need not wait long for this suspicion to be confirmed by the narrator only a few short paragraphs later. He describes that in the early days of the lottery (which began to be managed by “La Compañía”) the losers could choose between paying a fine or spending some days in jail. “Todos optaron por la cárcel para defraudar a la Compañía. De esa bravata de unos pocos nace el todopoder de la Compañía: su valor eclesiástico, metafísico” (OC 1: 853). Every occurrence is ordained by the lottery, which is

the unperceived logic that structures this Babylonian society. And yet, paradox nevertheless reigns. The lottery provides order, reason, logic—and yet—, the drawing of straws is presumably random. The lottery dictates based on chance: *el azar*. In fact, this can be carried even further. The narrator imagines that every even ordained by the lottery will be carried out, but the manner in which this event is to be carried out must likewise be ordained by the lottery.

Imaginemos un primer sorteo, que dicta la muerte de un hombre. Para su cumplimiento se procede a otro sorteo, que propone (digamos) nueve ejecutores posibles. De esos ejecutores, cuatro pueden iniciar un tercer sorteo que dirá el nombre del verdugo, dos pueden reemplazar la orden adversa por una orden feliz (el encuentro de un tesoro, digamos), otro exacerbará la muerte (es decir la hará infame o la enriquecerá de torturas), otros pueden negarse a cumplirla... Tal es el esquema simbólico. En la realidad *el número de sorteos es infinito*. Ninguna decisión es final, todas se ramifican en otras. (*OC* 1: 855)

Not only is the lottery itself aleatory, but each decision that it is capable of making must itself be ramified by a potentially infinite number of further decisions. It should come as no surprise that some critics like Martínez take moments like this in the Borgesian fiction to expound upon mathematical theories such as Gödel's incompleteness theorem, with the idea being that certain sets of mathematical proofs must themselves be ramified by more fundamental axioms, and these must have their own ramifications and so on, until such a point is reached in which some of the proofs contradict others given and a once logical whole goes from being cohesive to fragmented and paradoxical.

Like all such logical metaphysical or theological systems, La Compañía can neither be proven or disproven.

Ese funcionamiento silencioso, comparable al de Dios, provoca toda suerte de conjeturas. Alguna abominablemente insinúa que hace ya siglos que no existe la Compañía y que el sacro desorden de nuestras vidas es puramente hereditario tradicional; otra la juzga eterna y enseña que perdurará hasta la última noche, cuando el último dios anonade el mundo... Otra, por boca de heresiarcas enmascarados, *que no ha existido nunca y no existirá*. Otra, no menos vil, razona que es indiferente afirmar o negar la realidad de la tenebrosa corporación, porque Babilonia no es otra cosa que un infinito juego de azares. (*OC* 1: 855-856)

The heresiarch—as opposed to merely the heretic—is a recurring trope throughout Borges’s fictions. But the role of the heresiarch is fundamental, as the heresiarch codifies an alternative possibility to the prevailing ideas. A heretic may merely deny, but the heresiarch seeks to supplant. Ultimately, though, the heresiarch is needed by orthodoxy in order for that orthodoxy to be able to define itself. Still, the most atrocious possibility is that neither orthodoxy nor heresy has any more grounds upon which it bases itself than the other, and this comprises the last conjecture that the narrator of “Babilonia” lists. Such an abominable or vile conjecture, in affirming that “Babilonia no es otra cosa que un infinito juego de azares,” rejects the possibility that one could even be cognizant of such a system promulgated by either orthodoxy or heresiarch (*OC* 1: 856). As such it is entirely agnostic and skeptic, as even if the lottery were to exist, it would be impossible to be able to prove its existence or nonexistence, and, moreover, even if it were possible to prove that it exists, this would still not change that the underlying logic of the lottery is aleatory.

10. “La biblioteca de Babel” and Epistemology

Another analogy for man's ineluctable perception of metaphysical ordering to the world can be intuited from "La biblioteca de Babel." In brief, we might consider, as the narrator does, that if this library does indeed contain every possible combination of letters, then it stands to reason that some set of these letters would indeed serve as a code to decipher the rest of the library. Importantly, we do not know for sure if the library contains every possible combination of letters, and this is due to Borges's engagement with the set theory of Georg Cantor united with Zeno's paradox. If the library is indeed infinite (again, the certainty of this is put in doubt), this does not necessarily mean that it contains every possible combination of letters. Just as one could interpolate an infinite series of numbers between 1 and 2 (1.5, 1.75, 1.875, etc) and never reach the number two, so too could one continue to interpolate an infinite set of A's before ever reaching B. Hence, infinity does not necessarily equate to totality. The set of infinitesimals between 1 and 2 is infinite, which is to say equally as large, as the set of all integers, even though it will never encompass integers past 1. But with this disclaimer let us again suppose that the library does in fact contain all possible combinations of letters in its infinitude, and therefore the key to deciphering the layout and code of the library does in fact exist. As the narrator points out, the first possibility in looking for this code is that one of the librarians actually would stumble upon a false code; one that bears the ostensible presentation of a deciphering keystone, but which in reality is impotent. Again, these false keystones must be assumed to be infinite. Nevertheless, it is still possible, however unlikely, that one stumble upon the veridical keystone. One would hope, then, that this code or keystone would supply metaphysical order; that it would be transcendent and apodeictic; that it would be the source of all other judgments or conclusions that one could draw from the structure of the library. However, one soon realizes, upon considering the many possible apocryphal codes, that there is no way to ensure that this code is

not also apocryphal. The only way to make such a determination is through empirical evidence: checking it against its claims. But again, one is faced with Hume's problem of induction: this code might be accurate for every use so far, but this does not ensure that it shall continue to hold true for every use in the future. This may not be significant practically for the lives of many generations of librarians, just as the problem of induction poses little hindrance to the progression of the sciences, but on a metaphysical level one can see that his or her relation to the metaphysical structure or ordering qua metaphysics is entirely shattered, as the logic behind metaphysics seeks to transcend induction. One recalls again that in Kant, transcendent seeks to take away the limits and boundaries of the transcendental mind. In other words, the metaphysical code inscribed within this imagined book is not self-sustained, it necessitates a ground upon which to base itself, and the search for this ground through empirical induction betrays its value as a metaphysical code. What is missing is a metaphysics of epistemology, something which we have elsewhere referred to as gnoseology.

We may ask ourselves now what exactly inducts both character and reader into the path of metaphysics. In these stories arises the sensation of the inadequacy of reason to apprehend the magnitude of the given empirical data of the world and as a consequence the inability to decipher this data. Reason seeks to lay claim to the absolute totality of the infinite, and in its inadequacy awakens the feeling of a supersensible faculty (*Kritik der Urteilskraft* 110-114). This is essentially the Kantian description of the sublime, more specifically the mathematical sublime. Whereas for Kant the sensation of the sublime lies in the apprehension of something of great magnitude, for Borges this same sensation is provoked by the medium of language itself. It is the search for an overarching structure to the library of Babel that is analogous to reason's search for an absolute totality of the infinite. Yet the empirical apprehension of the library exceeds the

faculty of the imagination. The apprehension of infinity is disclosed to us through the presence of the word.

Considering again “Undr,” we remember that the sensation of *asombro*, of *Verwunderung*, of the *sublime* even, is provoked not through the grandiosity of the events which the poet had witnessed throughout his life, but rather the singular, indecipherable word spoken to him at the very end of his journeys. The sublime in Kant is a sensation of the mind that confronts the subject with an inconceivable, ineffable sense of metaphysical wonder precisely because it confronts the subject with an inconceivable totality. In Borges’s “Undr” this very same metaphysical wonder is produced by the central character’s confrontation—not with the grandiosity of nature as appears in Kant’s original formulation of the sublime—but rather when he is confronted with a singular word spoken by the skald. It is for the first time in Borges that a word stands in as the way into metaphysics. His descriptions wandering through a crepuscular Buenos Aires are encoded by the word *Eternidad*, and this word in particular signals with what sort of inconceivable totality language confront the subject: time. We ought now to recall the line in “Penúltima versión de la realidad” in which Borges expresses a preference for time as the fundamental form of intuition. For Borges, therefore, any sort of sublime must correspond more with temporality than with spatiality, as temporality is the condition *sine qua non* for any other form of intuition. It is here that we arrive at the conclusion that for Borges, language is precisely that which encrypts temporality and provokes *Verwunderung*. One considers this line from “Al Aleph:” “Lo que vieron mis ojos fue simultáneo: lo que transcribiré, sucesivo, porque el lenguaje lo es” (*OC* 1: 1068), or this question from the prologue to *Historia de la Eternidad* “¿Cómo pude no sentir que la eternidad, anhelada con amor por tantos poetas, es un artificio espléndido que nos libra, siquiera de manera fugaz, de la intolerable opresión de lo sucesivo?” (*OC* 1: 689).

Language serves as an impetus to wonder because it divides totality into successive parts. In only being able to relate or experience an individual part of a totality, one becomes aware of the difference between perception, which is instant, and description, which is successive. Thus is the word locked in a process of infinite, palimpsestic signification. It is this potential infinity behind each word which may transform it into a sensation of a temporal sublime. Language inheres temporality, or rather a syncopation of temporality. This syncopation requires a reordering; a projecting of order from the mind to subjugate it to a totality. So does this syncopation provide the way into metaphysics; thus does the word become the way into metaphysics.

Chapter III: Ontological Consequences

1. Preliminary Remarks on Heideggerian Interpretations

The road to metaphysics is paved with language. But it is not just any road. Another apt metaphor is to say that this road is the *Holzweg*, the term utilized by Heidegger to denote the path a lumberjack carves through the forest, marked for its circuitousness and relapses.

Whither does this way go? Why do we never reach its end? Perhaps one answer can be posed that satisfies both questions. It goes to oblivion, to nothingness. We tread it always in half-steps because on some level we know it leads to oblivion, and therefore we hope never to reach its end.

If this road leads to nothingness, this means that at the heart of metaphysics is the question of Being. At the heart of metaphysics is ontology, *metaphysica generalis*. Heidegger again gives us direction. In *Identity and Difference*, he says: “More rigorously and clearly thought out, metaphysics is: onto-theo-logic” (*ID* 59). In his introductory essay on metaphysics, he writes: “Metaphysics is inquiry beyond or over beings, which aims to recover them as such and as a whole for our grasp” (*Basic Writings* 106). This helps to clarify why Heidegger inserts “theo” into the middle of the word ontology. Metaphysical thought seeks to behold Being in its totality, and this is impossible from within Being. Therefore, metaphysics invents God, retroactively, to do this labor where Dasein cannot. As with every other metaphysics, the claim of God’s existence has no legs to stand on, and it is in the realization of the impossibility of the proof of the existence of God that man is confronted with the profundity of nihilism.

The overlap of metaphysics and ontology has a long history, but in the context of twentieth century philosophy and the fiction of Borges at least two other names are inevitable: Heidegger and Levinas. Levinas’s ontology, or counter-ontology, may be particularly useful in

relation to Borges, as Borges is well noted for his Kabbalistic influences. Shlomy Mualem notes how coming face-to-face with the Other (*l'Autrui*) appears across Borges, made particularly interesting when this other is an alternate version of the self ("Face to Face" 326). Naturally, there is much to be said about how this relationship with the other forms what Levinas would call a primordial metaphysical relation. One of Levinas's largest critiques of Heidegger is that he focuses too much on Dasein's relationship with things and not enough on its relationship with the Other. It is entirely appropriate to include Borges in this conversation, as Borges occupies somewhat of a middle position, confronting the Other as an *existent*, but as an *existent* which is part of the selfsame. This is the basic idea of "Borges y yo," "El otro," and "Agosto 25, 1983," among others. Philologically, similar themes can be detected in Giovanni Papini's "Due immagini in una vasca," which was a particular influence on Borges.

Here, though, we must be careful not to confuse Heidegger with Levinas's critique of him. Although there are many aspects of Levinas's philosophy that expand Heidegger's ontology, I would argue that the parts of his philosophy designed to go beyond or to counter Heidegger fall flat, especially in the context of Borges. The reason for this is that Levinas seeks to rekindle the *juissance* of language as it is emergent from the primordial metaphysical relationship of the *existent* with the Other. This optimism is entirely unsubstantiated in his philosophy and ungrounded. In the stories by Papini and Borges, there even seems to be a tendency towards annihilation when confronted with the Other. This is most clear in Papini, in which the Other (if we are to use that term) is violently drowned, but it is also more subtly present in Borges. "Agosto 25, 1983," is notable for its mention of the suicide of the author, even causing worry that when the then-future date came to pass, Borges himself would commit suicide. For these reasons briefly outlined here, I claim that the relationship with Being and

beings found in Borges is ultimately more Heideggerian than Levinasian. In Heideggerian terminology, metaphysics arises as onto-theo-logy. To understand this, we must trace the evolution of philosophical thought and see how it corresponds to the questions posed to us by Borges's text.

Up until now we have only discussed the role of Schopenhauer's metaphysics in Borges, and there are some crucial differences between Schopenhauer's metaphysics and Heidegger's. The main difference I will focus on has to do with the shift from *Verwunderung* as the metaphysical emotion in Schopenhauer, to anxiety and boredom as the metaphysical emotions in Heidegger. The past chapter sought to explain how Borges writes *Verwunderung* as his way into metaphysics. This chapter shall seek to explain how he writes anxiety and boredom. More precisely, this chapter shall begin by explaining how *Verwunderung* may still be the way into metaphysics, but upon entering into metaphysical thought, this *Verwunderung* is quickly transformed into anxiety and boredom; *Angst und Langeweile*.

2. Metaphysics in La pampa

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Thomas Pynchon's Argentine, *Martin Fierro*-singing Squalidozzi remarks upon the particularly Argentine tension between the openness of the virginal pampas and the labyrinthine order imposed by the European city.

In the days of the gauchos, my country was a blank piece of paper. The pampas stretched as far as men could imagine, inexhaustible, fenceless. Wherever the gaucho could ride, that place belonged to him. But Buenos Aires sought hegemony over the provinces. All the neuroses about property gathered strength, and began to infect the countryside. Fences went up, and the gaucho became less free. It is our national tragedy. We are

obsessed with building labyrinths, where before there was open plain and sky. To draw ever more complex patterns on the blank sheet. We cannot abide *openness*: it is terror to us. Look at Borges... (267-268)

Rousseau also seems to be present in this excerpt: one cannot help but think of his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* juxtaposed to the imagery of the erection of fences in the pampas which enslave just as they lay claim to the wild. But there are other reasons I have decided to quote Thomas Pynchon rather than a critic on Argentine literature to open this section. Firstly, Pynchon's prose is always as enjoyable as it is insightful. More importantly is the substance of what Squalidozzi is saying. The Argentine problem has always been one of the confrontation with openness and labyrinths, concepts which seemingly contradict one another but may actually be one and the same. One is reminded of Borges's "Los dos reyes y los dos laberintos," in which the openness of the desert itself is the final labyrinth.

This problem has experienced both literary and political manifestations over the centuries, but its fundamental crux is metaphysical – and these political and literary responses have always arisen out of a desperate need to respond to the metaphysical dichotomy between the openness of the pampas and the intricate framework of the labyrinth. In Heideggerian terms one might imagine the pampas as the groundlessness (*Abgrund*) of metaphysics previously mentioned, and the labyrinth as the structure that Dasein constructs in order to simulate a proper metaphysical system and ground itself. Moreover, in choosing to cite Pynchon I hope to show that the philosophical analysis heretofore carried out is one that reaches beyond Argentina: it is, in fact, one of the fundamental tensions that arises in most postmodern literature, yet, as is made clear by the quote, in no literature is this tension clearer and more succinct than in the Argentine tradition, and in no Argentine is it presented more clearly than in Borges.

Of course, this theory about the nature of the Pampas is already well established since at least Ezequiel Martínez Estrada. “Lo ilusorio reemplazó a lo verdadero. La verdad, la tierra ilimitada y vacía, la soledad, eso no se advierte, pues forma como la carne y los huesos de que va andando: materia inadvertida en que bulle un sueño derramado por los bordes de lo que contiene la realidad, del horizonte para afuera” (Martínez Estrada 14). Estrada draws from the European existential tradition that places the solitary man against the abyss, and this abyss is manifest in the pampa. It is the part of the physical world that remains yet uncolonized by European metaphysics, and where every attempt at metaphysical colonization falls flat and is left with no leg to stand on. All ideology is metaphysical. All ideology is grounded in tautology. The presence of the pampa discloses or unconceals (*unverbirgt*) the untenable metaphysical ground of ideology. It leads to aporia. As such it becomes a labyrinth where all metaphysics goes to die.

A brief sketch of Argentine literary history confirms this. Guillermo Enrique Hudson has already been mentioned in relation to Borges’s essay about him, and indeed there is eminent metaphysical consequence to his works such as *Allá lejos y hace tiempo* and *La tierra purpúrea*. The tradition of gauchesco literature and the openness of the pampa is felt throughout Borges, particularly in the early works. Bartolomé Hidalgo, Estanislao del Campo, Hilario Ascasubi, Almafuerte, Ricardo Güiraldes, Esteban Echeverría—all are felt, particularly in the early essays. But this early influence never goes away. One recalls that in the last pages of Bioy’s journals he records that one of the last set of books Borges requested from the library in Geneva was the complete works of Ascasubi, commenting that he found it appropriate that Ascasubi’s collected works should amount to three volumes and his own only two.

Ernesto Sabato picks up on this metaphysical proclivity. In *Sobre héroes y tumbas*, he (Bruno) comments first on Güiraldes: “Güiraldes es argentino por su preocupación metafísica”

(*Sobre héroes* 176). Then about Roberto Arlt: “Es grande por la formidable tensión metafísica y religiosa de los monólogos de Erdosain. *Los siete locos* está plagado de defectos. No digo de defectos estilísticos o gramaticales, que no tendría importancia. Digo que está lleno de literatura entre comillas, de personajes pretenciosos o apócrifos, como el Astrólogo. Es grande a pesar de todo eso” (*Sobre héroes* 176). Compare this with his (Bruno’s) treatment of Borges:

No sé. De lo que estoy seguro es de que su prosa es la más notable que hoy se escribe en castellano. Pero es demasiado preciosista para ser un gran escritor. ¿Lo imagina usted a Tolstoi tratando de deslumbrar con un adverbio cuando está en juego la vida o la muerte de uno de sus personajes? Pero no todo es bizantino en él, no vaya a creer. Hay algo muy argentino en sus mejores cosas: cierta nostalgia, cierta tristeza metafísica...” (*Sobre héroes* 174).

What Borges shares in common with the greatest of Argentine authors, at least according to Sabato, is this metaphysical predisposition, imbricated with sadness. For him, the quality of being Argentine is a metaphysical quality. Borges’s sadness and labyrinths emerge from this.

Sabato is also one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century for this very reason. Sabato, following the metaphysical disquietude of those great Argentines before him, adds to it a certain paranoia that in many ways is shared in Thomas Pynchon. This can be seen across his three novels, as well as his essays. In *El túnel*, we are introduced via a paranoid artist to the possibility that a blind man is secretly pulling the strings of his wife and, by extension, everyone in her immediate vicinity. This premise is expanded upon in *Sobre héroes y tumbas*, culminating in the “Informe sobre ciegos” of Fernando Vidal Olmos, the paranoid report of a man who becomes convinced of this secret society and the nocturnal power that its members wield. In *Abbadón, el exterminador* a gnostic dimension is added, suggesting that in the beginning Satan

defeated God, and now all prophets of God exist at Satan's permission, to give people hope in a dead God, to mock God's legacy. The society of *ciegos* are those who carry out this will.

This summary does not do justice to the complexity of Sabato's writing, however what we may state is that the order provided by these secret societies—secret societies which, it ought to be noted, resemble one of Pynchon's favorite themes—is the Order of metaphysics. Specifically, it is the order that metaphysics is intended to provide, but which is always only visibly peripherally, from the eyes of a paranoiac; from the eyes of someone who perceives it through pareidolia more than through unmediated perception. It is this metaphysical order—or lack thereof—that forms the basis of Sabato's disquietude in the world. While not endemic to Argentine thought, it seems that the history and geography unique to Argentine create fertile breeding grounds that allows for this thought to spread.

To be clear, there are many differences between Sabato and Borges, and the two of them had a complicated, sometimes lightly antagonistic, relationship. Yet one thing that cannot be doubted is the metaphysical disquietude that informs their writings. It is almost a testament to the pareidolia of metaphysics that such a similar disquietude could spawn two such different writers.

All of this is to say that Las Pampas provides a strong introduction into this problem of metaphysics. Yet I am also wary to make a declaration that this way of perceiving the world is endemic to Las Pampas. One could even trace this dichotomy well beyond Argentina both geographically and temporally. Even Virgil's *Bucolics* are a manifestation of the tension between idyllic pastoral life and the city. All this amounts to saying that the gaze of the philologist is biased; the patterns are not woven naturally into the tapestry of the history of literature, but projected by the mind ever seeking patterns, even where there are none. When one considers the totality of literature, which is impossible, or even the totality of Western literature, which is just

as infinite of a set as all the totality of all literature, one quickly realizes that any claim to historical particularity quickly dissolves. The process of historiology makes both possible and ineluctable the paradox that the uniqueness of every historical moment becomes inscribed into the plurality of historical moments.

So, this mode of thought is not necessarily endemic to La Pampa, but it is true that La Pampa exacerbates it. More aptly, it is pervasive across the European culture and its decaying metaphysics, and that it seeks to nestle in every nook and cranny of the colonized world. As this thought nestled in Argentina, it took the form of the anxiety of the openness of La Pampa. This anxiety is read into La Pampa by a colonial culture in metaphysical decay, not extracted from them. Is it coincidence that this angst and world-weariness follows the dissemination of Capital?

3. “Utopía de un hombre que está cansado”

In the epilogue to *El libro de arena*, Borges writes that the story “Utopía de un hombre que está cansado” is, in his judgment, “la pieza más honesta y melancólica de la serie” (OC 3: 71). Melancholy is putting it mildly. There exists a melancholy that looks backwards, nostalgically, lamenting that the glory and grandeur that once was shall never again come to be, but which through this nostalgia evinces a certain contentment that accompanies the consolation that at least for one moment it *was*. But this nostalgic melancholy is decidedly *not* the melancholy captured by “Utopía de un hombre que está cansado.” In short, the melancholy of “Utopía” is produced by a boredom that metamorphoses into insouciance.

The epigraph of the story is of Quevedo, reminding us that in Greek the word *utopia* means “no hay tal lugar.” Not only is this important in reinforcing the notion that utopia has

always been a fantasy, but it also connects the idea of utopia with inexistence, annihilation. One arrives no-where by becoming no-thing. The yearning for utopia is the yearning for oblivion.

The first line written by Borges proceeds thus: “No hay dos cierros iguales, pero en cualquier lugar de la tierra la llanura es una y la misma” (*OC* 3: 53). Immediately the motif of place is taken up. The ubiquity of the plains harkens the aforementioned quote by Thomas Pynchon. It is an openness and terror that exists on the plains. It is terrible because it is ubiquitous and all-encompassing. None may escape. Eventually it will consume the mountains and assimilate their difference. Additionally, one may remark that this first sentence echoes *Anna Karenina*, although it is unclear if this is by design. Nevertheless, if we are to trace happiness and unhappiness onto the hills and plains of Argentina, we may be able to say that the plains, which correspond to the happy families, seek to assimilate all resistance into their formula of happiness; the hills, which correspond to the unhappy families, resist for a while but eventually are consumed by the monotony of a totalizing happiness whose only end is annihilation and oblivion.

After stressing the fact that the plains in which he finds himself could be Oklahoma or Texas just as well as La Pampa, the narrator, Eudoro Acevedo, comes across a house. There, he is greeted by a man dressed in all grey. The door has no lock and a clepsydra rests on the table. He attempts to communicate with the man and eventually finds that the only language they have in common is Latin. But this speaker of Latin is not a Roman, nor an enthusiast of Latin language and literature. He, like everyone in his time, speaks Latin out of convenience. “La diversidad de las lenguas favorecía la diversidad de los pueblos y aun de las guerras; la tierra ha regresado al latín. Hay quienes temen que vuelva a degenerar en francés, en lemosín o en Papiamento, pero el riesgo no es inmediato. Por lo demás, ni lo que ha sido ni lo que será me

interesan” (OC 3: 53). Difference and the language that was symptomatic of this difference did not lead to any sort of *juissance* or productive emergence of ethics when faced with the Other. Contrariwise, it led only to war and colonization. So grave was the state of the world that the only way to remedy it was to abandon all difference, return to some neutral tongue, and become absolutely disinterested in the state of the world: past, present, and future. The melancholy is poignant because the presence of Latin, which by so many poets is beheld as one of the two literary languages, is here bereft of literature. In fact, the names of the Latin poets are all but forgotten. If they exist, it is only as phantasms and whispers that fade with the dawn.

Eudoro Acevedo expresses that he is professor of English letters and a writer of fantastic stories. The Other responds that he once read

Dos cuentos fantásticos. *Los Viajes del Capitán Lemuel Gulliver*, que muchos consideran verídicos, y la *Suma Teológica*. Pero no hablemos de hechos. Ya a nadie le importan los hechos. Son meros puntos de partida para la invención y el razonamiento. En las escuelas nos enseñan la duda y el arte del olvido. Ante todo el olvido de lo personal y local.

Vivimos en el tiempo, que es sucesivo, pero tratamos de vivir *sub specie aeternitatis*. Del pasado nos quedan algunos nombres, que el lenguaje tiende a olvidar. Eludimos las inútiles precisiones. No hay cronología ni historia. No hay tampoco estadísticas. Me has dicho que te llamas Eudoro; yo no puedo decirte cómo me llamo, porque me dicen alguien. (OC 3: 54).

Within this short paragraph a multitude of references can be drawn to other stories by Borges, making it just the type that a critique would love to spend time memorizing. First is the return of metaphysics as fantastic literature. Equating the *Suma Teológica* to *Gulliver's Travels* invokes that phrase from “Tlön,” not to subordinate metaphysics to fantastic literature, but to link the

emergence of metaphysics with the experience of *Verwunderung*. Next comes the line that facts are mere points of departure for invention and reasoning. These facts, we might be able to say, are what is primordially at hand, but they are immediately subordinated to invention, most likely taking the form of language (reason, i.e. Logos), and are transformed by this invention. The events are disclosed and mediated through invention and reason.

Next comes the reference to *olvido*. Again, as we have seen before, the mention of *olvido* generates melancholic ambivalence. On the one hand forgetfulness, particularly of the personal and local, seems to imply a homogenized world in which identity is lacking. And yet we cannot deny the fact that a heterogeneous world of difference produces disquietude and anxiety. Memory is that which keeps us subordinated to successive time, and it is time, as the horizon of being, that makes impossible the understanding of transcendent Being in its totality, thereby keeping us isolated and anxiety ridden. By calling time successive, Borges is recalling the words in his prologue to *Historia de la eternidad*, in which he says that it would require eternity (totality) to liberate us from “la intolerable opresión de lo sucesivo” (OC 1: 689). The line from “El Aleph,” which has already been quoted in previous chapters, may also be reiterated: “Lo que vieron mis ojos fue simultáneo: lo que transcribiré, sucesivo, porque el lenguaje lo es” (OC 1: 1068). In order to live *sub specie aeternitatis*, it would be necessary to live without memory, because only the moment which beholds itself as a singularity can avoid the fate of weighing itself against an ever-incomplete totality. For this reason is man mortal: because he is cognizant of the past and of the future. The animals, who according to Lucretius lack any cognizance of past and future, are thus immortal. This is the primary theme explored by Borges in “El inmortal.” In following Lucretius, the immortals are those who forget and are immortal precisely because they forget. Moreover, such a forgetfulness is not complete until it has cast language

into the shores of oblivion, as language is exactly that which establishes successive, non-total temporality as the horizon of Being.

To be in the world is to dwell with the particular. Nominalism is the view that only the particular exists; realism that the essence of something transcends the particular. If, like Coleridge observes and Borges reminds us in “El ruiseñor de Keats,” all men are born either Platonists or Aristotelians, then realists are those who are descended from Plato and nominalists those who are descended from Aristotle. Both, ultimately, are metaphysical doctrines. Specifically, they occupy the realm of ontology. The matter at hand is not to differentiate the advantages of one system over another, but instead to understand that each is imbricated with ontological presuppositions. The ultimate nominalist would be someone like Funes, who remembers each moment as an absolute particular. The ultimate realist would be someone like the tribal men of “El inmortal” or this “alguien” of “Utopía de un hombre que está casado.” Time is the horizon that leads both doctrines to aporia. On the one hand, for the nominalist like Funes, living in successive time implies a negation of the absolute particularity of each thing. This is felt especially in the phrase “pensar es olvidar diferencias, es generalizer, abstraer” (*OC* 1: 883). To string together events in a chronology is to feel the intolerable oppression of successive time and to sacrifice the particular to the general. On the other hand, for the realist like *alguien*, successive time delineates the universal into particular incarnations. Each of these incarnations is discrete, even if their synthetic whole is a universalized totality. Totality, if it were truly attainable, exists only outside of time. Existence within time makes the achievement of totality impossible.

These descriptions of nominalism and realism are insufficient for a discussion of the complexities of each doctrine, but for our purposes it suffices. What is important for us to note at the moment is that at the base of each of these ontological doctrines rests the problem of time.

The metaphysics of each suppose a way to transcend the temporal dimension, which is ultimately unattainable.

Leaving behind the temporal dimensions of nominalism and realism and continuing in the story, Borges gives us the information that the inhabitants of this future utopia are accustomed to living as many centuries as they wish, but that in all the years of their lives find it unfathomable to read more than a half dozen books. The art of reading is not directed at the retention of things learned, but instead things are read to be forgotten, replaced by other trivialities. This may harken Plato's argument in *Phaedrus*, who is the first to suggest that writing makes way for Lethe. In the context of the story, it is linked to Berkeley's maxim that *esse est percipi*. One can see the relation this maxim has with Plato, as it is only during the course of beholding or perceiving the written document that the content therein is graced with existence. As soon as the gaze of the reader leaves the text, it leaves his memory, and upon leaving his memory ceases to be.

Next there is a discussion about the procreation of man. "Ya que no hay posesiones, no hay herencias. Cuando el hombre madura a los cien años, está listo a enfrentarse consigo mismo y con su soledad. Ya ha engendrado un hijo" (*OC* 3: 55). Knowing that this is a utopia for tired men, it is strange that they confront their solitude. Confrontation implies that they are somehow perturbed or disquieted by this solitude. Yet at the same time this is a population infused with abulia. Also appropriate would be the Spanish *hastío*. Neither word is used in the text, but it is not necessary: the whole text lacks any decisive will; it simply meanders to its inevitable conclusion. Abulia is just this: the lack of a will. As such it is more than merely a state of being apathetic or phlegmatic. Abulia seems especially appropriate because having a will almost certainly requires chronological judgment; it requires acting with some sort of purposiveness, implying a *telos* or *Zweck* chronologically posterior to the current moment. This is even true if

we interpret time as merely another dimension that would be static even if we were able to step outside of it. In this entirely deterministic universe, in which everything is preordained, everything would be perceived atemporally or achronologically, as it is only with the introduction of time that sequence as well as cause and effect become categories through which the universe is perceived.

But as mentioned, these people strive to live *sub specie aeternitatis*, and as such strive to live outside of time. The Will is attached to perception of chronology. Differentiation through time and awareness of it generates the phenomenon of the Will, which above all seeks unity. The temporal horizon that constitutes Being discloses the transcendental limitations of the subject contrasted to the ideal of the infinite supposed by pure reason. These future beings in Borges's story realize this and try to shed themselves of these limitations. They would realize that to step outside of time they have to shed themselves of their will. For this motive do they become, literally, abulic; *abúlicos*, not unlike *los inmortales*.

If one accepts this logic, it then becomes easy to perceive why pessimists like Philipp Mainländer are highly regarded by the author. According to "Alguien," one of the conclusions this abulic race of beings has reached is the following: "No conviene fomentar el género humano. Hay quienes piensan que es un órgano de la divinidad para tener conciencia del universo, pero nadie sabe con certidumbre si hay tal divinidad. Creo que ahora se discuten las ventajas de un suicidio gradual o simultáneo de todos los hombres del mundo" (*OC* 3: 55). Hand in hand with this is the statement that an individual "cuando quiere se mata" (*OC* 3: 55). Pessimism is here linked to two things: the tyranny of the Will, and the tyranny of chronology, although these two concepts may very well be able to be reduced to the latter in order to reduce

redundancy. As discussed, this is the “intolerable opresión de lo sucesivo” mentioned by Borges in *Historia de la eternidad* (OC 1: 689).

Another note on this refrain about the intolerable oppression of the successive: it has been observed that this successive is connected to both time and language, as language can only express itself successively, thereby preconceiving some form of chronology. Given the influence of Fritz Mauthner in Borges, especially as brought to light by Silvia Dapía, I would like to juxtapose this sentiment of Borges with an excerpt from Mauthner. Mauthner begins the first volume of his *Beiträge* with the following: “Wer weiter schreiten will, auch nur um den winzigen Schritt, um welchen die Denkarbeit eines ganzen Lebens weiter bringen kann, der muss sich vom Worte befreien und vom Wortaberglauben, der muss seine Welt von der Tyrannei der Sprache zu erlösen versuchen” (Mauthner 1). The form of both Borges and Mauthner’s sentences is similar. The “tyranny of language” could just as well be “oppression of the successive,” it would hardly be surprising if Borges were thinking—even if only subconsciously—about Mauthner when he penned that sentence. But beyond the formal similarities, there is a deeper thematic similarity that has to do with the consequences of trying to liberate oneself from language and the successive. In Mauthner the two words are “befreien,” meaning simply “to free,” and “erlösen,” which more closely translates to “release,” “deliver,” or “redeem.” This idea of “redemption” has already been mentioned elsewhere, in the context of analyzing Borges together with Philipp Mainländer, whose magnum opus was entitled *Die Philosophie der Erlösung*. In order to overcome this tyranny and oppression, man must be redeemed from language, and this is the thesis that Borges again and again explores. However, this redemption can only come once man has cast off his ties to language, which means also that he has cast off his ties to time and the successive. He has cast off the very transcendental categories through

which man as such (as Dasein) can even be articulated at all. In being redeemed from language man has ceased to be. We suddenly see the return of Mainländer's thesis that all redemption or salvation is only achievable through annihilation; oblivion.

A few final observations about "Utopía de un hombre que está cansado:" first, the canvases the narrator observes in the house of these future beings. "En un rincón vi un arpa de pocas cuerdas. En las paredes había telas rectangulares en las que predominaban los tonos del color amarillo... que figuraba o sugería una puesta de sol y que encerraba algo infinito" (*OC* 3: 56). Yellow was the final color that Borges was able to see as he gradually lost his sight. He described becoming blind not as some sudden shift into darkness, but as a gradual shift towards a ubiquitous yellow, here compared to the setting of the sun. Augustine and Heidegger and even Levinas note how the other senses are subordinated to sight, at least linguistically (*look* how it smells, *look* how it tastes, etc.). So, it should not at all come as a surprise that the gradual loss of sight is juxtaposed to the gradual melding into infinity, especially if this infinity is articulated as stepping outside of the phenomenological; stepping outside of time and outside of the senses that subordinate Dasein to time. Dasein's being-there is being-there in both time and space, the Kantian forms of intuition which forms the transcendental aesthetic. To step outside of these two, is to negate the very definition of Dasein. It would mean the very oblivion of Dasein, as the categories through which Dasein reveals itself are themselves forgotten. We are reminded of what Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*: "In Dasein there is undeniably a constant 'lack of totality' which finds an end with death" (286).

The second observation of this story is the following: as the narrator is guided through this future world, he observes one peculiar building. "Alguien" explains what it is: "—Es el crematorio—dijo alguien—. Adentro está la cámara letal. Dicen que la inventó un filántropo

cuyo nombre, creo, era Adolfo Hitler” (*OC* 3: 57). The statement is short and to the point. There is no room for sentimentality. It is the final blow to any feeling of hope or optimism. Again, the only possible interpretation falls in line with Mainländer’s philosophy of salvation, which is also the philosophy of suicide. The main question facing the members of this future society is not *if* they should kill themselves, but rather *how* and *when*. Is it better to exterminate mankind gradually or all at once? Is man ready to extinguish himself at one-hundred or three-hundred? Does he use the crematorium or some other means?

Ultimately, however, death is nothing different than achieving the timelessness of being *sub specie aeternitatis*. Perhaps it would not even be necessary for such beings to enter into the crematorium after living one hundred years. Becoming like the animalistic immortals from “El inmortal” would suffice. Either way, the only salvation—*Erlösung*—is that which liberates man from the categories through which Dasein’s understanding of the world arises. It is no coincidence that these same categories, namely consciousness of time, give rise to the phenomenon of the Will and the struggles that man must suffer as it becomes clear through the persistence of the Will that he is ever-denied totality. The result is a pessimism that turns either inward or outward.

The thesis that art can be used to overcome the pessimism that leads to the violent proclivities of mankind is resoundingly refuted. On the contrary, the very ontological conditions that make possible art are the very same that make possible the Holocaust. Art and holocaust are not opposed forces: they are two sides of the same coin, and the more this is understood by artists, the more art turns towards aporia and self-annihilation, towards the forgetfulness of form and logic, towards deconstruction, towards oblivion as the only form of salvation, *Selbstmord als Erlösung*; the “lack of totality which finds its end with death.” A valid interpretation of the story

can be that the ability for man to think in terms of the sublime is the very thing that condemns him to Holocaust. The only solution, then, is to cease to think; that is to say, to cease to be.

At the end of “Utopía de un hombre que está cansado” the narrator reflects on the yellow canvas he has taken back with him, “que alguien pintará, dentro de miles de años, con materiales hoy disperses en el planeta” (*OC* 3: 57). This is almost surely a reference to three texts referenced in his essay “La flor de Coleridge,” mentioned in the first chapter of this inquiry. As a review, the first is by Coleridge. He questions what would happen if a man traversed paradise in a dream and brought back with him a flower as proof of his journey. The second is Wells’ *The Time Machine*, in which the protagonist brings a flower back with him from the future as proof of his having been there. The third and last text is most similar to Borges’s story. It is Henry James’s *The Sense of the Past*, in which the protagonist travels to the past to see the creation of a painting on a canvas and unwittingly contributes to the creation of that very canvas.

One wonders if this journey into the future will be at all consequential in the realization of said future, just as James’s imagined journey into the past was consequential in the realization of the painting.

What is most unnerving about the story is that the narrator is dispossessed of any emotion or personal will (differentiated from the Schopenhauerian Will). He simply observes this future. There is a sense of inevitability to it all that is neither worth embracing nor rejecting.

4. *Angst*

This brings us to anxiety and boredom—*Angst und Langeweile*. One might think that fear and boredom signal different states of being. If one is afraid one cannot be bored just as it is conversely true that if one is bored one cannot be afraid. Yet this reveals a certain logical

correspondence between the two terms. They are two sides of the same coin. But what is this coin?

Heidegger writes:

Anxiety is not only anxiety in the face of something, but, as a state-of-mind, it is also *anxiety about* something. That which anxiety is profoundly anxious [sich abhängig] about is not a *definite* kind of Being for Dasein or a *definite* possibility for it... That which anxiety is anxious about is Being-in-the-world itself. In anxiety what is environmentally ready-to-hand sinks away, and so, in general, do entities within-the-world... Anxiety thus takes away from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself, as it falls, in terms of the 'world' and the way things have been publicly interpreted. Anxiety throws Dasein back upon that which it is anxious about—its authentic potentiality-for-being-in-the-world. (BT 232)

Anxiety is produced when the ostensibly natural machinations of nature fall away, when the great machinery of nature is perceived—truly perceived—, and in this perception it is understood that it could have been otherwise than it is. We go through life, interacting with *things*, with equipment (*Zeuge*), often without thinking about them. They are as if a phantasmagoric reel is being played out, predetermined and without reflection. One recalls the phantasmagoric beings in Bioy Casares's *La invención de Morel*. Anxiety breaks with this. It sees being as possibility and understand that the only universal possibility of every contingency is death. "Death does not just 'belong' to one's own Dasein in an undifferentiated way; death *lays claim* to it as an *individual* Dasein. The non-relational character of death, as understood in anticipation, individualizes Dasein down to itself" (BT 308). Anxiety is the state of being that realizes that the reel will run out, that eventually the play will end, that being will give way to nothingness.

It is in the confrontation with this nothingness that the true existential analytic of Dasein can take root, as it is this confrontation that shall determine whether or not it is possible to live authentically.

But the state-of-mind which can hold open the utter and constant threat to itself arising from Dasein's ownmost individualized Being, is anxiety. In this state-of-mind, Dasein finds itself *face to face* with the "nothing" of the possible impossibility of its existence. Anxiety is anxious *about* the potentiality-for-Being of the entity so destined [des so bestimmten Seienden], and in this way it discloses the uttermost possibility... Being-towards-death is essentially anxiety. (BT 310)

In face of death, Dasein flees towards the world-present-at-hand. It seeks to become a cog in the machinery, to extirpate the anxiety which places it face to face with the possibilities of the world. Just as an individual frame in a reel of film has no cognizance of what precedes it or what follows, Dasein submits itself to the present-at-hand to extirpate its sense of chronology and thereby extirpate any notion of death and the ultimate triumph of non-being over Being. In the experience of anxiety, there are two options: to either flee towards the world present-at-hand, or to confront that anxiety. In confronting said anxiety, Dasein must confront its own existential relation with the world in which it finds itself. It must understand this world as a series of possible relations that could be otherwise than they are. In so doing it must understand that the equipment of the world and the relations that Dasein has with said equipmental is not grounded in ontological necessity. Likewise, there is no single principle of causal ontological necessity to which Dasein can ground its being. These relations, insofar as they are thinkable, are proven to be thinkable as otherwise than they are, and the ability for them to be thinkable otherwise than

they are destabilizes Dasein's ability to exist immersed in the unreflective present, operating unthinkingly like the cogs in a machine.

In confronting this anxiety, Dasein must confront death. Death stands as the only universal to every contingency. So, in acknowledging being as possibility—in recognizing that what is present-at-hand is not grounded in its being by some fundamental ontology—, Dasein must confront death as the only universal telos of each possibility. When Dasein does not confront its being-towards-death, it instead flees towards the world present-at-hand. This is nothing more than stating that in the face of death and the contingency of existence, Dasein moves towards interacting mechanically with the world, as if this mechanistic, clockwork-like behavior could supplement the lack of a fundamental ontology. In other words, Dasein moves towards what has classically been called an animal-like existence, like an unreflective cog in a clockwork universe. This is what Heidegger terms inauthenticity.

To refer to the universe as clockwork neither means that the universe is ontologically deterministic nor ontologically non-deterministic. It merely denotes how it is experienced phenomenologically, as ultimately any existential analytic of Dasein is born of Husserlian phenomenology. Due to the metaphysical nature of statements regarding the determinism of the universe, such judgments must be interpreted based on an existential analytic rather than in cosmology. The reasons for this were discussed in the preceding chapter and have to do with the ineluctable contingency of all metaphysics, which makes metaphysics as a whole inevitable, but simultaneously makes any individual logical system of metaphysics ontologically ungrounded.

In light of the authenticity or inauthenticity of Dasein, the next question must be how this relates to the story “Utopía de un hombre que está cansado.” It must first be remembered that the future beings in Borges's story are not exactly Dasein, or, if they are Dasein, they aspire to be

otherwise than Dasein; they aspire to cease to be Dasein and therefore aspire to cease to be. In Da-sein, *Da* is the indexical predicate meaning there. Being is not the predicate, it is the logical structure of the judgement. To cease to be-there the negation comes not in the negation of the indexical predicate *there*, because every consciousness cannot help but have an orienting *thereness* to it. The negation, therefore, can only come in the rejection of the ontological substrate of the judgement, which is to say the verb *to be*. Dasein—or at least inauthentic Dasein—flees towards the world in the face of death. The beings in Borges flee towards death in the face of the world. Flee might seem like a strong word when referring to the future beings in “Utopía,” given their languor, but it is the word I elect to use, since in the world established by Borges, these beings could choose to remain where they are indefinitely. The reason they flee towards death in the face of the world has everything to do with how the question of authenticity is formulated and the way in which it is answered.

Here, the role of art in the utopia can guide our analysis. It is commented that over the course of hundreds of years of life, *alguien* (which, we remember, is the name of the future man) may only read half a dozen or so books. It is also mentioned that each individual creates any art or sciences that he needs, without need to draw on the wisdom of others. Art lacks any deep existential function because it no longer is tied to the limitations of Dasein. Only within the temporal limits of Dasein does art retain any sort of existential function. This is because it responds to the inconceivable totality of the world which manifests itself in the sensation of wonder or the sublime. However, for beings that reject or hope to one day reject the temporal dimension, the existential experience of wonder ceases to have any meaning.

Does this then mean that we should praise art as an authentic response to the abyss of being? The answer is not so simple. Art is born of a will to understand the world as totality, and

this will is always renewed by the impossibility of achieving totality. Art, then, seeks to simulate this totality. This is the function of metaphysics heretofore discussed. It behaves *as if* it understood the structure beyond being, despite the impossibility of knowing what rests beyond being. Art manifests itself as ideology, which seeks to impose itself upon the world totally, because only in achieving this totality can it feign laying claim to the ontological grounding which is prohibited to it by the constraints of the consciousness of Dasein. But precisely because there is no ontological grounding, this art can manifest as any ideology. Each ideology can claim equal ontological priority, as no ideology has any ontological priority. This means that in ontological terms that the pathos of King Lear is just as well-grounded as the unfeeling cruelty of Edmund the Bastard. In other words, the mere existence of art proves that the specter of Holocaust will always loom over humankind.

The beings who delve into art and into books are the very same beings who commit holocaust. Any redemptive capacity of art is tempered by totalitarian grasps at power and the oppression or slaughter of the Other that follows. In this sense, we should not be surprised that the greatest ontologist of the twentieth century was also affiliated with Naziism. In fact, it seems almost inevitable that he should be a Nazi. There is no contradiction that the greatest ontologist of the twentieth century should also be a Nazi. For man to be able to write poetry after Auschwitz, as Adorno once mused, is in fact to signal that Auschwitz will happen again. They both correspond to the same existential and ontological crisis of man.

This is why Borges notes the Holocaust has been forgotten by these future beings. By signaling that the name of Adolf Hitler is merely a shade of some uncertain memory, and by signaling that this memory is tied with philanthropy, there is no doubt that the notion of holocaust has been forgotten. But this forgetting is not to the chagrin of historians who might say

“those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it.” Instead, the holocaust occupies the same place as art, and as such is inconceivable to beings that live outside of time and without individualized will. Their rejection of individualized will is linked to Schopenhauer’s recommendation for the rejection of the Will as the yearning for totality that leads to art is the same as the yearning that leads to holocaust. To best reduce this natural state of suffering that arises from the Will and its individualized fragments, we must reject those fragments as best we can, and this is precisely what is accomplished by the future people of Borges’s “Utopía.”

In summation, this is where Borges differs from Heidegger: whereas Heidegger maintains that it is possible for Dasein to have authentic existential interaction with the world through art, Borges is much more skeptical of this possibility. If he does think that art may provide this existential interaction, he would also say that this necessarily means that holocaust can occupy this role just as well as art. Especially on the large scale of a culture or of a civilization it seems unlikely that art would be possible to satisfy this existential crisis arising from such a nihilist ontology. If this yearning is not rejected, it must be occupied by something. When it cannot be fulfilled by art, there is nothing to stop it from being fulfilled by other means.

His pessimism triumphs over any optimism that would assert a redemptive quality to art or life. In short, Heidegger is too optimistic for Borges. His philosophy only becomes compatible after one removes the notions that authentic living means anything other than the extinguishing of Dasein. *Erlöschen als Erlösung*. In other words, *olvido*.

5. *Langeweile*

The analysis thus far has occupied itself with the matter of anxiety in the works of Borges, particularly “Utopía.” However, anxiety is only one of the existential states of mind

identified by Heidegger. Another crucial state of mind is boredom—*Langeweile*. Given the theme of “Utopía,” it might even seem from the outset that boredom is a more apposite term than anxiety. Here Heidegger expresses how boredom is a profoundly existential emotion:

Even and precisely when we are not actually busy with things or ourselves, this ‘as a whole’ overcomes us—for example in genuine boredom. Boredom is still distant when it is only this book or that play, that business or this idleness, that drags on. It interrupts when ‘one is bored.’ Profound boredom, drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference. This boredom reveals beings as a whole. (*Basic Writings* 99)

Boredom is that which shatters any illusion that the ontic is also ontological; it shatters any illusion that the *existentiell* is also *existential*. When one is indifference to beings, one realizes that this indifference is founded upon the contingency of beings; the recognition that they could be otherwise than they are. When one is occupied only with one task, boredom is kept at bay. But when one realizes the whole host of tasks that one could otherwise be doing, one is struck by the possibilities of existence and struck by it as a whole. Boredom is a response to the contingency of our actions. This contingency is in turn generated by the fact that no action—be it a judgement or Husserlian intentional act—is grounded ontologically, and thus always has the possibility of being otherwise than it is in the realm beyond perception.

But can we say that this definition of boredom is what is experienced by the tired men of Borges’s story? They do experience boredom as a remarkable indifference, even jadedness or *hastío*. But they do not experience it in such a way that causes them to turn towards authenticity—at least not Heidegger’s definition of authenticity. When boredom reveals beings

as a whole, this gives Dasein the opportunity to assess his relationship with the phenomenological ontological structure of its existence, and it is here where Heidegger, much like Schopenhauer before him, finds meaning in a verse by Hölderlin which shatters all ontological presuppositions and liberates Dasein to think its existence.

But again, as with anxiety, the future beings in “Utopía” do not experience this. The “beings as a whole” which they experience in their boredom do not afford the possibility of authenticity because it is understood that any interaction with the world may be authentic so long as it takes into account its metaphysical groundlessness and the absolute contingency of *existentiell* character.

Borges’s story is itself a logical exploration of this concept. In order to understand this scope, one must take into account the general philosophy developed over his entire work, as I have endeavored to show. When one synthesizes these various aspects—his penchant for oblivion, his pessimism, the metaphysics present in all of his works and the simultaneous destruction and resuscitation of metaphysical logic, and his total opposition to fascism and Peronism—, one sees that the worldview that is established is one in which the horrors of fascism is inevitable, and in which art is insufficient to offer any redemption to the soul of man. Indeed, the very ontology of the work of art can be coopted by fascism just as authentically as it can by the solitary artist who opposes fascism. The only salvation, if one is to think in such soteriological terms, is found in *olvido*.

6. Totality and Crisis in Epistemology¹⁴

¹⁴ Part of this section appears in my essay “Metaphysics and Contingency: Borges, Schopenhauer, Heidegger”

The epigraphs of “El Aleph” signal infinity and totality in both time and place, and directs philosophical discussion again towards the phenomenologists Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas. The epigraph from Hamlet recites the quote about being trapped in a nutshell and considering oneself of king of infinite space. The lament is that he does not have access to a singular infinity. Hamlet himself would make an excellent detective in the postmodern tradition. He cannot decipher the mystery of his father’s death because he is plagued by uncertainty. This uncertainty is of course metaphysical, as there is no proof that would solve the mystery with apodeictic rigor. There are always more contingencies to take into consideration, and this foils Hamlet’s attempts at attaining knowledge of the totality.

To be able to assess the totality of the ontological structure of Dasein, one must perceive that structure from without, but Dasein is by its very nature trapped within this temporal horizon. Only death liberates it. But at the same time makes impossible the apperception of this totality. In this way does ontology promise theology, as the only way of perceiving the ontological structure of Dasein from beyond Dasein.

To put it negatively, it is beyond question that the totality of the structural whole is not to be reached by building it up out of elements. For this we would need an architect’s plan. The Being of Dasein, upon which the structural whole as such is ontologically supported, becomes accessible to us when we look all the way *through* this whole *to a single* primordially unitary phenomenon which is already in this whole in such a way that it provides the ontological foundation for each structural item in its structural possibility.

(BT 226)

The melancholy and pessimism of “El Aleph” is tied into its parody. As mentioned, one of the intentions of the story is to parody those universalists like Michael Drayton and his *Polyolbion*

which strives to encompass the totality of things. Yet merely because it is parodying this type of writing (and the epistemological structure presupposed by it), does not mean that one does not feel a profound existential attachment to the purpose behind this folly.

The Aleph would be such a way to pierce through this whole into the single primordially unitary phenomenon that provides the ontological foundation for each structural item. In the context of “El Aleph,” this can be explained by saying that the Aleph gives access to totality of the structure of all of the individual items enumerated from beyond existence. It is what is hoped for by the study of classical ontology and metaphysics. Of course, the Aleph does not exist, and by virtue of the fact that it does not exist the praise-worthy endeavors of Michael Drayton become follies worthy of parody.

Here we can reintroduce the discussion of optimism and pessimism. Borges falls into the tradition of philosophers and artists that hope there may exist a moment of transcendence that allows for the apperception of totality. For Schopenhauer it is the true experience of art and genius; this is what allows him to say that the *Ding-an-sich* (the Will) can be experienced and known. For Nietzsche it is tragedy and overcoming. Even Heidegger hopes that such a feeling may be experienced in a line from Georg Trakl or a painting by Van Gogh. But what is important to us is the following: for existence to be at all redeemable, such a moment of transcendence must be presupposed as possible. It is as if all of these thinkers presupposed a moment in which the veil can be pierced by their own aleph, because they know that without it the whole of Dasein’s episteme would be rendered meaningless, and with it experience itself. The Aleph is necessary for there to be meaning to existence. But this does not mean that the Aleph necessarily exists.

This tension lies at the heart of Borges's struggle. It would be wrong to underestimate it. One can question whether or not Borges was aware of the fact that for him the aleph was the existential tether suspending him above the abyss. It seems like he may have been. But it is useless to postulate what the poet thought. The only thing we can do is assess the consequences of that thought. These consequences, as far as I can tell, establish a worldview in which some metaphysical maxim is necessary in order for there to be something redeemable about life. Without it, man is lost. It is as if one were to pose the question to the aforementioned philosophers: Suppose art could not be experienced in a way that made life meaningful—what then?

All of the philosophical themes discussed so far are related to the problem of epistemology or gnoseology, if we consider gnoseology the problem of epistemology in absolute. The problem of epistemology has already been touched upon in the previous chapter pertaining to metaphysics, but here must be resuscitated in light of the ontology currently being articulated. Its presence will do much to connect the threads of metaphysics in the previous chapter to the ontological developments of the present one, hopefully justifying the disparate philosophical paths heretofore traversed.

Let us begin with a return to a metaphysical reading of "La biblioteca de Babel." As Borges describes the library of Babel, he arrives at the actual content of the library: "A cada de los muros de cada hexágono corresponden cinco anaqueles; cada anaquel encierra treinta y dos libros de formato uniforme; cada libro es de cuatrocientas diez páginas; cada página, de cuarenta renglones; cada renglón, de unas ochenta letras de color negro. También hay letras en el dorso de cada libro; esas letras no indican o prefiguran lo que dirán las páginas" (*OC* 1: 861). The content of these books, in turn, consists of spaces, periods, commas, and the twenty-two letters of the

Spanish alphabet. Additionally, no two books are identical. The purpose of the library, it is therefore alleged, is to register every possible combination of letters and words. “De esas premisas incontrovertibles dedujo que la Biblioteca es total y que sus anaqueles registran todas las posibles combinaciones de los veintitantos símbolos ortográficos (número, aunque vastísimo, no infinito) o sea todo lo que es dable expresar: en todos los idiomas” (*OC* 1: 863). This is merely the interpretation of one of the librarians, and it is entirely possible that he errs. One might retort that if indeed the library is not infinite, then it does not truly express everything there is to express. Another might retort by saying that expressions of other languages are not fully translatable into the Spanish alphabet and punctuation. Even if these criticisms of the librarian’s theory were to be true, they do little, if anything, to solve this more pressing epistemological question: How are we to navigate between information that is true and that which is simply white noise? Regardless of whether or not the library is truly infinite, it contains a massive amount of systematically produced information, so much so that it effectively behaves *as if* it were infinite. Here, the words *as if* (*als ob*) are emphasized because of their relation to the philosophy of Hans Vaihinger, by whom Borges was considerably influenced. So, some of the information systematically produced by the books in the library will, by sheer chance, correspond with the world. In other words, the information contained by these books is entirely contingent, and represents every possible entelechy of this contingency. The question is: How may the librarian distinguish the contingent information that describes reality from the contingent information that does not? This is the same problem confronted by Umberto Eco’s Guglielmo da Baskerville in *Il nome della rosa*, heavily inspired by both “La biblioteca de Babel” and also “La muerte y la brújula,” in which the signs he had been interpreting revealed a verisimilar order, and yet this verisimilar order is revealed to be false.

Let us first examine why it is necessary that we even speak of a system beyond empirical standards being necessary for the deciphering of the library. We can do this by examining the deficiencies of those empirical standards. The narrator gives us some indication as to why. “En algún anaquel de algún hexágono (razonaron los hombres) debe existir un libro que sea la cifra y el compendio perfecto de todos los demás: algún bibliotecario lo ha recorrido y es análogo a un dios” (*OC* 1: 864). But there is a problem with this book. The problem is not whether or not it exists, although this too could be placed in doubt based on the presuppositions made about the essence of the library, i.e. whether it is truly infinite or merely periodical. Rather, the problem would be how one is even able to locate this book and know that it is not coincidence or deception. In other words, since the information provided by all books is contingent, how can we determine that the contingent information in one specific book is veridical or at the very least more plausibly veridical than the equally contingent information of other books. Well, goes the logic, if another book exists that corroborates the validity of that book, or at the very least tells where it is located, then this is a start. Of course, this soon becomes a *regresus ad infinitum*, as the narrator indicates. “Alguien propuso un método regresivo: Para localizar el libro A, consultar previamente un libro B que indique el sitio de A; para localizar el libro B, consultar previamente un libro C, y así hasta lo infinito...” (*OC* 1: 864).

Additionally, we may add, how are we to know with apodeictic certainty that these books claiming to be the keys to deciphering the library are true? Perhaps they merely have the outward appearance of a deciphering code but contain a few small inconsistencies that invalidate it (again, how would we be able to know these inconsistencies are inconsistencies?). It is worth remembering that the library may contain *every* combination of letters. Thus, if it contains a book with the correct code, it certainly contains a book with an incorrect code that nevertheless

has incredible verisimilitude. So, one must corroborate the code in order to eliminate verisimilar facsimiles. In order to corroborate the apodicticity of the code, it is necessary to check it against some other standard, which itself is confronted with the same problems. It is impossible, by definition, to corroborate apodicticity through empiricism, the highest one can hope for is an empirical corroboration of an assertoric judgement. The metaphysical problem at hand is that the logical apodicticity of a given book, should it even be found, cannot be deduced from within the system (or world; *Welt*) that the metaphysics would theoretically describe.

The problem here is the problem of contingency—the necessary apparition of unnecessary (non-apodictic) phenomenon. It is necessary that there be a phenomenon, but not necessary that said phenomenon be ontologically determined and therefore invariant. This concept is important for any school of existential phenomenology, and thus any of the disciples of Husserl, such as Heidegger, Gadamer, Levinas, and even Sartre, who speaks extensively about contingency and its counterpart, facticity, in *L'être et le néant*. Yet before elaborating on them, let us first turn back to Schopenhauer, for it is through Schopenhauer that Borges would have been influenced by these ideas. In the first volume of *Will and Representation* he writes:

The contradictory opposite, in other words, the denial of necessity, is *contingency*. The content of this concept is therefore negative, and so nothing more than absence of the connexion expressed by the principle of sufficient reason. Consequently even the contingent is always only relative; thus it is contingent in relation to something that is not *its* ground or reason. Every object, of whatever kind it be, e.g., every event in the actual world, is always at the same time both necessary and contingent; *necessary* in reference to the one thing that is its cause; *contingent* in reference to everything else. For its contact in time and space with everything else is a mere coincidence without necessary

connexion; hence also the words *chance*, *contingency*, *σύμπτωμα*, *contingens*. Therefore an absolute contingency is just as inconceivable as an absolute necessity, for the former would be just an object that did not stand to any other in the relation of consequent to ground. The inconceivability of such a thing, however, is precisely the content of the principle of sufficient reason negatively expressed. This principle, therefore, would first have to be overthrown if we were to conceive an absolute contingency. (*WWR* I: 463)

The word in German, it ought to be noted, is *Zufälligkeit*, and not *Kontingenzen*. *Kontingenzen*, or *Contingens*, only appears when Schopenhauer lists the synonyms and related words. In any case the words in Schopenhauer are interchangeable.

The importance of this passage on contingency brings us back to Borges. As before, we note that Borges takes this as the basis for the fantastic worlds that he writes, however, unlike Schopenhauer, he goes beyond the principle of sufficient reason into a world of absolute contingency. Let us take Quentin Meillassoux's definition of contingency: "the term 'contingency' refers back to the Latin *contingere*, meaning 'to touch, to befall', which is to say, that which happens, but which happens enough to happen *to us*. The contingent, in a word, is *something that finally happens*—something other, something which, in its irreducibility to all pre-registered possibilities, puts an end to the vanity of a game wherein everything, even the improbable, is predictable" (Meillassoux 108). The German *Zufälligkeit* shares this sense of "befalling to us" with its Latin counterpart. As such, both represent that which is possible—but by no means necessary—that finally befalls. This befalling happens to some subject, as indicated by Meillassoux.

Meillassoux, for his part, is drawing heavily from Sartre, who writes about contingency in relation to the *en-soi* (non-conscious Being), *pour-soi* (nihilation of *être-pour-soi*), and *facticity*.

It follows that this in-itself, engulfed and nihilated in the absolute event which is the appearance of the foundation or upsurge of the for-itself, remains at the heart of the for-itself as its original contingency. Consciousness is its own foundation but it remains contingent *in order that there may be* a consciousness rather than an infinity of pure and simple in-itself. The absolute event or for-itself is contingent in its very being. (Sartre 130)

And again:

This perpetual evanescent contingency of the in-itself which, without ever allowing itself to be apprehended, haunts the for-itself and reattaches it to being-in-itself—this contingency is what we shall call the *facticity* of the for-itself. It is this facticity which permits us to say that the for-itself *is*, that it *exists*, although we can never *realize* the facticity, and although we always apprehend it through the for-itself. (Sartre 131)

And for a last excerpt from Sartre:

The surpassed in-itself lives on and haunts the for-itself as its original contingency. The for-itself can never reach the in-itself nor apprehend itself as *being* this or that, but neither can it prevent itself from being what it is—at a distance from itself. This contingency of the for-itself, this weight surpassed and preserved in the very surpassing—this is *Facticity*. But it is also the past. “Facticity” and “Past” are two words to indicate one and the same thing. The Past, in fact, like Facticity, is the invulnerable contingency of the in-

itself which I have to be, without any possibility of not being it. It is the inevitability of the necessity of fact, not by virtue of necessity but by virtue of fact. (Sartre 173)

The principal ideas to extract here from Sartre are simply further elaborations on the concepts heretofore introduced. *Facticity* is the necessary relation of conscious being with its past. This past is the in-itself and is also wholly contingent. The past is in-itself insofar as it is not directly accessible by the being-for-itself, similarly to how the Kantian *Ding-an-sich* is never directly accessible by a subject. Its contingency arises from the fact that it is what eventually appears phenomenologically to the being-for-itself. The fact that it appears is necessary, but the particulars of that appearance are not necessary. This is, as mentioned, the same insight provided by our phenomenological reading of “La biblioteca de Babel.” The being-for-itself is the librarian. The in-itself is the content written in all the books of the library. Facticity describes the fact that if the librarian is to know anything, he must acquire this knowledge through attempting to read the books. Contingency describes the fact that while the librarian must necessarily engage with the books (the in-itself), the words that he reads could just as easily be *otherwise than they are*.

To review, such contingency is everywhere in Borges. Let us remember that the books contained in the library contain—at least in theory—every possible expression that language can fabricate. Any one book can contain any one combination of letters, but it is not necessary that any one book be limited to a reduced set of combinations of letters. We remember that many—nay countless—books in the library are filled with gibberish. The infinite possibilities of the books in the library represent every possible contingency; every possibility of what may eventually befall. Even those books which contain only gibberish are possibilities that can be found within the library. Necessity does not regulate that only those books which are

decipherable may exist. The books which are read by the librarians represent those which finally “befall.” No law of necessity demands that any one particular book be read, or any one particular book be discarded or overlooked. Ultimately, each book is selected randomly. Even if a librarian selects a book on purpose, that purpose is grounded in information supplied by other books, which are equally contingent, and therefore equally random in a metaphysical sense. Hence, each book, regardless of whether or not it accurately represents the code to decipher the library, has an equal chance of being picked up and beheld as true. This is absolute contingency.

7. Onto-Theo-Logy

As a result of this metaphysics and contingency we can return to the problem articulated above pertaining to how one may know whether a given book in the library of Babel contains the keys to deciphering the library. Again, this problem is metaphysical insofar as the logical certainty of a given book, supposing it is indeed the book to “befall,” cannot be deduced from within the world (*Welt*) that the metaphysics contained in the book would then theoretically describe. As Borges describes, this process becomes regressive. We recall, in order to prove the contents of book A, one would have to verify this with book B and so on. this process goes on until we arrive at the fundamental problem of not only metaphysics but also of ontology. Specifically, the problem of ontology posited by Heidegger. It is also why, for the German ontologist, metaphysics becomes onto-theo-logy.

First, the let us cover the problem of ontology. In no place is the problem more succinct than in his lecture on *Identity and Difference*, although it is necessary to read this in conjunction with all of his writings in order to grasp the profundity of this problem.

Die Metaphysik denkt das Seiende als solches, d. h. im Allgemeinen. Die Metaphysik denkt das Seiende als solches, d. h. im Ganzen. Die Metaphysik denkt das Sein des Seienden sowohl in der ergründenden Einheit des Allgemeinsten, d. h. des überall Gleich-Gültigen, als auch in der begründenden Einheit der Allheit, d. h. des Höchsten über allem. So wird das Sein des Seienden als der gründende Grund vorausgedacht.

Daher ist alle Metaphysik im Grunde vom Grund aus das Gründen, das vom Grund die Rechenschaft gibt, ihm Rede steht und ihn schließlich zur Rede stellt. (*ID 125*)

[Metaphysics thinks of beings as such, that is, in general. Metaphysics think of beings as such, as a whole. Metaphysics thinks of the Being of beings both in the ground-giving unity of that is most general, what is indifferently valid everywhere, and also in the unity of the all that accounts for the ground, that is, of the All-Highest. The Being of beings is thus thought of in advance as the grounding ground. Therefore all metaphysics is at bottom, and from the ground up, what grounds, what gives account of the ground, what is called to account by the ground, and finally what calls the ground to account.] (*ID 58*)

From this Heidegger goes on to explain how the -logy, and Logia from which it is derived,

ist jeweils das Ganze eines Begründungszusammenhanges, worin die Gegenstände der Wissenschaften im Hinblick auf ihren Grund vorgestellt, d. h. begriffen werden. Die Ontologie aber und die Theologie sind “Logien”, insofern sie das Seiende als solches ergründen und im Ganzen begründen. Sie geben vom Sein als dem Grund des Seienden Rechenschaft... Demgemäß heißen sie genauer Onto-Logik und Theo-Logik. Die Metaphysik ist sachgemäßer und deutlicher gedacht: Onto-Theo-Logik. (*ID 126*).

[is the totality of a nexus of grounds accounted for, within which nexus the object of the sciences are represented in respect of their ground, that is, are conceived. Ontology,

however, and theology are “Logies” inasmuch as they provide the ground of beings as such and account for them within the whole. They account for Being as the ground of beings... Thus they are more precisely called onto-logic and theo-logic. More rigorously and clearly thought out, metaphysics is: onto-theo-logic.] (ID 59)

Ontology thinks the ground of beings and therefore must presuppose Being as the ground of beings. This does not mean, we must reiterate, that it is at all logically valid to affirm the Being behind beings. It means only that this is the way in which thought organizes itself, and that this presupposition must be made in order for it to maintain its logical validity. The whole problem with ontology, particularly after Heidegger, is how to bring those presuppositions into unconcealment, and, moreover, what to do when those presuppositions are proven to be themselves ungrounded. In other words, how do we, firstly, meaningfully come to understand that our metaphysical way of interacting with the world is fraught with onto-theo-logical bias, and, secondly, what do we do when that onto-theo-logical ground for beings is itself proven to be groundless; is itself proven to be an abyss (*Abgrund*)?

The librarians of Babel encounter this same problem and their responses, predictably, are onto-theo-logic in nature. The narrator provides a list of the various superstitions that are presupposed in order to provide order to the library. “Durante mucho tiempo se creyó que esos libros impenetrables correspondían a lenguas pretéritas o remotas” (*OC* 1: 862). Later came the idea, as mentioned, that “la Biblioteca abarcaba todos los libros” (*OC* 1: 863). It is no coincidence that this theory, metaphysical because it asserts a fact about the structure of the library, is then immediately met with theological jubilation: “El universo estaba justificado, el universo bruscamente usurpó las dimensiones ilimitadas de la esperanza. En aquel tiempo se habló mucho de las Vindicaciones: libros de apología y de profecía, que para siempre vindicaban

los actos de cada hombre del universo y guardaban arcanos prodigiosos para su porvenir” (*OC 1: 863*). The notion of a metaphysical order provides ontological justification for the universe (which is synonymous with the library). This ontological justification of the universe becomes theological, almost out of necessity, because ostensible access to these ontological codes inscribes a prophetic ordering to the library; it inscribes theological purposiveness into it. This onto-theo-logical justification of the library leads to the hope of “la aclaración de los misterios básicos de la humanidad: el origen de la Biblioteca y el tiempo” (*OC 1: 863*). There is something Heideggerian about this sentence. The reason for this is because it prefigures the tautology that rests at the bottom of every ontology. Now that a metaphysical order has been assumed to be discovered, the question then turns towards the origin of this metaphysical order. Now that God has been presupposed to absolve us of our epistemological uncertainties, we must now posit some origin to God, and so on. The other mystery is time, as time is the horizon behind which Being lies concealed.

Eventually, however, like all theological pursuits, the librarians come up short, inaugurating “una depresión exesiva.” Such was the depression that “una secta blasfema sugirió que cesaran las buscas y que todos los hombres barajaran letras y símbolos, hasta construir, mediante un improbable don del azar, esos libros canónicos” (*OC 1: 864*). It is possible, no doubt, that this blasphemous sect actually does hit upon the solution to the riddle of their existence. But even if they were to randomly create the correct code, their artificial book, written by human hands, would then be subjected to the same uncertainties to which the other books of the library are subjected. How would one prove that it does contain truth? Ultimately, this would be impossible, and the truth would have to be taken on faith, as metaphysical standards continue to fail us. This is effectively the beginning of religion, or more accurately, the doctrine of faith

necessary for the justification of Western religions. A strange paradox has here arisen regarding the emergence of religion. This paradox is that faith (religious onto-theo-logy, i.e. metaphysics) has emerged precisely as a result of the impossibility of any metaphysics. Quentin Meillassoux, who is critical of this tradition, writes that

the end of metaphysics, understood as the doctrine of ‘de-absolutization’ of thought, is thereby seen to consist in the rational legitimation of any and every variety of religious (or poetico-religious) belief in the absolute, so long the latter invokes no authority beside itself. To put it in other words: *by forbidding reason any claim to the absolute, the end of metaphysics has taken the form of an exacerbated return of the religious*. Or again: the end of ideology has taken the form of the unqualified victory of religiosity. (Meillassoux 45)

It would be a mistake to equate Meillassoux’s philosophy to that of Heidegger, but here there is overlap. The end of apodictic metaphysics paves the way for theology because every metaphysical doctrine has, in the end, the same probability of being valid, precisely because there is no empirical way to verify the validity of such metaphysical doctrines. Meillassoux will seek to overcome this by proposing an end to correlationism, but for now this can be put aside. The importance of the above quote is that it shows how metaphysical skepticism makes way *not* for empiricism, but rather for fideism. We see this not only in the turn to religion within the Borges’s account of the library of Babel, but also in our own world.

But let us continue with the doctrines that arise within the “La biblioteca de Babel:”
 Afirman los impíos que el disparate es normal en la biblioteca y que lo razonable (y aun la humilde y pura coherencia) es una casi milagrosa excepción. Hablan (lo sé) de “la Biblioteca febril, cuyos azarosos volúmenes corren el incesante albur de cambiarse en

otros y que todo lo afirman, lo niegan y lo confunden como una divinidad que delira”.

Esas palabras que no sólo denuncian el desorden sino que lo ejemplifican también, notoriamente prueban su gusto pésimo y su desesperada ignorancia. En efecto, la Biblioteca incluye todas las estructuras verbales, todas las variaciones que permiten los veinticinco símbolos ortográficos, pero no un solo disparate absoluto. (*OC* 1: 865)

In the light of every contingency being equally possible in the library, no one combination can be deemed nonsense. The labyrinth of the post-metaphysical (and potentially postmodern) era is such *not* because we have lost Theseus’s string (which is a metaphor for metaphysics), but rather because *every* path seems to contain this clue (one recalls that clue originally meant the thread used to guide Theseus out of the labyrinth). It’s not that we haven’t a clue, to use the turn of phrase, but rather that *everything* is a clue. Alfonso de Toro writes about Borges in conjunction with postmodernism, and he makes brief mention of the philosophy of Gianni Vattimo. Vattimo writes that the history of western philosophy is the weakening of metaphysics, but it is possible to go further follow this line of thought through to its logical end, paralleling the above analysis of Borges. This means that in the ultimate weakening of metaphysics, *everything* becomes metaphysical.

The last of the doctrines that emerges in the library is the one shared by the protagonist. Faced with the twin absurdities that the library can neither be limited nor infinite, he suggests that “*La biblioteca es ilimitada y periódica*. Si un eterno viajero la atravesara en cualquier dirección, comprobaría al cabo de los siglos que los mismos volúmenes se repiten en el mismo desorden (que, repetido, sería un orden: el Orden). Mi soledad se alegra con esa elegante esperanza” (*OC* 1: 866). Various possibilities can be ascribed to this doctrine. For one, it corresponds to the doctrine of eternal return, to which, even for all of its contradictions, Borges

eternally returns (“Yo suelo regresar eternamente al Eterno Regreso”) (*OC* 1: 727). But there is a logic at the base of this doctrine that is even more fundamental, and that is the logic of the tautology. This is prefigured by the narrator’s statement that “Hablar es incurrir en tautologías;” To speak is to run into tautologies (*OC* 1: 865). Indeed, the tautology is everywhere in Borges’s writing. In “Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*,” it is described that Menard is able to premeditate the (re)writing of the *Quijote*, and even write it, “sin incurrir en tautologia;” without running into tautologies (*OC* 1: 845). The logic of the tautology is linked to the ontology of the text itself.

The fact that the library repeats itself tautologically is crucially important for its identity. Borges says that the library repeats *itself* (*se repite*), and this is important if we continue to consider Heidegger. For Heidegger, the problem of identity is also this repetition of the same to itself. His point of departure is Plato’s sophist. This is particularly important after Kant. “Seit der Epoche des spekulativen Idealismus bleibt es dem Denken untersagt, die Einheit der Identität als das bloße Einerlei vorzustellen und von der in der Einheit waltenden Vermittelung abzusehen”¹⁵ (*ID* 88). The repetition of something to itself or the thinking of something to itself is important because it posits that identity (the repetition of Being to itself) is not a characteristic of Being, but rather the grounds on which Being thinks itself to itself. This ground is itself not grounded ontologically but rather is emergent from an event, i.e. the event of identity. “Die Lehre der Metaphysik stellt die Identität als einen Grundzug im Sein vor. Jetzt zeigt sich: Sein gehört mit dem Denken in eine Identität, deren Wesen aus jenem Zusammengehörenlassen stammt, das wir das Ereignis nennen. Das Wesen der Identität ist ein Eigentum des Er-eyignisses“ (*ID* 103).¹⁶ In

¹⁵ “Since the era of speculative Idealism, it is no longer possible for thinking to represent the unity of identity as mere sameness, and to disregard the mediation that prevails in unity” (*ID* 25).

¹⁶ “The doctrine of metaphysics represents identity as a fundamental characteristic of Being. Now it becomes clear that Being belongs with thinking to an identity whose active essence stems from that letting belong together which we call the appropriation. The essence of identity is a property of the event of appropriation” (*ID* 39).

the context of the library, we can think it this way: the essence of the library is not its repetition (identity), but rather it is its repetition (identity) that makes the library thinkable. In other words, the identity of the library is not the metaphysical ground for its existence but is instead contingent upon the iterability of thought and language. Its identity is contingent, because any one doctrine could plausibly describe the library, and thus there is no apodeictic identity. Moreover, if we continue with the Kantian terminology, we can go on to say that assertoric judgements are also lacking, as there is no empirical way to corroborate the logical statement. All that is remaining are problematic judgements.

In review, metaphysics arises out of the sense of wonder (*Verwunderung*) produced by the sense of groundlessness of the world into which Dasein is thrown (*geworfen*). Metaphysics then immediately becomes onto-theo-logy, not necessarily because there is any validity to theology, but rather out of compulsion. Dasein is not able to grasp the totality of beings (*Seiende*), because it is trapped within the horizon of time, which is the horizon of Being. The totality of Being cannot be grasped by beings as this would require transcending the temporal dimension in which being finds itself. If it is to grasp the totality of beings, it must reach out beyond this horizon, beyond death itself, and posit an entity, outside of beings (*Seiende*), that transcends the horizon of temporality to provide a synthetic totality to Being (*Sein*). In no place is this entity born of logical necessity. Indeed, there is no logical foundation or grounding for the existence of such an entity. It is born as a presupposition in order for our Western metaphysics to have a ground upon which it may base itself. Hence, it is necessary for any subsequent claims of logical necessity but is not itself born of logical necessity. In Borges this is the library, which ideates and reiterates itself as Being, the ground for beings. The logical identity of the library is tautological. As it is tautological, it is therefore contingent upon thought and language. The

Being of the library (Being is synonymous with the library; the phrase is itself tautological) is therefore itself fundamentally contingent.

8. The Problem of Contingency

What are the consequences of such a radical contingency? The most immediate effect has been the destabilization of metaphysics. With the loss of metaphysics, we find ourselves lost in a Borgesian labyrinth in which every contingent possibility becomes equally possible and undecipherable; unverifiable. The minotaur that we face in this labyrinth is relativism, cynicism, and nihilism. Relativism, because each contingent possibility seems to be equally true; cynicism, because there is no way to prove or disprove any of these contingent possibilities through experience; nihilism, because these two preceding animals have shown us the groundlessness of Being and brought us face to face with the abyss. What can our response to this be? For Borges, as for Schopenhauer before him, the only response that one can have when faced with these is pessimism. Pessimism is the doctrine that they are inevitable. One may try to fight them as a tragic hero would, however one cannot ultimately triumph. The only thing that truly awaits is oblivion.

But is this the only possible response to the completion of metaphysics and the world of absolute contingency? Quentin Meillassoux attempts to point to a way out. Whether or not he is correct is beyond the scope of the present inquiry, and will need to be further explored in continuation, however it would be a disservice to omit mention of it as a possible alternative.

Meillassoux's position centers upon abandoning the correlationism of the post-Kantian epistemologies.

Correlationism consists in disqualifying the claim that it is possible to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another. Not only does it become necessary to insist that we never grasp an object ‘in itself’, in isolation from its relation to the subject, but it also becomes necessary to maintain that we can never grasp a subject that would not always-already be related to an object (Meillassoux 5).

He astutely refutes the notion that this is a Copernican revolution in philosophy, as a Copernican revolution would affirm the existence of the outside object independent from the subject. Instead, he calls this a Ptolemaic counter-revolution because the transcendental idealism situates the limits of knowledge within the mind rather than objective world. This is entirely in line with what we have here seen in our analysis of “La biblioteca de Babel.” Meillassoux identifies the same problem in metaphysics that is present in my analysis of Babel. Namely, that the destruction of metaphysics has led to fideism and the current epistemological crisis.

...our abolition of metaphysics will only have served to resuscitate religiosity in all its forms, including the most menacing ones. So long as we construe facticity as a limit for thought, we will abandon whatever lies beyond this limit to the rule of piety. Thus, in order to interrupt this see-sawing between metaphysics and fideism, we must transform our perspective on unreason, stop construing it as the form of our deficient grasp of the world and turn it into the veridical content of this world as such—we must project unreason into things themselves, and discover in our grasp of facticity the veritable *intellectual intuition* of the absolute. ‘Intuition’, because it is actually in what is that we discover a contingency with no limit other than itself; ‘intellectual’ because this contingency is neither visible nor perceptible in things and only thought is capable of

accessing it, just as it accesses the chaos that underlies the apparent continuity of phenomena. (Meillassoux 82)

This would, at least in theory, paint a way out of the era of speculative idealism of which Heidegger speaks, and instead point towards a speculative materialism.

In light of this crisis in metaphysics, which is also a crisis in onto-theo-logy, Meillassoux's assertion that we must find some way beyond metaphysics seems more pertinent than ever. Indeed, at least in the ivory tower of the philosophers, the inability to overcome this need, *Bedürfnis*, of metaphysics seems to allow only for skepticism and its more serious deformations of relativism and cynicism. Yet the question remains: is going beyond metaphysics possible by postulating the absolute contingency of the world. It is true that we must overcome metaphysics if we are to avoid a new epoch of relativism and nihilism, but, as Kant proved regarding Descartes' ontological argument, we cannot impose existence upon something born of thought, as thought itself is contingent (for the same reason that the identity of the library is contingent: it could be otherwise, or not at all). The fact that we need a way beyond metaphysics does not *a fortiori* make this way extant. And so here more work must be done to ascertain whether there is a way out of this crisis of metaphysics and our *pensiero debole*, as Vattimo calls it.

"La biblioteca de Babel," like many of Borges's stories, is grounded in his skepticism, which, in turn, is deeply rooted in his pessimism. It is a revenge of Berkeley's philosophy in which only what is perceived is what exists, but in which everything has an equal chance of being perceived. The ultimate skepticism that results renders all information useless, as all order corresponds to the transcendental analytic, rather than metaphysics proper. What the story demonstrates is that modernity, despite existing in a world of post-Kantian metaphysics, is

unable to establish order without recurring to metaphysics, resulting in absolute skepticism. While this might not be immediately dangerous to those in scientific disputes, it is something that seems inevitable in the study of phenomenology and also rhetoric. The only escape from this skepticism would be to go beyond the physical dimension entirely. I repeat the words that close “La biblioteca”: “Si un eterno viajero la atravesara en cualquier dirección, comprobaría al cabo de los siglos que los mismos volúmenes se repiten en el mismo desorden (que, repetido, sería un orden: el Orden). Mi soledad se alegra con esa elegante esperanza” (*OC* 1: 866). Our only hope is metaphysical, and yet metaphysics is inaccessible for Dasein, which, simply put, would cease to be Dasein were it to go beyond its physical limitations. Our only hope is metaphysics, and yet, for us, metaphysics can never exist.

9. Maieutics and Interpretations Involving Levinas

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Shlomy Mualem brings Borges into discussion with Levinas with considerable success. He correctly identifies the main difference in the philosophy of Heidegger and Levinas. “Responsibility for the Other releases the subject from the solitariness of Being. Ethics—or, more accurately, ethical metaphysics—thus precedes ontology as first philosophy” (“Borges and Levinas” 317-318). Ethical metaphysics falls into the realm of *metaphysica specialis*. As Heidegger makes clear in the Kant book, he thinks that all *metaphysica specialis* is preceded by a *metaphysica generalis*, which is to say, ontology. (*Kant und das Problem* 11). So, should Levinas be able to successfully argue that ethical metaphysics—*metaphysica specialis*—precedes ontology—*metaphysica generalis*—, he can then reasonably propose a counter-ontology to the Heideggerian tradition which grounds itself in Kant or even that of the pre-Socratics in rejection of the western tradition.

Contrast this to what Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*.

If ontology—the comprehension, the embracing of Being—is impossible, it is not because every definition of Being already presupposes the knowledge of Being, as Pascal had said and Heidegger refutes in the first pages of *Being and Time*; it is because the comprehension of Being in general cannot *dominate* the relationship with the Other. The latter relationship commands the first. I cannot disentangle myself from society with the Other, even when I consider the Being of the existent he is. Already the comprehension of Being is said to the existent, who again arises behind the theme in which he is presented. This “saying to the Other”—this relationship with the Other as interlocutor, this relation with an *existent*—precedes all ontology; it is the ultimate relation in Being. Ontology presupposes metaphysics. (*Totality and Infinity* 47-48)

In other words, the ethical relationship with the other described by *metaphysica specialis* precedes the ontological relationship with Being described by *metaphysica generalis*.

This is relevant to Borges because it is important to determine into which ontology (or counter-ontology) is presupposed by fictions. This, in turn, casts light on the general metaphysical underpinnings of the modernity from which Borges emerged and the postmodernity that he helped bring into being. In reference to one of Borges’s later essays on time, Mualem writes that “according to Borges, time forms the central problem of metaphysics and personal identity precisely because existence within it creates the mysterious structure of being that is simultaneously identical to and different from itself. The tension of time-bounded subjectivity thus lies in the dialectic of permanence and transcendence” (“Borges and Levinas” 325). The main philosophical issue at stake is the treatment of the continuity of identity over time. For Borges, however, it is precisely the discontinuity of identity over time that produces an

“other,” which is quite distinct from Levinas’s conception of the Other. “Borges y yo,” “El otro,” and “25 Agosto 1983” immediately come to mind, however doubling in almost all of Borges’s stories contains this element of solipsism.

Taking “Los teólogos,” “Deutsches Requiem,” and “La otra muerte” as his points of departure, Mualem first argues that

the drama takes place wholly within the closed iron circle of subjectivity immersed within itself—a relation Levinas calls “allergic” (in the Greek etymological sense of *allos andergon* meaning that the Other has no effect on the subject’s thought) because it negates the alterity of the other. From a Levinasian perspective, the encounter in its entirety is thus nothing other than a drama on the stage of “tragic egoity”—another twist in the circle of fate in its anonymous and unforgiving inevitability. (“Borges and Levinas” 326-327)

In this he is wholly correct. The other in Borges is nothing more than the negated projection of the self. As it is a projection of the ego, it is not truly “other,” and its alterity is only an illusion. Mualem contrasts this to the collaborative work of Borges and Bioy Casares, referring to the Levinasian and Heideggerian formulation of “an alterity that emerged from the act of writing” (“Borges and Levinas” 328). Much like with Pessoa, he argues, this heteronym constitutes a distinct quasi-ontological identity. Still, however, it is not a confrontation with the Other.

The most interesting part of Mualem’s work comes in his analysis of Borges’s understanding of Shakespeare. “De alguien a nadie,” “El enigma de Shakespeare,” “Everything and nothing” and “La memoria de Shakespeare” all contain the idea that Shakespeare’s characters each have their own unique, even ontological, identity, but that Shakespeare himself is a nullity. In other words, in order for the plurality of characters to exist, Shakespeare himself

cannot exist. The existence of his identity as some form of grounding ontology would make impossible such a plurality of subjectivities. “The Borgesian Shakespeare and the Pessoaan heteronym thus share a singular mode of existence in which the creative subjectivity is nullified in the act of writing, this void giving rise to endless forms” (“Borges and Levinas” 331).

Another happy coincidence not mentioned by Mualem but which might have been considered by Borges: the nihilated unity that gives birth to a plurality of subjectivities shares much in common with Mainländer’s gnostic interpretation of the death of God. God commits suicide—in other words he annihilates himself—and from this annihilation come forth the multitudinous subjectivities of mankind as *fragments of a suicidal God*. God’s suicide or annihilation would then be the event that simultaneously creates a plurality of subjectivities whilst also making impossible any ontological ground to which they may be tethered. This is very much paralleled with the death of Shakespeare and the emergence of his characters.

So far Mualem has been correct in his analysis. This brings us to the most radical point of his analysis:

I thus posit that the relation between writing, alterity, and subjectivity in Borges constitutes a fabulously singular and distinctive example of the Levinasian model of paternity. The cornerstone of this affinity between the writer and philosopher lies in the breaking of the logic of identity. Borges’s boldness is epitomized in the idea that this dialectic of birth and alterity exists within subjectivity, in an introvertive move in which the other emerges from within in the act of writing. (“Borges and Levinas” 336)

The claim must be carefully picked apart, as it contains much which is correct, but also at least one implicit premise which is either misguided or wrong. Let us begin with what is correct. It is true that writing, such as in “Borges y yo,” gives birth to alterity, which, in Heideggerian terms

more than Levinasian terms, breaks the tautology of identity. Alterity may be produced by the negation of subjectivity. The question then becomes: How is the Other defined? Is it defined following Levinas's conception of the Other? Or is it more akin to the Other spoken of in Heidegger or Sartre?

What are the key features of the Other for Levinas? Levinas seeks to establish the ethical relationship with the Other as the first relationship of metaphysics for one reason above all else: to make teaching possible. By teaching I mean the trans-subjective communication of knowledge. Levinas states as much very explicitly: "Teaching is a discourse in which the master can bring to the student what the student does not yet know. It does not operate as maieutics, but continues the placing in me of the idea of infinity. The idea of infinity implies a soul capable of containing more than it can draw from itself" (*Totality and Infinity*, 180). Here we see that Levinas staunchly opposes maieutics because maieutics is instruction through negation. Teaching, for Levinas, is a bringing in from the outside, similar to the German word *beibringen*. Maieutics is instruction, but it is instruction through negation. One need look no further than *Meno* and the idea that all knowledge is really anamnesis. The instructor can guide a pupil toward knowledge dialectically by telling him or her to try again—that is to say, by negation—, but this negation is not an imparting. Ultimately the knowledge is still generated by the subject. For Plato (as later for Heidegger and Sartre), the Other exists, but exists only as perpetual negation. For Levinas, the Other exists as negation and as teacher. The difference may seem small, but in fact Levinas's entire counter-ontology hinges upon it, as wrapped up in it is the primacy of *metaphysica specialis* over *metaphysica generalis* as first philosophy.

To understand whether or not confrontation with the Other is an event of teaching—*παιδεύειν*—or an event of maieutic negation, we must see how these confrontations resolve

themselves. If the event is of maieutic negation, we can expect that the confrontation with the Other will result in a nihilation—an encasement in non-being—which disallows the other the possibility of affecting us except through negation.

Let us begin with the Other of “Las ruinas circulares,” both because we have already discussed this story earlier and also because the relationship between dreamer and dreamt is explicitly linked to the relationship between father and son, a formulation of utmost importance to Levinas. But this relationship is not one of mutuality. The dreamer thinks “*Ahora estaré con mi hijo. O más raramente: El hijo que he engendrado me espera y no existirá si no voy*” (OC 1: 850). The existence of the Other is entirely dependent upon the presence of the dreamer. He imparts what he thinks it is necessary for his son to know, but this teaching is only made possible by the lack of subjectivity of the Other. Moreover, the teaching is not reciprocal. It cannot be reciprocal because the Other is objectified. Lastly, the most iconic line: “Antes (para que no supiera nunca que era un fantasma, para que se creyera un hombre como los otros) le infundió el olvido total de sus años de aprendizaje” (OC 1: 850). In order for the dreamt son to realize his subjectivity, he must have all teaching erased from him. *In order for him to be a subject all teaching must be made irrelevant and impossible through an act of nihilation.* This moment is an act of nihilation because henceforth all acquired knowledge will result from negation. Arguably, the only moment of true teaching comes at the end, with the revelation that the dreamer is himself dreamt. But this moment is met not only with nihilation, but with annihilation.

Next, let us look at the case of doubling in “La muerte y la brújula.” The protagonist and antagonist, Lönnrot and Red Scharlach, are linked by their names. *Rot* is mirrored by *Red* and also by *Scharlach*. The labyrinth that best describes their relation appears at the very end, “un laberinto griego que es una línea única, recta” (OC 1: 899). The labyrinth is of course another

incarnation of Zeno's paradox. "Cuando en otro avatar usted me dé caza, finja (o cometa) un crimen en A, luego un Segundo crimen en B, a 8 kilómetros de A, luego un tercer crimen en C, a 4 kilómetros de A y B, a mitad de camino entre los dos. Aguárdeme después en D, a 2 kilómetros de A y de C, de Nuevo a mitad de camino" (*OC* 1: 899). When Scharlach eventually does fire his gun, the trajectory that it makes towards Lönnrot becomes this labyrinth inspired by Zeno. It represents the infinity that separates the subject from the other, which just like in Levinas is insuperable. The subject, regardless of how hard he tries, never is able to hit his target of true communication with the other, who remains always just out of reach. Just like in Levinas, it is this infinity which denies totality. However, unlike in Levinas, the act of traversing this infinity is violent; its objective is annihilation, repeated again through the centuries. Lönnrot and Scharlach admit as much when they say that it is not the first time they have met nor will it be the last. They may not have a paternal-filial relationship like the dreamer and dreamt in "Las ruinas circulares," but the telos of that relationship is nevertheless the same.

"El fin" demonstrates the gauchesco influences in this worldview. It recounts the encounter between Martín Fierro and el negro which ends in the annihilation of this later one. "Limpió el facón ensagrendado en el pasto y volvió a las casas con lentitud, sin mirar para atrás. Cumplida su tarea de justiciero, ahora era nadie. Mejor dicho era el otro: no tenía destino sobre la tierra y había matado a un hombre" (*OC* 1: 911). To be no-one is to be the Other, encased in non-being and ultimately annihilated.

"El otro" is the best example of how all learning comes as a result of dialogue with oneself. It is the older Borges who wishes to impart knowledge upon the younger Borges, but crucially we are only given the first-person perspective of the older Borges. The fact that we are given the perspective of the one who is attempting to teach rather than the one who is being

taught should signify to us that the success or futility of the task is ultimately unknowable. Had the perspective been that of the younger Borges, we would know for certain and the story would lose much of its mystique. Additionally, we are told that the bill the older Borges gives to the younger as proof of his visit, much like the flower of Coleridge, is somehow faulty. It has a date printed on it, which is an anachronism. This makes it likely that at the very least the older Borges is the one being dreamt, if not both of them. So even if he were successful in imparting some knowledge, this knowledge would still ultimately be of a maieutic nature as it would result from a conversation with himself. Lastly, “El otro” draws greatly from “Due immagini in una vasca” by Giovanni Papini, which has much the same plot. The great difference is that Papini has his “other” violently drowned at the end of the story, while Borges does not. Perhaps the reason for this is because the older Borges did not tell the younger anything that he was not already predisposed to accept (the older is, after all, the projection of the younger). To teach something that one is not predisposed to accept is a violent and penetrative act that results in annihilation. To make oneself open to being taught is to be open to the idea that one’s beliefs may be negated, reformulated, and negated again, and so on dialectically. The beliefs are always generated from within, never imposed from without. *Omnis determinatio est negatio*, as Spinoza says.

The last example of this I will limit myself to relating is “La memoria de Shakespeare.” The reasons for this should be obvious, as central to the story is the question of teaching. The first indication that teaching in the sense of Levinas might in fact be possible is the scene in which Shakespeare’s memory is passed on from Daniel Thorpe to Herman Soergel. Thorpe tells Soergel that “el poseedor tiene que ofrecerlo en voz alta y el otro que aceptarlo. El que lo da lo pierde para siempre” (*OC* 3: 670). At first glance this seems to indicate that there is a transmission of knowledge, indicated especially by the fact that the teacher loses the memory

after offering it. However, this event of teaching is complicated by how the memory is accessed once it has been transmitted. Thorpe explains “La memoria ya ha entrado en su conciencia, pero hay que descubrirla. Surgirá en los sueños, en la vigilia, al volver las hojas de un libro o al doblar una esquina. No se impaciente usted, no invente recuerdos. El azar puede favorecerlo o demorarlo, según su misterioso modo” (OC 3: 671). The memory is not *taught* to Soergel; he must discover it by remembering it. This is, in essence, the definition of anamnesis. The memory is not imposed from the outside, but rather discovered as something already existing latently from within. It is knowledge that is not *learned*, but rather is knowledge that is *discovered to have already subconsciously possessed*.

Hence, it is possible that Herman Soergel might catch a glimpse of Anne Hathaway when imagining “aquella mujer, ya Madura, que me enseñó el amor en un departamento de Lübeck, hace ya tantos años,” but the figure of Anne Hathaway must correspond to the image of this latter woman prior to the event of memory (OC 3: 671). This is to say that “learning” of Anne Hathaway was only possible because of a disposition to learn of her. Were Soergel not already disposed to have her identity revealed to him, then she never would have appeared on his horizon. So, it must be said that within this paradigm set up by Borges all learning and teaching is palimpsestic, just like De Quincey says about memory. As all learning is palimpsestic and thereby invokes memory, this means that it is also anamnesis. If learning is anamnesis, then it may be maieutic but certainly cannot be what Levinas envisions when he speaks of teaching. In sum, the idea that another person must freely *give* Shakespeare’s memory in an act of *teaching* is immediately undercut by the nature of how that memory is accessed. The *event of teaching* in Borges, if indeed we may call it such, is nothing other than the making possible of anamnesis, and as such has much more in common with Plato than with Levinas.

At the same time this does not mean that change in what one perceives as true is impossible. “De Quincey afirma que el cerebro del hombre es un palimpsesto. Cada nueva escritura cubre la escritura anterior y es cubierta por la que sigue, pero la todopoderosa memoria puede exhumar cualquier impresión, por momentánea que haya sido, si le dan el estímulo suficiente” (OC 3: 672). Old truths may be covered up by new ones, which themselves might be replaced. But what is crucial is that this process is dialectical and takes place through negation. Outside events may stimulate a memory, but they do not create it. Thus, interaction with the Other is much like this encounter with these outside events. The Other has the power to stimulate certain memories, but the subject must already be predisposed to their recollection. The Other may negate, negation does not mean transmission of new truth. It is still left to the subject to discover it. Perhaps such truth will coincide with the subjective episteme of the other, but this does not mean the other is its point of origin. Herman Soergel’s discovered memories may coincide with the discovered memories of Daniel Thorpe, but the stimulus for their discovery has been internal and unique to each individual.

10. Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter has been to expand upon the metaphysical question and understand how it is foundational in understanding Borges’s pessimism. Having already established how Borges shows that all works of writing presuppose metaphysical relations, and thus are by their nature cannot eschew metaphysical analysis, I here have endeavored to show two main things: 1) That the metaphysics presupposed in writing pertains to *metaphysica generalis*, which is to say ontology, as opposed to *metaphysica specialis*, and 2) That the fundamental ontology is in its very nature tautological and cannot be pinned down. Thus

metaphysics, though it claims to be a ground for epistemology, itself lacks a viable ground. My contention is that this has been the fundamental problem in epistemology in such stories such as “La biblioteca de Babel,” and thus has been the origin for intense ontological skepticism while also making impossible any true communion with the Other. In light of this emerges Borges’s pessimism. Without any real means to either overcome this ontological Weltanschauung presupposed in his writings, or any real means to transvaluate it to something more akin to what would appear in Levinas, we are left with a universe in which skepticism is inevitable, epistemology is forever ungrounded, and communication with the other is rendered as maieutic at best and solipsistic at worst. Lastly his pessimism is topped off with Zeno’s riddle, the tacit acknowledgment that there can be no completion of these realms, and we must accept this fact as we must accept our own oblivion.

Chapter IV: Pessimism, its Precursors and its Successors

1. Event and the Constitution of Precursors and Successors

The following chapter is the analysis of an event. Derrida writes in the well-known essay “Sign, Structure, Play” from *Writing and Difference* that “[p]erhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an ‘event,’ if this loaded word did not entail a meaning which it is precisely the function of structural—or structuralist—thought to reduce or to suspect” (278). This essay does not concern the concept of structure, but it does concern the analysis of a particular event, namely, the event of Borges: an event which recontextualizes both predecessors and successors alike, but which itself seems nevertheless impervious to recontextualization. Following Derrida’s schema, we might be able to say that the following chapter is the hermeneutics of an event, if this statement did not falsely imply that the event precedes its interpretation. More accurate is to say that the event itself exists in the horizon of hermeneutics, created by the very interpretive forces that seek to understand it, and that for this reason any investigation into the particulars of this event is therefore an investigation of the interpretations of said event. The true question, therefore, is not: “What particular qualities makes Borges (like Kafka, Joyce, or Proust) an event?” but rather: “What does it mean to us that there exists no such event in our contemporary culture capable of recontextualizing past events?” In other words: “Does our modern (perhaps postmodern) hermeneutics itself disclose a certain insuperable pessimism in the way it deals with the interpretation of such events?”

The purpose of the preceding chapters has been to establish the ways in which the fictions and other writings of Jorge Luis Borges embody a doctrine of pessimism, specifically understanding pessimism as a doctrine which emphasizes man’s need of metaphysics, whilst simultaneously proving the futility of any system of metaphysics. This is what I have endeavored

to demonstrate in my reading of “La biblioteca de Babel,” namely, that in a very post-Kantian gesture, the necessity of metaphysics is affirmed whilst simultaneously demonstrating its impossibility. In such a way is man marked by an incompleteness owing itself to this contradiction, as in “La biblioteca.” It would not be entirely inappropriate to reference Gödel’s theorem, although one must be cautious about mixing together too many concepts, especially of disparate fields of inquiry.¹⁷ Pessimism enters as an axiological judgement asserting that the epistemological limitations of the mind to form a coherent metaphysics creates the conditions for a Schopenhauerian Will, yearning in its fragmentation for an unachievable unity.

This review leads to the following question, upon which the present chapter shall reflect: In what way has this pessimism, through Borges, exerted influence on subsequent authors? In other words: Who are the heirs to this pessimism, and what might an analysis of them tell us about the state of modernity in fiction and philosophy? As such, the present chapter will focus on the works of two authors in particular, Pablo Katchadjian and Agustín Fernández Mallo, both of whom attempt a “rewriting” of sorts of the work of Borges, which can be interpreted as a continuation of this form of pessimism.

When speaking about the influence that Borges has exerted, it is unavoidable that one must begin with the essay “Kafka y sus precursors.” It is an essay that I have previously mentioned, but here I would like to emphasize an aspect of the essay, generally in accordance with much of what has been written about it by critics and philosophers, but with the appendage of the novel question: Does this paradigm holds for the successors of Borges, that is to say, those who name Borges as a precursor? The differences in how Borges analyzes Kafka’s precursors and how more contemporary writers treat Borges will be rejoined to the argument of pessimism

¹⁷ For the abuses of Gödel’s incompleteness theorem, see Franzén, Torkel. *Gödel’s Theorem: An Incomplete Guide to Its Use and Abuse*.

through showing how the impotence of modern writers and critics to define to the work of Borges as a subset of his (Borges's) successors (unlike how the qualities of Kafka's precursors become subsets of their successor, i.e. Kafka himself), is a consequence of the metaphysical decay of modernity and the inability to overcome the need for a lacking metaphysics.

2. The Kafka Paradigm

Before proceeding to an analysis of the ways in which Borges's successors fail to live up to the challenge issued forth by Borges in "Kafka y sus precursores," it is first necessary to review what that challenge is.

Antonio Cajero Vázquez registers a genealogy of the concept of precursors as it appears throughout the work of Borges in his essay "Del concepto de *precursor*." Here, he first explains how Borges moves from a more conventional understanding of the concept of a precursor in his early writings such as "El tamaño de mi esperanza," to gradually beginning to question the etiology of influence in "Ubicación de Almafuerde." In the former essay the concept of a precursor is conventional because it merely denotes someone who has demonstrably exerted influence on a subsequent writer. In the latter essay it is suggested that the concordance between Almafuerde and Nietzsche may not be as clear-cut as would otherwise appear. One might assume that given Nietzsche's chronological priority to Almafuerde that his thoughts influenced those of the Argentine, but this might not necessarily be the case. In this way Cajero Vázquez points to it as a turning point in how Borges utilizes the concept of the precursor, as the precursor is here no longer necessarily someone that has exerted philological influence, but rather someone who may be linked together with the "successor," by the discerning mind of a third party, a critic. Here we again see a dynamic similar to that of the subject in a post-metaphysical world. Order (or in this

case influence) does not inhere the system; it comes from without. And this is the role of the critic.

The essay “Ubicación de Almafuerte” by Borges questions something of an etiology of influence (here understood metaphysically, much different from the aesthetic and poetic theory articulated by Harold Bloom’s *Anxiety of Influence*) in a similar way to the book *Il formaggio e i vermi*, by Carlo Ginsburg. Etiology is a helpful term to use when describing influence within the work of Borges because when analyzing the causes of influence, we are not just looking at genealogy and sequence, but we are also perceiving these genealogies on a meta-level, questioning the very motive for which the critic determines a causal relation between two writers.

Yet the true Borgesian turn, as we might call it, in the concept of the precursor comes, according to Cajero Vázquez, in the essay “La eternidad y T. S. Eliot,” found in the *Textos recobrados* (Cajero Vázquez 126). There it is written: “La aparición de una obra de arte afecta a cuantas obras de arte la precedieron. El orden ideal es modificado por la introducción de la nueva (de la efectivamente nueva) obra de arte” (*Textos recobrados*, cited in Cajero Vázquez 126). In other words, it marks the point at which causality becomes inverted, and at which any sort of etiological study of influence must forego strict genealogy and instead look at causality as an act of interpretation, and in the process shifting the focus from philology to hermeneutics. This brings us to some of the common interpretations of the essay “Kafka y sus precursores.”

After briefly recounting the history that Borges’s essay on Kafka has had on literary criticism throughout the decades, from Harold Bloom’s *Anxiety of Influence*, to Gérard Genette’s theory of semiotics to Umberto Eco (Butler 94-95), Rex Butler writes, “as we gradually realize, it is not that Kafka actually read these authors, or at least we could never conclusively prove this,

but rather that Kafka operates as an excuse allowing his interpreter to put together this erudite and heterogeneous list” (Butler 97). The result is obvious: the essay on Kafka is deceptive, and it is so purposefully. Its thesis is invalidated by its method. Rather than prove that Kafka, the writer, had created his own precursors, Borges has cleverly shown that it is in fact Kafka’s interpreter that has attributed these precursors to Kafka. In other words, by selecting authors whose philological relation to Kafka is tenuous at best, Borges is in fact emphasizing the fact that it is not Kafka who is choosing his precursors, but rather Borges himself.

But what effect does it have to claim that such an author is a precursor to Kafka; that such an author is Kafkaesque? According to Brett Levinson, who embodies the common interpretation of the essay:

With the advent of the Czech writer (or a part of his oeuvre, he of “somber myths and atrocious institutions”), the unlikenesses emerge as likenesses, as mimetic reproductions of an *eidōs* of idiosyncrasy that Kafka, in Borges’s essay, seems to embody. Signifiers do not exist without a whole; neither do the textual oddities of Kafka’s precursors. Only as entities or instances of mimesis—in this case, of the “Kafkaesque”—can such peculiarities appear as unities; thereby, can they be grasped, can they exist. (Levinson 58)

Additionally, an important observation that Levinson makes is how Borges does very little to compare the texts that he introduces to Kafka, only vaguely stating how they are similar in “tone” or genre. The only precursor whose relation to Kafka Borges takes the time to actually explain is that of Zeno, and here the relation is thematic, with the paradoxes of the Greek being read into the ever-incomplete bureaucracy of *The Castle* (Levinson 59). The other texts are Kafkaesque insofar as they exhibit certain fantastic characteristics with a tone that we might be able to call disquieting, uncanny, or *insólito*.

Ernesto Sabato has a wonderful definition in his book of essays *Uno y el universo of lo Fantástico* that I would like to signal, as it will be a key point of reference in the discussion of the near-ineffable tone of Kafka and his precursors. Sabato writes that *fantástico* “Es la palabra con que designamos lo insólito. Por eso se aplica continuamente en los viajes y en la historia del pensamiento. No es que designe cosas de contenido mágico: simplemente designa *otras cosas*” (*Obra completa: Ensayos* 48). What makes the fantastic in Kafka (and by extension in his precursors) so difficult to specify is precisely because the fantastic is a quality of the other, which, were it definable, would cease to be wholly other. Bearing in mind this definition afforded to us by Ernesto Sabato, let us again look at the other stories enumerated by Borges and see if we may understand their relation to Kafka in terms of *lo insólito*.

The first precursor is Zeno, and, as Levinson has already stated, the relationship there is thematic, and not so much based in tone. Regarding Zeno, Borges writes that “la forma de este ilustre problema es, exactamente, la de *El castillo*, y el móvil y la fleche y Aquiles son los primeros personajes kafkianos de la literatura” (*OC* 2: 80). This thematic parity is itself pertinent to the concept of *lo insólito* insofar as it designates an Other (for instance, the turtle or the arrow’s destination) which is unattainable. If we define that which is somehow unattainable or ineffable as partaking in the *other*, then by the goal in Zeno’s paradoxes is other, and therefore it is *insólito*, and therefore *fantástico*. Similar is the case of the apologist of Han Yu, encountered by Borges in the translation by Margouliès. The excerpt that Borges quotes begins with the phrase “Universalmente se admite que el unicornio es un ser sobrenatural y de buen agüero.” Already we are struck by the otherness of the unicorn; but the description does not end here.

“[N]o siempre es fácil encontrarlo, no se presta a una clasificación. No es como el caballo o el toro, el lobo o el ciervo. En tales condiciones, podríamos estar frente al unicornio y

no sabríamos con seguridad que lo es. Sabemos que tal animal con crin es caballo y que tal animal con cuernos es toro. No sabemos cómo es el unicornio. (*OC 2: 80*)

The tone evoked by this passage is one of uncertainty caused by a being that does not neatly fit into ontological categories. The last sentence is particularly poignant, as it falls directly after an enumeration of the various qualities that animals have which have been designated by humans. The unicorn, precisely because it falls outside of what man has already categorized, is unknown and thus remains wreathed in the shadow of otherness.

The third text is from Kierkegaard, and Borges admits that this is the “fuente más previsible” of the various precursors that he signals, as the relation between Kierkegaard and Kafka could be exemplified through philological analysis, although this is not the route that Borges takes. Instead he briefly gives summaries of two parables. The first is the allegory that evil is discovered in the world just as a bank employs a falsifier to discover fake bills—we intuit the presence of evil because it is the very currency in which we traffic. The second is the parable in which it is declared that participating in an expedition to the north pole is beneficent for the eternal soul of man, however, due to the difficulty of the journey, the difficulty threshold of the journey is gradually reduced until trivial distances such as from house to a nearby plaza is declared equal as an expedition to the north pole. In both of these parables, it is the very idea of goodness that is other, the very idea of goodness that is *insólito*. In the first parable Kierkegaard can only define goodness as in relation to evil. So, by this reasoning we can only know what goodness is not. Yet still this definition of goodness seems hollow, for we are not able to define it for what it is, but merely for what it is not. As we only have access to knowledge of Evil, our knowledge of Goodness always lurks on the peripheries, always just out of grasp. We may be able to affirm it, but this affirmation comes always by means of knowledge of evil and its

negation, never through direct access to goodness itself. Again, this corresponds to the above analysis of how we are only able to define the unicorn in terms of man-made categories, but not as the thing proper.

The second parable might be seen as a sort of inversion to Zeno's paradox. The north pole is the goal, and it is implied most men will never reach it. So, the goal is shortened to distance of a country. Still men cannot make it, so it is shortened again to the distance of a city, and so on. Of course, regardless of how short the distance is, the result is the same: man is either too lazy or incapable of traversing it, similar to Zeno's Achilles, even if that distance is right beyond the threshold of his front door. For this parable, Borges may well consider it to correspond to the Kafka's parable *Vor dem Gesetz*, in which a man, confronted with a gate blocked by a powerful guard, entreats entry only to be repeatedly denied. He lives out his life never traversing the gate, and it is left to be believed that this is because of his weakness in will and pusillanimity before the powerful guard. He is similar to the men in Kierkegaard's parable who lack the will to make a pilgrimage to the north pole. Of course, this comparison and analysis is entirely speculative, as Borges gives no indication of what story by Kafka he has in mind when referencing Kierkegaard. Indeed, it could be any number of stories. Returning once more to Ernesto Sabato's definition of *lo fantástico*, I would venture to say that both of these parables demonstrate *lo insólito* of the other. The other here is nothing less than the potential that the modern man will never attain because of his pusillanimity and weakness of will. This corresponds to the impotence of man when faced with a universe that is entirely alien and other, and which systematically defies man's attempt to axiomatize it through metaphysics. The result is a defeated subject, full of doubt and lacking in will; one of Nietzsche's *last men*, which seems to be the inevitable telos of modernity.

Borges concludes his essay with the following, well-known, excerpt:

Si no me equivoco, las heterogéneas piezas que he enumerado se parecen a Kafka; si no me equivoco, no todas se parecen entre sí. Este último hecho es el más significativo. En cada uno de esos textos está la idiosincrasia de Kafka, en grado mayor o menor, pero si Kafka no hubiera escrito, no la percibiríamos; vale decir, no existiría. (*OC 2*: 81)

From this we may conclude something rather remarkable about the quality of a precursor. The precursor is always untimely and anachronistic because his or her writings can only be read in a context other than that in which it was composed. They become untimely because the act of applying a posterior adjective (e.g., Kafkaesque) to anterior writings (Zeno, Kierkegaard, etc.) causes them to prefigure or adumbrate something that is not yet able to be realized; to herald something great with which the world is yet only pregnant. Their own greatness is tied to this future event, and in many cases is contingent upon it. They are like prophets who, in making aleatory predictions, get lucky and then are retrospectively deemed to have had access to a secret gnosis.

Continuing with this simile, we may see Kafka as that event which turns these writers into untimely precursors, and from this we may draw further conclusions. Firstly, the event that is Kafka is a realization of the tacit potential of these works; it is a messianic fulfillment of the promise made by those precursors (even if those promises only emerge from an *ex post facto* exegesis of the precursor). Regardless of whether it is due to the intrinsic power of Kafka's writing or due to ceaseless encomiums by critics, the event of Kafka recontextualizes everything that precedes it. And it is here that we might make our first startling observation: why have none of Borges's *successors* been able to recontextualize him in this manner? If Kafka is the apotheosis of his precursors, why are Borges's successors merely epigones of him? In other

words, what has changed so that the paradigm of influence set forth by Borges no longer holds for himself? Although some academic journals such as *Variaciones Borges* discourage the inelegance of an adjective such as *Borgeano*, one must admit that it is much more appropriate to apply this adjective to one of Borges's successors—for instance, Agustín Fernández Mallo—than it would be to apply an adjective such as *Mallano* to Borges. The same can be said of Kafka. There has been no great *event* in literature that has rendered Borges or Kafka untimely in the same way as they have rendered their precursors untimely. It is the reasons for the lack of such an event that the remainder of this chapter shall seek to analyze. In keeping with the discussion of hermeneutics in the previous chapters, it is not my purpose to suggest that there is something that ontologically separates the works of Borges and Kafka from the works of their successors, but rather to frame this disjunct as a function of the hermeneutics of modernity.

3. *El Aleph engordado* and the Archive

The conceit of Pablo Katchadjian's *El Aleph engordado* is simple: in this reworking of Borges's famous story, he reproduces the original text, but adds to it an excess of adjectives, nouns, and sentences which serve to fatten or engorge the original. The purpose of this is clearly more theoretical than it is aesthetic. When viewed purely from the perspective of the quality of the prose, one immediately feels the impulse to levee the same criticism against Katchadjian as one would levee against a student trying desperately to meet the word limit of some essay. Essentially, his purpose was to leave Borges's work intact but intersected but his own additions, so that one might question which words belong to the original and which are the additions of Katchadjian.

Let us take one example, a section of the first sentence of both stories, in order to clarify Katchadjian's purpose. First, the original:

La cadente mañana de febrero en que Beatriz Viterbo murió, después de una imperiosa agonía que no se rebajó un solo instante ni al sentimentalismo ni al miedo, note que las carteleras de fierro de la Plaza Constitución habían renovado no sé qué aviso de cigarillos rubios... (*OC* 1: 1061)

And the Katchadjian's version:

La cadente y húmeda mañana de febrero en que Beatriz Viterbo finalmente murió, después de una imperiosa y extensa agonía que no se rebajó ni un solo instante ni al sentimentalismo ni al miedo ni tampoco al abandon y la indiferencia, note que las horribles carteleras de fierro y plástico de la Plaza Constitución, junto a la boca del subterráneo, habían renovado no sé qué aviso de cigarillos rubios mentolados... (1)

This style of prose is particularly jarring when one is accustomed to Borges's prose, which almost never indulges in unnecessary verbiage, endeavoring always to be as succinct as possible. Whilst Borges will allow himself the use of embedded clauses within a sentence, as with the above excerpt, they rarely feel as if they have become unmanageable or interrupt the flow of the prose. One always sees where a sentence begins and where it will end. In terms of adjectives, Borges will usually pair one with a noun, oftentimes written before the noun, as if influenced by English. When Borges does double up on adjectives, it will usually be after an intransitive verb, oftentimes conjoined with a semicolon, as in this line from "La biblioteca de Babel:" "La luz que emiten es insuficiente; incesante" (*OC* 1: 861); or this line from "La muerte y la brújula:" "Le prometo ese laberinto, que consta de una sola línea recta y que es invisible, incesante" (*OC* 1: 899). Both of these examples employ the same style of adjective implementation, and moreover

one immediately notes that not only is the way in which adjectives are used the same, but also one of the adjectives itself: “incesante.” Additionally, one might remark that in this formulation, it seems as though Borges has a penchant for paring adjectives of negation, particularly those beginning with the prefix of negations “in.”

In this way we see a clear departure in how the prose of Katchadjian differs from the prose of Borges, in many ways seemingly undermining the ways in which Borges crafts a sentence. And yet there is a certain sense in making the story “El Aleph” bloated and replete with verbiage, as it is precisely this story that deals with as its theme the description of the entire world. The epigraph of the story, which is a citation from Hamlet: “O God! I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a King of infinite space,” introduces the problem of the condensation of the infinite into the infinitesimal (two more words beginning with the prefix “in”), and with it is introduced the problem of hermeneutics in general, namely the essence of something which contains everything.

The legal history of Katchadjian’s “*El Aleph engordado*” compliments its theoretical dimensions. Alejandra Saavedra Galindo offers an overview of this controversy in her essay “Retóricas de la intervención literaria,” in which she explains how the reworking of “El Aleph” was engaged in a long political battle in the Argentine courts over the issue of plagiarism and the rights of Borges’s works, owned by his widow María Kodama. Regarding Kodama’s continued involvement in extinguishing the works of authors which focused on rewriting Borges, the quip emerges that the only person who does not understand Borges’s work is his very own widow.

Beyond the political dimensions, Saavedra Galindo notes that during the process of engordamiento “a cada paso, el autor va añadiendo un matiz que amplía el sentido original del texto. Amplía el sentido, es decir, apenas corrige o modifica. El sentido de la intervención no es

el de enmendar a Borges, sino, en muchas ocasiones, hacerlo más preciso” (Galindo 282). This position is immediately understandable, yet at the very same time it does not seem entirely correct. One particular word used by Saavedra Galindo stands out: “ampliar.” In order to understand whether the above quote is valid, one must first pose the question: What does the words “ampliar” even mean? Saavedra Galindo is clearly using them in the sense to mean “to add specification.” On this level what she says is clearly true. However, what if one were to define “ampliar” as “to make open to greater quantities of interpretations” or something of the like? In this case, the act of adding descriptive adjectives to a text does not amplify it, but rather does the exact opposite: it restricts it. No longer can the “cadente mañana” exist as possibly both humid and dry, like some literary version of Schrödinger’s Cat. In Katchadjian’s version it is definitively “húmeda.” Katchadjian’s version can be thought of as just one instantiation (to use the language of predicate logic) of the many possible different interpretations (instantiations) of the work. The version of the work that is open to a greater variety of interpretations remains the original. In this manner of thinking, one can in fact turn Katchadjian’s statement on its head. Whilst he says that one can return to Borges’s original text through his own *engordamiento*, it turns out that his *engordamiento* is already contained as a possible interpretation or instantiation of Borges’s text. Katchadjian does indeed make the text more *precise*, as Saavedra Galindo notes, but ironically the process of making it more precise restricts its possibilities.

With the aforementioned observation, we can begin to sketch the contours of the diminishing potentiality between the original (Borges) and his successors. The original text will always be the universal generalization of any particular instantiation and will thus always be more *amplio* in terms of interpretive possibilities.

But here again we may question the notion of an original text, as it seems this concept is in perpetual need of clarification. One may recall that the Greek word for origin, ἀρχή, means beginning in a chronological sense and also beginning as principium in a speculative, logico-philosophical sense. It is with this observation that Hans-Georg Gadamer begins his disquisition in *Der Anfang der Philosophie*, and the point of this observation is clear: when thinking about origin, we cannot think of it merely as temporal principium; ἀρχή means also that which gives logical grounds to interpretation. Gadamer employs this concept to analyze the presocratic philosophers, arguing that although they may chronologically exist before Plato and Aristotle, our access to their corpus of thought is both fragmentary and additionally entirely mediated by Plato and Aristotle, so much so that we are only able to understand their works in the context of Plato and Aristotle. Although Plato and Aristotle are chronologically posterior to the presocratics (a statement which seems comically unnecessary to write, given the very meaning of pre-Socratic), they nevertheless serve as the speculative ground through which we may come to understand the presocratics, making them the logical ἀρχή of Western philosophy. This argument should interest us because of its potential implications to the problem of precursors and successor of Borges. At once, one apprehends the strong parallels that Gadamer's argument has with the aforementioned essay about Kafka. Only Borges's argument goes even further than Gadamer's. Gadamer is, in the end, still bounded by philology. It is only by virtue of the fact that many presocratic fragments are recorded in the works of Plato and Aristotle that we may make the philological argument that the two great Grecian philosophers serve as the speculative, logical ground for Western philosophy. But as explained, Kafka (according to Borges) takes this a step further. He is able to mediate the perception of even those whom he has not explicitly quoted, showing influence to pertain to the realm of the purely speculative. For Gadamer, Plato and

Aristotle are the ἀρχή to the presocratics because without them, we simply would not have access to many of the writings of the presocratics. They exist only as citations within their philosophies or as citations within commentaries on their philosophies. The way in which the texts of the presocratics is traversed or mediated entirely by Plato and Aristotle is not unlike Katchadjian's attempt to cross the text of "El Aleph" with his own. But Kafka's precursors exist outside of explicit references within his work. Indeed, many of them (listed by Borges) may never have even been read by Kafka at all. Kafka exists (following my interpretation of Borges) as a speculative, logical ἀρχή that breaks all rules of philology. He casts all philological research into the realm of the purely speculative.

Principium as ἀρχή means both chronological beginning and speculative, logical ground. Usually, these two concepts coincide with one another, and the chronologically anterior author also serves as speculative, logical ground. But occasionally these two concepts do not align, and a posterior author serves as the speculative, logical ground for an anterior author or thinker. This is the dynamic between Plato and Aristotle and the presocratics according to Gadamer. But for Gadamer this reversal is still bounded by philological constraints. Yet Borges outlines in his essay on Kafka certain situations in which these philological constraints can be exploded and influence can enter into the realm of the purely speculative, allowing one author or one corpus of work to serve as speculative, logical grounds to another, regardless of temporal or philological constraints. This is to say, just as Aristotle and Plato mediate the interpretation of the presocratics, so too can certain authors—we may call them *events*—come to mediate the interpretation of their predecessors in such a way that the unity of two disparate concepts contained in ἀρχή (chronological beginning and speculative, logical ground) become splintered

and alienated from one another. This is the heart of what it means to be an event: to be that which causes a schism between the two disparate concepts contained in the word ἀρχή.

And yet, as we have seen with Katchadjian, it does not seem as though any work coming after Borges has been able to exert this retroactive influence over him. In other words, Borges himself may be considered an event, but we cannot say the same for any of his successors. Rather, the classic paradigm still holds in which Borges serves as both chronological *and* speculative, logical ἀρχή to his successors.

From the ἀρχή, it is logical that one then consider the archive, which unites yet another concept to the word ἀρχή, namely that of government or sovereignty or authority. Archive derives from the variant of ἀρχή that means public records, and its thus linked more to the concept of government and authority, as in words such as monarchy, anarchy, etc. Yet we should not entirely disassociate these two seemingly disparate definitions of ἀρχή, since we have earlier noted that Gadamer's notion of ἀρχή as speculative, logical ground shares much in common with the notion of ἀρχή as authority. The speculative, logical ground is that which gives authority, and with this the two separate definitions of ἀρχή are again united.

Hans Frex Aguirre, in his essay on Borges and Foucault, links the idea of the library in Borges with heterotopia in Foucault. “Son las heterotopías las que habitualmente se encuentran en la obra de Borges. Es la metonimia, que relaciona elementos por sus puntos colindantes o bien los yuxtapone del todo, aquella figura del discurso que releva a la metáfora y que opera en la heterotopía” (Frex Aguirre 27). He then goes on to quote the key passage from Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* in which he expresses that the very idea of such a general archive, which would enclose all times and epochs and therefore be beyond time, belongs to our modernity. Foucault's phrase, as it appears quoted in Spanish, reads “El museo y la biblioteca son

heterotopías propias de la cultura occidental del siglo XIX” (Foucault, in Frex Aguirre 29). The library is an archive in which one finds only disquietude.

Foucault es quien propone la primera formulación propiamente filosófica del archivo, que es “la ley de lo que puede ser dicho, el sistema que rige la aparición de los enunciados como acontecimientos singulares” (*La arqueología* 170). Es el Sistema de la enunciabilidad de los discursos, que coordina su funcionamiento al interior de las disciplinas. El archivo permite atender al enunciado en su inmanencia, esto es, sin la legitimación de un sujeto que lo enuncia y sin la referencia a un orden de cosas. El enunciado es la unidad atómica del discurso y su ley consiste en la rareza. La atención al enunciado en su materialidad permite hacer de la biblioteca un archivo, lo que se traduce en transitar desde el pensamiento del sujeto de la metafísica a un habla dispersa del archivo, desde un régimen aristocrático de exclusión a uno inclusivo de exhaustividad. (Frex Aguirre 37)

The archive is at once everywhere. It is that in which order and structure is to be found, but which does not inhere order or structure. This is a disquieting thought, because it supposes that order (again, we must consider the meanings of ἀρχή) does not inhere the system, but rather is a function of hermeneutics.

This brings me to the following proclamation: Borges, much like Kafka, is the archive itself; his successors are merely its librarians or curators. It is here important to remember the discussion of the pessimistic metaphysics of “La biblioteca de Babel” discussed in the previous chapters. If we, as successors, are akin to the librarians of “La biblioteca de Babel,” then this means that we are lost; that we are ever-yearning for a metaphysics that does not exist, trapped in the realm of pure speculation.

Let us clarify this in terms of Katchadjian's project of *El Aleph engordado*. Katchadjian attempts a re-telling of Borges's story. But this is not a re-telling in the same way that Joyce attempts a re-telling of the *Odyssey*. Instead, it is an attempt to fill in the gaps; it is an attempt to add that which is ostensibly missing. By filling in the gaps Katchadjian presupposes that there is no need to recontextualize the story of "El Aleph," precisely because the story itself—in its very ontology—already contains its own recontextualization. The only thing needed to elicit this recontextualization is the act of interpretation. This presupposition is key in understanding the dynamics of the text, and what makes Borges an event. If we recall Borges's analysis of Kafka, we remember that he states that each of Kafka's precursors had a quality of Kafka, but not all of them. Kafka, on the other hand, was the composite of all of these qualities. The fictions of Borges, as an archive, are the depository of all possible qualities—*depósito de las cualidades*, if one wants to further twist the formula found in both Cervantes and Pierre Menard. Katchadjian realizes that this is the goal of "La biblioteca de Babel," "El Aleph," and "El congreso," among many other stories. They are stories that serve as the depository of all possible stories; stories which contain even their own recontextualization. As Katchadjian demonstrates, they are more than just stories about archives, they are the archive themselves, and as such it is impossible to say that they lack any quality that is to be found in a successor.

The theme of the archive in relation to Borges is taken up also by Marc Nichanian in his essay on Borges at Yale. He begins with a reading of the poem "Elogio de la sombra," commenting that Borges speaks of a secret. This secret is something of a mysticism in which Borges, likely due to the influence of Macedonio Fernández, will occasionally indulge, especially in his later writings from *El hacedor* on, although glimpses of this can still be seen in

his earlier works, especially poetry. Commenting on the line “no hay letras en las páginas de los libros,” Nichanian writes:

There is no longer a material exteriority to the archive, although this does not prevent it from being an archive... And now, the winds converge from the four corners of the universe, by way of the roads (*los caminos*) that lead to his ‘secret center [a mi secreto centro],’ converging as he does toward this center, toward the parabolic core of his self and of the collection we are holding in our hands. (Nichanian 2)

The fact that there is no material exteriority to the archive seems to indicate that it is coextensive with the physical universe. The secret center, like some cosmological force, finds itself always to be the object of interpretation, infinitely vast and coextensive with any interpretation interpolated into it. But simultaneously Borges is not responsible for the contents of this center. The contents are imposed on it, converge in it, always from the outside inwards.

It is here that Nichanian turns toward another text from the book *Elogio de la sombra*, “El etnógrafo,” to explain this difference between production of meaning and having meaning imposed or interpreted from the outside. The story itself is relatively straightforward: a student is tasked to study indigenous languages. This student, Fred Murdock, is described as “naturalmente respetuoso, no descreía de los libros ni de quienes escriben los libros. Era suya esa edad en que el hombre no sabe aún quién es y está listo a entregarse a lo que le propone el azar” (*OC 2*: 627). After spending a considerable time among the natives, the secret doctrine is revealed to him: “Comprobó que en las noches de luna llena soñaba con bisontes. Confió estos sueños repetidos a su maestro; éste acabó por revelarle su doctrina secreta. Una mañana, sin haberse despedido de nadie, Murdock se fue” (*OC 2*: 627). As one might imagine, when the professor asks Murdock if he can report on this secret, he replies in the negative, saying quite plitudinously “El secreto,

por lo demás, no vale lo que valen los caminos que me condujeron a él. Esos caminos hay que andarlos” (*OC* 2: 628). The last line of the story is perhaps the most intriguing in terms of both theme and narrative: “Fred se casó, se divorció y es ahora uno de los bibliotecarios de Yale” (*OC* 2: 628). In short, instead of publishing his research and becoming a professor, Fred Murdock becomes a librarian.

Everything thus hangs on the difference between the “professor” and the “archivist.” But what is this difference? Are they not both servants of knowledge? Are they not part of the same institution, one dedicated to the conservation and the development of knowledge, and precisely Western knowledge? Yes, but if the professor is the guardian and the propagator of knowledge, the librarian is the guardian of the books and of the archives. He is responsible for their maintenance, for their classification, perhaps for their selection, and finally for their significance, for their provenance as much as for their fate as archives. He is obviously not responsible for their content. (Nichanian 4)

He then goes on to explain how knowledge is structured within the archive. All knowledge is reducible to the archive, but the archive itself is irreducible (Nichanian 9-10). The archive itself expands to encompass all possible knowledge, just like the cartographers’ map in “Del rigor en la ciencia.” Therefore, one need not preoccupy oneself with the production of new knowledge; the promise of new knowledge lies always outside of the archive, but it is impossible to reach outside of the archive.

This should harken the discussion in the previous chapter about the metaphysical implications of “La biblioteca de Babel,” which is also a perfect archive—not in the sense that it contains *all knowledge*, but in the sense that it contains *all possible knowledge*. The distinction here is fundamental. It is possible to conceive of a knowledge that exists outside of the library. It

is also possible to state that this knowledge is necessary to understand the library. And yet by virtue of lying outside of the archive, such knowledge is inaccessible. This is the grounds of metaphysical pessimism. We can only think things through the archive because the archive is the logical ground for knowledge, ἀρχή. Borges as an event means precisely this: the ubiquity of the archive. The archive subsumes its successors. It sets forth the criteria of any future event, namely, that for any future event to occur, it would have to break the paradigm of the archive. It would have to go beyond the archive; go beyond the walls of “La biblioteca de Babel.” Any future event would have to accomplish something in the realm of metaphysics that we know since Kant is forbidden. Borges as an event marks the ἀρχή because this event is the event of the archive, but it also marks an end. This event is the end because in order to go beyond it, in order to imagine a different event, we must believe in the possibility of a revolution in metaphysics, but this possibility is all but excluded. Thus does the ἀρχή become also τέλος, like the Ouroboros mentioned in Borges’s “There Are More Things.”

4. *Remake*

The book *El hacedor (de Borges), Remake*, written by Agustín Fernández Mallo is perhaps an even more ambitious attempt at writing after Borges than that of Pablo Katchadjian, although it is a disservice to both authors to categorize their works together, as everything in these books ranging from the prose, methodology, and structure to scope and justification vary drastically.

El hacedor (de Borges), Remake was published by Alfaguara in 2011, and one of the indisputable similarities between it and Katchadjian’s *El Aleph engordado* was the immediate legal issues that it encountered at the hands of the lawyers of María Kodama. Alfaguara

immediately pulled the edition, but the wake of these legal issues nevertheless leaves the question of what it means to write after Borges. Juan Villoro signals this when he stated that “no hay tema más borgeano que el de la apropiación creativa de un texto ajeno,” a position shared by Vicente Luis Mora when he claims that such a decision is a grave anachronism (Mora 275). Eduardo Becerra expands this discussion to consider how works written by Borges himself, such as “El fin” or “Biografía de Tadeo Isidoro Cruz” are variations of episodes from *Martín Fierro* or how “La biblioteca de Babel” is an homage to Kurd Lasswitz (Becerra 202-203). More complicated still is the fact that Fernández Mallo’s reworking of *El hacedor* is not a mere plagiarism in the way that Katchadjian’s could be accused of being. One recalls that Katchadjian explicitly stated that it was his purpose to write a version of “El Aleph” so that the original was still perfectly preserved, and nothing was taken out or removed, only added. The same cannot be said of Fernández Mallo, who routinely not only adds large swaths of text, but also will change, manipulate, mutate, or delete insofar as it serves his purpose. The retelling is so stark that it approaches a Joyce-like retelling of the *Odyssey* more than it does Katchadjian-like *engordamiento*.

Kevin Perromat Agustín identifies one such literary movement which he terms “plagiarismo,” which he links to the production of art under capitalism (Perromat 122). However, this definition is insufficient to describe the work of Fernández Mallo, which goes beyond merely a critique of capitalist production of art to something more ontological, questioning the origin of meaning and structure in the work of art. It should be noted that this is by no means a new critique. In fact, I would argue, as previously stated, that such an analysis can be done relating the work of James Joyce with the *Odyssey*, and Joyce exists on the cusp of many of the most notable crises in the production of art in the twentieth century, such as Duchamp, the

Ready-Made, and the mechanical reproduction signaled by Walter Benjamin. Indeed, another comparison ought to be drawn between Joyce and Borges when discussing retellings of stories, namely that both authors are, in the way I have above described, events. As events, they recontextualize their precursors without themselves being able to be recontextualized by their successors. (Who can read Italo Svevo without thinking of Joyce? Yet at the same time it is entirely possible to read Joyce without thinking of Samuel Beckett. Svevo, Joyce's direct precursor is entirely interwoven with the presence of Joyce, however Beckett, Joyce's direct successor, cannot be said to mediate our understanding of Joyce. If anything, it is the opposite. Joyce mediates both precursor and successor). It should be of note that both Borges and Joyce, as events, operate in the realm of retellings, plagiarisms, and palimpsests.

Instead of the word "plagiarismo," Agustín Fernández Mallo suggests his own term in a different book, *Postpoesía*, which deals more with the theoretical side of literary production. "El cine es un corta y pega de elementos de naturalezas disímiles, un arte bastardo. La postpoética también. Se reivindican, de esta manera, la legitimidad de las intervenciones en una obra ajena, que la modifiquen, para crear así otra obra que no necesariamente ha de ser inferior a la original. Apropiacionismo..." (*Postpoesía* 87). Whether or not the term *apropiacionismo* describes a new phenomenon or whether it is merely a superfluous coinage that describes an already existing phenomenon is a question for another time. What concerns us now is what Fernández Mallo intends to communicate with the term. Becerra comments: "Las exigencias mercantiles no parecen suponer para Fernández Mallo una barrera para la libre expresión del pensamiento poético por sus imposiciones y su poder de manipulación; el mercado surge en sus palabras como campo de actuación, hasta parecería que exento de carga ideológica alguna, por donde la literature pulula juguetona" (Becerra 205).

5. “Mutaciones” and the Origin of the Work of Art

Yet before analyzing Fernández Mallo directly, let us first look at the original text as it appears in Borges’s *El hacedor*. As is well-known, “Mutaciones” as it appears in Borges is a short text, even by his standards; it is comprised of four short paragraphs which take up less than one page. It wastes no time describe three symbols: “Cruz, lazo y flecha.” Because of its brevity, I will here transcribe “Mutaciones” in its entirety:

En un corredor vi una flecha que indicaba una dirección y pensé que aquel símbolo inofensivo había sido alguna vez una cosa de hierro, un proyectil inevitable y mortal, que entró en la carne de los hombres y de los leones y nubló el sol en las Termópilas y dio a Harald Sigurdson, para siempre, seis pies de tierra inglesa.

Días después, alguien me mostró una fotografía de un jinete magyar; un lazo dado vueltas rodeaba el pecho de su cabalgadura. Supe que el lazo, que antes anduvo por el aire y sujetó a los toros del pastizal, no era sino una gala insolente del apero de los domingos.

En el cementerio del Oeste vi una cruz rúnica, labrada en mármol rojo; los brazos eran curvos y se ensanchaban y los rodeaba un círculo. Esa cruz apretada y limitada figuraba la otra, de brazos libres, que a su vez figura el patíbulo en que un dios padeció, la “máquina vil” insultada por Luciano de Samosata.

Cruz, lazo y flecha, viejos utensilios del hombre, hoy rebajados o elevados a símbolos; no sé por qué me maravillan, cuando no hay en la tierra una sola cosa que el olvido no borre o que la memoria no altere y cuando nadie sabe en qué imágenes lo traducirá el porvenir. (*OC 2*: 290)

This story is perhaps best known for its reflection on the symbol as such, and one can see its influence in later post-structuralist semiotics, as in Eco and Derrida, that latter of whom is particularly keen on analyzing the sign-relation. The discussion of the symbol is not entirely alien to our current purpose, either, as the symbol is the depository of meaning, the common anchor which both spurs interpretation whilst simultaneously serving as telos to it.

We can see this process in the story itself. The narrator, presumably Borges himself, sees an arrow in a hallway, immediately recognizing it as a polysemous symbol, uniting the contemporary idea of direction with the idea of ancient warfare, from Greece to Harald Sigurdson's claim to the English throne. The symbol does not refer itself to ancient warfare, but it does cause Borges to reflect upon it. Signification returns to the arrow as its former uses are re-interpreted into it. This process is repeated two more times, with the symbols of the whip and the cross. Each time in we are first confronted with the objects as symbols. After this initial confrontation, reflection begins which re-introduces the object into the symbol. The cross is to us an abstract symbol, only upon reflection is the material (objective) cross rediscovered with its original function. The story ends with the ambiguous statement that these objects are either "rebajados o elevados a símbolos," and this ambiguity as to whether or not they are lowered or raised is crucial in avoiding any sort of structuralist semiotic.

The process of interpretation of the symbol can be traced onto many philosophers. As mentioned, Derrida's analysis of semiotics shares affinities with Borges and both he and Umberto Eco are explicitly influenced by him. The symbolic order of the library in *Il nome della rosa* and the Kabbalistic symbolism of *Il pendolo di Foucault* give rise to the very possibility of Eco's detective fiction. But in order to be more thematically consistent with my analysis of Borges from the preceding chapters, it is better to link the symbol as it is here described with

Heidegger's essay on the origin of the work of art. This has the advantage of linking the semiotics of the symbol directly to the discourse of ontology that has been hitherto important.

Heidegger's discussion of the work of art begins with the recognition of a triad. This triad is comprised of the relation between the work of art (*Kunstwerk*), the artist (*Künstler*), and art (*Kunst*). The differentiation between the work of art as *Kunstwerk* and art as *Kunst* is of crucial importance for Heidegger's analysis, as the work of art refers to the thing itself in its tangibility. Heidegger even uses the word *Dinghaft* when describing works. Art, contrariwise, refers to the abstraction, something emergent from the interplay of work of art and artist, which allows both to be recognized as such. Each concept somehow grounds the other concepts, at yet cannot itself be grounded without referring to the other two. The question is semiotic insofar as it questions the nature of these mutual references, and ontological insofar as it questions the origins of this triadic relation.

Heidegger is very explicit in his essay, writing, "Das Werk macht mit Anderem öffentlich bekannt, es offenbart Anderes; es ist Allegorie. Mit dem angefertigten Ding wird im Kunstwerk noch etwas Anderes zusammengebracht. Zusammenbringen heißt griechisch *συνβάλλειν*. Das Werk ist Symbol" (*Holzwege* 4). ["The work makes public something other than itself; it manifests something other; it is an allegory. In the work of art something other is brought together with the thing that is made. To bring together is, in Greek, *sumballein*. The work is a symbol"] (*PLT* 19-20). Like all words in Heidegger, the word symbol is carefully chosen. The symbol brings together the thing (*Ding*) with something else (*etwas Anderes*). The disclosure of this something else is fundamental to the understanding of art.

A constant point of reference in Heidegger's essay is the painting of a pair of shoes by van Gogh. In one of the most curious sentences from the essay, the philosopher writes that "Wir

wählen dazu ein bekanntes Gemälde von van Gogh, der solches Schuhzeug mehrmals gemalt hat” (*Holzwege* 18). [“We shall choose a well-known painting by Van Gogh, who painted such shoes several times”] (*PLT* 33). He announces that he will analyze a particular painting by van Gogh, seemingly indicating which one, before then backtracking and stating that van Gogh has painted many such works of shoes, thereby leaving it unclear exactly which painting he has in mind. In this very gesture, Heidegger indicates without explicitly stating that the ontology of the work of art lies not in what is presented, but in the process of thinking that it evinces.

Already we can see similarities with “Mutaciones” by Borges. In both essay and story, a symbol is presented out of context. In Heidegger it is van Gogh’s painting of peasant shoes; in Borges it is the triad of “cruz, lazo y flecha.” It then befalls the interpreter to understand what the nature of symbols and art is, having nothing more than a dislocated image as a point of departure. Let us reconstruct Heidegger’s argument, using the symbols in Borges’s story as a point of reference just as Heidegger uses van Gogh’s shoes.

Let us focus our attention on the second of the symbols mentioned by Borges: “el lazo.” The reason for this is because it is presented to him as a photograph, and thus most approximates the shoes painted by van Gogh. One beholds the artwork not as the thing itself, but as an image or copy of the thing. Heidegger uses the word *Abbild* to indicate this. The photo is an image or copy of the lasso, and as such separates the thing that is therein presented from its readiness-to-hand or *Zuhandenheit*. But what exactly is the thing itself?

Borges uses the word “utensilios” to signal the three symbols that he presents, and this word harkens quite well that which Heidegger designates as “*Zeug*.” *Zeug*, translated often into English as equipment, means more than just a mere thing—it is something that interacts with the world, and in interacting with the world it presupposes a world.

Here we come to another triad of concepts proposed by Heidegger, which find equivalents in Borges's story. They are 1) *das Dinghafte des Dinges*, 2) *das Zeughafte des Zeuges*, and 3) *das Werkhafte des Werkes*.

What a thing is in its thingness is the material and form which it takes. The equipmentality of the equipment is that which presupposes a function, and in presupposing a function, presupposes a certain world. The "*Werkhafte*" of the work is that which brings this function to the fore, and in so doing brings its ontology into consideration.

In "Mutaciones," the strangeness, if we may call it so, of the photograph of the lasso is the dissonance between how the lasso (the thing) is presented in the picture and the expectation of how it is to be used as equipment. The equipmentality of the lasso brings a presupposed knowledge into the interpretation of the photograph, and this is what Heidegger means when he says that it presupposes a world. A world is this presupposed knowledge that informs the interpretation of the thing. This leads us to the question: is it possible for us to consider the picture of the lasso without pulling anything exterior to it into consideration?

One of the first things that we might note if we were to attempt this is that we are removed by yet another degree from the content of the photograph: we do not know to which photograph Borges is referring, just as we do not know to which painting Heidegger is referring. We are left with only words. Words which are always referring to other words. But we wish to behold the work in a vacuum. To this Heidegger comments: "Doch ist das Werk jemals an sich zugänglich? Damit dies glücken könnte, wäre nötig, das Werk aus allen Bezügen zu solchen, was ein anderes ist als es selbst, herauszurücken, um es allein für sich auf sich beruhen zu lassen. Aber dahin geht doch schon das eigenste Absehen des Künstlers. Das Werk soll durch ihn zu seinem reinen Insichselbststehen entlassen sein" (*Holzwege* 26). ["Yet is the work ever in itself

accessible? To gain access to the work; it would be necessary to remove it from all relations to something other than itself, in order to let it stand on its own for itself alone. But the artist's most peculiar intention already aims in this direction. The work is to be released by him to its pure self-subsistence"] (*PLT* 40). It is, of course, impossible to approach the work without any extrinsic reference, to behold it in-and-of-itself. And yet that is conclusion is not what is important. What is important, however, is what this process of thinking reveals to us. What Heidegger is here signaling is exactly what is investigated in "Mutaciones." It is the return to the pure thing behind the symbol. The symbol, in its very etymology, unites the disparate. It unites the image of the lasso with the world.

What should call to our attention about "Mutaciones" is the very fact that Borges's confrontation with the image of these symbols causes a reflection on the nature of their meaning. It is this reflection itself which is more important than the meaning which it reveals, as it the reflection itself corresponds to the origin of the work as art. The lasso as equipment has its service, which Heidegger terms *Dienlichkeit*. "Das Zeugsein des Zeuges besteht in seiner Dienlichkeit" (*Holzwege* 18). ["The equipmental quality of equipment consists in its usefulness"] (*PLT* 33). As the equipment is separated from its service or serviceability, something becomes hidden. This thing which becomes hidden is the world to which the equipment corresponds. The act of seeing the photograph of the Magyar with a lasso separated from its serviceability and world causes Borges to interpret into the photograph something which is hidden or concealed; *verborgen*. The concealed interpretation is the memory that the lasso was used to subject the bulls of the pasture. The photograph evokes this memory without ever containing any reference to it. To describe this process, Heidegger draws upon the Greek *ἀλήθεια*, specifically its supposed etymology meaning the negation of the state of being concealed.

Was geschieht hier? Was ist im Werk am Werk? Van Goghs Gemälde ist die Eröffnung dessen, was das Zeug, das Paar Bauernschuhe, in Wahrheit *ist*. Dieses Seiende tritt in die Unverborgenheit seines Seins heraus. Die Unverborgenheit des Seienden nannten die Griechen *ἀλήθεια*. Wir sagen Wahrheit und denken wenig genug bei diesem Wort. Im Werk ist, wenn hier eine Eröffnung des Seienden geschieht in das, was und wie es ist, ein Geschehen der Wahrheit am Werk. (*Holzwege* 21)

[What happens here? What is at work in the work? Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, *is* in truth. This entity emerges into the unconcealedness of being. The Greeks called the unconcealedness of being *Aletheia*. We say "truth" and think little enough in using the word. If there occurs in the work a disclosure of a particular being, disclosing what and how it is, then there is here occurring, a happening of truth at work.] (*PLT* 36)

What the analysis of each of the symbols in "Mutaciones" reveals is the same thing that the analysis of van Gogh's peasants' shoes reveals, namely, that the act of identifying them as equipment discloses or makes unconcealed. It is the act or event of truth. By using the word event we must pause to make clarification. In the above passage Heidegger uses the word "*Geschehen*" and later he will use the word "*Geschehnis*," as here: "Was das Zeug sei, ließen wir uns ein Werk sagen. Dadurch kam, gleichsam unter der Hand, an den Tag, was im Werk am Werk ist: die Eröffnung des Seienden in seinem Sein: das Geschehnis der Wahrheit" (*Holzwege* 23-24). ["We allowed a work to tell us what equipment is. By this means, almost clandestinely, it came to light what is at work in the work: the disclosure of the particular being in its being, the happening of truth"] (*PLT* 38). *Geschehnis* as event is not the same as *Ereignis* as event, even though both English and Spanish unite the two concepts behind one word. An *Ereignis* is that,

that recontextualizes all preceding history or knowledge. A *Geschehnis*, on the other hand, at least in the philosophical tradition upon which I am drawing, lacks this specificity. Moreover, *Geschehnis* is apposite for what Heidegger is describing and for what is happening in the symbols in “Mutaciones,” because the event is not one of recontextualization, but rather of disclosing or unconcealing that which is already latently there.

This *Geschehnis* is the bringing forth and laying bear of truth. “Die Einrichtung der Wahrheit ins Werk ist das Hervorbringen eines solchen Seienden, das vordem nicht war und nachmals nie mehr werden wird” (*Holzwege* 50). [“The establishing of truth in the work is the bringing forth of a being such as never was before and will never come to be again”] (*PLT* 62). This citation confirms what is above stated. The event of truth, which Heidegger describes as an “*Einrichtung*,” is the bringing forth of something that did not previously exist. Therefore, it cannot be considered a recontextualization, because the prefix of this word presupposes an already-established context upon which the event as *Ereignis* reflexively acts.

In the last paragraph of “Mutaciones,” Borges questions: “no sé por qué me maravillan, cuando no hay en la tierra una sola cosa que el olvido no borre o que la memoria no altere y cuando nadie sabe en qué imágenes lo traducirá el porvenir.” There arises a tension between the concepts of “*tierra*,” “*cosa*,” “*olvido*,” “*memoria*,” and “*imágenes*.” *Tierra* is the earth or *Erde*, the material out of which the *Cosa* is constituted. *Olvido* is more than just forgetfulness. *Olvido* is the Greek *Λήθη*, Lethe, from which *ἀλήθεια*, Aletheia is derived. As such it is forgetfulness as concealment. *Memoria* is the remembrance of that which lies latent; it is the faculty which alters the meaning of the work of art by erecting a new world for it. *Imágenes* is the work itself, abstracted from the *cosa* (Ding) and *utensilio* (Zeug).

This brings us to the last part of Heidegger's essay, which deals with the nature of art itself, building off the thing, the equipment, and the work.

Im Werk ist das Geschehnis der Wahrheit und zwar nach der Weise eines Werkes am Werk. Demnach wurde im voraus das Wesen der Kunst als das Ins-Werk-Setzen der Wahrheit bestimmt. Doch diese Bestimmung ist bewußt zweideutig. Sie sagt einmal: Kunst ist das Feststellen der sich einrichtenden Wahrheit in die Gestalt. Das geschieht im Schaffen als dem Hervor-bringen der Unverborgenheit des Seienden. Ins-Werk-Setzen heißt aber zugleich: in Gang- und ins Geschehen-Bringen des Werkseins. Das geschieht als Bewahrung. Also ist die Kunst: die schaffende Bewahrung der Wahrheit im Werk.

Dann ist die Kunst ein Werden und Geschehen der Wahrheit. (Holzwege 59)

[In the work, the happening of truth is at work and, indeed, at work according to the manner of a work. Accordingly the nature of art was defined to begin with as the setting-into-work of truth. Yet this definition is intentionally ambiguous. It says on the one hand: art is the fixing in place of a self-establishing truth in the figure. This happens in creation as the bringing forth of the unconcealedness of what is. Setting-into-work, however, also means: the bringing of work-being into movement and happening. This happens as preservation. Thus art is: the creative preserving of truth in the work. *Art then is the becoming and happening of truth.*] (PLT 71)

Art, in its simplest definition, is the setting-into-work of truth. But even this simplest of definitions cannot help but be syncretic. The work (*Werk*) is at the same time the artwork, which exists set fast in its form, unaltering, and it is also something that exerts an effect (*Wirkung*), which is the bringing forth of the concealed. Art is the process of the becoming truth.

“Mutaciones” demonstrates this. If we return to the last paragraph, we see Borges emphasize the *mutability* of the truth disclosed by art. Indeed, art is this mutability itself.

The last verb to appear is “traducir.” The future, *el porvenir*, acts upon symbols to translate them into new images. We might even note, as a brief aside, the similarities between what Heidegger terms “*Ins-Werk-Setzen*” and the word for translate, *übersetzen*. The act of the future translating symbols into new images is in this sense also a form of *setzen*.

As noted, Borges again employs the word “*olvido*” in this final paragraph, which is also syncretic. As mentioned, it is forgetfulness in the sense of concealment. Yet it is also oblivion. “No hay en la tierra una sola cosa que el olvido no borre.” This twofold schism in the word “*olvido*” corresponds both to the origin of the work of art and its end. Its origin is in the event of truth as disclosure or unconcealment, and yet this event is itself ungrounded. The end, therefore, returns to this nothingness—the ontological vacuity from whence art springs into existence. Bearing this in mind, we should again reflect upon the preceding section discussing the archive, which ended with the conclusion that the archive in Borges also becomes the telos of knowledge, because it is impossible to go beyond it. Similarly—but now in ontological terms rather than epistemological—does *olvido* signal both the rip from which truth is brought forth into disclosure and also the oblivion of its ineluctable end.

6. Fernández Mallo and the Origin of the Work of Art

The first observation that may be made of Fernández Mallo’s version of “Mutaciones” in his book *El hacedor (de Borges)*, *Remake* is the inclusion of photographs, containing images and symbols. The inclusion of these photographs harkens not only the original “Mutaciones” of Borges, in which a photograph is described but never presented as an image, but also other, later

works such as *Austerlitz* by W. G. Sebald. The inclusion of photographs is at once a seemingly natural continuation of “Mutaciones” whilst also being a radical departure from it. Superficially, it is a natural continuation because Borges specifically identifies a photo and analyses the symbol that appears in it. The inclusion of photographs therefore seems like an exemplification of a process that Borges has already identified. However, if we again reflect upon Heidegger’s analysis of van Gogh’s peasant shoes in “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” we begin to see why the actual inclusion of photographs is a departure from the mere discussion of photographs. As discussed, Heidegger names the painting by van Gogh without ever specifying it. He refers to the famous painting of the peasant’s shoes, before saying that van Gogh painted many such shoes during his life. He gives no further indication to specify which painting exactly he has in mind. We are left with an ambiguity which serves to reinforce the abstracted nature of the symbol. The symbol is not grounded in a specific work of art, but rather emerges from the truth that the work of art discloses. Fernández Mallo’s inclusion of photographs banishes this ambiguity and, in so doing, he changes our relationship to the symbol.

Let us look at the structure of Fernández Mallo’s “Mutaciones.” It begins with a section entitled “Un recorrido por *Los monumentos de Passaic* 2009,” which begins with a chronicle of a walk taken through New York by the author. There is a break and then the next paragraph is heralded by the title: “Antecedentes.” The scene then immediately shifts to one such antecedent walk, carried out by Robert Smithson:

Una mañana de 1967, Robert Smithson, residente en la ciudad de Nueva York, valido de una libreta, bolígrafo y cámara fotográfica Instamatic 400, toma un bus en la 8. Avenida con destino Passaic, zona residencial de Nueva Jersey. Una vez se apea del bus, emprende la caminata que transformaría la idea de monumento y ruina romántica que

hasta entonces se tenía en la Historia del Arte. La obra tomaría la forma de artículo-informe, ese mismo año, en la revista *Artforum*, con el título “Un recorrido por los monumentos de Passaic”. (*Remake* 58)

We note that the object that is mutated is the walk taken by Robert Smithson, which led to his revolutionary article. Yet it perhaps false to label this walk as an object; it is not a noun but rather an action.

Instead of embarking on a physical walk, Fernández Mallo takes out his computer and begins to retrace the path taken by Smithson. It is during this digital recreation that he comes across the first object chronicled by Smithson: a bridge. At this point another key difference emerges between Mallo and Borges. As a point of reference, Mallo includes the original photograph taken by Smithson of this bridge, and even includes a portion of Smithson’s text, translated into Spanish. As mentioned above, this removes any possible ambiguity of the original photo and therefore changes our relationship with the symbol. One could imagine how differently Heidegger’s text would be interpreted were he to have included a copy or definitive specification of the painting by van Gogh to which he was referring, or if Borges were to have included a specification of the photo to which he was referring. Fernández Mallo, on the other hand, goes on to include a second photo, which is the image of the same bridge as it appears on Google Maps. It seems hackneyed to make note of, but the photo is in this way twice mediated: it is a photo of a photo, obscured and pixilated, whose function is to reference the original of Smithson. The German word *Abbild* comes to mind—it is not a *Bild*, or image, in and of itself, but rather something derived, contingent.

Fernández Mallo emphasizes the relationship between photography and reality in an evocative passage: “Apuro el paso y pienso que quizá toda la realidad esté hecha de cables que

no vemos, y que toda fotografía no sea otra cosa que un corte limpio en ese cableado, un filete extraído a un compacto músculo al que llamamos Realidad, en cuyo interior crecemos” (*Remake* 65). It is a snapshot of a reality that penetrates and encapsulates it, which extends in either direction beyond the two-dimensional moment of the photograph. That which extends in either direction is later linked to the concept of time. Describing the difference between one of his photographs taken from the Internet and one taken decades earlier by Smithson, Fernández Mallo describes:

Pero, de alguna manera, tengo la sensación de que todo sigue igual, como si la personalidad de un lugar la otorgaran las fotografías, como si las fotografías valieran no para distinguir y clasificar épocas sino para buscar la constante de una ecuación que involucra al tiempo y al carácter. De alguna manera, mi fotografía y la de Smithson, me digo, son también espejo la una de la otra. (*Remake* 69)

The photographs are not mirrors in space, but rather mirrors in time, and this is what imbues them with symbolic weight. Indeed, the problem of signification becomes entwined with the problem of time, and even spatial difference becomes subordinated to time as the fundamental form of intuition, shall we say. Kant places time and space both as *Formen der Anschauung*, but in the years since Kant time increasingly has become the dominant between the two. Borges is no exception to this, as his idealism privileges time as the initial form of intuition, opposing Kant. In "La penúltima versión de la realidad" he writes: "Pienso que para un buen idealismo, el espacio no es sino una de las formas que integran la cargada fluencia del tiempo. Es uno de los episodios del tiempo y, contrariamente al consenso natural de los ametafísicos, está situado en él, y no viceversa." And then again: "Vuelvo a la consideración metafísica. El espacio es un incidente en el tiempo y no una forma universal de intuición, como impuso Kant" (*OC* 1: 379).

We see this privileging of time over space at play in both Borges's and Fernández Mallo's "Mutaciones," as it is not the space that changes. The space, or also the space that an object occupies, remains the same. The decisive factor is time.

This idea is again broached in a separate description some pages later, in which the author writes:

Me viene la idea de que los lugares tienen un *espesor de tiempo* dirigido en dos direcciones: el tiempo que, vertical, se alza por encima de la tierra, y el que, también vertical, se hunde hacia su primer estrato en la tierra. Superficies terrestre, celeste y subterrestre, y las 3 se nos presentan en cada instante, simultáneamente.

Tiempo palimpsesto. (*Remake 76*)

Each photograph is mediated not only by the image that precedes it, but also by the contingent possibilities that the future will disclose. The word "palimpsesto" clearly draws upon Borges's affinity for the word, which very likely comes through his affinity for De Quincy's famous essay. But the word is more than just an homage to Borges, who uses the word to its greatest effect in the late story "La memoria de Shakespeare." The image of the photograph, mediated by its past and its contingent future, is always a palimpsest. The symbol, insofar as it defers to something other than itself, invokes palimpsestic time.

There is enough discussion in the world about symbols being mediated by past and future traces; *différence*, etc. But let us give special attention to an occasionally overlooked phenomenon in "La memoria de Shakespeare" and then consider its application to Fernández Mallo and the problem of successors. The narrator of that story, Herman Soergel, receives Shakespeare's memory and begins to "discover" it. As he has experiences in his life, it triggers the memories embedded somewhere deep within Shakespeare's. There must be a contemporary

trigger to bring forth those memories, to such an extent that it becomes impossible for Soergel to discern which memories originally belonged to Shakespeare and which originally belonged to him. This phenomenon is well-known and documented. What is less noted but equally noteworthy is the fact that at no point does it cease to be Shakespeare's memory. I do not mean this in the sense that some ontological kernel definable as Shakespeare exists always separate from mediation. In fact, the opposite is true. Shakespeare's memory is so fundamental that it overwhelms Soergel and transforms all of Soergel's memories into Shakespeare's. By this I mean the following: Soergel becomes Shakespeare, but Shakespeare never becomes Soergel. This is confirmed that when he passes the memory along to someone else it is still called "Shakespeare's memory" and not "Soergel's memory." This intent of this is to link this phenomenon to the aforementioned discussion of influence; how both Kafka's precursors and successors can be termed Kafkaesque, but Kafka remains immutable. It is possible to replace Soergel with Shakespeare, but it remains impossible to replace Shakespeare with Soergel.

We should ask ourselves: is this merely convention? Is it simply convention that we continue using the names of great writers as points of reference when describing secondary writers, be they precursors or successors? This may largely be true, no one can deny as much, but even supposing it is all convention—what then? This convention itself may be analyzed as symptomatic of a pessimistic and decadent culture, in which all meaning is ascribed to the past, and none is left for the present.

The next section is entitled "Un recorrido por los monumentos de Ascó." It follows a similar pattern as the first section, as does the third section, "Un recorrido por los monumentos de *La aventura*." They correspond, loosely, to the three paragraphs and symbols in Borges's original. The first two sections each end with a reflection, respectively: "¿Ha sustituido Passaic a

Roma como ciudad eterna?” (*Remake* 76), and “¿Ha sustituido el bolígrafo BIC al Montblanc como bolígrafo eterno?” (*Remake* 81). The questions seem provocative, in that they propose a shift in paradigms, with the modern or postmodern—depending on one’s persuasion—supplanting the classical. The irony of the word “eterno” is appreciated, for how may something be supplanted if it is eternal? And yet, the posing of these questions discloses the impossibility of what they insinuate. Rome remains the point of reference for the eternal city. Passaic and BIC—be they modern or postmodern—are mimesis and epigone, they do not contain the essence of the eternal; they merely refer to it. Essence is always elsewhere and otherwise. To illustrate this let us pose another question, which has been the thread connecting this chapter: *¿Ha sustituido Agustín Fernández Mallo a Jorge Luis Borges como escritor eterno de los espejos, los laberintos y el tiempo palimpsesto?* The question is rhetorical; the answer is clearly *no*. What interests us here are the formal ontological structures that prohibit the answer from being *yes*.

In the preceding paragraph I mentioned two adjectives—modern and postmodern—to potentially describe the substitutions suggested by Fernández Mallo. I opted not to definitively select one because the two words each are embedded within a quagmire of overlapping concepts, so much so that their use generally brings more confusion than it clarifies. A brief discussion, however, is inevitable. Ignacio Infante, in his essay on Borges and Fernández Mallo, expounds upon Fredric Jameson’s definition of postmodernism, which holds that it is the state in which nature has disappeared and in which culture is transformed into a type of capital (Infante 117). The barriers between commodity and culture are erased. Infante then adds Jeffrey Nealon’s term post-postmodernism, which he associates with the production of capital from capital, without the intermediate step of production of a commodity. These definitions seem to hold when speaking about the economic side of modernity but become obscured when used in the context of literary

criticism or philosophy. They bear the weight of attempting to describe a new form of artistic production which is not altogether without precedence. Implicit within the term postmodern is the attempt to differential oneself from past paradigm—to begin a new movement—which concomitantly discloses the impossibility for this new movement to ever truly be a new paradigm. This is embedded within the very word itself. Postmodern strives to be something other than the modern, but etymologically finds itself always returning to the same paradigms established by modernism. Crushed by the anxiety of influence—to borrow the term from Harold Bloom—it cannot hope to be anything more than conscious of the fact that it is mimesis and epigone.

This brings us back to the idea of a pessimist ontology. When speaking of the ontology of the work of art, we are speaking of the formal structure of theorems and axioms that binds together the field or domain of art. In Husserlian terminology this formal structure is a manifold, which entails a formal ontology. That this manifold is incomplete, or that it always makes reference to that which is outside of itself, introduces metaphysics to resolve this problem. Pessimism enters as an axiological judgement of the possibility of such metaphysics, which transcends the domain of possible knowledge. A manifold of a certain domain of knowledge which recurs to an undecidable metaphysics is deemed pessimistic insofar as it yearns for the fulfillment of a criteria that can never be fulfilled. This is an over-complication of a simple problem, namely, the *regressus ad infinitum* highlighted by Borges in “La biblioteca de Babel,” in which to prove the validity of a given code book (manifold), one must refer to another and another and another.

This translates to the examples given about precursors and successors in the following way: the event presupposes its precursors and successors. We understand writers such as Kafka

or Borges as events insofar as they serve as the hermeneutical ground for the interpretations of both their precursors and successors. We do not understand event to be the event of writing or even the event of authorship, but something much closer to the event of interpretation. It is the moment in which the categories of precursor and successor are retroactively constituted. The formal structure of interpretation posits this event as the moment of rupture (schism into categories of precursors and successors) in which the manifold of the work of art (formal ontology of logical relations between event-precursor-successor) is disclosed whilst at the very same time positing that the objects of this manifold may only be known in parts or in fragments, not as a totality. Interpretation is here linked to the Will in Schopenhauer, as both yearn to recover unity among fragmentation. Just as the Will in Schopenhauer is not an individualized will, so too is interpretation understood as the very process by which the text itself seeks unification, beyond just the subjective attempts of the subject to understand the text. Interpretation in this sense presupposes a transcendental subject but is not directed by it. This non-individualized conceptualization of interpretation also therefore takes on a phenomenological character.

This brings us to an analysis that shares much in common with the schools of Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida, in which it is posited that texts always refer to other texts *ad infinitum*, thus implying a similar relationship with metaphysics as in “La biblioteca de Babel.” The difference emerges in our analysis of the existential quality of this ontology, which is here seen to be grounded in pessimism. This pessimism manifests itself in how the work presents itself. It is what is *atroz* or *effroyable*—to harken back to the first chapter of this inquiry—in the formal ontology of the manifold. In our examples in this chapter, we might say that this feeling of the atrocious or even of terror is produced in Katchadjian insofar as no amount of *engordamiento* is

capable exhausting the infinite possibilities of the original text, thereby producing a sensation much like that of the mathematical sublime, which presents a limited imagination to the boundless idea of infinity. In Fernández Mallo, we have seen this through the symbol, which always presupposes something ineffable toward which the text aims but never arrives. The event (Kafka or Borges) is quite literally a symbol in the sense that it is the point of contact between precursor and successor. The predicate Kafkaesque or Borgesian is only retroactively constituted from a synthesis of precursors and successors. The synthesis of such a predicate is the attempt to move toward a consolidated unity much in the same way as the Will for Schopenhauer.

In light of this analysis, we see that the work of art discloses pessimism. It is not the function of art to overcome pessimism or establish a vague form of existential purpose. Rather, its structural function—which is to say how it formally operates, as opposed to purposive telos—discloses the ontological and metaphysical preconditions for pessimism. If non-individualized interpretation is at all comparable to Schopenhauer's conceptualization of the Will, we might offer one final conclusion, namely, that we ought to reject interpretation. We may not be able, as individual subjects, to reject non-individualized interpretation, but we may reject its individualized manifestations. The very ontology of the work of art is a labyrinth. To seek a way out is to indulge individualized will or interpretation. It should hence come as no surprise to us that in "La casa de Asterión," the minotaur barely defends himself. Rather than choose to fight for a way out, he rejects this will and allows himself to be slain.

Conclusion

1. Final Remarks

The Will in Schopenhauer paves the way for pessimism because it is always striving but never satiated, like Tantalus. The Will is trapped in a double-bind: it is aimless and yet it is striving for completion. This completion does not have any end goal or purposiveness, and so the Will is left ever incomplete and striving. It is this striving that characterizes the suffering of existence. In Borges, as we have tried to demonstrate, this striving takes the form of a yearning for metaphysics, whose perpetual incompleteness paves the way for pessimism.

Schleiermacher once proclaimed that everything presupposed in hermeneutics is but language [“Alles Voraussetzende in der Hermeneutik ist nur Sprache”] (Schleiermacher, quoted in *Wahrheit und Methode* 387). Equally might we be able to say that everything presupposed in language is but metaphysics. In the course of this enquiry, we have endeavored how this metaphysical disposition emerges at every level of Borges’s writing, informing everything from the lexical and syntactic level of the sentence, the level of the structural format of the story (especially in detective fictions), to the meta-level of how his text interacts with other acts of writing. We then have endeavored to show how each of these levels of interpretation paves the way for a pessimistic tone within the text itself as well as in how others interact with this text. By far the most difficult and tenuous part of this investigation has been in showing the dependency between the pure metaphysics evinced by a hermeneutic study of the text and the negative *Weltanschauung* of pessimism.

Regarding this first level of our interpretation, we have seen certain recurrent words that seemed to be employed when conveying sentiments about the world in the cosmological sense. Crucial have been two words in particular, that of *atroz*, or *atrocious*, and that of *Verwunderung*

together with its etymological variants (*Undr*) and translations (*maravilla*). These words paint a clear picture of the world evoked through Borges's writings, stipulating at once that there is something sublime and inconceivable about it (*Verwunderung*) in tandem with something terrifying or atrocious. This is mostly in keeping with the Kantian tradition of the sublime and, much like how the Kantian sublime is bound up in the problematic of the power of aesthetic judgements, so too does this atrocious wonder prompt questions of value given this worldview. More specifically, we see this sense of wonder or *Verwunderung* emerge specifically when confronted with a need for metaphysics.

This need for metaphysics manifests itself in the text when within the text, a character is searching for an order, and yet the key to deciphering that order can only exist outside of the text in which the character is bound. This is the level of the structural format of the story. We see this, to some extent, in many if not most of Borges's stories, from "El acercamiento a Almotásim" all the way to "La memoria de Shakespeare." This register of stories includes, but is by no means limited to, "Tlön," "La biblioteca de Babel," "La lotería en Babilonia," "El Aleph," "El congreso," "Undr." The metaphysical disquietude of these texts manifests in different ways, to be sure, but there is a common thread of the desire to ground some knowledge in a totality that exists outside of the confines of the text, even, we might say, outside of what is experienceable through the text.

The unification with pessimism then comes when we consider the existential aspects of being in this world. In light of this, certain stories such as "Utopía de un hombre que está cansado"—which Borges dubbed his most honest piece—help bring this pessimism to fruition. The chief characteristics of this story are the apathy and resignation with which the existence in the world is treated. In this narrative more than perhaps any other, we see an honest response to

the disquietude established in our previous analyses. Rather than some form of confrontation with what we might crudely call nihilism, it is determined that every confrontation, every attempt at overcoming, only furthers the suffering it is meant to overcome. This occurs both on the societal and personal level. On the societal level—according to the inhabitants of the future world of “Utopía”—this yearning for totality leads to totalitarian ideology; on the personal level it leads to dissatisfaction. One cannot, for instance, read all the books there are, and each further book one reads discloses only a greater horizon of ignorance. The Will seeks to expand into this horizon, but it is left always wanting more. The solution to these problems, at least for the inhabitants of the future world of the story, is instead to *negate* the Will in all of its manifestations. They become phlegmatic, abulic. They read maybe a dozen books in two-hundred years. In other words, they take quite literally what Schopenhauer calls for in the negation of the Will, influenced greatly by coetaneous interpretations of Buddhism. When all action is a manifestation of the Will, and all manifestations of the Will only increase its voracity and hence increase suffering, the logical conclusion of how we ought to act, we may surmise, is exactly as those future inhabitants of the world in “Utopía de un hombre que está cansado.”

These two elements—wonder and the sense of the atrocious—are so inextricable from how Borges crafts narratives that one may even go so far as to claim that it is one of the fundamentals of the much-elusive definition of *lo fantástico*. Indeed, the amalgamation of all of these various elements—from the level of the interpretation of the individual word to the structure of the narrative to the meta-textual level of how it interacts with other texts—all intersect in what we might be able to term the *fantastic*, and it is for this reason that the fantastic, as a genre, remains so difficult to define. Built into it is a yearning for the ineffable, which is to say that which is beyond language. Again, we return to our reformulation of Schleiermacher:

everything presupposed in language is but metaphysics. The fantastic is the yearning for this ineffable thing beyond language known as metaphysics. With this in mind it is not difficult to understand why Ernesto Sabato claims that the fantastic designates “lo insólito.”

Lastly, this understanding of the fantastic operates not only within one text, but across a network of texts in processes of reference and deferral which Derrida, among others, articulates well in his theoretical texts. The very position that Borges acquires for his successors is that of unattainable metaphysics. The very structure of influence and citation discloses this, and in disclosing *Borges the event* as standing in for this unattainable metaphysics, it simultaneously incorporates the reader of the text into the pessimistic worldview. According to de Toro, Borges cites the world rather than imitates it. We can expand upon this idea to introduce the concept of a metaphysics of citation, which operates both structurally within individual texts by Borges and also among a matrix of texts that refers back to Borges. This is a metaphysics because the object being cited is inaccessible. We may think of the “original” text of “Del rigor de la ciencia” that Borges purported cites through translation (the original text appears in quotes because it is apocryphal, an invention of the author). We might also think of the “original” artefacts of Tlön, which are only retroactively constituted to then stand in for an inaccessible point of historical origin. Even the Aleph cites fragments of the world. The objects that are cited are produced insofar that they are cited. A small part is disclosed of a much greater, inaccessible whole which no mereology can fully bring into light. This metaphysics of citation is again reminiscent of the metaphysics of the Will which as we have said discloses a wide horizon of possibilities, the totality of which we are able to conceive but unable to access. It is this tension between conceivable totality and its inaccessibility which forms the horizon.

This horizon manifests itself also in the relation between *Borges the event* and those influenced by him. Authors such as Pablo Katchadjian and Agustín Fernández Mallo cite Borges as they bloat or remake his work. Truth in their work (truth broadly conceived of as *meaning*) uses Borges's works as a continual point of reference, to the point that truth cannot be conceived of in their works without this reference to Borges. These works make explicit the hermeneutic process by which truth in a text constitutes itself. In this way we are reminded of how Gadamer thinks about truth in relation to the Greeks. Truth comes to from a distant, seemingly ineffable point, not because the Greeks possessed some secret gnosis of truth, but because our hermeneutics always situates truth in this historical point *beyond* our present horizon. We cannot conceive of truth without at the very same time situating it beyond our horizon. In a very similar process do these texts we have analyzed situate meaning beyond their horizon (crudely meaning beyond the contained text), in what we have called *Borges the event* (to distinguish it from Borges the author). The logical structure of how these authors relate to the event should seem familiar, as it is the same correspondence that the characters of many of Borges's stories have with metaphysics. If our discussion of pessimism holds for the analysis of metaphysics within the text, then it should also apply to the metatextual level in the metaphysics of influence between texts.

This enquiry is in many ways incomplete, not least because the project in its essence hinges upon the question of metaphysics, the completion of which is always revealed to be a lacking. The breathe of this topic is not enough even for enquiries devoted wholly to philosophy, and this was never our purpose. Rather, the present purpose was always to situate the work of Borges somewhere within this tradition and suggest that it contribute a part which may has been overlooked or obfuscated, namely, pessimism. The pessimistic tradition rooted in Schopenhauer

is itself vast and has exerted a great influence on literature, particularly the literature of the latter half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century such as, for instance, *la generación del 98* in Spain. Yet rather than attribute literary pessimism to fin de siècle *malaise* brought about by imperial decline, we have here tried to understand it formally from the very structure of writing and influence, removed from its historical causes.

The greatest difficulty in this project is the consolidation of the pessimist axiological judgment concerning the negative value of existence with the ontological judgement about the basic formal structure of the text and the correlative textual hermeneutics. The simple reason for this is that to say something *is* such-and-such a way does not imply that it *is good/bad* that it is such-and-such a way. In other words, an ontological predicate does not imply an axiological predicate. The challenge is in synthesizing these two judgements—a synthesis which it is here argued occurs only in the confines of literature.

The axiological judgements (of value) are united with the ontological judgement (of formal structure) through the work of literature because the work of literature overlays a poetic or prosaic aesthetic over a formal ontology, whereby the two judgements are synthesized. The effect of this cannot be measured in syllogisms, and this is why the philosophy of Gadamer has been interwoven throughout this enquiry. The validity of these judgements rests on hermeneutic reflection which acknowledges that the very horizon from which we begin to interpret literature presupposes the metaphysical relationship we have with truth-in-literature and indeed sets out how this truth is revealed or disclosed.

2. Remake

Reflecting upon the structure of this project, one cannot help but notice that which has been omitted, either by choice or ignorance. Much has been omitted by the constraints of the structure and trajectory of the enquiry, whose hope was to proceed from the level of the word (*atroz*, *Verwunderung*) to the thematic level of the individual story to the metatextual and intertextual level. In so doing, certain scholarship has been set aside that may contribute to a more thorough and convincing analysis of the themes laid out in the preceding chapters. In keeping with the theme of *remakes*, it is appropriate to end with a re-envisioning of the project from different theoretical perspectives.

In general terms, an appropriate reorganization might look like this. Chapter one: The mathematical sublime and encounters with metaphysics. The sublime as *atroz*; Chapter two: Hegel's logic and creation (here would include a reading of "la creación y P. H. Gosse" and other texts of *Otras inquisiciones*). The fall (*Sündenfall*) as the event compared with the creation of precursors and successors. Reading of precursors and successors through the logic of how Being and Nothingness is understood in Hegel. This would also introduce the problem of time in Borges. In any discussion of metaphysics, it is indispensable to talk about the problem of time, and yet here this has been largely omitted to make room for other things; Chapter three: Husserl's phenomenology and time consciousness. Reading of Husserlian noesis-noema through Hegelian logic; Chapter four: Hermeneutics of the archive and pessimist ontology. A revised discussion of "La biblioteca de Babel" and my fourth chapter of dissertation. This would include an expansion of the discussion of Heidegger and the work of art, brought into the discussion of phenomenologist hermeneutics.

Regarding the first chapter, we see immediately the importance of the sublime in any disquisition on metaphysics and literature, especially because it invokes the sensation of

something terrible unconceivable the faculty of our imagination; the very impotence of our imagination is this something terrible. A brief sketch of the genealogy of the idea of the sublime shows that the sensation of the sublime discloses something beyond our faculty of imagination. It is presupposed by the faculty of reason, but no judgement about it may be pronounced. For Derrida, this is the *parergon* which serves as the limit of the work of art, which by its nature as *ergon* presupposes something that exists beyond its borders, the sublime object beyond the *parergon*. In Lacan, the sublime object is the Thing at the center of the Real, the inaccessible vacuity produced by transcendental reflection. Žižek's reading of Kant and Hegel opens the way for ideological objects (which can be anything from political ideals to moral and aesthetic convictions) to be understood as a response to this vacuity. The sublime is also present in Borges, in particular in the form of the mathematical sublime, which refers itself to the idea of the numerically infinite. Borges writes in "El otro Whitman:"

Cuando el remoto compilador del *Zohar* tuvo que arriesgar alguna noticia de su indistinto Dios—divinidad tan pura que ni siquiera el atributo de *ser* puede sin blasfemia aplicársele—discurrió un modo prodigioso de hacerlo. Escribió que su cara era trescientas setenta veces más ancha que diez mil mundos; entendió que lo gigantesco puede ser una forma de lo invisible y aun de lo abstracto. Así es el caso de Whiteman. Su fuerza es tan avasalladora y tan evidente que sólo percibimos que es fuerte. (*OC* 1: 384)

Therefore, every reference to the numerically great in Borges can be seen as invoking the numerically infinite. Hence the sublime is implicated in stories like the much-discussed "Biblioteca de Babel" and "El Aleph."

Regarding the second chapter, this would include a deeper discussion of time which would draw mainly texts from *Otras inquisiciones* such as "El tiempo y J. W. Dunne," "La

creación y P. H. Gosse,” and of course “Nueva refutación del tiempo” into conversation with Hegelian logic. Additionally, the analysis of time in these texts pairs well with a reading of the discussion of precursors and successors. Hegel’s logic and what is commonly called dialectic departs from an event in which Being and Nothingness first become differentiated from one another. This ontological difference cannot precede the event of differentiation because, as Hegel stresses, the selfsame and identical lacks any defining ontological characteristics. Pure Being is the same as pure Nothingness. We begin with the act of differentiation and the ontological categories of Being and Nothingness are later retroactively presupposed in the process of *sich-anders-werden*. We see a similar logic of time presented in “El tiempo y J. W. Dunne,” insofar as Borges elaborates a temporality in which any one moment causally implicates all others yet in which creation as such may occur at any point in the causal chain. Simply, if we take a chain of events *A* through *Z*, and stipulate that event *A* necessitates event *B* just as event *Z* necessarily presupposes event *Y*, it does not matter at what point creation occurs. Parodically, this might be referred to as a form of *last Thursdayism*, but even if it does not correspond to the universe *simpliciter*, it is still revelatory to how logic constitutes the universe. The past and future are retroactively constituted from the moment of creation, the moment of rupture, which remains the inaccessible point of origin. It is not difficult to see how this might relate to the discussion of precursors and successors and the metaphysics of influence that we have earlier discussed.

From here, in the third chapter, we might venture a comparison of this logic to Husserl’s phenomenology, particularly the phenomenological reduction (eidetic and transcendental reductions) that culminates in the *epoché*. The carrying out of these reductions by the phenomenologist is famously a radical change in *attitude* (*Einstellung*). Husserl understands our natural attitude towards the world as uncritical or unaware of the essences of the objects of

perception. In other words, it is a naturalistic *approach* or *attitude* that beholds the world as it seems. One assumes a straightforward theory of experience: First the world exists, then the subject exists, experience is produced when the subject interacts with the world. If we are to speak of ontological basis for experience, we see that the world is the basis for ontological justification, and all theory of knowledge of experience derives from that point. But for Husserl this is not sufficient, as we then fall into the trap of needing to prove the ontological apodicticity of the world. This requires a metaphysics to which we (*per* Kant) do not have access. The phenomenological reduction is a change in *attitude* insofar as it seeks a new basis of experience that does not recur to a metaphysical ontology of the world. But what does this mean for the schema of the natural attitude listed above, which posits (1) world (2) subject (3) experience? We no longer assume the priority of the world, and in radical interpretations we may not even be able to assume the priority of the subject. We must begin with experience itself, the pure form and logic of experience, and how this experience is the basis for a new science of phenomenology. After the world is bracketed out, only consciousness in itself remains as phenomenological residuum. We begin with the phenomenological residuum—which manifests itself as noesis and noema, articulated by *hyle*—and from the phenomenological residuum do we begin to form the concepts of object and subject. Much like in Hegel's logic, we begin with the moment of rupture, the *Sündenfall*, from which the concepts of object and subject are retroactively constituted. The objects of analysis in Hegel and in Husserl are of course different. For Hegel it is the formal logic of how the concepts of Being and Nothingness differentiate and articulate themselves. For Husserl it is the formal structure of the correlation between consciousness and objective world. The very form of this logic or structure is where fruitful comparisons may be had.

This phenomenological turn would then be applied to the reading and production of subjectivity within Borges, especially in texts that divide the self (“Borges y yo,” “El otro,” “Agosto 25, 1983”), particularly in reference to how this phenomenological approach produces a time consciousness. This would therefore allow for a relatively underdiscussed synthesis of Hegelian logic with phenomenological perception of time (Husserl, Heidegger) through the reading of Borges.

This new reading of temporality and chronology would lead into the last chapter, which would be a revised discussion of precursors and successors. Of all the proposed new ways or articulating this enquiry, this chapter would be the least changed. It would lead into a discussion on how this phenomenological turn in time consciousness fused with Hegelian logic produces an ontology which we may term pessimist, for the reasons discussed in this dissertation. It also creates the archive as it has been discussed, namely, as an inaccessible point of origin meant to contain that which lies beyond our concurrent horizon. The archive, which is revealed or disclosed to us only fragmentarily, is the origin of the work of art.

The myriad of ways in which this question of the metaphysics and ontology of the work of art—here the work of Borges—can be approached shall be forever inchoate, and it is with this very structure of being-inchoate that we might end. Metaphysics, in its very completion, is still lacking. Similarly does this myriad of approaches to apprehending the work of art simulate this incompleteness. The very multifaceted of the work and its interpretations paves the way for metaphysical reflection and disquietude. This ontological structure of interpretation (the structure of infinite approaches) is present in the interpretation of all works of art, but it does not reflexively the contents of each work of art proper. This is why Borges serves as an excellent case study. In the work of Borges, this ontological structure is accounted for and takes active part

in the formation of the themes and general worldview. The ontology of the work of art (formal structure of how the work of art is accessed via interpretation) then presupposes the need for metaphysics, and this metaphysics which, in turn elicits a pessimistic worldview.

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