Spring 5-7-2021

Rhetoric and Philosophy of Communication in Jorge Luis Borges' Metaphysical Obsession with Time

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RHETORIC AND PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNICATION

IN JORGE LUIS BORGES' METAPHYSICAL OBSESSION WITH TIME

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Aurora M. Pinto

May 2021

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ABSTRACT

RHETORIC AND PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNICATION

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This project begins with the assumption that through storytelling we humans make sense of the world around us. Language and communication are powerful in defining who we are and allowing individuals to "become a self" (Taylor *The Language* 318). Drawing from Schrag, I argue that rhetoric is inextricably linked to discourse but is also situated beyond its classical persuasive function. Rhetoric evokes a response from the other, based on reflection and deliberation. Since that other might be a reader of texts of fiction, there is a rhetorical connection to interpretation that situates literature as an exemplar of communicative engagement.

This dissertation contends that Jorge Luis Borges' work is hermeneutically provocative for philosophy of communication. Borges is able to transform intriguing philosophical enigmas into compelling stories that offer different interpretations, and that

amplify the participation of the reader in the experience of storytelling. I also argue that Borges was engaged in fostering a communicative relationship with his readers, offering them alternative understandings to his fictional work, permitting them to become co-authors with the writer, and defying traditional approaches to the text.

This project seeks to understand how Jorge Luis Borges contributes to the conversation on philosophy of communication through some fundamental metaphysical inquiries found both in his fictional world and in his philosophical essays and lectures. I contend that Borges made a significant contribution to rhetorical hermeneutics since his writings promote a non-traditional approach to the relation among the author, the text and the reader. This dissertation examines some of the main topics that form the Borgesian universe: Labyrinths; mirrors; memory; dreams; myths; encyclopedias; and libraries. I argue that Jorge Luis Borges addressed the metaphysical problem of time through the former metaphors. Borges developed his own philosophy of communication rooted in his use of language for the search of meaning, on one hand, and in his drive to reach communicative engagement with his readers.

DEDICATION

In loving memory of my parents José de La Paz Pinto Cubero and Elena Paredes de Pinto. And my grandparents Carlos Paredes Reverón and Mena González de Paredes; José de La Paz Pinto and Eliodora Cubero de Pinto.

To my sister, Lisbeth Margarita Pinto Paredes, *muchas gracias por tu apoyo incondicional a todos mis proyectos.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank all my professors, colleagues, and friends that had accompanied me in this journey. I am especially thankful to all the faculty members at the Department of Communication and Rhetorical Studies at Duquesne University. I very much appreciate their generosity and will to share their knowledge and experience.

I would like to thank my committee, Dr. Janie Harden Fritz, Dr. Ronald C. Arnett, and Dr. Erik Garrett, who understood my interest for the work of Jorge Luis Borges and always encouraged me to deepen my research in order to reach my goals. Dr. Arnett encouraged me to come back to Duquesne University many years after my master studies, and always provided me with guidance in the new territory of a doctorate program. Dr. Garrett backed my work as a student and as a TA, and widened my view about social issues related to philosophy of communication. Dr. Fritz supported me in so many ways; her patience, enthusiasm and teaching have been a source of inspiration through my studies. I would be very grateful if I ever reach her level of excellence and compassion in my own teaching.

I also would like to thank my companions in the program, Matt Mancino, Justin Bonanno, Basak Guven, Rana Ramadan, and so many others, thank you for the mutual support and stimulating conversations. My gratitude also goes to my former professors in Venezuela, and my friends and relatives in Caracas, in Pittsburgh, and other places of the world that followed and backed my adventure as a student in this doctoral program.

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1.1 Introduction

We humans are natural storytellers. It is through stories how we make sense of the

world around us. The stories that we tell ourselves, those monologues, provide us with

clues about who we are. But also the stories that we tell others and that may turn into

dialogues gives us meaning by promoting encounters among different selves. Charles

Taylor sees storytelling "as a creative or constitutive feature of language" (*The Language*

317). Thus, language and communication are powerful in defining who we are and

allowing individuals to "become a self" (318). This project aligns with a vision of

philosophy of communication as articulated by Arnett and Holba that responds to

multiple narratives and perspectives and is attentive to historical circumstances (4, 12).

Following these authors, I also propose that exceptional works of literature may

illuminate our understanding of philosophy of communication beyond its informational

role, by stressing its goal to contribute to foster communicative engagement. Although I

recognize the importance of aesthetics in works of art, I also foresee their rhetorical

appeal. Drawing from Schrag, I argue that rhetoric is inextricably linked to discourse but

is also situated beyond its classical persuasive function. I concur with Schrag's vision of

rhetoric as reflection and argumentation (182). He further states that "communicative

praxis as expression is a process of making something manifest through the

hermeneutical displays of words and deed. Communicative praxis makes manifest the

world of thought and action… borne by an intentionality of hermeneutical reference"

(184). Thus, rhetoric evokes a response from the other, based on reflection and

deliberation. Since that other might be a reader of texts of fiction, there is a rhetorical connection to interpretation that situates literature as an exemplar of communicative engagement.

Imagination and creativity are at the foundation of literature as a form of art. Literature may be associated then to rhetoric and philosophy of communication as part of an engagement to action that manifests in two ways. The first one, the actual writing of authors, shaped by their particular obsessions, intentions and inquiries; the other, molded by hermeneutical approaches to their work, that may vary according to the different historical circumstances that surround the authors as well as their readers. In this project, I argue that Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges' work is hermeneutically provocative for philosophy of communication since through his fictional worlds, he is able to transform intriguing philosophical enigmas into compelling stories that offer different interpretations and alternatives amplifying the participation of the reader in the experience of storytelling. Borges was engaged in fostering a communicative relationship with his readers, offering them different alternatives to the act of reading, permitting them to become co-authors with the writer, and defying traditional approaches to the text.

This project attempts to respond two questions. I first explore how Jorge Luis Borges contributes to the conversation on philosophy of communication through some fundamental metaphysical inquiries found both in his fictional world and in his philosophical essays and lectures. My second question is based on the assumption that, through his short stories, Borges fosters a non-traditional approach to the relation among the author, the text and the reader. Then, I am intrigued about what would be Borges' contribution to rhetorical hermeneutics.

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In order to explore answers to the former questions, I begin by examining the main topics that form the Borgesian universe. As stated by different authors, most of Borges' work involves labyrinths, mirrors, libraries, memory, dreams and myths, and even mathematics and literary forgery (Griffin; Guibert; Nuño). However, all those topics are part of his obsession with time.

Nuño points out:

Borges is a spirit obsessed with some truly metaphysical themes: the phantasmagoric, hallucinatory of the world; the identity through the persistence of memory; the reality of the conceptual that prevails over the unreal of the individuals, and above all, time, the "vast problem of time", with the threat of its repetitions, its returns, with the sickly mark of its unavoidable power that drags, and devours, and burns. (17)

An obsession that drives him to write "A New Refutation of Time" (Borges, *Selected* 317–332), an essay that explores the idealist theories of George Berkeley, and the thoughts of David Hume and Arthur Schopenhauer, among other thinkers. I also examine some of the essays and lectures of Borges related to the subject of time.

I start this chapter with a brief biographical sketch that situates Jorge Luis Borges within a specific historical, geographical and cultural milieu.

1.2 Jorge Luis Borges: From Local Poet to Global Writer

Arnett & Holba affirm that nowadays the difference between the concepts of modernity and postmodernity might be considered blurred (*An Overture*). According to Arnett, modernity does not correspond to a time period but to a secular religion based on a trinity of faith that comprehends: progress, efficiency, and individual autonomy

(*Communication* 3). Likewise, postmodernity does not coincide with a single time period but represents "an intertextual cacophony of historical voices coexisting with multiple narratival neighborhoods" (Arnett and Holba 46). Following these considerations, it is possible to situate Jorge Luis Borges, the author and his work, between those two eras. Having born in 1899, most of his education was influenced by modern writers and thinkers of the 19th century. However, his search for his own authorial voice allowed him to respond to the intellectual demands of the 20th century, and beyond. He anticipates some of the philosophic and artistic expressions that are characteristic of contemporary times. Past the historical periods, some scholars also highlight his geographical location and situate him as a post-colonial author (De Toro; Fiddian). De Toro fuses postmodernity and postcoloniality as a characteristic of Borges' work. He affirms:

> Postcoloniality as a postmodern perspective is characterized by a
> deconstructionist attitude and thinking, that is, a critical/creative reflection, both
> intertextually and interculturally. It is also characterized by the thinking that
> recodifies history (or de-centers history), by a heterogeneous or hybrid thinking,
> which is subjective and radical, and by a radical particularity and diversity that is
> therefore universal. Postcoloniality does not exclude but rather includes a
> multidimensionality. (83)

Fiddian also points out that postcoloniality comprehends not only the historical period after the independence of the Latin American nations from Spain, "but also the enduring legacy of colonialism in terms of the nation-building project, differentiation from the former imperial metropolis, the critique of Eurocentric thinking, and personal and collective memory" (96). Thus, to understand the relevance of Jorge Luis Borges for the

field of philosophy of communication, I develop some biographical notes that situate him in a complex historical, geographical and cultural scene.

1.2.1 In Search for an Identity

Jorge Luis Borges was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on August 24, 1899. His parents, Jorge Guillermo Borges, and Leonor Acevedo Suárez were Argentinians with European ancestors. English and Portuguese on Jorge Luis' father's side, and Spaniards on his mother's. Jorge Guillermo Borges was a lawyer, a psychology teacher, and a writer, who would influence his son with his literary tastes. Jorge Luis Borges' only sibling, his sister Norah, was born in 1902. As a member of an educated Argentinian middle-class family that appreciated the arts, Borges always counted with the support of his parents to pursue his literary career while his sister Norah was backed in her vocation as a painter. The children also had the influence of the two grandmothers, the paternal Fanny Haslam, English and Presbyterian, and the maternal and Catholic, Leonor Suárez. The family accepted the influence of both religions, and also used to communicate in English at home. In fact, Jorge Luis Borges was called Georgie in his family environment, and he and his sister learned the language and were even tutored by an English governess during their childhood acquiring their basic education at home. Borges showed his precocity in all things related to literature by writing his first short story at age six, inspired by a scene of Don Quixote. When he was nine, he would translate Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince* into Spanish. Since an early age, he devoured numerous books in his father's library in both Spanish and English. Huckleberry Finn, by Mark Twain, was the first novel that he read. His biographers also point out that he was fascinated by authors such as H.G. Wells, Robert Louis Stevenson, Charles Dickens,

Lewis Carroll and Miguel de Cervantes (Wilson; Woodall). Some of his later intellectual obsessions would have started in his early childhood, like his terror of seeing himself in a mirror. He would later confess that when he was a child he had three mirrors in his bedroom, and he was afraid that the images of himself would somehow become alive. The idea of reproduction, "the vertiginous self-multiplication in a mirror" (Woodall 15) became intolerable for him. Although he was later sent to school, most of his education was completed at home. Woodall highlights,

> His father started discussing philosophy with him when Georgie was ten, he introduced him to chess, and presented little illustrations of mathematical theory, Zeno's paradox about the hare and the tortoise, and the problems of memory – how a recollection can only refer back to the last one, which has been drawn from a previous one, and so on: proof that memory was, in effect, non-existent, led to nothing, was a hall of mirrors. (19)

By 1914, Jorge Guillermo Borges' poor eyesight worsened and he decided to move to Europe looking for medical aid. The family lived briefly in Paris, Milan, Venice, and established in Geneva, where Jorge Luis studied French and Latin at school. He also developed an interest in philosophy that made him learn German on his own to read Nietzsche and Schopenhauer (Soler-Serrano, *Entrevista*). The former philosopher was undoubtedly very influential to many writers and thinkers of the beginning of the 20th century. The idea of the death of God and the raise of the human will attract a young Borges. However, later in his life, he would deny his influence since Nietzsche was mainly associated to Nazism. Borges was accused of being supportive of the right-wing dictatorships that would rule Argentina in the 1970s, and would detach from Nietzsche's

influence later in his life. Woodall suggests that Borges preferred to speak about Schopenhauer during his interviews in those years (28–29). However, he was truly interested in Schopenhauer. The philosopher's regard for men's self-control appealed to Borges, who drew from the philosopher "a non-deterministic reading of the world, a postulation of it as a kind of brilliant mental invention" (29) that would aid him in his search of his own self.

Due to the outbreak of the war, the family extended his stay in Europe for four years moving to Spain, where they lived in Madrid, Barcelona and Mallorca. In Madrid, the young Borges would soon meet other intellectuals that were part of a literary movement named Ultraism. Derived from Futurism, Ultraism was a Spaniard avant-garde literary trend that aspired to renew poetry and art by embracing modernism. Poetry was at the time Borges' main interest, and his first poem, "Hymn to the Sea," was published in 1919 by the magazine *Grecia*. Without a university education, Borges' formative years were filled with mentors like his own father, the Spanish intellectual Rafael Cansinos-Assens and, later in Argentina, the poet Macedonio Fernández. While Cansinos-Assens provided Borges with the opportunity to join other young poets that discussed Ultraism and other literary subjects, under Fernández tutelage, he would also explore metaphysical subjects. Macedonio was a keen reader of David Hume and Schopenhauer and even "corresponded with the North American pragmatist philosopher William James" (Woodall 53).

By the beginning of the 1920s, the Borges family had returned to Argentina establishing again in Buenos Aires. Jorge Luis joined a literary-philosophical group presided by Macedonio Fernández and enthusiastically undertook the launching of the

literary magazines *Prisma,* and later *Proa*. In 1923, he published his first book of poetry,

Fervor de Buenos Aires [*Passion for Buenos Aires*]. Two other books would follow in

1925, *Moon Across the Way* (poetry), and his first book of essays: *Inquisitions*. During

those formative years, the young writer established long-lasting friendships and

collaborations with other fellow poets and different intellectuals like the Mexican

diplomat and writer Alfonso Reyes and the unconventional artist Xul Solar, who

awakened in Borges an interest for exploring the richness and invention of languages, and

the "possibilities of dimensionless worlds" (Woodall 73).

1.2.2 The Dawning of the 'Borgesian' Style

In the middle 1930s, Borges started to collaborate regularly in *Sur* [South], a

magazine ran by Argentine intellectual Victoria Ocampo. This magazine was very

successful in gathering the most brilliant Argentinian literary minds of the time. Ocampo

was an unconventional wealthy woman that acted as a Maecenas for young poets and

writers and imbued her magazine with a European style that helped to separate Borges

from the provinciality that dominated most of the national artistic environment. And it

permitted him to publish his first short stories, where he also avoided realism and

introduced fantastic literature. At *Sur*, he also met brilliant young writer Adolfo Bioy-

Casares who will become one of Borges closest friends and collaborators in different

literary adventures. Bioy-Casares described Borges at that time as "sociable… but shy.

He preferred people come to him, and was always best in one-to-one exchanges"

(Woodall 90). That same year, Borges publishes *A Universal History of Infamy*, a

collection of short stories, leaving behind most of his work as a poet. In 1936, with the

publication of *History of Eternity*, Borges formally approaches the question of time in

three essays, the one that gives the title to the book, "Cycles' Doctrine," and "Circular Time." In a sharp, direct style, he analyzes time from the viewpoints of Plato, the Christian doctrine, and Nietzsche. And he introduces his particular way of storytelling by fusing essay and fiction in "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim," a short story that begins as a literary review of a certain book and derives into a story inside another story with a twisted end barely insinuated in the final words of a footnote. This mix of literary forgery with erudite quotations attributed to both real and invented characters, followed by open endings would become one of the characteristic seals of the Borgesian style.

By 1937, Borges took a menial job at a local library that he would later describe as giving him "solid unhappiness" (Borges, *Autobiographical* 83). However, he needed the money since his previous assignments as editor of literary magazines did not report him profits. A year later, two incidents would significantly affect Borges' life. The first one, the death of his father, already completely blind, after a strenuous sickness. Jorge Luis not only lost his beloved mentor but also realized that since he was also suffering from poor eyesight, he would eventually endure a similar destiny than Jorge Guillermo Borges. The other occurrence was an awkward accident that he had when stumbling against a window. A severe injury on his head was mistreated resulting in septicemia and a high fever that threatened his life (Wilson 102–104; Woodall 108–110.) A convalescent Borges was afraid of losing his mind. In order to prove himself of his mental capacity, he wrote the magnificent short story "Pierre Menard, Author of The Quixote." In it, a certain French poet named Menard would receive the praise of the critics when he attempts to rewrite the highest work of Cervantes by using exactly the same words of the original book in his text. Woodall highlights, "Borges produced his first fictional statement about

the inefficacy of the written word to do anything other than imitate, and the stark dubiety

of the writer's role" (114). This is a piece that requires further analysis since it might be

considered a literary antecedent to the theories about the deconstruction of the text that

will be proposed later by philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Hans Gadamer. In the

following years, Borges publishes a book with Bioy-Casares, using the pseudonym H.

Bustos Domecq. "Six Problems for Isidro Parodi" is a short collection of detective stories

characterized by parody and irony that entertained the authors but was neither understood

nor appreciated by most of his early readers. However, in 1944, with the publication of

Ficciones [*Fictions*], a collection of short stories from *The Garden of Forking Paths*, and

from *Artifices*, he obtains public praise by critics and readers. This was the breakthrough

that positioned the Argentinian as a truly universal writer when translated to French and

English. In these collections, Borges is at his best by utilizing all the devices that he had

acquired before. He showed in these stories all his philosophical and language erudition,

his bold imagination, and a will to invite the readers to enter a game of deciphering some

codes and even the possibility of choosing their own interpretations and endings to some

of the stories.

By the beginning of the 1940s, the world was at turmoil. Some years before the

war, in 1937, Borges was able to envision the danger that Nazism represented for the

humanity, when he wrote an article on *Sur* lamenting the surrender of Germany to

Hitler's ideology (Woodall 112). By the end of the war, when Europe started to rebuild

after its nightmare, ironically, Argentina surrendered to the fascist ideology represented

by Juan Domingo Perón. Although not very famous yet, Borges was known as an opposer

to the new president. He was appointed by the government as inspector of poultry and

rabbits at a municipal market, as a revenge for his political stances. He resigned the

humiliating position. Besides, his mother and his sister served a month in prison after

participating in a demonstration against the government. Overcoming all those

circumstances, Borges started a new life as lecturer on diverse humanistic topics such as

"Swedenborg, Blake, the Persian and Chinese Mystics, Buddhism, gauchesco poetry,

Martin Buber, the Kabbalah, the Arabian nights, T.E. Lawrence, medieval Germanic

poetry, the Icelandic sagas, Heine, Dante, Expressionism, and Cervantes" (Borges,

Autobiographical 86).

In 1947, between trips and lectures, Borges finds the time to publish what would

be considered his most philosophical essay *Nueva Refutación del Tiempo* [*New

Refutation of Time*]. In this text, he cites "Berkeley, Leibnitz, Hume, amongst many

others… The essay is concerned with the fixity of identity within the fluidity, the illusion

of time" (Woodall 166). As he points out, "time is a delusion: the indifference and

inseparability of one moment of time's apparent yesterday and another of its apparent

today are enough to disintegrate" (qtd. In Woodall: 167). Time might be the primary

subject of Borges' narrative, both fictional and non-fictional. In the Borgesian universe,

the topic would appear sometimes disguised as a preoccupation with identity; others, as

an interest in eternity and infinity, the fragility of memory, and the delusion of dreams.

As Nuño signals when discussing some of Borges' narrations in *Ficciones*, time opens

not only many, but all the possibilities in order to conclude a story (120–121.)

1.2.3 International Success

During the 1950s, some occurrences contributed to consolidate Borges reputation

as a writer. He became professor of English and American Literature at the University of

Buenos Aires and President of the Argentine Society of Writers. Likewise, after Perón lost power, he was appointed Director of the National Library. Since he became completely blind at that time, he commented about that post in a poem, pointing out "God's splendid irony in granting me at one time eight hundred thousand books and darkness" (Borges, *Autobiographical* 90). However, he stoically accepted his condition, and continued reading and writing with faithful collaborators. He would also publish *The Aleph*, a book of short stories, and *El Hacedor* [*Dream-Tigers*], where he offered prose and poetry. Although framed in more realistic settings, the former book follows the same pattern outlined in *Ficciones*, suggesting new possible or secret worlds hidden behind the reality. Dreams, mythology and identity, with the incorporation of fantastic objects like "The Zahir," and "The Aleph," depict again the topic of infinite and the delusion of time. Borges regarded *Dream-Tigers*, a compilation of poetry, fiction and essays, as probably his most personal book, where his obsessions and opinions written in previous decades appear without chronological order (Woodall 188).

The first international recognition to Borges' work occurs in 1961, when he wins the reputed international literary award Prix Formentor, which he shares with acclaimed Irish playwriter Samuel Beckett. That award opened a door for more translations of his work and gained him the respect of international scholars. Borges will begin to lecture in American universities such as the University of Texas, and Columbia University (Woodall 193–195.) In 1966, he also wins the Literary Prize of the Ingram Merrill Foundation of New York. A year later, he marries Elsa Astete and begins to lecture at Harvard University. In the 1970s he publishes *Dr. Brodie's Report*, a new short story book. A short autobiographical essay, published in 1970 in *The New Yorker*, also

contributes to publicize his work for American audiences. In those years, despite his age, Borges travels around the world either lecturing in diverse literary themes or receiving more awards and honorary doctorates from diverse reputed schools such as Columbia, Oxford, Michigan, Tokyo, Crete, and Santiago universities, among others. Besides, some of his short stories are adapted for TV and films, like his tale "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero", which was versioned for Italian TV by acclaimed filmmaker Bernardo Bertolucci (Burgin *Conversations* xviii).

Most of his life, Borges continued to live in Buenos Aires. Even when eventually Juan Domingo Perón regained power, he still felt safe in his country since he was probably at the time the most famous Argentinian, and no regime would dare to attack him (Woodall 245). After the death of Perón and a brief government of the general's second wife, Isabel, a military junta took power. At the beginning of their rule, Borges welcomed them, a position that he would regret later, when their regime became very repressive. Being perceived as a conservative in the matter of politics, Borges gained many enemies in influential academic circles. For example, Swedish academic Artur Ludkvist declared that Borges will never obtain the Nobel Prize of Literature because of political reasons (Belén). However, he would eventually receive the Cervantes Prize, the most prestigious literature award in the Spanish language. By the end of his life, he would continue to be awarded many honors such as the Legion of Honor of France, The Balzan Prize of Italy, and the Jerusalem Prize in Israel (Burgin *Conversations* xviii-xx; Woodall 256). Sick with liver cancer, he moves to Geneva, the city of his teenage years, to protect his privacy. With his first marriage already finished many years ago, in April of 1986, he surprisingly weds his assistant and longtime companion Maria Kodama, who

became the sole inheritor of his legacy. On June 14 of that year, he died in Geneva where his tomb reproduces words from an Anglo-Saxon poem, "The Battle of Maldom," and from the *Old Norse Saga of the Volsungs* (Woodall 259), uniting Borges' passion for both ancient languages.

Borges' work has been praised by authors such as American John Updike and Turkish Nobel Prize of literature Orhan Pamuk, and he has influenced writers such as Ray Bradbury, Italo Calvino, August Wilson, and Zadie Smith. Contemporary scholars such as Umberto Eco, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan, recognized his work. Jorge Luis Borges' books have been translated to many languages, and still intrigue authors and readers who discuss them on numerous books, academic articles, blogs and podcasts. As Griffin points out, Borges was not a philosopher and did not want to be considered one. He described himself as "merely a man of letters" (*Philosophy and Literature* 339). However, Griffin signals:

> Borges's engagement with philosophy lies at the heart of the "fiction" (ficción), the genre he develops which lies somewhere between the essay and the story, and which has a close affinity to the eighteenth-century French conte philosophique. The influence of philosophy can be detected in the weft and warp of his stories: in their imagery and metaphor, their structure, their narrators, their characters, and even their language. (14)

Thus, the connection of Borges with his readers appeals in them to something that goes beyond the plots of his stories or the development of his characters, manifesting a yearning for metaphysical inquiries that surpasses the conventional artistic purposes of literature.

1.3 The Book as the Extension of Memory

Of all of man's instruments, the most amazing is, without a doubt, the book.

The rest are extensions of man's body. The microscope, the telescope, they're extensions

of sight; the telephone is an extension of voice; and then we have the plow and the sword,

extensions of the arm. But the book is another thing: the book is an extension of

memory and imagination.

(Borges, *Borges Oral* 13)

In the former quote from a lecture about the significance of the book that Jorge

Luis Borges offered at the University of Belgrano, the writer reflects on the specific

characteristics of the oral and printed words and their importance for preserving the past.

As an example of this role, he proposes the Library of Alexandria, pointing out that it was

supposed to be "the memory of the humanity" (13). Furthermore, he also highlights the

human capacity of abstraction, and the possibility of guarding our thoughts and memories

in books. He affirms that our past is just a sequence of dreams. To him, the function of

the book is to remind us of our dreams and the past. Borges defines himself as a devotee

of the printed word. However, he recognizes that in Antiquity, the book was regarded as a

substitute of oral communication, making it something lasting but dead. However, he

highlights the positive influence of the books in the preservation of memories and

knowledge. In order to illuminate Borges' engagement to the field of communication

studies, it is pertinent then to examine some of the most representative ideas of media

ecology scholars on the topic of oral and written communication.

1.3.1 Primary and Secondary Orality

The human capacity for speaking makes orality the first form of communication. Walter Ong makes a clear differentiation between primary and secondary orality (*Orality*). Primary oral cultures are the ones 'totally untouched by any knowledge of writing and printing" (*Orality* 11). He points out that orality does not count with the capacity of storage that written words have. It is not associated to vision. A person from an oral culture finds it difficult to associate words to visual signs. Sound is then very powerful in these cultures. Universally, Ong affirms, people from oral cultures have the tendency to associate words with magic and the sacred. They may make this unconscious link because of their perception of the world as "necessarily spoken, sounded, and hence power-driven" (*Orality* 32). Besides, oral communication appeal to the community more than to the individual. The introspection of reading and writing is missing. Marsh also notices some characteristics of oral cultures that were highlighted by McLuhan, "reduced individualism, reduced Western sense of chronology, and reduced analytical thinking" (Marsh 345).

Secondary orality, according to Ong, refers to "present-day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print" (*Orality* 11). However, secondary orality still has some similarities with primary orality. It also promotes a sense of communal participation, and it is focused on the present moment. What clearly differentiates them is that secondary orality relies on writing and print (*Orality* 134–135). When discussing orality, Havelock highlights the role of language as a component of society. "Language of any kind acquires meaning for the individual only as that meaning is shared by a community, even though the individual

speaker is not addressing the community" (68). He also discusses the difficulty that represents for a literate person to understand the world of primary orality since "all our terminologies and the metaphors involved are drawn from an experience which is literate and which we take for granted" (65). Thus, for Havelock, primary orality is deeply associated to the sound. Communication may involve the nonverbal, gestures and other visual signs but only engaging in conversation it is possible to express ourselves and respond to different utterances.

McLuhan addresses the power of sound when he refers to the human voice. Since he saw all communication media as extensions of our senses, he compared the human voice to a radio transmitter. "The power of the voice to shape air and space into verbal patterns may well have been preceded by a less specialized expression of cries, grunts, gestures, and commands, of song and dance" (*Understanding* 114). Language and the many languages spoken by the humanity are unique. "Each mother tongue teaches its users a way of seeing and feeling the world" (114).

Anton also contributes to the discussion on orality and sound by acknowledging the opportunity that the human voice provides for opening up and encountering others through conversation. "Voice convey presences, presences that are invitations to interiorities in which we can find ourselves and with which we can commune" (80). Writing was probably invented as a way to keep record or storage of the history and creative activities of the community.

1.3.2 Literacy and writing

For Borges, most of the ancient Greek philosophers —in his lecture on the book, he specifically mentions Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato— were oral masters who showed

to be suspicious of the printed word. They attributed to the book the stagnation of the durable and lifeless. The oral word would have been for them something winged and light, and even sacred. Borges states that Pythagoras voluntarily chose not to write since he wanted that his thought would live beyond his corporal death, in the mind of his disciples. Borges suggests that when Pythagoras' students were asked to provide new ideas, they invoked the Latin saying: *Magister dixit* (the master has said) to imply their respect for the teachings of their master. He explains that this doesn't mean that they were tied to what the master said, but that they reassured their freedom to continue thinking and elaborating on the original thought of the master. Borges also mentions Plato's critique of the book by comparing it with an effigy or an illustration that seems to be alive but is unable to respond to questions. He hypothesizes that Plato invented the platonic dialogues as a way to compensate for the stagnation and muteness of books (*Borges Oral* 15).

Similarly, different contemporary scholars highlight that ancient Greek philosophers were profoundly suspicious of writing and literacy (Ong, *Orality* 78; Joseph et al. 6; Gibson 5). Socrates and Plato, particularly, rejected writing as a way to teach philosophy. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato quotes Socrates as saying that "only the spoken word is the original, whereas the written word is merely an image. Serious philosophy uses speech, he adds, whereas writing is legitimate only as a form of play and recreation" (Gibson 5). Ong highlights the resemblance between Plato's rejection to writing to the contemporary concern that the use of calculators and computers would diminish the abilities of students for memorization. He also enumerates the reasons why Plato argued against writing. Firstly, the philosopher considers writing as not being human, but

artificial. Secondly, he finds it as the opposite to memorization. Thirdly, he affirms that texts are unable to respond as a person can do and finally, "the written word cannot defend itself as the natural spoken word can: real speech and thought always exist essentially in a context of give-and-take between real persons" (*Orality* 78). In sum, ancient Greek philosophers found writing as a limitation to critical thinking and enquiry (Joseph et al. 6). Probably the only exception to this thought was represented by Aristotle. As the father of rhetoric, he favored speech and writing in a convincingly way. In fact, Haskins states that "it is only thanks to writing, and especially prose writing of the late fourth century BCE, that rhetoric seems to achieve its full potential" (158).

Writing represented a revolution for humankind. And it was an innovative technology that not only changed traditional communication media but also affected the mechanics of human thought. When analyzing Ong's work about literacy, Soukup mentions some of the features of writing: it favors introspection and isolation, permits separation between the text and the reader, and even "establishes a 'correct' form of a language" (5). Writing was also influential on learning and moved cultures from a communal stance to an individual one. In his book, *The Muse Learns to Write*, Havelock discusses the transition between orality and the written word in Ancient Greek literature. Orality would be characterized by singing, recitation, and memorization while reading and writing would be the major attributes of a literature culture. For Havelock, orality, under the form of poetry, provided Greek ancient civilization with a means to communicate tradition, with a didactical intention. "The rhythmic language of orality combined the didactic and aesthetic modes in a single art" (120). He also highlights the importance of the transition to literacy, and its consequences. He stresses the capacity of

the written expression to provide both, the writer and the reader, with self-reflection while the oral world was directed to action and doing. He states: "the concept of selfhood and the soul, as now understood, arose at a historical point in time and was inspired by a technological change, as the inscribed language and thought and the person who spoke it became separated from each other, leading to a new focus on personality of the speaker" (120). The technology of writing also influenced rhetoric. Strate affirms that "alphabetic writing, by virtue of its ability to make speech visible, gave rise to the discipline of rhetoric… and to the study of language and poetics… the alphabet also set the stage for what was known as dialectics, or logic, as codified by Aristotle" (129).

For McLuhan, the use of the alphabet is associated to power. Ancient civilizations characterized by the use of arcane pre-alphabetic writing favored the monopoly of authority by the caste of priests. When the phonetic alphabet irrupted, it occurred a remarkable shift of power and knowledge. "The easier alphabet and the light, cheap, transportable papyrus together effected the transfer of power from the priestly to the military class" (*Understanding* 118–119). McLuhan also identifies literacy with civilization. He says that "literacy is a uniform processing of a culture by a visual sense extended in space and time by the alphabet… Oral cultures act and react at the same time. Phonetic culture endows men with the means of repressing their feelings and emotions when engaged in action" (122). He also highlights the fact that all Western languages are derived from Graeco-Roman alphabets. These alphabets separated "sight and sound from semantic and verbal content" (123). This characteristic helped to foster homogeneity and uniformity in the Western world.

In *The Presence of the Word*, Ong points out the role of the words when associated to the senses. Ong stresses how word and sound have transformed humanity throughout three different stages that correspond to the pre-written, print, and electronic eras. He highlights the capacity of individualized self-consciousness acquired by humans thanks to the printed word. Ong also discusses the word from a historical perspective. To him, the history of the word is associated with an interior and an exterior reality. Orality would favor human life engaged in the exteriority represented by the communal and the society. Meanwhile, reading and writing would promote self-reflection and individuality. In *Orality and Literacy*, Ong emphasizes: "without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but normally even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form. More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness" (77). He explains that writing has been internalized by humans in such a manner that we often forget that it is a technology. We need and use tools for writing such as a brush, a pencil, and a surface. Like all technologies, writing is artificial, he affirms. Speech happens naturally to most human beings. We are born with this capacity. On the contrary, writing has to be learned. Translating the spoken word to writing implies a conscious effort associated to assigning meaning to determined symbols and using grammatical rules. However, for Ong, the artificiality of language is not considered a negative characteristic. "To live and to understand fully, we need not only proximity but also distance. This writing provides for consciousness as nothing else does" (81). He also stresses that technologies, after being interiorized, can enhance human life. As an example, he describes the technologies associated to musical instruments and how years of practice permit musicians to make the

tool part of themselves. In this way, "learning a technological skill is hardly dehumanizing" (82). And writing, he asserts, is more deeply interiorized than a musical instrument.

When Ong discusses the transition from memory to written records, he stresses that earlier cultures that adopted literacy still showed remnants of oral discourse. In their writing, it is possible to find narratives that emulate oral driven accounts. Recitation, repetition, redundancy are oral mnemonic tools that often appear in texts. "The alphabet as a simple sequence of letters is a major bridge between oral mnemonic and literate mnemonics: generally, the sequence of the letters of the alphabet is memorized orally and then used for largely retrieval of materials, as in indexes" (*Orality* 99). A code was devised through the alphabet so the writer could exercise his power to choose the words that the readers are going to interpret. Writing then has its own value independently of its capacity to transform sounds into visual signs. "It is the most momentous of all human technological inventions. It is not a mere appendage to speech" (84).

1.3.3 The Evolution of Reading and Writing

In ancient times, handwriting and reading were traditionally activities reserved to elite social classes. The priestly caste and the military exercised power and authority through their use of literacy. But this world was changed with the invention of the movable types. Guttenberg's press allowed the widespread of reading with the subsequent diffusion of ideas and news. As McLuhan points out, the printing press facilitated the storage and diffusion of information (*Understanding* 216). He states:

Perhaps the supreme quality of the print is one that is lost on us, since it has so casual and obvious an existence. It is simply that it is a pictorial statement that can

be repeated precisely and indefinitely –at least as long as the printing surface

lasts. Repeatability is the chore of the mechanical principle that has dominated

our world, especially since the Guttenberg technology. (218)

Printing was also for him a way to amplify the "private, individual handicraft via

mechanization" (*McLuhan's Laws* 77). For McLuhan the dominance of the visual was

stressed by the alphabet, "reducing all other sensuous facts of the spoken word to this

form" (*Understanding* 218). He hypothesizes that other forms of expression that depicted

images, such as photography, were welcomed in the literate societies to compensate its

omission in the written word. As with other technologies, automation was a consequence

of the invention of the press. Thus, the revolution of the print stressed the importance of

the visual in such a way that contributed to tear apart the notion of knowledge. "The

increasing precision and quantity of visual information transformed the print into a three-

dimensional world of perspective and fixed point of view" (*Understanding* 220).

1.3.4 Language, Narrative, and Meaning

Charles Taylor, who has developed an epistemology about language and

communication, also provides interesting insights on narrative and meaning. He states

that narratives give humans a sense of the self, of others, and of the world around us that

is different from other disciplines. He even affirms that this understanding cannot be

replaced by other forms of knowledge. "The story…can also open out alternatives in a

wider sense; it can lay out a gamut of different ways of being human, different paths or

characters which interact in the story, and thus offer insights about human life in general"

(*The Language* 291). Thus, the human condition is part of what attracts us in stories as

well as certain features related to cause and effects, –how that development of the story

happened, why a certain character did that– and even the interactions and the decisions that characters enact may awake in the readers a sense of moral judgement. Although Taylor affirms that a work of art such as a novel does not make "assertions" in real life, but in the fictional world of the book, he still acknowledges that they depict "a nonassertive portrayal of human life, of its choices, issues, travails, fulfillments; and this can open new horizons for the reader" (298). This is probably what makes literature – fictional and non-fictional– unique.

According to Taylor, storytelling is part of the "creative or constitutional feature of language… it is through story that we make sense of our lives" (*The Language* 316). Language is a very powerful tool then since it permits humans to recall the past to make sense of the present. We are making decisions in a daily basis and we are driven by the desire to find meaning to our existences. Taylor argues that we somehow "read ourselves" (317) to understand us better. He affirms: "It is through the power of making and understanding stories that I have access to myself as a self. But we also say that it is only in this, at first dialogical, but later potentially monological, discourse of storytelling that I became a self" (318).

1.3.5 The Book and its Interpretation

Jorge Luis Borges has a particular view on the book as the storage of memory, imagination and wisdom. He affirms that while in Antiquity the book was seen in the Western world as inferior to the oral word, in Eastern cultures their perception was different. Those cultures brought a new concept: The concept of the sacred book. He asserts that in the Eastern cultures there exists the idea that the book does not need to reveal things, but just aid the reader to discover them. Speaking about sacred books, he

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mentions how the Koran is considered by Muslims as a work that appeared before the creation of the world, and before of the creation of the Arabic language. Thus, the Koran is an attribute of God. He says that the concept of the sacred book, the Koran, the Bible, or the Book of the Vedas, may have passed but still keeps a certain sanctity. Opening a book keeps the possibility of the aesthetic fact. However, he wonders about the meaning of the words displayed in a book. What are those dead symbols? Absolutely nothing, he responds. A book is nothing if no one opens it. It is just a cube of leather and papers. But when we read it, something odd happens. It changes with every reading. He states,

> Heraclitus said (I have repeated it many times), that no one goes to the same river twice. No one does that since the waters change, but most terribly, we are not less fluid than the river. Every time that we read a book, the book has changed, the connotation of the words is different. Besides, the books are burdened with the past. (*Borges Oral* 25)

He even affirms that Hamlet is not exactly the same Hamlet that Shakespeare conceived at the beginning of the 17th century. Hamlet is the same of Coleridge, Goethe and Bradley. Hamlet has reborn, he argues. The readers have enriched the book. When we read an old book, he points out, it is as if we were able to read all the time that has passed since the day when it was written until today, when we are reading it. Borges also considers impossible the disappearance of the book. For him, a newspaper is read for forgetfulness, like the music listened in a disc but a book is read for memory, a book is read to remember it (*Borges Oral* 25).

In a lecture about time, Borges reflects about eternity and memory. He affirms that eternity is the sum of our yesterdays and all the yesterdays of all the conscious

beings. All that past that we do not know when it started. And then, we have the present and the future that does not exist yet but somehow it already is (*Borges Oral* 94–95). Borges explains the future drawing from Plato's idea of the mobile image of the eternal. If time is the image of the eternal, the future would be the movement of the soul towards the world to come. And the future would also be the eternal (106). Regarding memory, Borges states that it is individual and we, human beings, are made mainly, from our memories. But memories are also made from forgetfulness.

These elaborations on time and memory are at the heart of all the work of Borges. He examines the problem in lectures and essays but above all, in his short stories. Memory, its absence or its abundance, as we will see in the next short story, may become problematic for the simple act of communication.

1.4 "Funes, his Memory"

For the purpose of understanding the contribution of Jorge Luis Borges to philosophy of communication, I outline this short story that describes what happens to a young man that receives the unexpected gift of an amazing and total memory. In this tale located between 1884 and 1887, Borges situates himself as a character, as a fictional Borges that travels from Buenos Aires to Fray Bento, a small rural town in neighboring Uruguay in order to visit a cousin. While there, he meets Ireneo Funes, a young worker of his cousin, who has the capacity of guessing the exact time without any watch and even without looking at the sun. Borges will come back to the town a couple of years later finding Funes now permanently paralyzed as a result of an accident. But this new Funes, he is informed, is now endowed with an amazing gift. He is able to remember everything that ever happened to him and to perceive the reality around him with every detail.

Knowing that Borges is back and has some books in Latin, Funes writes him and asks him to lend him one of the books and a dictionary. Borges agrees to the bizarre request and sends him the books. The next day, he receives news of the sickness of his father and decides to go back to Buenos Aires. He goes to Funes' home that evening to recover his books and before entering his room, he astonishing listens Funes reciting a whole chapter of one of the books in perfect Latin. The two young men start a conversation that will last the whole night. Funes, the gaucho peasant, describes his new and amazing recalling powers. He begins by enumerating historical examples of amazing memory that he read in the Latin books that Borges lent him, and disregards his previous state of mind before the accident as that of a man without any grasp of the world around him. In vain, Borges tries to remind him of his capability to guess the exact time without any instrument. Funes is now the owner of a perfect perception and memory. "He knew the forms of the clouds in the southern sky on the morning of April 30, 1882, and he could compare them in his memory with the veins in the marbled binding of a book he had seen only once, or with the feathers of spray lifted by an oar on the Rio Negro on the eve of the Battle of Quebracho" (Borges, "Funes" *Collected* 135). Furthermore, his recalls of all those events including the tactile and thermal sensations. Funes also is now able to reconstruct all his dreams and days. Paradoxically, reconstructing any given day would take him another full day. Content with his new capacities, the young man does not lament his immobility. Confined to his room, he even attempts to invent a new numbering system based on a "private language" that substitute figures with words. "Instead of seven thousand thirteen (7013), he would say, for instance, "Máximo Pérez"; instead of seven thousand fourteen (7014), "the railroad…" (136). In vain, Borges tries to

explain to him that this task is the opposite of a numbering system. Borges then reflects that Locke envisioned a language that would give a proper name to each individual thing, but that idea was rejected by the philosopher. Funes' attempt was similar but the young man also realized the futility of the task. Although Borges acknowledged the greatness behind Funes' projects, he recognizes their impossibility. Borges explains it by highlighting that Funes was unable of "general, platonic ideas" (136). For example, he was uncapable to see that "the generic symbol 'dog' took in all the dissimilar individuals of all shapes and sizes" (136).

This hyper-perception and memory, of course, provoked in the young man a restless condition. It was very difficult for him to sleep since he was at all times aware of the minimal details around him. He saw the decay and the progress of death in objects and persons around him, even in himself. Borges then explains that although Funes taught himself several languages, he was not probably a good thinker, being unable to make abstractions and generalizations. Finally, the dawn comes and lightens Funes' face letting Borges appreciate that the young man appeared "as monumental as bronze —older than Egypt, older than the prophecies and the pyramids" (137). Far ahead, he would be informed that Funes passed away a couple of years after that last encounter sick with pulmonary congestion.

1.5 A Reading of Funes: Implications for Philosophy of Communication

In the prologue to *Artifices*, a series of short stories that are part of *Ficciones*, Borges briefly describe "Funes, his memory" as "a long metaphor of insomnia" (*Ficciones* 119). Borges himself acknowledged that he suffered from insomnia. In an interview with Richard Burgin, he admitted using pills for many years to deal with his

lack of sleep. Thus, insomnia and its restlessness were a problem that worried him ("The Living" *Jorge Luis Borges* 30). In this story, Funes, a young man endowed with a hyper perception of reality finds impossible to rest overwhelmed by his perceptions. However, I argue that this short story goes beyond the problem of insomnia. It is a literary resource used by Borges to introduce his own approach to philosophy of communication based on a reflection on time, language, memory and, in the case of this particular short story, the inability to think that derives in lack of communication and isolation. The young protagonist, Ireneo Funes, seems to be a gifted man, accidentally endowed with the amazing capacity of a total memory. However, he is also a tragic character, embodying the burdensome of being unable to forget. His use of language is based on observation and the repetition of the reality or the realities around him, which impoverishes his capacity for a full command of language than encompasses reasoning, meaning, and communication. For the purpose of this analysis I would like to draw from Charles Taylor's theories on language and meaning to understand the vision of Borges on communication through the tragic destiny of Funes.

In *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity*, Charles Taylor approaches the nature of language as an attribute that goes further its obvious goal of exchanging information. Taylor is mainly interested in the creation of meaning and thus, develops a thorough critique of the empirical thinkers that characterize modernity. In fact, he analyzes the contributions of Hobbes, Locke and Condillac, grouping them under the name "HLC". Those philosophers would then be representative of what he calls a designative view of language, based on an "enframing theory" (5). The defenders of this viewpoint have a particular vision on language and its characteristics.

They understand language as a picture of human life, based on the concrete and observable. To this enframing/designative theory, he opposes the ideas of philosophers such as Hamann, Herder, and Humboldt (HHH), as part of the constitutive theory. For these thinkers, language facilitates "new purposes and levels of behavior, and even new meanings" (3.) While the HLC philosophers assumed an atomistic mode of explanation that Taylor attributes to a Cartesian viewpoint, "the view that language is a collection of independently introduced words" (16), the latter favored a holistic mode. Herder, particularly, was able to envision a holistic approach to meaning that asserts that human reason and language are an integral part of our life form, they are not separate of how we humans live. Taylor affirms, "a word only has meaning within a lexicon and a context of language practices, which are ultimately embedded in a form of life" (17).

In "Funes, his Memory," the young protagonist conserves his ability for speech. However, the hyper capacity to perceive all the details of his environment forces him to focus his attention in the objects around him. And his use of speech is limited to reproducing all those impressions. However, he does not seem to be aware of this limitation. On the contrary, his new condition proves to be very rewarding for Funes. Borges describes him as fascinated with his new knowledge: "the present was so rich, so clear, that it was almost unbearable, as were his oldest and even his most trivial memories" ("Funes" *Collected* 135). However, Borges notices, the gift also implied a drawback. It disparaged his capacity for abstraction. In the short story, Borges suggests,

> He had effortlessly learned English, French, Portuguese, Latin. I suspect
> nevertheless that he was not very good at thinking. To think is to ignore (or
> forget) differences, to generalize, to abstract. In the teeming world of Ireneo

Funes there was nothing but particulars– and they were virtually immediate

particulars. (137)

According to Taylor, for Condillac, language was a tool that humans use to build and regulate their surroundings (*The Language* 12). That assumption leads to a reification of language, inspired by Descartes and Locke, that "objectify our thoughts and mental contents" (13). At the basis would be a way to understand language and the thinking processes "from the standpoint of the external observer" (14). I argue that the amazing capacity for recalling and perceiving most details made Funes an immediate and external observer. However, what happened to his internal thoughts? Too preoccupied with the reality of his surroundings, Funes was unable to formulate ideas of his own. The richness of the external world somehow invalidated his capacity for abstraction. It made him a reporter of the external, incapacitating him for the appreciation of his internal world.

Taylor affirms that the constitutive theory, contrary to the enframing one, supports a holism of meaning based on the idea that "individual words can only be words within the context of an articulated language" (*The Language* 18). Then, language cannot be formed and learned by only using individual words. Each word is connected to others throughout a whole system. Similarly, it is suggested in the short story that Funes was able to acquire an ample vocabulary in different languages but his command of those languages probably lacked the capacity for articulating complete thoughts according to linguistic structures. Thus, the world of Funes that seems to be very rich in perceptions and recollections, in the end transforms in a limited environment based exclusively on his own sensations and remembrances.

Further describing the characteristics of language, Taylor highlights the capacity for "the exploration and naming of human meanings" (*The Language* 336), mentioning as examples ethical values, rules and even "the pursuit of truth and the creation of beauty" (336). Additionally, he asserts that language is fundamental for the creation of community. All those characteristics do not exist in the world of Funes. In the short story, Borges describes Funes' pathetic attempts to create something new out of his gained capacities but he hopelessly fails. First, he tries to create an original numbering system. In this system, words would substitute figures. Borges writes, "Every word had a particular figure attached to it, a sort of marker… I tried to explain to Funes that this rhapsody of unconnected words was exactly the opposite of a number system… Funes either could not or would not understand me" ("Funes" *Collected* 136).

The second project implied the elaboration of a system in order to classify all his memories. Borges compares this attempt to Locke's postulation of "an impossible language in which each individual thing—every stone, every bird, every branch—would have its own name" (136). He explains that Locke soon discarded this idea. Likewise, and frustrated by the impossibility of the task, Funes finally abandoned the project. Borges acknowledges the greatness of these attempts but signals that Funes was unable to generalize, to use abstraction in the Platonic sense, being that his great limitation. As Nuño points out,

> What Funes lacked was the rational dimension of abstraction, that capacity for
> transcending what is perceived and being able to elaborate superior, composed
> and general ideas that act as unifying categories. As a result, after only registering

instantaneous ideas like successive flashes, the ontological continuum is broken

becoming impossible to respect the identity of what was perceived. (190)

For Funes it was not possible to distinguish between the generic name "dog" and all the

different individuals that are also known as dogs. The limitations of Funes are articulated

by Borges as a way to expose the Platonic Theory of the Ideas. Plato indicates that there

is a distinction between the sensorial world of the things, which might be deceitful and

incomplete, and the intelligible world of the ideas, that are eternal and immutable. The

Theory of the Ideas appears in different works by Plato. In the seventh book of *The*

Republic, the Myth of the Cavern offers one of the most complete explanations of the

differences between the universal and the particulars (Plato 360–396). Funes would be

the man only aware of the immediate, of the things that can be perceived with the senses.

But the world of the universal ideas, those that can only be attained by reasoning, would

be denied to him. The reasoning of ethical values, rules and the pursuit of beauty

mentioned by Taylor (*Language* 336) appear beyond the reach of Ireneo Funes.

1.5.1 Memory and Memorization

Some media ecology scholars point out to the characteristics of memory and

memorization and their advantages and weaknesses. Havelock draws attention to the fact

that some cultures known for their remarkable achievements in arts, politics and

organizational systems such as the Incas, were illiterate. He wonders how those cultures

were able to function and preserve their traditions and identities (56). Memorization and

repetition were key for recording in primary oral cultures. However, Marsh highlights

that some scholars like Ong and Havelock concur in stating that primary oral societies

that focus on memorization lack abilities for analytical thought. "In an oral culture,

human intellect operates not as an analytical device but as a storage unit, a function that would allow an uncritical acceptance of media messages" (346). Although Funes did not belong to an oral society, and he was able to read and write, is it possible that he would only operate as 'a storage unit'? In the short story, there is a moment when Funes confess to the fictional Borges: "My memory, sir, is like a deposit of garbage" (Borges, "Funes" *Collected* 135). Thus, he was unable to select which memory or perception to keep and which one to discard. He then functioned as a storage unit lacking analytical thoughts or ideas that permit him to differentiate and categorize memories and perceptions as irrelevant or important.

In *The Medium is the Massage*, McLuhan and Fiore stress how media nowadays affect and control the human mind and are even more significative than the actual information that they portray. They argue that media, especially electric ones, modify patterns of thinking, learning, and even the way we relate to others. Since every new technology is an extension of the human body, the media transforms us. "The book is an extension of the eye as clothing is an extension of the skin, the electric circuitry, an extension of the central nervous system" (33–41), thus, our perception of the world dramatically evolves. One of the more significant consequences might be the disappearance of the conventional understandings about time and space. The global village described by McLuhan is explicated as "a simultaneous happening" (63). And high speed is at the center of this revolution. McLuhan stresses how data is constantly coming to our minds and being quickly substituted by fresher material. He claims, "our electrically-configured world has forced us to move from the habit of data classification to the mode of pattern recognition" (63). That poses a difficulty to the classic sequential

interpretation of the environment. Actions do not happen stage by stage but "all factors of the environment and of experience coexist in a state of active interplay" (63). What Funes is experiencing might be interpreted as a high speed and high perception of what happened in the past and what is happening to him at the same time. Similar to the rush provided by electronic media, in Funes' world time and space disappear. But contrary to the tribal mode that accompany the global use of electronical media, Funes is the only protagonist and receptacle of the simultaneous experiences of perception. Unable to separate the present from the past or, better said, unable to stop that his recollections from the past invade his present, he uselessly attempts to classify his memories. That would be a way to give some sense to his unusual gift. But he realized that he would be dead before he could organize only the memories of his childhood. High speed, simultaneity and hyper perception become then an impediment to reflection, something that some media ecology scholars claim when analyzing electronic contemporary media.

1.5.2 Language, Memorization, and Communication

In *Human Agency and Language*, Taylor states that humans manifest their ideas expressing them through language. Taylor explains, "through language we formulate things, and thus come to have an articulated view of the world. We become conscious of things, in one very common sense of this term, that is we come to have explicit awareness of things" (258). Thus, language permits humans to find a common place that enlarges communication beyond information. "Language enables us to put things in public space" (259), by creating a bond that allows people a sense of togetherness. This is something that Funes lacked. Confined to his bed, being apart from the rest of the world, and absorbed in his own thoughts, it might not be surprising that Borges ends the short story

showing a nineteen-year old man as an ancient and wasted being that seems content in his own isolation. The act of memorization itself does not mean that he possessed a superior mind since his memorization is based on repetition. One of the tasks that interested Funes was to recreate all the memories that he had had in a particular day. He disregarded this idea when he realized that he would need another complete day to finish this work, absurdly duplicating the task. In "Funes, his Memory," Borges approaches philosophy of communication by implying that repetition and memorization do not substitute for analytical thought. Only the elaboration of new, original ideas might convey true knowledge. Funes' stunning and detailed recollections demonstrated his lack of ability for abstraction, creativity, social interactions and true communication.

1.6 Suspended Time: "The Secret Miracle"

"The Secret Miracle" is another short story related to a bizarre use of time and memory included in *Ficciones* and published in 1943. I briefly outline this story where Borges also explores other subjects that lean to the ontological and the spiritual.

The action is situated in Prague, in 1939. The night before the entrance of the Third Reich army in the city, Jaromir Hladík, a Jewish writer, dreams that he is taking part in an ancient chess tournament between two rival families. Jaromir forgets the rules of chess and runs idly through the dunes in a rainy desert. When he wakes up, the Nazis enter the city. He is soon arrested and condemned to be executed by a firing squad. During the ten days before his execution Hladík agonizes, horrified by his imminent death. Sometimes he imagines all the possible circumstances of the execution, absurdly thinking that visualizing an event would prevent it from happening. Naturally, he would end up fearing that those exercises of the imagination would become prophetic. His

nights were almost unbearable but throughout the days he finds comfort in the thought that during those times he was immortal. The evening before the execution, he started to think about his incomplete play entitled *The Enemies*. Being more than forty years old and without a family of his own, most of life had been dedicated to writing. Hladík was aware of the mediocrity of his books of essays and poems. He thought that the play in verse The Enemies would be his opportunity to redeem himself from the dullness of his writing career and somehow justify his own life. That night he reviewed that unfinished project. The plot contemplated the life of the baron of Roemerstadt during the 19th century. In the first act, the baron is surrounded by enemies that want to kill him, they speak about a certain Jaroslav Kubin, who once was after Julia de Weidenau, Roemerstadt's fiancé. Kubin, now driven by madness, thinks that he is Roemerstadt. In the second act, the baron kills one of the conspirators. In the third act, some characters that were supposed to be dead in the first acts, suddenly reappear. The audience then understand that Roemerstadt is actually the evil Jaroslav Kubin. The drama is just the circular delirium revived by a mad Kubin. Jaromir only had written approximately half of the play. He secretly asks God to grant him enough time to finish this project. He argued that if he, Jaromir Hladík, was not a repetition or a mistake of God, his life would be validated as the author of *The Enemies*. That play would justify God as the creator of Hladík and Hladík's life as a writer. That night he dreamed that he was in the Library of the Clementinum . A blind librarian asked him what he was looking for. He responded that he was looking for God. The librarian told him that God was in one of the letters of one of the 400 hundred thousand books of the library. He and all his ancestors became blind looking for God in the library but never found him. Then, a reader returned an atlas

arguing that it was useless. Hladík opened it and touched a letter in a map of India and listened to a voice that said that the time for his work has been granted. Hladík woke up and was immediately taken to the place of his execution. The day was cloudy and rain was coming. At 9:00 am, the soldiers pointed at him. While a drop of water started to roll down his cheek, the commander in chief voiced the order of fire. Then, the physical universe suspended. Hladík could see the soldiers pointing at him but they were paralyzed. He saw the unmovable shade of a bee on the ground. He tried to cry, speak or even move a hand, but he was also paralyzed. He thought that he was dead or mad until he realized that God almighty had granted him with his desire. God performed a secret miracle and offered him one year to finish his play. Hladík realized that the fire squad would kill him at the exact time of the execution but in his mind, a year would pass. Since the play was written on verse, it was possible for him to memorize it. He worked hard during a whole year erasing some verses, rewriting scenes, and shortening and amplifying others. Just when he writes in his mind the last word, the drop of water rolls down his cheek, he yells, moving his face and the bullets reach him. He died at 9:02 am in the day of his execution (Borges, "The Secret" *Collected* 165–174).

1.6.1 Time as subjective

It is known that Jorge Luis Borges was not a religious man. Although he was acquainted since his upbringing with both the Catholic and the Protestant traditions, he was not a believer. In fact, according to Fishburn, Borges stated that he was an agnostic (64). Fishburn also claims that Borges was "a self-confessed non-believer for whom God was at best an unknowable entity beyond human comprehension" (56). However, he found religion an interesting source of metaphors and often included Jewish, Christian,

and Gnostic themes in his short stories, lectures and essays. Nevertheless, "The Secret Miracle" seems to be his more 'religious' short story. This fact does not seem casual but it may be interpreted as an approach to concepts such as immortality, memory, and eternity as part of his obsession with the problem of time. When asked about the topic of this short story, Borges points out that it is based on a sort of pact between God and a man. He explains that two main ideas appealed to him in this short story. He was thinking in "an unassuming miracle… for the miracle is wrought for one man only. And then in the idea, I suppose, a religious idea, of a man justifying himself to God by something known only to God… God giving him his chance" (Burgin, "The Living" *Jorge Luis Borges* 25).

In my view, in "The Secret Miracle," Borges explores a rhetorical approximation that postulates time as subjective. Throughout the literary resource of the story Borges elaborates a theory of time based on two postulates: the human and the divine time. Under the first one, time is determined by men and their constructs such as the use of the clock, and the separation of time in years, months, days and hours. The divine time might be the one regulated by God and that points to concepts unattainable to humans like infinity and eternity. Logic and the external reality govern the human time while God's regulation of time remains in the internal life of the main character and the mystery of the divine and mystical. However, both seemingly parallel concepts join briefly in the short story through memory and imagination.

In order to provide ground for understanding different approximations to time and memory from the perspectives of rhetoric and philosophy of communication, I now turn to Saint Augustine's search for the meaning of temporality. I will also explore the

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ontological quest of Jaromir Hladík of justification for his life, and the role of the mnemonic methods used by the protagonist of the short story as part of the miracle granted by God.

In the second part of the *Confessions*, mainly in the 11th book, Augustine searches for the meaning of time from a religious perspective. He envisions time and all creation as part of the will of God (356). Regarding the different kinds of time, he acknowledges for men the idea of past, present and future. However, Augustine leans towards the idea of a continuous present time that would be the time of God (364–365). In his appeal to God he also claims:

> You, God, don't precede time by means of time; otherwise, you wouldn't precede all time. Rather, you precede everything that is past, through a transcendent state of the eternity that is always present; and you are superior to everything that is to come in that those things are to come, and once they come they're going to be past. You, however, are always the same, you are yourself, and your years don't run out. Your years don't arrive and depart, but ours do, so that they can all eventually arrive. (359)

Eternity, then, is a concept not only created by God's will but somehow 'embodied' by him. God, therefore, transcends the ideas of fastness and slowness, and the human notions of years, months and days. Augustine asserts that God defies our concept of time with his permanence. Likewise, Augustine disregards the motion of the sun, the moon and the stars as identified as the meaning of time. Interestingly, he acknowledges that through divine intervention, time could be suspended. He offers the example of a man, like Borges' Jaromir Hladík, who asked God for more time. "When in answer to a certain

person's prayer the sun stood still so that he could complete a battle and win it, the sun stood still but time kept going" (Augustine 372). The prayer elevated to God by Jaromir asking him for the time necessary in order to complete his task might be considered a rhetorical appeal to the divinity. In this dialogue between Jaromir and God, the divine response would arrive in the form of a dream, when God accepts to grant him a spare year.

1.6.2 The Ontological Justification for Jaromir Hladick's Life

Agonizing about his imminent death, Jaromir Hladík thinks that his whole existence would be worth only if he would be a talented writer. But he is not happy with what he had accomplished so far. Therefore, he needs time in order to write a work that eliminates the mediocrity of his past. He then engages in prayer asking God to help him to justify his life. Jaromir's prayer is not a conventional one. He rhetorically appeals to God by saying: "If … I do somehow exist, if I am not one of Thy repetitions or errata, then I exist as the author of *The Enemies*. In order to complete that play, which can justify me and justify Thee as well, I need one more year" (Borges, "The Secret" *Collected* 160). He implies two assumptions, the first would be that Jaromir's life needs a justification. He needs a reason for his existence. And that single reason would be his performance as a writer. The other implication would be that God, or at least Hladík's God, does not escape to failures and repetitions, a recurrent theme that appears in the work of Borges, as we will see in other chapters of this dissertation. Thus, God also would need to justify Jaromir as His creation. Hladík ends his prayer by asking God, "Grant me those days, Thou who are the centuries and time itself" (160), thus recognizing

God's power as the giver of life, and identifying his Creator with time itself, as Augustine did.

Returning to the media ecology scholars that examined the role of oral tradition before the spread of writing and reading, I draw from McLuhan, who points out to the characteristics of the Greek pre-literacy era where knowledge and tradition in the form of Homer's *Iliad* was passed from one generation to the other with the aid of the mnemonic techniques represented by poetry. The rhythm of verses articulated in specific patterns facilitated the memorization of the large epical story (McLuhan *The Global* 113). Similarly, Jaromir Hladík, the protagonist of "The Secret Miracle," appeals to mnemonic resources to accomplish his goal. His drama *The Enemies* is written in verse, facilitating his memorization. As Thomas states, "repetition keeps meaning in constant circulation, whereas texts risk not being read… oral ritual coherence stays with what is already known, whereas writing favors innovation and variation" (389). The same author accentuates the use of "mnemonic aids like patterning, rhythm, and formula" (386) to keep record of knowledge. Accordingly, Van Dijck states that "both memory and media constitute intermediaries between individual and society, and between past and present" (261). The previous remarks allow some reflections on the role of memory in the act of writing. Jaromir Hladík does not possess any physical media to write his drama. He only relies on his memory. Contrary to the previous story about Funes, the role of memory in "The Secret Miracle" is not a storage of debris but a useful resource. With the aid of his memory, Jaromir is able to complete his task and finds justification for his life as a writer. Borges' scholar Edwin Williamson affirms, "this is salvation by writing in its purest form – writing as a means of giving the author's life a purpose, and thereby saving the universe

also from absurdity" (213). The life of Hladík, then, would probably be regarded as absurd or meaningless if his *raison d'etre*, his destiny as a writer, would have not been fulfilled.

1.7 Focus of the Project

This project begins with the assumption that Jorge Luis Borges' work is hermeneutically provocative for philosophy of communication since he is able to transform intriguing philosophical enigmas into compelling stories that offer different interpretations and that amplify the participation of the reader in the experience of storytelling. I also argue that Borges was engaged in fostering a communicative relationship with his readers, offering them alternative understandings to his fictional work, permitting them to become co-authors with the writer, and defying traditional approaches to the text.

This dissertation seeks to understand how Jorge Luis Borges contributes to the conversation on philosophy of communication through some fundamental metaphysical inquiries found both in his fictional world and in his philosophical essays and lectures. I am also interested in Borges' contribution to rhetorical hermeneutics, given that his writing promotes a non-traditional approach to the relation among the author, the text and the reader.

I divided this project into five chapters that address the following central metaphors associated to time that are found in Borges' work: memory; dreams and myths; libraries and books; mirrors; and labyrinths. I started Chapter One, "Memory and Imagination," with an introduction that depicts the foundations for this project, the central questions that drive it, based on an exploration on the contribution of the work of Jorge

Luis Borges to the field of rhetoric and philosophy of communication. I offered some biographical notes about the life and work of Borges situating him as a postmodern and post-colonialist author. I contrasted the theories of some media ecology scholars on literacy and writing with Borges' view on memory and the printed word. Other considerations on language, narrative, and meaning as understood by scholar Charles Taylor permitted me to introduce the analysis of two of the short stories of Borges that examine the problem of time related to memory and imagination. "Funes, his Memory," and "The Secret Miracle," portray the reflections of Jorge Luis Borges on the roles of memory and memorization as part of the problem of time, and introduce ontological and spiritual topics pertinent to rhetoric and philosophy of communication.

Chapter two, "Dreams and Myths," is an approximation to the philosophical sources that nurtured the Borgesian world. I analyzed some of the main tenets of the epistemologies developed by Plato, George Berkley, David Hume, and Arthur Schopenhauer. In my view, dreams and myths become a metaphor of creativity and are inextricably linked to the use of language and thus, communication. I explore some views on dreams and myths from the perspectives of classical and contemporary philosophers as well as communication scholars. I also examine the main tenets of the idealist philosophers that fostered Borges' reflections on the world. I focus my analysis on the imprints of idealism on Borges' most philosophical essay: "A New Refutation of Time". I also explore the communicative implications of Borges' idealism on two of his short stories related to dreams and myths: "The Circular Ruins," and "The House of Asterion."

The Third Chapter, "Mirrors and the Horror of Repetition," shows the association between notions of duplication and the infinite in the treatment of time in Jorge Luis

Borges' work. I explore how Borges draws from Nietzsche's view on circular time and the concept of the eternal recurrence. I argue that he offers his readers the possibility to reflect on time and identity through the short essays: "Circular Time" and "The Doctrine of Cycles". I also examine the thought of Borges, as a postmodern and postcolonial author that proposes a new approximation to the relationship among the author, the text and the reader. I argue that he was able to anticipate some contemporary communication scholars preoccupied with those topics. By bringing into conversation scholars Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Umberto Eco, I address the differences and similarities of their ideas about the notions of writing and reading. Likewise, I explore the communicative resonances related to identity, authorship and repetitive time that are present in the following short stories by Borges: "The Other," "Borges and I," "Death and The Compass," and "Pierre Menard, Author of The Quixote."

In Chapter Four, "Encyclopedias and Other Books," I argue that Borges keenly anticipated current theories on the deconstruction of texts, hermeneutics, and intertextuality by the incorporation of these themes as part of his fictional work. I continue the discussion on authorship and readership by reviewing some of the main aspects related to hermeneutics and the deconstruction of texts as explicated by Hans Gadamer, Jacques Derrida, and Paul Ricoeur. I attempt to amplify the understanding of authorship and readership by exploring the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva on intertextuality. Additionally, I consider the role of translation as part of the hermeneutical approach that Borges carried out as translator of the works of different Western writers. I then focus on the analysis of Borges' essay: "John Wilkins' Analytical Language," which intrigued French scholar Michel Foucault. I also examine the short

stories "The Approach to Al'Mutassim," and "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbius Tertius." Both stories exemplify the rhetorical appeal developed by Borges to invite his readers to participate in a communicational game of intertextuality and hermeneutics.

Finally, in Chapter 5, "Labyrinths: The Infinite Library," I examine some themes that enrich the study of philosophy of communication. In my view, some theories on semiotics, as conceived by Charles S. Peirce, Umberto Eco, and other authors, enlarge the scope of the field of communication. I first offer an exploration on the labyrinth, as a metaphor of a physical and a mental space. I argue that Borges' notion and use of the metaphor of the labyrinth in many of his works anticipated the influence of technologies like the Internet on human communication. The 'labyrinthine' nature of the Internet fosters a discussion on media ecology that contemplates the basic tenets of this technological tool. Throughout an approximation to the work of Marshal McLuhan, Lance Strate, and other media ecology scholars I focus on the impact of cyberlanguage, hypertext, and electronic storytelling on rhetoric and philosophy of communication. I then analyze Borges' essay "The Total Library," and the short stories: "The Aleph," "The Library of Babel," and "The Garden of the Forking Paths." I contend that Borges' work is hermeneutically provocative and attentive to issues related to human communication. Finally, I propose some concluding remarks that highlight the contribution of Jorge Luis Borges to the study of rhetoric and philosophy of communication.

Given the amount and complexity of the work of Jorge Luis Borges, I have decided to examine only some of his short stories, lectures, and essays. My criteria for choosing them is based on the idea that those works would be the most representative of Borges' encounter with rhetoric and philosophy of communication.

Chapter 2:

Dreams and Myths

2.1 Introduction

In this project, I argue that Jorge Luis Borges' literary work portrays a reflection on the unsolved problem of time with an approach related to rhetoric and philosophy of communication. In my view, his work constitutes a unique contribution to understanding the rhetorical capacity of literature of enlarging the experience of the readers by allowing them to participate in the creative process of writing. Likewise, the topics of most of his fiction promote metaphysical reflections that expand the conventional reach of a work of art.

In Chapter 2: "Dreams and Myths," I continue examining the major metaphors that characterize Jorge Luis Borges' metaphysical obsession with time. Dreams and myths become a metaphor of creativity and are inextricably linked to the use of language and thus, communication. I will explore some views on dreams and myths as understood from the perspectives of classical and contemporary philosophers and communication scholars. I will also examine the main tenets of the idealist philosophers that fostered Borges' reflections on the world. Finally, I will analyze the imprints of idealism on Borges' most philosophical essay: "A New Refutation of Time". I will also explore the communicative implications of Borges' idealism on two of his short stories related to dreams and myths: "The Circular Ruins," and "The House of Asterion."

2.2 An Idealist "Weaver of Dreams"

In a conversation with L. S. Dembo, Jorge Luis Borges describes himself as an idealist. The interviewer inquires of him whether he might be considered "a philosophic

idealist" (85) or just a writer obsessed with the oxymora that might be derived from the philosophical current of idealism. Borges responds by recalling how at a very early age his father started to explain to him many of the postulates of some idealist philosophers by inventing puzzles and games that challenged his intelligence. Once, for example, Jorge Guillermo Borges showed his son a fruit, asking him if its flavor belonged or not to the fruit itself. Likewise, he questioned him about the color of the fruit when his eyes were closed. Borges recalls, "He didn't say a word about Berkeley or Hume, but he was really teaching me the philosophy of idealism, although, of course, he never used those words, because he thought they might scare me away" (85). Out of these games, Borges acquired a sense of reality that differed from that of most people. To him, thoughts and dreams were as factual as material objects (85). Similarly, when interrogated by Amelia Barili on the possible veiled meanings in his work, Borges subtly denies the possibility of understanding all that is behind a work of art. As an example, he speaks about the topic of time, one of his recurrent themes. He affirms that the concept of infinity, with its absence of beginning and end, might be very difficult for him to grasp (Barili 245). He then defines himself as "just a man of letters" (246) and continues, "I am not sure if I have thought anything in my life. I am a weaver of dreams" (246).

The former self-descriptions forced by the inquiries of interviewers point to the sources that nurtured the philosophical foundations of the Borgesian universe where metaphysical quests intersect with a preoccupation for deciphering the problem of time. Probably inadvertently, the "man of letters" admits his failure to understand the dimensions of eternity, although he would not renounce the search for answers to that matter in his fictional stories and essays.

From the different metaphors that are part of Borges' work, the topics of dreams and myths consider the problem of time related to the act of creating. In the Borgesian universe, aesthetic creativity, such as that of the writer, or a metaphysical enquiry about the creation of the world, has a foundation in the postulates of idealism. Densley asserts that idealism is based on "the assumption that reality is limited by our ability to conceive it, or that if something is in principle inconceivable, then it must be regarded as impossible" (133). Since Borges was educated by his father on the principles of idealism, he found the way to incorporate those views on his fiction, conceiving "impossible' worlds through imagination. As Borges affirms, "I am naturally idealistic. Almost everyone, thinking about reality, thinks of space, and their cosmogonies start with space. I think about time… I think we could easily do without space but not without time… It is more natural to think that in the beginning there was an emotion" (Barili 243). Ideas, then, may explicate the act of creating through dreams and myths related to the conundrum of time.

2.3 Traditional and Contemporary Views on Myths

Buxton offers a straightforward definition of myth by stating that it is "a socially powerful traditional story" (18). This explanation proposes that myths convey stories that appeal not only to individuals but to groups of people and influence them significantly. That influence first originated in the power of human voice since myths were part of the oral communication that characterized Antiquity and that addressed the collective (Havelock 54). However, the Greek myths seem to exert "plurality" (Buxton 14) as one of their features. There are different versions of a single narrative that may vary from different sources although the essential of the story remains similar in all tales. In fact,

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"each teller remade tradition according to the requirements of the particular social and artistic context" (14). The contexts were myths were told depicted the social character of storytelling. Probably first at home, children were exposed to the stories told by mothers and caretakers who wanted to prevent the toddlers from breaking rules, being then tools for social control. Later, in adult life, Greeks exercised myth-telling in social gatherings, parties, festivities, and even in temples, associating rites with dramatized stories (Buxton 28–30).

2.3.1 Plato and Mythology

Plato would defy traditional mythology, finding objection to the stories related to violence and vengeful deeds of the Greek gods. In *The Republic*, Plato criticizes those stories through the figure of Socrates. He reproduces a dialogue between Socrates and Adeimantos where the master attacks the falsehood of the myths told by "Hesiod, Homer and other poets" (Buxton 41). Socrates proposes to oversee those stories, making sure they are not told to the very young, who would not be able to understand them. He even proposes to mask what he qualifies as "ugly telling narrating" (41) with rituals and secrecy that guarantee that they are heard only by a few initiated persons that have the capacity for understanding them. Plato himself was a good storyteller and was one of the early philosophers who introduced the use of myths with a pedagogical purpose. As Buxton highlights, Plato "was aware of the power, for good or for ill, of imaginative narratives about the divine and heroic exploits" (41) But he wanted to frame them in "the quest for truth" (41) that characterizes the work of the philosopher.

2.3.2 Contemporary Views on Myth

Leeming points out to the origin of the word 'myth' as deriving from the Greek idea of the word, signifying the spoken word and relating it to religious approaches that portray it as communication from God (3). However, Leeming stresses the need for moving away from the definitions of myth as pertaining to tradition. Nowadays, he says, there are various approaches to myth that offer the viewpoints of "anthropologists, philologists, etiologists, ethnologists, and perhaps most of all, psychologists" (3). He highlights the Jungian approach that looks not for the historical implications of myths but for the meanings that can be found inside them. He asserts, "Myths, like dreams, are psychically real. Indeed, myths might be called the dreams of mankind. Dreams serve as escape valves for individuals. They represent wishes and fears. Myths serve whole societies and… many societies at once in much the same manner" (5). By signaling their relation to society, Leeming connects the dreams of individuals and their personal aspirations to the preoccupations of the collective. "Jung has shown," he points out, "that the individual's psyche cannot be divorced from the psyche of the human race as a whole. Dreams are also products of inherited themes that are buried in the very depths of the human psyche" (5).

Some philosophers also connect myth to the communicative act. Roland Barthes, for example, identifies myth with speech. He affirms that "myth is a system of communication, that it is a message… a mode of signification, a form" (*Mythologies* 109). He stresses the role of history in the changing nature of myths. "One can conceive of very ancient myths, but there are no eternal ones; for it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and the death of mythical

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language" (110). In *Image, Music, Text*, Barthes revisits his notions on "contemporary myths" (165), displayed already in *Mythologies*, by the end of the 1950s. He highlights that "contemporary myth is discontinuous. It is no longer expressed in long fixed narratives but only in 'discourse'; at most, it is a phraseology, a corpus of phrases (of stereotypes); myth disappears, but leaving—so much the more insidious—the mythical" (165). He adds,

> As a type of speech (which was after all the meaning of *muthos*), contemporary myth falls within the province of a semiology; the latter enables the mythical inversion to be 'righted' by breaking up the message into two semantic systems: a connoted system whose signified is ideological… and a denoted system… whose function is to naturalize the class proposition by lending it the guarantee of the most 'innocent' of natures, that of language. (*Mythologies* 166)

Thus, language is inextricably linked to myth even in contemporary times. Although perceived as the denotative element of discourse, it contributes to convey ideological connotations. For Barthes, myth seems to possess a pervasive nature that allows it to appear in all manifestations of language. In fact, he expresses, "the mythical is present everywhere sentences are turned, stories told… from inner speech to conversation, from newspaper article to political sermon, from novel… to advertising image—all utterances which could be brought together under the Lacanian concept of the imaginary" (168–169).

American philosopher Kenneth Burke also contributes to the conversation on myth. Coupe states that Burke's view on myth would be wider than the perspective of Roland Barthes, "who famously limited the function of myth to persuading people that

the culture they inhabit is natural and necessary rather than historical and contingent" (6).

Coupe highlights the social function of myth from Burke's perspective. He examines two

seminal essays of Burke: "Revolutionary Symbolism in America," dated in 1935, and

"Ideology and Myth," from 1947. In the former, Burke was still under the influence of

Marxism. However, he dares to challenge the traditional view of this current of thought

on myth that saw it "as synonymous with the illusory" (9). Marxists thought of ideology

as nonexistent and as part of a capitalist will to mask truth. However, for Burke "one

cannot challenge an ideology unless one has a distinct and positive view of mythology;

the two are not the same thing, though they frequently appear to overlap… myths have an

ideological function, embodying as they do cultural assumptions" (9). Burke considers a

Marxist idea of myth "should offer a vision of true community, a harmonious humanity"

(11). However, he was aware of the difficulties that his vision offered. When he exposed

his thoughts in a Marxist Congress, he was attacked, mainly about "his choice of the

symbol of 'the people' rather than 'the worker.' This choice was interpreted as a betrayal

of the proletarian cause" (12). He was accused of pairing communism with religion. But,

he "was always insistent… that myth and religion are essential modes of human

understanding" (13).

 According to Coupe, in "Ideology and Myth," Burke addresses the commonalities

of both terms, rather than their differences. He places ideology closer to ideas while

myth, "like poetry, gravitates to the side of the image" (13). When referring to the

traditional definition of ideology, he is aware that "Plato's philosophy could be seen as an

ideology in that it offers a system of ideas." However, he is cautious about the use of

stories by Plato stating that "this does not mean that the presence in Plato's philosophy of

narratives that we call myths is to be explained away simply as an illustration of his system of ideas" (15). Drawing from Malinowski, Burke explicates the association between ideology and myth. According to Burke, those societies that do not have a notion of essence or other philosophical terms turn to storytelling and myth to explicate some aspects of their communal interactions (16). For Burke, the use of myth in Plato would approach "the archetype. The link is memory, but the tales that Plato tells –of the cave, of the demiurge, of Eros– involve a recollection and a response that is more than rational" (16). For Coupe, Burke asserts that "myth precedes and inform ideology" (17). "Its function is to provide the imaginative structure that makes social institutions meaningful. In creating an origin for social institutions, myth gives shape and significance to social experience" (22).

Accordingly, Taylor also relates myth to language (*Language* 70). Drawing from the work of Merlin Donald, Taylor stresses that the mythic does not only include the verbal but also the use of nonverbal signs (70–71). However, he highlights the role of narration as one "of the uses of language" that portrays its potential (72). And one of the form of narrations is myth. Taylor affirms, "Myth offers an integrative form of thought, in which what we define as elements are given meaning in wholes. Many myths, as we identify them, exist in several redactions and variants" (72). Furthermore, he asserts, myth and ritual are inextricably linked. "One basic purpose of myth was to make sense of ritual" (72). In ancient cultures they complemented and informed each other. In more contemporary societies, where language was more sophisticated and related to the conceptual, myth started to be relegated "and not to be taken "literally," serving as illustrative image for people who already have some theoretical grasp of the matter" (72).

Taylor suggests that sometimes it was necessary to appeal to the images of myth when the conceptual cannot be entirely grasped. This would be the case of Socrates and the myths described in Plato's Republic. Socrates used some images that would be similar to the mythical in order to extend the theoretical reach. That would be the case of the myth of the cavern and other stories that illustrated Socrates' thought on the virtuous (72).

Taylor also draws from Rappaport to explain how rituals are related to a will of restoring a certain order in the world (73). In this sense, rituals "have an iconic or symbolic relation to what they are trying to effect, or to the order they are meant to repair, but the crucial point about them is that they are performatives, they help to bring about what they (at least in part) represent" (74). Thus, myth may aid in figuring out "the nature of the order they restore" (74) and the performance of ritual would help to make "more concrete" its purpose (74).

According to Taylor, the ascent of the theoretical, as described by Donald, leaves myth consigned to the realm of the symbolic. He states, "The undermining of myth, and the enthroning of literal assertions about the natural order, has helped to create this third category of rightness, which I will call "portrayal", and which is paradigmatically exemplified in certain works of art" (78). Those works of art, like the novel, offer a new way to present reality that is located near to the mythical, he affirms (79). I concur with Taylor's view and suggest that, similarly, some of the fictional short stories of Borges may be a vehicle to portray an innovative way to examine myths.

2.4 Philosophers that Nurtured Jorge Luis Borges' Idealism

In this project, I claim that Jorge Luis Borges' essays and fictional stories exemplify a communicative search for metaphysical responses that he drew from diverse

philosophers that impacted his work. From the different thinkers that influenced Jorge Luis Borges' preference for idealism I consider the most significant the following: Plato, George Berkeley, David Hume and Arthur Schopenhauer.

2.4.1 Plato

Plato was born in Athens around 427 BC as a member of an old patrician family (Melling 1; Mason 4). Athens was at the time a flourishing city-state where commerce of goods as well as poetry, theater, and other arts together with the exchange of ideas were common at public spaces. Although his family was involved in politics, Plato became a philosopher. Deeply influenced by his mentor Socrates, he dedicated his life to teaching and writing. Plato established the academy, a school that became a model of teaching for the Western world. At the academy there was an emphases on discussion of topics such as philosophy and mathematics (Mason 6). Disappointed with the political affairs of his time, Plato founded the academy with the goal of teaching the youth how to become better at exercising government. As he expressed in *The Republic*, he thought that the philosopher-king would be the ideal state leader since he would be wiser and more virtuous than other types of men (Plato 433–434).

Plato's work is considered a capital contribution to the Western thought. He introduced writing and literature to the teaching of philosophy through dialogues based on the Socratic method practiced by his mentor. Although he and Socrates defended the value of speech in learning and were aware of the limitations of writing for achieving understanding, Plato acknowledged that readers may be attracted to study philosophy and to exercise their reasoning by the examination of books (Mason 10). Some of his most significant texts include *The Republic*, where Plato proposes "an ideal state" (10) while

discussing a metaphysical approach to knowledge; *Protagoras*, *Gorgias* and *Euthydemus*,

where he addressed the dialogues of Socrates with famous sophists. *Phaedo* is about the

immortality of the soul while the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* examine love from different

viewpoints (9). *Symposium* deals with physical love and beauty while the myth of

Phaedrus explains the origin of men and the knowledge of ideas. Plato describes in this

myth a comparison between the soul and two winged horses; one is noble and well

trained while the other is unruly. The first one represents rational or moral impulses and

even restraint, while the second stands for the soul unable to control his impulses and

appetites. The charioteer that attempts to drive them represent the reason who tries to

control the demands of both horses (Plato 109). Melling points out to the self-struggle

that this internal fight represents for men, "The sense of division and conflict which is an

essential aspect of human self experience is grounded in the fundamental structure of the

human soul" (74). And Plato finishes the story by stating that only some superior souls

would be able to navigate through heaven and acquire "true knowledge" (110). The

difficulties in driving the horses may make some souls to fall. They would later

reincarnate in any of the categories that encompass from the philosopher to the tyrant.

"All these are states of probation, in which he who lives righteously improves, and he

who lives unrighteous deteriorates his lot" (111). Elaborating on the idea that the world

where we live in is a reminiscence of a previous existence, More suggests that the soul

that drives the chariot towards heaven is able to envision the things as they really are:

"justice and beauty and temperance and all the choir of virtues" (53), but instead of

perceiving them through the earthly lenses, they are able to see them "in their utter purity

and reality, as Ideas unsheathed of matter" (53). Again in the *Symposium*, Plato explains

the seek for and ideal beauty following a myth of the recollection of a former life. Using the resource of a woman seer, he explains the search for love and the beauty of bodies. "The soul is led on step by step up the celestial ladder until she is able to contemplate true beauty, the divine Idea pure and clear and unalloyed, as it lies before the eye of the deity" (54). Through the *Phaedo,* Plato exalts the encounter with death as a triumph of the philosopher, since only the philosophers would be able to find true and pure wisdom (54). More also signals that in *The Republic*, Plato develops his philosophy of ideas (59–60). The culmination of this thought would be the vision of the philosopher as a king, as the only individual adequate for the responsibilities derived by power due to his appreciation for knowledge and wisdom (60).

Therefore, one of Plato's most significant contributions to philosophy is his discussion on the forms or ideas. Those would be universal models, abstract like the ideas of justice and the good; and concrete like the idea of an object like a table or a chair. Mason argues that for Plato, forms "are grasped by reason, not by perception; they are eternal and unchanging; and they do not depend for their existence on particular instances of goodness, beauty, humanity or whatever it might be. They may also be thought of as patterns, of which the things we perceive in the world are imitations" (3). In explaining the philosophy of ideas by Plato, More says that "ideas are formed in the mind" (62). Although not formally, Plato discriminates between two types of ideas, the ones that may be observed and perceived by the senses, and the "ethical and aesthetical Ideas which belong to what we know by intuition" (62). When Plato speaks about the idea of a man, he is not referring to a specific person but to a generic man. Likewise, abstract ideas such as beauty and justice belong to the realms of ethics and the aesthetics. Interestingly, More

also stresses that the ideas derived from observation have no opposites. And poses the example that the idea of the generic man is not in opposition to the idea of the generic horse. However, ethical and aesthetic ideas possess opposites such as goodness and badness, and beauty and ugliness (63).

Plato once again uses the resource of myth to explain the nature of ideas and other thoughts. In the seventh book of *The Republic*, he elaborates on the differences between the physical world and the world of the ideas through the myth of the cave. Plato tells the fictional story of some men that have lived all their lives chained in a cave and back to the entrance. They have never seen the light or the external world and are only able to see the shades of the things projected on the wall in front of them. They listen to the voices of the pedestrians that walk outside the cave and think that their voices come from the shades. But one day, one of the men gets rid of the chains and escapes to the exterior world. First blinded by the light, he is not able to distinguish things around him. Slowly, he adapts to the new situation and starts to see the shades, then, the images of things reflected on the water and finally, the things as they are. All is new for him, and he finally is able to contemplate the sun. Amazed, he thinks in coming back and explaining the true nature of things to his companions at the cave. However, he realizes that they may not believe him, would mock him and even would kill him (Plato *The Republic* 360–362). Then, the man who has seen the truth symbolized by the world of ideas situated outside the cave would be the philosopher. His comrades inside the cavern may prefer to live in the shadowy reality of their conjectures, thus rejecting the use of reason.

Plato describes his idea of the Good in the end of the sixth book of *The Republic*. More highlights that is not clearly defined since the philosopher stresses that the Good

would not be attaining pleasure, as many would believe. Instead, Plato would appeal to "something deeper than the passing desires… something which in his heart of hearts a man knows that he wants, which ever retreats before him on the pathway of justice and beauty, and of which he gets a far-off glimpse in moments of satisfied conscience" (66). More finds then that Plato's doctrine of ideas is best portrayed in the *Phaedo*, when Socrates, aware of his imminent death, "turns from materialistic studies to seek goodness as the true motive of human acts" (67).

More asserts that in the *Timaeus*, as a continuation of *The Republic*, Plato also introduces the myth of creation. According to this myth, God created the world from a matter that was in "turbulent motion without sense of measure, and out of this disorder moulded it into an ordered likeness of the everlasting harmonies, thinking that order is altogether better than disorder" (70). This introduction of God as a creator behind the ideas does not substantially modify Plato's emphases on the work of the philosopher but adds the element of an eternal designer as "an agent of good in the world" (70).

2.4.1.1 Plato's Idealism and Western Philosophy

Rockmore states that Platonic idealism nurtures much of the Western philosophy. Thus, doctrines related to idealism originated from the theory of ideas derived from Plato and which will be named as idealism by Leibniz (24): "The theory of ideas attributed to Plato, which illustrates a form of metaphysical realism, is regarded as a way to reliably claim to know the mind-independent real lying beyond appearance as it is" (26). Rockmore points out that this theory may have not been exclusively from Plato, who may have acquired it from Parmenides' thoughts on truth and knowledge. He also explains that for the Greek, the word "idea" or "form" meant "look of a thing," which was

something different from the reality of things. Plato's theory of ideas may rest upon two basic assumptions:

> First, the epistemological conviction that we know and only can know a particular because of a universal, or what is now also called universal predication; and, second, the related ontological belief that there are particulars only because of the causal relation to a universal, as in the well-known example of a carpenter with an idea of a bed in book 10 of the Republic. (Rockmore 27)

Since Plato did not fully develop this theory, some scholars see a difference between ideas "as universals… and ideas as perfect examples (or paradigms)" (27). Plato explores different versions of these views in the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium, The Republic, Thaemus* and *Parmenides*. The idea of immortality of the soul, for example, is depicted in the *Phaedo* by stating that "a concept (or idea) is said to be immutable, timeless, unitary (or one over many), and knowable in virtue of its status as a mind-independent thing" (25).

Regarding mind-independent reality, Rockmore affirms that for Plato, "we cannot correctly represent what is; rather… we can only know, if indeed we can know at all, through direct, immediate grasp of the real by means of cognitive intuition" (30). For Rockmore, "Platonic idealism offers a very simple analysis of knowledge in terms of the cognitive relation of the subject to a mind-independent cognitive object" (30). Rockmore also affirms that for scholars that follow Platonism, ideas are both independent and eternal objects. This thought, he claims, has been determinant for thinkers of late antiquity and medieval thinkers, mentioning Plotinus, Augustine and Aquinas. Even a later thinker, such as Montaigne, depicted "idea" as "a mental representation" (31).

2.4.2 George Berkeley

George Berkeley, an Irish philosopher and clergyman, was born in 1685. After studying at the Trinity College in Dublin, he traveled to America with the purpose of establishing a missionary school in Barbados. Since he could not gather the funds for this enterprise, he returned to England where he dedicated his life to both his religious vocation and his interest in philosophy (Evans 324). His main works include: *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*; *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*; *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*; and *Alciphron*. Inspired by his Christian faith and driven by idealism, he negated matter. Berkeley studied Locke's theories on empiricism, but developed his own philosophy. His idealism relies on perception. "Nothing (except minds and spirits) exists except insofar as it is thought or conceived or felt by a mind" (325).

In his work, Berkeley developed different arguments against the existence of matter. His nominalism manifest in his theories on abstract ideas. For him, they are "just names for groups of particulars that resemble each other enough that we find it useful to group them together" (Evans 326). For him, "the idea of matter is an "abstract idea par excellence". If we have no abstract ideas, we have no idea of matter and no idea what matter is" (326). Likewise, he argues that we know the world around us "by sense or by reason" (328). However, "even our knowledge that we gain by reason or inference must be rooted in experience" (328). Evans offers the example of our knowledge that smoke derives from fire, thus, we can guess the existence of fire when we see smoke. Nevertheless, "in the case of unperceived matter… we have no experience to draw on" (328). Most of Berkeley's arguments are rooted on his belief in God as a regulator of the universe: "since matter does not exist, the stability, order, and regularity we discover in

the natural world are all due to God's activity" (330). When explicating the differences between reality and imagination for Berkeley, Evans suggests that the notion of experience is relevant. "What we dream or imagine are ideas, and so are the "real objects" we deal with in everyday life. The difference is that what we call reality feels different, and also has a kind of regular structure and order which an imaginary world lacks" (331).

On the topic of causation, Evans highlights once more that "the true cause for every event is God" (332). The role of humans would be "to be rational and responsible agents… able to anticipate the consequences of our actions. That requires an orderly system of nature, and God is responsible for that system by giving us regular patterns and structures in the ideas we receive" (333).

2.4.2.1 About the Essay on a New Theory of Vision

Consiglio explains that in this essay, Berkeley proposes a research on spatial perception, focusing on a critic on the optic theories that were widely accepted in his time. The main question of this essay, he says, is that we perceive the distance between an object and us in relation to the amplitude of the angle that forms its ends with our eye. When trying to evaluate if the object is close or distant what we need to examine is not the amplitude of the angle but other more concrete elements like the clarity or the confusion of the representation that we have about that object. What is important to Berkeley, according to Consiglio, is that the ideas of confusion and clarity are not related to the idea of distance (283). The tie between our visible and tangible ideas resides only on experience. The ideas, for Berkeley, would be an expression of any immediate object of the senses (283). Berkeley stresses the secondary of the visible ideas in relation to the

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tangible ones in order to express knowledge about the concrete world (284). Consiglio affirms that Berkeley sees the ideas about the different senses as constructions of the mind, except those that come from the sense of touch (285). Berkeley also rejects the general idea of a triangle since a triangle, as any other form, cannot be an object of a geometrical study but at the level of a concrete materialization. Here Consiglio stresses the gap between Berkeley and Locke since the latter spoke about a general idea of a triangle, regardless of its type (286).

For Consiglio, in this essay, Berkeley attempts to explain the relation between the world as the object of our experiences, and the ideas that we get from it. Berkeley would affirm that the visual ideas as well as other ideas that come from hearing, smelling and taste do not have the same consistency than those that come from touch. Visual ideas about an object do not have an objective correspondence with reality. They are an internal content for the person (286). When speaking about colors, Berkeley proposes that they cannot be isolated from the images of the objects of vision. They are a mental support for the reality, without having a true existence in the external world. On the contrary, the tangible ideas about the objects of the world are the ones present in the world itself. The latter are not related to the ideas about vision (286). Consiglio states that Berkeley starts to eliminate the material object as independent of the mind. The external world is revealed only through the tangible contents of perception. An element like a visible distance, he explains, as a mere object of the mind, only suggests a real distance whose external existence would be confirmed by the sense of touch (286–287).

2.4.2.2 On Principles of Human Knowledge

Consiglio points out that in this book, Berkeley refines and advances in his argumentations on the nature of ideas. Again he refutes the notion of abstract ideas, arguing that it is impossible to abstract an idea completely without forming first an image in the mind. For Berkeley, ideas are the objects of human knowledge. Likewise, they are the only object of the senses either as the result of direct perception, or as the consequence of the remembrance of past ideas (288). When explaining how ideas transform into the objects that we perceive, Consiglio highlights that for Berkeley different ideas are always together. Since we see them as close, it is easy to interpret them as parts of a single object. He offers the example by Berkeley of the ideas of a certain color, taste and smell that we identify as a single object, an apple. Consiglio suggests that this interpretation is similar to the contemporary idea of the principle of proximity of Gestalt. According to it, objects that are close to each other are perceived by the observer as a single object (288). In this book, according to Consiglio, the existence of an idea resides in being perceived. And the active being that perceives it is what we call the soul, the self, or the mind. Ideas, then, only exist in the mind of the subject that perceives them (289).

Consiglio suggests that Berkeley elaborates on the origin of the ideas by suggesting that they are caused by the spirit itself, since there is nothing material, neither a substance beyond the minds that perceive ideas, including the mind of God. Besides, there is a difference between the ideas that come from the senses and those that come from memory since the former are not related to our will and may appear suddenly. Consiglio stresses that even though for Berkeley ideas exist depending upon our

perception; when I do not perceive some things, they already exist since they are

perceived by other minds and by God, acquiring some independence (290–291).

2.4.2.3 About Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous

In the dialogues that form this book, two friends argue about their questions about

the nature of knowledge and reality as part of Lockean thought. Hylas defends the widely

accepted ideas of Locke, and Philonous presents the new and not yet recognized thoughts

of Berkeley (Consiglio 291). Philonous proposes the negation of the material substance

while Hylas continues thinking that reality is formed by a series of objects from which

we perceive their sensible qualities. Philonous refutes all the ideas proposed by Hylas,

and also the abstract ideas whose existence was acknowledged by Locke (292). Hylas

defends the thesis that ideas are nothing more than tracks or stamps that the things

imprint in our minds when they are perceived. Philonous refutes this thought and affirms

that in the common perception of reality, the objects of knowledge are those things that

we perceive through the senses, in other words, the ideas. Again Berkeley defends the

thought of God as the cause of the ideas since he is an active force while matter would be

of a passive nature (293–294). Thus, in their dialogue, Philonous says that it is difficult

for him to grasp how the ideas of humans, "which are things altogether passive and inert,

can be the essence, or any part (or like any part) of the essence or substance of God, who

is an impassive, indivisible, purely active being" (Berkeley 99).

2.4.2.4 Some Implications of Berkeley's Thought

Consiglio affirms that for many thinkers, the core of the work of Berkeley focuses

on his refutation of the abstraction of ideas. However, he cites Margaret Atherton, who

affirms that this is a tangential subject. What is more important to Berkeley would be to

defend his immaterialism and idealism by adopting an anti-abstractionism stance. He strongly rejects the abstraction of individual qualities and the differences between individual and secondary qualities (294–295).

Rockmore believes that Berkeley has not been sufficiently read nor studied and thus, he continues to be misunderstood and ignored by contemporary philosophers (41–42). Rockmore affirms that although he is primarily perceived as a representative of idealism, Berkeley saw himself as a defender of immaterialism (42). He favored religion as opposed to philosophy as a way to "counter the effects of modern science through a conception closer to common sense" (43). Rather than denying general ideas, Berkeley highlights the particularity of things, also proposing that "whatever exists can be sensed or imagined" (43). In this sense, he opposes "Locke's conception of a general triangle as well as, and well before Kant, Newton's conceptions of absolute space, time, and motion" (43). Berkeley stressed the role of perception in the formation of ideas, which "cannot exist outside the mind" (46). Rockmore claims that Berkeley does not adhere to the Platonic thought. The Platonic thought described by Rockmore is a reference to how Plato, as he portrayed in his myths, believed that only superior souls would be able to acquire true knowledge. While for Plato knowledge would be then attainable only for a few, "the new way of ideas, which distinguishes between the idea and its referent in a perceptual theory of knowledge, extends this privilege to everyone" (47). For Rockmore, Berkeley somehow got ahead of the German idealism that proposed the "view that knowledge is always knowledge of what is given in and limited to experience" (47).

2.4.3. David Hume

A prominent member of the Scottish Enlightenment, David Hume was born in Scotland in 1711. After studying probably at the College of Edinburgh, he dedicated his life to philosophy. He lived in France for three years, during which he completed a first draft of his most famous book, A *Treatise of Human Nature*. While living in London, in 1739, he published the first two volumes of this work. The last volume would be published the next year (Norton 2009 1–3). Although the *Treatise* is his most ambitious book, he also published other texts like his essays on *Moral, Political, and Literary and Political Discourse* (between 1741-1752); *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748); *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751*); Of the Passions* and *The Natural History of Religion* (1757); and *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1778). As Norton states, Hume's epistemology encompasses philosophical concerns and a preoccupation for an understanding of knowledge. Hume "explained how it is that we form such important conceptions such as space and time, cause and effect, external objects, and personal identity" (1). He also explored issues on the human nature associated to psychology and the roots of morality.

Norton highlights that for Hume "moral philosophy can collect its experimental data from a careful examination of human life, and having done so, can hope to construct a useful science of human nature" (7). Hume was also aware of the restrictions of experience. However, he attempted to pursue an understanding of human nature through "experience as far as it will take us" (7). Like previous philosophers, he affirms that "all sensory experience is indirect" (7); thus, we only perceive ideas and "our direct experience is limited to mental phenomena" (8). Contrary to Locke, who thought that

there were not "innate ideas" (8), Hume claimed that Locke did not differentiate "between two kinds of perceptions, impressions (especially impressions of sensations) and the ideas that derive from them" (8). Hume admits the possibility of the absence of innate ideas but "there are no innate impressions" (8). For him, human feelings are innate as part of human nature. Although Hume's thought has been known as empiricist and, ultimately, skeptical, Norton prefers to see it as "*postskeptical*" (9). He assumes that Hume acknowledged that other scholars such as "Nicolas Malebranche, Pierre Bayle, John Locke, and George Berkeley, had already taken traditional metaphysics and epistemology to its skeptical conclusions" (9). Then, Hume thought that the new mission of philosophy "was to show how we manage to get on with our lives, particularly our intellectual lives, without the knowledge of ultimate causes and principles sought by his predecessors" (9). Likewise, he wanted "to provide moral philosophy with a new foundation, the science of human nature, on which all the other sciences will be founded" (9).

Hume was not driven to modify human nature. If there was to be a change, that needed to be oriented to restrain dogmatic thought. His epistemology "attempts to show us how to moderate our beliefs and attitudes" (Norton 35). In the end, according to Norton, "Hume did not suppose that he would effect changes in human nature itself, but he did hope that he could moderate individual belief and opinion, and, as result, moderate the opinions, institutions, and behavior of the public at large" (35).

2.4.3.1 Hume's Vision of Time and Space

David Hume was concerned with the topics of time, space and vacuum: "He argues that space and time are not infinitely divisible, that their smallest parts must be

occupied, and that as a consequence there is no vacuum or interval of time without

change" (Baxter 105). These theories and their conclusions have elicited disapproval

from many analysts (Baxter 105; Hausman 36). However, as Baxter points out, a

reinterpretation of Hume's thought seems pertinent to increase understanding of his

contributions to the discussion of the subject of time (105).

"Ideas for Hume are like images," notes Baxter (106). Thus, what Hume proposes

is that material things may be constituted of many parts. However, ideas cannot be

divisible. The reason would be that it is impossible for the human mind to conceive "an

infinite number of ideas" (106). When addressing the topic of space, Hume also

challenges traditional assumptions about the exactness of science that were prevalent in

his time. For him, "space has indivisible parts, that is, parts without parts" (121) and

proposes a "general argument against any supposed geometric proof of the infinite

divisibility of space" (121). Hume does not believe in the exactitude of geometry,

claiming that "the ultimate standard of equality for geometric figures, or straightness for

lines, and of flatness for planes is merely appearance to the senses or the imagination"

(122). And appearances might take us to erroneous conclusions. In fact, he argues that

"first appearances can sometimes be misleading. We have learned to correct them by

determining whether the figures continue to appear equal even after they have been

juxtaposed or compared in size to some movable third figure (the "common measure")"

(122). On the topic of time, Baxter highlights how Hume defines it as "a particular

succession of objects, insofar as it resembles other successions of objects. Thus, the idea

of time is the idea of successiveness, or better, of a succession in general" (135). For

Baxter, Hume's idea of time is inextricably united to the thought of change. He cites

Hume, affirming that "time is nothing but the manner, in which some real objects exist" (Hume quoted by Baxter T 1.2.5.28 142). Thus, the duration of objects somehow determines the passing of time. "He concludes that we cannot conceive of a 'steadfast and unchangeable' object enduring through time. We only imagine that we can conceive it" (142). Likewise, it is difficult for us to think of a vacuum or emptiness, since we think of time and space by means of abstract ideas. But, according to Hume, we can still "conceive of both a vacuum and a period of time without change" (136). Thus, change is again a determinant component of the idea of time.

When discussing Hume on time and causation, Lennon differentiates three arguments developed by the Scottish philosopher: the Succession, the Explosion, and the Homogeneity Arguments. The first one assumes that time is formed by a series of successive moments and each of them cannot "ever be co-existent" (277). Then, for Hume those instants are not divisible, since if they were, "there would be an infinite number of simultaneous moments" (277). Lennon affirms that what Hume proposes is that "the infinite divisibility of time entails that no point in time either precedes or is preceded by any other so that all points, of which there is an infinite number given infinite divisibility, are simultaneous" (277). This stance presupposes that "no point either immediately precedes or is immediately preceded by any other" (277). Order would be then primordial for this successive notion of time. This is a condition of cause and effect. A given situation is preceded by another. However, in the Explosive Argument outlined by Lennon, Hume explores the opposite possibility. The prospect that a cause and its effect occurs at the same time. This "totum simul view… excludes all succession… the upshot of this would be the annihilation of time" (278). Hume, cited by

Lennon, affirms: "For if one cause were contemporary with its effect, and this effect with its effect, and so on, 'tis plain there would be no such thing as succession, and all object must be co-existent" (278). The third proposal, the Homogeneity Argument, as called by Lennon, appears as a response to Hobbes on the theme of cause and effect. Following Kemp's interpretation, Lennon affirms, "that a thing should begin to exist without a cause of when and where it exists is no more problematic than that it should begin to exist without a cause. With this emphasis, the argument allows moments of time as causes, but not necessarily causes" (282–283). Hume's thought permits an interpretation of time "without qualitative change" (283). This means that continuous moments may be similar in a qualitative sense but differ numerically. Lennon concludes that there is not a possibility that we could affirm with certainty if "what we were perceiving was the same object or a series of numerically distinct but qualitatively identical objects" (283).

2.4.4 Arthur Schopenhauer

Arthur Schopenhauer was born in Danzig in 1788 and died in Frankfurt in 1860. He was influenced by Plato, Kant, the Post-Kantian idealists, whom he opposed, and Indian and Buddhist thoughts (Marias 328). In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer depicts the core of his philosophy. For him, the world would be a phenomenon, a representation, he does not distinguish phenomenon from appearance, but unifies them; the world of our representation is made of appearance or deceit. The forms of this world, which make it a world of objects, are space, time, and causality. And they order and elaborate the sensations. However, there is a moment in the world that we don't apprehend as a pure phenomenon but in a deeper and more immediate way: the self. The self is perceptible, on the one hand, as a body; but it is also something without space and

beyond time. The self is free. This is what we call will. Our will, in a deeper stratum, is a will to life. Everything in the world manifests itself as eagerness or will to be; the same in what is inorganic than in the organic or in the sphere of consciousness. Reality is, then, will. But as wanting implies dissatisfaction, the will is in constant pain. Pleasure is transitory, and consists of a cessation of pain; but life at its very bottom is pain (329).

Adamson argues that Schopenhauer's statement that the world is representation responds to the elucidation of "the Phenomenal" (498). The philosopher proposes two ways to approach reality. At the cognitive level it is impossible to know what is true, "things-in-themselves are not to be known on any terms by any intelligence. But in inner experience, in the consciousness of internal states, we do come across something that is more than phenomenal; this is the Will… the body… is the objectification of the will" (498–499). Furthermore, "its manifestations are phenomena" (499). When elaborating on the metaphysical quest of Schopenhauer, Adamson suggests that this preponderance of the will makes Schopenhauer think that "true reality belongs only to the universal, to the aimless Will, incessantly striving to realise itself. Our present existence is but an episode in this long life, a dream from which death is the awakening" (504). The philosophy of Schopenhauer has been perceived as essentially pessimistic. Adamson confirms this assumption: "not only is this life a mere episode in the blissful repose of the universal will; it is a uselessly interrupting episode. Man's greatest misfortune is to have been born" (504). This dark view on life is ingrained on the idea that evil is strong and "incurable" (505). For Schopenhauer, the enactment of the will in the world is the cause of all suffering. "As the will is eternal, so suffering is eternal. No satisfaction of desire is

ever permanent; it only arises new desires… Freedom is only for the thing-in-itself; for man it is a mere delusion" (Adamson 505).

Schopenhauer's ethics emerges from this idea. Moral feeling for him is based on compassion and the idea of relieving the pain of others. Knowledge and art, especially music; tend to do this, but they are temporary remedies. The only definitive salvation is the overcoming of the will to life. If the will is annulled, we can enter nirvana; and this, that seems simple annihilation, is actually the greatest good, the true salvation, the only thing that puts an end to the pain and discontent that characterize human beings (Marias 329). Salvation would be in the realization that "our true self is not in our own person but equally in others, then the affirmation of the will to live takes the form of sympathy, fellow-feeling; whence flow love and all ethical action" (Adamson 505). Schopenhauer signals that men can only achieve redemption by suppressing desires in a life characterized by austere practices. For Adamson, the core of this pessimistic philosophy relies on "three fundamental propositions –that reality is to be found only in the universal; that pain is the necessary accompaniment of will, pleasure being mere negation; and that intellect is completely subordinate to will" (505). The ethics of Schopenhauer has a deterministic character, in the sense that man, for him, is always essentially good or bad (Marias 329).

2.4.4.1 Idealism in Schopenhauer

Some scholars (McDermid; Snow and Snow) are preoccupied with deciphering if Schopenhauer might be considered a true idealist. At the beginning of *The World as Will and Representation,* Schopenhauer announces his ties to idealism by stating the iconic sentence: "The world is my representation" (3). He continues explicating that this

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assertion is valid for all creatures although only a man has the capacity of understanding, aided by philosophy, the reach of this statement. "It then becomes clear and certain to him that he does not know a sun and an earth, but only an eye that sees a sun, a hand that feels an earth; that the world around him is there only as representation, in other words, only in reference to another thing, namely that which represents, and this is himself" (3). How human beings conceive the world through perception is highlighted here. McDermid suggests that the idealist thought in Schopenhauer might be understood on some assumptions: that "our knowledge of the world around us is knowledge of appearances… external things are representations, and that representations presuppose a subject" (58–59). He also affirms that Schopenhauer admits "some mind-independent reality. This is the thing in itself, known not by means of our perceptual representations, but only (and imperfectly) in self-consciousness as will" (59). When interpreting the philosopher's sentence on the world as representation, Snow and Snow highlight a subtle contradiction in Schopenhauer. They state, "the implicit suggestion is that there is a world that can be viewed, as it were, in two ways: either as will, or as a representation; viewed from the latter perspective, idealism is true" (1991 633).

Most scholars admit a strong influence of Kant's idealism in Schopenhauer's thought (Adamson 493; McDermid 75). Adamson points out that Schopenhauer himself "claims to be the only post-Kantian writer who has truly apprehended and successfully carried forward the great thought of his predecessor" (493) He also stresses that Schopenhauer's thought begins from the Kantian concept of the thing-in-itself. "Inner and Outer experience, which is the abstract expression for the cognized system of things, may be resolved logically into Subjects knowing and Phenomena known; but beyond

what is experienced there is a realm of real objects, among which the Ego has its place"
(494–495). Likewise, McDermid highlights that Schopenhauer's idealism is closely
situated under Kant's work rather than under Berkeley's. He asserts, "it is not surprising
to find Schopenhauer arguing for idealism in a broadly Kantian fashion, contending that
we cannot adequately explain the uncanny fit or correspondence between our minds and
the world unless the latter is formally conditioned or structured by the former" (75).

Snow and Snow claim that although Schopenhauer saw himself as an idealist,
there are evidences that suggest a contradiction between his view on the world as
representation, which would situate him close to idealism, and his emphases on what they
call "an ultimately nonrational essence, the will" (654). Thus, they find him "more a
thinker of his time than either he or many of his commentators have appreciated" (654).
McDermid responds to Snow and Snow arguing that the will, as conceived by
Schopenhauer is not necessarily irrational. He states, "once we realize that the sense in
which idealism makes the world as representation rational – in virtue of its conformity to
the intellect's forms of space, time and causality – is not the sense in which the
pessimist's world, as the objectification of the insatiable and ceaselessly striving will,
fails to be rational (in virtue of its manifest purposelessness)" (58). He also highlights the
influence of Schopenhauer to the philosophical current of idealism by his emphases on
the idea that "our knowledge of the world is contributed by the knowing subject – that
have dominated the philosophical agenda from the time of Descartes to the present" (83).
Besides, McDermid acknowledges Schopenhauer's effort on "back up his views and
integrate them in the way serious philosophers – as opposed to the eloquent sages, free

spirits and aphorists among whom Schopenhauer is sometimes numbered (by detractors and admires alike) – are expected to do" (83).

When discussing idealism, Densley acknowledges that there are diverse understandings on this issue (133). He argues that "it is not the division of subject and object that is most fundamental in Schopenhauer's reasoning, but the basis on which he puts this suggestion forward: the implied connection between the possible and the conceivable… There is nothing that is inconceivable. It is this assumption that seems to be the fundamental view of idealism" (133).

2.5 A New Refutation of Time

"A New Refutation of Time" is the essay that probably situates Jorge Luis Borges closer to the viewpoint of a philosopher since he examines there the problem of time as a metaphysical enigma beyond the fictional stories that characterize his literary universe. Most of the ideas that he outlines on the essay come from the thinkers that inspired his work. Griffin points out that "it was principally Berkeley, Hume, and Schopenhauer whom Borges referred to when discussing the idealism that was so important for his imaginative writing, and they stimulated his interest in three questions: substance, identity (or self), and time" (6). Romero argues that since Berkeley refuted the matter, Borges would feel that he could refute time. In fact, all the plot of "A New Refutation of Time" revolves around the idea of elaborating the refutation of time that Berkeley never wrote" (Romero). This essay might be considered a bold move for an intellectual mainly known by his fictional work. In the preliminary note Borges recognizes the audacity of his task when he describes the essay as "The feeble artifice of an Argentine adrift on a sea of metaphysics" (*Selected* 317).

I argue that "A New Refutation of Time" represents Borges' rhetorical attempt to utilize all his literary resources—non-fiction, narrative, and even poetry—as a combination of genres in order to explore a solution to the problem of time following the basic tenets of idealism. This appealing but unsuccessful attempt would end stressing the significance of literature as a communicative act and as a practical vehicle for metaphysical inquiries.

2.5.1 The First Article

The essay comprehends two articles published in 1944 and 1946, respectively. Borges (1999) warns his readers that even the title implies a sort of verbal game. He plays with the irony of using the word "new" to his refutation of time, posing that to say that it is "new (or old, for that matter) is to recognize a temporal predicate that restores the very notion the subject intends to destroy" (*Selected* 318). As Griffin points out, "he teasingly states from the outset that, as this is his second version of the essay in which he questions time, it therefore presupposes it, for without time there could not be an earlier or a later version" (6). In the introduction to the essay, Borges also displays a keen awareness of the importance of language. Borges affirms, "Language is so saturated and animated by time that quite possibly, not a single line in all these pages fails to require or invoke it" (318). Likewise, he informs the readers that his thesis on the refutation of time is "as old as Zeno's arrow or the chariot of the Greek king in the Milinda Pañha" (317), alluding to ancient references from the Greek tradition and from Buddhism. The new element that he adds would be his discussion of the ideas of Berkeley and Hume, which he thinks oppose his own thesis on time. However, he admits that in the end, his view on time would be derived from their work.

At the beginning of the first article, Borges states that he does not believe his own refutation of time. However, he acknowledges that this idea keeps haunting him with the strength of "a truism" (318) and always reappear in his poems, short stories and metaphysical essays. He then affirms that his refutation of time is based on Berkeley's idealism and the principle of indiscernibles by Leibniz. Curiously, he never mentions Leibniz again in the essay and focuses most of the text on the work of George Berkeley. Borges highlights that in *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley stresses the role of the mind in the human perceptions of things. Out of the mind, according to Berkeley's thought, it would not be possible even to conceive ideas. Furthermore, Borges points out that things do not exist when we do not think of them, unless that they exist, as Berkeley affirms, in "the mind of some Eternal Spirit" (319). Having described the fundaments of Berkeley's idealism, Borges draws from Schopenhauer's dualism, explaining that for the philosopher, the universe would be formed by a world inside the mind of a person, and another world, "outside of the head" (320). Deepening in this thought, Borges contrasts the definitions of time for both Berkeley and Hume. While for the Irish philosopher, time would be a succession of ideas in the mind of men, for Hume, it would be "a succession of indivisible moments" (320). Borges defines the view on time of the idealists as an "unstable world of the mind" (321). He further describes this world as

> a world of evanescent impressions; a world without matter or spirit, neither
>
> objective nor subjective; a world without the ideal architecture of space; a world
>
> made of time, of the absolute uniform time of the Principia; an inexhaustible
>
> labyrinth, a chaos, a dream –the almost complete disintegration that David Hume
>
> reached. (321)

For Hume, he says, "the mind is nothing but a series of perceptions" (321). What preoccupies Borges is that following the theories of the idealists, the notions of the spirit, the matter and the space are negated. Then, he assumes that he can also deny time. He observes, "Hume denied the existence of an absolute space, in which each thing has its place; I deny the existence of one single time, in which all events are linked. To deny coexistence is no less difficult than to deny succession" (322). Borges, then, denies succession and simultaneity. He explains that every moment is separated from others. For him, the notions of past, present and future are deceitful. "Each moment that we live exists, not the imaginary combination of those moments" (322). Then, he wonders, "If time is a mental process, how can it be shared by countless, or even two different men?" (322).

Addressing the problem of repetition, Borges suggests an example based on a personal experience. Whenever he walks certain streets of Buenos Aires, or elicits some recurrent thoughts and ideas, he is aware that those iterations form his whole life. There might be variations of all those moments, some physical, but he thinks that they are not unlimited. And he wonders, "Are not those identical moments the same moment? Is not one single repeated terminal point enough to disrupt and confound the series in time? Are the enthusiasts who devote themselves to a line of Shakespeare not literally Shakespeare?" (*Selected* 323). For Lesher, the former assumptions of Borges on time and repetition may indicate either of two conclusions. The first, that all the reiterations of experiences observed by Borges would make them difficult to differentiate between the first experience and its remembrance. The second, "that despite the fact that some experiences appear to follow upon one another in a forceful manner, it is impossible for

us to tell whether their ordering reflects objective reality or is merely our own creation" (A306).

Following this same idea on repetition and identity, Borges draws from the Sanhedrin of the Mishnah, citing this section of the Talmud that affirms that "in the eyes of God, he who kills a single man destroys the world" (323). Furthermore, he asserts, "tumultuous and universal catastrophes—fires, wars, epidemics—are but a single sorrow, multiplied in many illusory mirrors" (323). This thoughts seem to suggest an ethical position that he does not further develop but that is part of a definition of time as a portion of a totality that would bond all humanity around the idea of a single identity. Borges finishes this first part of his essay reflecting on the possibility that any matter is formed by parts of itself. He draws from Josiah Royce, one of the founders of American individualism, the idea that "time is made up of time" (324), implying the difficulties of defining it.

In the second part of his first article on the refutation of time, Borges also reflects on the limitations of language. Being successive, he affirms, language is limited when addressing the concept of eternity. He describes a personal episode that occurred to him in a certain night in the village of Barracas.   He wandered by himself one evening through the streets of the place. While he was walking without purpose, contemplating the unfamiliar poor houses and the whole scenery, he had a realization. He thought that what he was observing might be exactly the same landscape of thirty years earlier. And he did not think that he travelled in time, but that he was somehow at that particular moment grasping the meaning of eternity. "Time is a delusion… the impartiality and inseparability of one moment of time's apparent yesterday and another of time's apparent

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today are enough to make it disintegrate" (*Selected* 325). He also hypothesizes, "Life is too impoverished not to be also immortal" (326). And he ends this article by suggesting that time may be refuted "by the senses", but not by the mind (326).

2.5.2 The Second Article

The second article that forms "A New Refutation of Time" begins with a reflection that sees idealism "as ancient as a metaphysical angst" (326). Borges revisits his description of the thoughts of Berkeley, Hume and Schopenhauer on the problem of time. The novelty that he incorporates is his discussion on the dream of Chuang Tzu. The Chinese philosopher and poet describes a particular dream that elicits different interpretations on reality and illusion. In his dream, Chuang Tzu saw himself as a butterfly. Later, when he awoke, he was not sure if he was the man who dreamed of being a butterfly or a butterfly that dreamed it was a man. The poem ends in this way: "Chuang Tzu and butterfly: clearly there's a difference. This is called the transformation of things" (Hinton 31). Analyzing the significance of Chuang Tzu's dream, Borges writes,

> There is no other reality for idealism than mental processes; to add an objective butterfly to the butterfly one perceives therefore seems a vain duplication; to add a self to the mental processes seems, therefore, no less exorbitant. Idealism holds that there was a dreaming, a perceiving, but not a dreamer nor even a dream; it holds that to speak of objects and subjects is to fall into an impure mythology. (329–330)

It is not impossible then for Borges to argue that during the dream, Chuang Tzu is not himself. The consequence would be that the abolishment of the space and the self would be comparable to denying time. How can chronology be assigned to an occurrence since

it "is alien and exterior to the event"? (330). Borges even takes this idea further. He wonders what would happen if one or many of Chuang Tzu readers had exactly the same dream. "Are not those coinciding moments identical? Is not one single repeated term enough to disrupt and confound the history of the world, to reveal that there is no such history?" (330). Borges also reflects on the uncertainty involved in denying time. He recalls how the Greek philosopher *Sextus Empiricus* doubted the existence of past, future and present times. Borges draws from Schopenhauer's idea that affirm the prevalence of the present. Schopenhauer, quoted by Borges (331) affirms, "no man has ever lived in the past, and none will live in the future; the present alone is the form of all life, and is a possession that no misfortune can take away".

By the end of his essay, according to Nuño, Borges realizes that his attempt to refute time failed (255). As Lesher asserts, "Borges next quotes from Buddhists texts that reduce time to a series of present moments, just "as a carriage wheel touches the ground in one only place when it turns," but concludes by conceding that this refutation is unbelievable" (A307). He provides "a sad, elegiac, almost surprising end to such a metaphysical essay" (Nuño 254). Thus, the thinker steps back and invites the artist, the poet, to admit his failure. Borges writes,

> And yet, and yet… To deny temporal succession, to deny the self, to deny the
> astronomical universe, appear to be acts of desperation and are secret
> consolations. Our destiny… is not terrifying because it is unreal; it is terrifying
> because it is irreversible and iron-bound. Time is the substance of which I am
> made. Time is a river that sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger that

mangles me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire that consumes me, but I am the fire. The

world, unfortunately, is real; I, unfortunately, am Borges. (332)

Nuño points out that as part of the acceptance of his failure in denying time, Borges

finally surrenders to the thought opposite to idealism: a thought based on the prevalence

of the world and the subject (212). Only the idealist notions of time: the river, the tiger,

and the fire as identified with the self, are to survive as part of a chain of successive

perceptions. Another obsession also haunts him, the one about his own identity: to know

if Borges is really Borges (255).

Lesher proposes that one may feel prone to think that Borges would definitely

abandon any attempt to oppose the idea of time. However, many other elaborations on

"circular time" would emerge in his poetic work (A307). I also suggest that the problem

of time would recurrently appear in most of the short stories of Borges as well as in some

other short essays. Both, the thinker and the writer, would always be haunted by the

unresolved enigma of time, and through the use of the written language, Borges would

continue exploring its significance.

2.6 Idealism and Time in Borges' Fiction

As stated before, the strong influence of the tenets of idealism in the non-fictional

work of Jorge Luis Borges suggest that a metaphysical quest for answers to the problem

of time may not be resolved. However, in the realm of fiction, it may be possible to grasp

some of its meaning through puzzling plots and the interactions of different characters.

After all, idealism proclaims that anything would be possible through imagination. Then,

anything can be conceivable through the creative force of literature. The basics of

idealism as outlined throughout the work of the different thinkers that influenced Borges

appear and reappear in his fictional and non-fictional work. As part of his obsession with deciphering the problem of time, the Argentinian writer incorporates elements that challenge "the objective existence of things" (Griffin 7). But for Borges, objectivity and reality are not desired in literature. As Griffin proposes, for the writer, "if the world exists only in our minds, then mimetic realism is based upon a false realism… literature is intrinsically idealist… writing and reading fiction is philosophical idealism put into practice" (7).

Concurring with Griffin, I argue that the Borgesian fictional universe is the product of a certain perception of reality that transforms it. His fiction also directly alludes to the creative power of dreams and the strength and endurance of myths in the contemporary world. When highlighting the confluences of myth and speech, Roland Barthes states, "Mythical speech is made of a material which has already been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a signifying consciousness, that one can reason about them while discounting their substance" (*Mythologies* 110). Imagination, then, is nurtured by myth as part of speech and, thus, communication. And the world of appearances becomes real throughout the work of art, which in Borges' case is literature. In the following short stories, "The Circular Ruins" and "The House of Asterion," I will explore those confluences.

2.7 "The Circular Ruins"

I now present an outline of this short story where dreams and myths come together as a rhetorical exploration of the topic of creativity as linked to the dilemma of time. This tale begins with the iconic sentence: "Nadie lo vio desembarcar en la unánime

noche…"[1] (Borges *Ficciones* 61). A man that came through the river and from the South disembarks in a village and approaches a circular space crowned by the stone statue of a tiger or a horse. The omniscient narrator tells that the man came from a distant land where the zend language is not contaminated with Greek, and where a disease like leprosy is not frequent. The man sleeps at that abandoned temple and during the night, his scars are healed. He was looking for that specific temple, although he knows that there are others similar in other villages in the jungle. He knew that his imperative was to sleep and to dream. During the night, the local men, maybe scared by his presence, offered him fruits and water. The man, who the narrator insinuates might be a magician, kept sleeping since his purpose was to dream a man in every detail so that he could impose it onto reality. His first dreams were chaotic, but later turned into a dialectic nature. He dreamt of himself as being in the center of an amphitheater surrounded by many students. He could distinguish all his faces, even those of the ones who were at centuries of distance. The man lectured to them on different matters such as anatomy, cosmography, and witchcraft. They were very attentive, as if they understood the importance of an exam that would redeem one of them from his condition of being just a vain appearance. He looked attentively for the face of a student that could be more intelligent than the others, the one whose soul deserved to participate in the universe.

After some nights of dreams, the magician understood that he could not expect anything from the passive ones, but from the ones who were able to respond to his teachings with a reasonable contradiction. He eliminated for good the vast school and only left a single student. The young man was taciturn and sometimes rebellious, and his

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[1] "No one saw him disembark in the unanimous night" (My translation from Spanish).

features resembled his creator's. But one night the magician was unable to sleep. The intolerable lucidity of insomnia took over him. He wanted to explore the jungle to become tired and sleepy again, but failed. The result of his intermittent dreams was meager. He could not even create his illusory school again. He wept tears of rage. The man understood that attempting to model dreams was the most unattainable task in the world. He decided to change his methods. He rested and repaired his strength during a month, abandoning any idea of dreaming voluntarily. He purified himself in the waters of the river and invoked the planetary gods before sleeping. His efforts were rewarded when he dreamt of a beating heart.

The magician dreamt that heart as active and red, and visualized a shape of a human body without a face or a gender yet. He did not touch him in his dream until the 14th night, when he touched the pulmonary artery and later the whole heart. That examination proved successful and he continued dreaming other organs for his creature. Before a year, he had the skeleton and the eyelids. He dreamt the whole body of a young man who was sleeping. One afternoon, he almost destroyed his creation. He implored help from the statue of the temple. That evening, he dreamt with the statue. That god revealed to him that his earthly name was Fire, and that in that circular temple he was revered and offered sacrifices. He also told him that he would animate the dreamed young man, so that all the creatures, except the Fire itself and the dreamer, would believe him to be a real man. Once instructed in the rites, the magician must send him to another ruined temple in the North, so that the creature could glorify the god of Fire there.

The magician followed the instructions of the god of Fire and prepared his son for his imminent awakening. He corrected some of his features and trained him in the cult of

the god of Fire. He bitterly understood that his creation was ready to be born. He

eliminated his memories of his learnings in order for him never to know that he was only

a ghost and not a real man. The son was then sent to another temple in a far location

upstream. Then, the man felt empty after fulfilling his dream of having a son. He used to

imagine him praying at another circular ruins, just like him. After some years, certain

men talked to him about another man upstream who was able to walk through fire

without burning himself. He feared that his son would discover that he was not a real

man. He feared that he would suffer the humiliation of not being human but a projection

of a real man.

After many years, the temple was again burned by fire. The magician felt that the

time of his death had arrived. He walked towards the conflagration and with horror

verified that the fire did not consume his flesh. He realized that he was also an

appearance that another man was dreaming (*Ficciones* 61–69).

2.6.1 Idealism and Time in a Reading of "The Circular Ruins"

The creative power and strength of dreams and myths are united in this short story

that clearly depicts the idealist philosophies that nurtured Borges' fictions. And the

problem of time appears again suggesting the fallacy of immortality.

2.7.1.1 The Imprints of Idealism

According to Arango, Borges' preference for some authors of English literature

such as Coleridge, De Quincey, H.G. Wells and Chesterton influenced him to favor the

use of dreams in his own literary work. That type of literature has been always considered

valuable for discovering the human nature and its destiny. Besides, dreams are also used

to explain the past and the future of men (249). Borges, then, would be interested in

speculating about the relation of men with the world in order to be able to create another one. He was looking for transcendence of the essential through the oneiric (249). Furthermore, the oneiric also opens other possibilities. As Arango remarks, in "The Circular Ruins," the dream appears as the creative faculty of the magician but also is represented as his only fundamental possibility, as the purpose of his life (251). He highlights that this story might be interpreted as an allegory to the aesthetic creation. This would be a product of the platonic and cabbalistic doctrines. Dreaming is creating and the one who dreams is participating in the act of creation. The magician submits the creation to the single control of the mind throughout the dream. (251).

Different authors (Arango; Kazmierczak; Nuño) highlight how in this story, Borges brings the basics of idealism as deployed by thinkers like Plato, Berkeley, Hume and Schopenhauer. For Arango, the Berkeleyan existential thought unites with the gnostic cosmogony in the idea that the universe is ordered by a dark and mysterious presence that observes and govern all destinies, a type of divinity that oversees from the remote beginnings of time (250). Kazmierczak thinks as undeniable that from all the thinkers that influenced Borges' fictions, most of them are closer to the idealist thought than to a more objectivistic or realistic vision (148). He highlights especially the impact of George Berkeley and David Hume. Kazmierczak asserts that the theses of Hume, even though they may oppose some of Berkeley's, still are part of the same idealistic framework. He points out that Hume rejects the idea of God as an eternal and continuous observer who through his divine perception, objectifies and keeps the existence of the world. This is related to Hume's opposition to the objectivity of any subject of observation and any spiritual substance. According to Kazmierczak, Hume's position might be considered as

reductionist of the vision of his predecessor (149). For Kazmierczak, Hume goes against

the thoughts of Berkeley by rejecting the truthfulness of the perceived subject. Hume's

psychology would not have a soul. On the opposite, for Berkeley, the soul is the only real

existence in the universe. Kazmierczak suggests that for Borges those opposed ideas are

complementary and reinforce each other (150). Another difference that Kazmierczak

finds between Hume and Berkeley is about the concept of time. For Hume, it lacks

causality. And since it is not possible to verify causality in an empirical way, the only

perceptible would be succession. Hume would not necessarily doubt causality but the

possibility of knowing it through the senses (150). Kazmierczak affirms that once refuted

the possibility of sensorially perceiving causality, Hume introduces the concept of the

laws of association, according to which ideas unite and combine inside the mind. From

the three laws that govern the associations (similarity, space-temporal contiguity and

causality) Hume reserves for the sciences of facts exclusively the association by space-

temporal contiguity (150). Nuño finds in "The Circular Ruins" connections to Plato's

work via Berkeley and Schopenhauer (192). For Nuño, the sensitive world as a simple

representation of the will aids to preserve the reality and superiority of the intelligible

world. The first one, degraded and material, is only a copy and a byproduct of the human

mind (192–193). He argues that believing in an intelligible world of forms and archetypes

helps Borges to compensate the ontological emptiness of the Berkeleyan idealism. Nuño

associates the archetypical models to a stable world that provides ontological sense. On

the contrary, dreams would be deceitful and an unstable and evanescent substance (193).

2.7.1.2 Temporality and Authorship

Arango points out that even the title "The Circular Ruins" alludes to time, represented by a cyclical order that is continuous, repetitive and in which are gathered all the beings of the world. If the ruins on the one hand are associated with the idea of the flow of time and represent devastation and death, they are also a temple, which might be associated to the communication between the human and the supernatural (250). For Arango, there is a complex cyclic game in the short story that depicts how the existence of a dreamer makes possible an infinite series of dreamers. The human condition is interpreted as a useless pilgrimage, a search with neither beginning nor end. Life might be interpreted as a deceitful representation that men build; everything is a dream, just an illusion (251). Arango also points out the indefinite temporality deployed in this short story. He asserts that the world is represented as part of an indefinite time that favors dreaming (251). He affirms that if a dream is the manifestation of abstractions or fantastic representations of the real world, the magician in the story is doing exactly the opposite. He is making tangible the evasive matter of dreams. Borges applies the oneiric principle in an opposite way: he materializes the dream (252). He also underlines that the process of mental lucidity exercised by the magician would be closer to insomnia than to a dream. Thus, the dream becomes a creative wakefulness (252).

Some authors find that when analyzing the work of Jorge Luis Borges, there is a clear distinction between the position of some scholars that supports the idea of the presence of the author on his texts and those who favor the disappearance of the writer, substituted by a deconstructionist viewpoint (Soud 739–740). Supporting the thesis of the presence of the author, Soud analyzes "The Circular Ruins," proposing "that through the

use of the Golem... Borges explores means of sacralizing the text, of establishing authorial presence in his work" (740). Soud warns that in a short story like "The Circular Ruins," it would be easier to affirm the poststructuralist stance that would frame the magician of the tale as being part of a succession of dreams and, therefore, the subject of different interpretations (740–741). He states that instead of "reading Borges as an author deconstructing himself, denying himself presence in his own texts, I would suggest that reading Borges through kabbalism—the golem legend in particular—renders his approach far more problematic than the poststructuralist account would have it" (741).

Soud's approach is metaphysical and highlights the sacred character of the tale by alluding directly to "the primal moment of divine creation" (741). He examines the similarities of the magician with the golem of the legend, and highlights how his creation of another human being that would resemble him might be interpreted "as a parable not only of the inspiring power of the logos, but also of the creative act of the artist (a mirror–image of Borges). This combination works to establish authorial presence and directly controverts a deconstructive reading of the story" (743). Soud stresses "the implication that texts can grant presence to other texts in a way that resembles intertextuality but that (and this is a crucial distinction) retains the possibility of authorial presence" (745). It is pertinent to point out that some scholars like Barthes and Foucault challenge the preponderance of the author, a matter that I would extensively discuss in chapter three: "Mirrors and the Horror of Repetition." However, some remarks of Barthes on the matter of the death of the author appear relevant here since they are related to time. In fact, Barthes highlights that a modern reading of texts would direct to the complete absence of the writer (*Death* 145). And he points out that "temporality is different" (145).

If we are to believe that there is an author, Barthes suggests, she is thought as part of her work which presupposes a stage before the conception of the text. However, "the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing… there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now" (145).

Based on the previous remarks, I suggest that the philosophy of Berkeley somehow anticipated a similar proposal. For Berkeley, matter does not exist and the material world is just a byproduct of human perceptions. Therefore, any text, any closed book does not become reality unless that there is a reader. Thus, stories need a reader to exercise in the present tense the act of reading and in this way, enliven the text.

In the prologue to "The Garden of the Forking Paths," the first part of *Ficciones*, Borges describes "The Circular Ruins" as a story where "everything is unreal" (*Ficciones* 11). He seems to emphasize this thought by the epigraph of the story, "And if he left off dreaming about you… *Through the Looking Glass, VI*" (61). Soud points out that this epigraph from Lewis Carroll's makes his famous story about Alice "a Borgesian book. It abounds in mirrors, doubles, geometrical structures, conundrums, and of course the subversion of philosophy by fiction and reality by dream" (747). But Soud also implies that Borges takes this epigraph beyond, to the realm of the metaphysics. When the magician thinks that he is a dream of another, there is a type of agnosticism that points to a "higher reality" (748). Soud explains that in the story there is a presence of the supernatural that would reveal authorial intent opposing deconstructionism (750). He concludes, "By invoking the myth of the golem, Borges attempted to re-establish presence in a literature of exhaustion, a literature bereft of spirit" (751). I concur with this

interpretation since in the short story, the son only appeared after the laborious work of the magician. However, he was just a product of his mind, an immortal being. Paradoxically, the magician realized his own immortality that reduces him to a nothingness, a mere creation of another.

In my view, in "The Circular Ruins," Borges dares to suggest a reverse of the function of human time in dreams. While dreaming should be for relaxation and rest, in the story it is a time of compelling activity. A time for work. But men, even the creatures product of dreams, cannot govern time, they cannot stop the cycles that suggest repetition and the infinite. Other conundrums emerge from this reading: Who is the original magician, the one who dreamed first with his creation? Is he God? Is there really an original creator? All those interrogations are not responded to in the story. They are just proposed for the readers to complete as part of a recurrent ontological quest that explores the unsolved problem of time.

I also suggest that in "The Circular Ruins," the power of the myth is reinforced by the rituals performed by the magician. His prayers, the location of the ruins in a natural and isolated setting, all those elements seem to facilitate the strenuous task of imposing a man to reality by using imagination. Reflecting on the nature of rituals, Taylor asserts that they help us "to reconnect to the whole… [they] not only serve to reconnect with the gods/spirits/cosmos, but also are the principal path by which this triple reality is conceived or understood, along with myth" (*Language* 343). And he highlights that in contemporary times, rituals are still needed and performed since they still help the different elements of society to reconnect (343). He explicates reconnection nowadays as our relation to the world, a relation that might be biological but transcends the biological:

"Perhaps certain relations to the cosmos—sun, fields, forest, mountains, wilderness, time—are essential not just biologically, but because outside of these we humans wither" (344).

Taylor sees our relation to nature, concretely to forests, as an association to the dawn of humanity. Likewise, he recognizes it as part of how we understand time. It is associated with our need to connect to our past: "Our relation to monuments of past civilization, or seeking them out, visiting them, perhaps manifests our need to be rooted in meaningful time" (344).

2.8 The House of Asterion

This brief story, narrated in first person, is about Asterion, a mythical creature that lives alone hidden in a labyrinth. Asterion speaks about himself, describing how he lives alone in a house with no adornments. He denies that he is a prisoner by arguing that the doors of his house are always open. He once dared to exit it but soon returned to the house since he was frightened by the colorless faces of the people. The commoners, as he called them, fled at his sight, and Asterion interpreted their flight as their recognition of his royal blood that would not permit him to mix with plebeians. He claims that he is not interested in books since his impatient spirit prevented him from learning how to read. However, he acknowledges that reading would have permitted him not to feel as lonely as he was.

Asterion explains that he spends his time running against the walls of his house or pretending to be sleeping. He also likes to simulate that he is visited by another Asterion, and he shows him the house, and they play together. His house is very big, like the world, or it is maybe the world, he says. But every corner of the house repeats itself: "Each part

of the house occurs many times; any particular place is another place. There is not one wellhead, one courtyard, one drinking trough, one manger; they are fourteen [an infinite number of] mangers, drinking troughs, courtyards, wellheads" (Borges "House" *Collected* 221).

Asterion is also visited every nine years by nine men who "come into the house so that I can free them from evil" (221). He runs to encounter them and they all fall in a short ceremony. He then explains that their bodies remain where they fell, allowing him to distinguish the different rooms in the house. One of the men once predicted that Asterion's redeemer would come soon. He is excited by this idea, and expects him as a savior that would take him to another place with "fewer galleries and fewer doors" (222).

In the last paragraph, the story changes its narrator. Now is Theseus the one who speaks to Ariadne explaining to her with surprise that the Minotaur barely defended himself.

2.8.1 The Myth of Immortality in a House of Desperation

I propose a reading of "The House of Asterion" as a short story that complements and consolidates "The Circular Ruins," appealing to the notions of the infinite and of immortality as part of the problem of time. I argue that in both "The Circular Ruins," and "The House of Asterion," Borges dismantles the myth of immortality as a condition longed for by humans. Immortality is part of the problem of time. If time is infinite, the idea of man as an immortal, infinite being only provokes anxiety and distress.

Interestingly, "The House of Asterion" is one of the shortest stories of Borges. Although it is included in the celebrated book "The Aleph," it was originally conceived and written in a single day. In an interview with Richard Burgin, Borges explained that as

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an editor of the magazine *Sur*, he needed to fill three empty pages of an issue and felt

obligated to write a story (Burgin *Conversations* 41). He worked on the tale the whole

day thinking that the key of the narrative was that the storyteller was the monster himself.

He explains, "And I… felt there might be something true in the idea of a monster wanting

to be killed… he knew all the time that there was something awful about him, so he must

have felt thankful to the hero who killed him" (41). However, the original myth does not

include the viewpoint of Asterion, who is only portrayed there as the vehicle for the

victorious deeds of a triumphant Theseus.

2.8.2 The Original Myth

As Leeming points out, the myth of Theseus and the minotaur tells the story of

how the hero faces adversity in the form of both the labyrinth and the monster. However,

he is not alone. Ariadne's aid is primordial to his success in that heroic "quest" (112). In

a labyrinth of Crete, Asterion, the son of Pasiphae and a white bull, the monster with the

body of a human and the head of a beast, waits for the sacrifice of young Athenians.

Following the instructions of the king Minos, the offended husband of Pasiphae,

Daedalus devise a maze where the monstrous son of the unfaithful Pasiphae is going to

spend his life (Buxton 196). Besides, seven male and seven female youths are to be sent

every nine years to feed the monster. Knowing of the sacrifice and moved by the sadness

of the parents of the youths, Theseus offered to be part of one lot with the intention of

killing the minotaur. When they arrived in Crete, Minos had a crush on one of the

sacrificial girls. Theseus challenged him telling him that as a son of Poseidon he needed

to protect the virtue of the girl. Minos asked Theseus to prove that he was the son of

Poseidon. He threw a ring to the sea asking Theseus to find it. Theseus fulfilled this first

challenge and returned the ring to Minos. After this first heroic deed, Ariadne, one of

Minos' daughters, fell in love with Theseus. She then gave him a magic ball of string that

she had received from Daedalus "and instructed him to follow it until he reached the

sleeping monster, whom he must seize by the hair and sacrifice to Poseidon. He could

then find his way back by rolling the thread into a ball again" (113). Theseus returns

triumphant from his encounter with Asterion. Ariadne abandons her father and flees with

the hero. But later, Theseus would betray Ariadne by leaving her on an island (114).

2.8.3 The Minotaur, the Labyrinth, and Theseus

The creative wit of Borges uses most of the elements of the ancient myth but

focuses his attention on the most neglected protagonist. In his short story, three central

elements converge to offer a new version that entices the readers by proposing a

metaphysical reflection on the finitude of time and the existential angst of

uncommunication. These are the minotaur, the labyrinth, and Theseus. However, the

main character is the minotaur. Asterion is the mythical figure endowed with power for

destruction and cruelty, a villain and anti-hero that is transformed in the short story into a

pathetic being. The labyrinth is a place of hiding and encountering, a symbol of the

infinite and even the world, as expressed by Asterion himself when he describes it: "The

house is as big as the world—or rather, it *is* the world" (Borges "House" 221). And

finally, Theseus, the mythical character that in the story is deprived of his heroic

attributes when the reader finds out that there was not a fight but a quiet surrender on the

part of the monster.

As Tilney proposes, "Borges turns the legend upside-down, redefining the

minotaur who is then reabsorbed into the mythical canon, thus confirming the labyrinth

as a place of transformation and rebirth" (53). Tilney also proposes that the minotaur does not seem to be conscious either of his own limitations or about his condition of being a prisoner locked in the maze that he calls his house (53). Quintana-Tejera goes further by asserting that the personality of the monster is defined by his arrogance, misanthropy, and madness (4). During his extensive monologue, Asterion boasts of his royal ascendancy that prevents him from befriending ordinary people. He is the son of a queen, who thinks of himself as "unique" (Borges "House" 220) and even despises learning how to read since he reflects that his soul "has been formed for greatness" (221). His mental illness may appear more evident when he recalls his solitary games that include running through the infinite corridors and even jumping from some elevated roofs until his body bleeds (221). His favorite pastime would be to imagine that there is another Asterion, his duplicate, to whom he shows proudly his house as children do with imaginary friends. However, he is not able to realize that he is a prisoner in the labyrinth, and the maze that he proudly calls his house isolates him from the external world. Is he guilty of some sin that he needs to purge in that solitude, as suggested by Borges in the interview with Burgin cited previously? He is, in fact, guilty of being alive. His very existence is a constant reminder of the shameful passion of his mother. But even in the midst of his madness, Asterion is trying to find meaning in his own dreadful existence. He fails in communicating with others in his short visit to the external world. He needs to imagine another Asterion, another being similar to him because maybe someone with his same features, his equal, would be the only possible interlocutor. He yearns for companionship and gets excited at the visit of the sacrificial youths. Tilney suggests, "In an impossibly lonely world almost absent of human contact it is no surprise that Asterion

actively searches for meaning in this macabre interaction with people" (53). Quintana-Tejera points to the labyrinth as a metaphor of the house that for Asterion is not only a familiar terrain but becomes part of him, causing him to believe that the exterior world does not exist. Thus, the world would be an intricate labyrinth where men get lost without really understanding it. Regarding Theseus, I propose that a first reading suggests that Borges stripped from him his heroic nature, signaling the passivity of Asterion in their encounter. However, a second interpretation may be that Theseus actually becomes a hero for Asterion by liberating him from his existential anxiety and isolation. Tilney highlights how the minotaur finds solace in waiting for his redeemer; "faith removes the pain of loneliness" (53). In the labyrinth that may represent the universe, like Asterion, men engaged in existential emptiness and isolation find that a finite time represented by mortality would be the final redemption. For Tilney, Theseus would not be the only redeemer. He affirms, "It is the reader who, through the process of reading, performs the magical rite of transforming a dreadful beast into a symbol of the human condition" (55). Immortality and its opposite are directly linked to the problem of time, and constitute a recurring theme in the Borgesian literary universe.

2.8.4 Borges on Immortality

In a speech at the University of Belgrano, Borges once more addresses the topic of immortality.[2] Being at the time almost seventy-nine years old, he approaches immortality with a very personal tone. He states that he is tired of himself, of his name and fame, and would like to be free of all that (*Borges Oral* 36). He begins his speech by pointing out that for William James, immortality was a minor problem, often mistakenly

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[2] On June 5, 1978

associated with religion. For James, the problem of immortality was not a basic problem

of philosophy, never as important as the discussion of knowledge, or the external world

(29). Other philosophers like Spaniard Miguel de Unamuno are preoccupied with

immortality. Differently from Borges, Unamuno wanted immortality. Borges admits that

if immortality exits, he would like to return as another man; Unamuno, on the contrary,

would like to continue being himself (29). When revisiting the thoughts of various

philosophers on immortality, Borges states that for Socrates every human being is

composed of two substances, the soul and the body. Socrates even affirms that the soul

can live better without the body. Our beings would be locked and constrained by the

limitations of a body. Without a body, the soul would be able to think (33). Different

thinkers develop arguments in favor of immortality. Borges recalls that Aquinas said:

Intellectus naturaliter desiderat esse semper (the mind spontaneously wishes to be

eternal, to exist forever) (35). Some thinkers, like Tacitus, Borges observes, even suggest

that immortality is reserved for a few, for the great souls. However, Borges argues,

everyone thinks of himself as part of those great few (37).

On the topic of transmigration, Borges highlights how ancient philosophers, such

as Pythagoras and Plato, supported that idea. Particularly Plato, he signals, accepted that

possibility. And transmigration entails a system of punishments and rewards based in the

behavior on a previous life. But that complicates metaphysical explanations. Since

Borges thinks that time may be infinite, how it would be possible that the number of

previous lives would be infinite too?, he wonders. He contends that for Pascal the

universe is infinite, and it is a sphere whose circumference is everywhere and whose

center is nowhere. Borges responds to Pascal's thought arguing that at any given moment

we are at the center of an infinite line, in any place of the infinite center we are at the center of space, since space and time are infinite (38). The Buddhists also believe that we humans have lived infinite lives and we are in a center, emphasizing that all moments are centers of that infinite time. Borges also points out that for Schopenhauer the doctrine of transmigration is the doctrine of the will to live (41). There is something that wants to live, he affirms, and that something reappears through the matter or despite the matter. That is the will of resurrection (41–42).

However, that resurrection may not be associated with the restoration of the flesh. Accordingly, Borges finally acknowledges that he believes in immortality but not in a personal one. He suggest that immortality may be linked to identity. He affirms that whenever someone loves his or her enemy, the immortality of Christ appears. At that moment, that person is Christ. Furthermore, he states that whenever we repeat a verse of Dante or Shakespeare, we are somehow the instant in which Shakespeare or Dante created that verse. Immortality then, is in the memory of others and in the work that we will leave after our death (42–43). Language, for example, he says, is a human creation and becomes a type of immortality. With these remarks, Borges acknowledges the power of language in the construction of the world around us and the intimate connection of reading and thinking with personal identity. At the end of the speech, he finally admits that he believes in a cosmic immortality. He thinks that beyond our bodily death our memory will remain, as well as our actions, and circumstances, as part of the universal history (45).

From Borges' previous observations, I suggest that he rhetorically equated identity with immortality. Our individual identities may be prolonged through the

communicative acts of writing and reading, and through storytelling and literature. However, Borges always shows aversion of personal immortality. The idea of repeating his acts (and his mistakes), and the thought of duplicating himself, provoked anxiety in him. I will explore those subjects in the next chapter: "Mirrors and the Horror of Repetition".

Chapter 3:

Mirrors and the Horror of Repetition

3.1 Introduction

Through the accounts on Jorge Luis Borges' life in his biography by Woodwall and in some interviews about his work (Barili; Barnstone; Yates), he often mentions as one of his obsessions and main themes his fear of mirrors and repetition. As Williamson suggests, the figure reflected in the mirror may have a correlation with the duality hero/coward: "The opposite of the hero was the coward, the nonentity, drifting on a treacherous sea of solipsism, of 'unreality,' plagued by doubts, fakes, and copies" (203). Borges might have felt called to heroic deeds similar to the ones that some of his ancestors performed, but as the man of letters that he was, he was aware of his limitations. As noted by Williamson: "This opposition between hero and coward brings us to Borges' fundamental preoccupation – the debate between self and non-self" (203). Notions of identity or better said, an existential *angst* about the real self, emerge here. When interrogated by Yates about the recurrence of mirrors in his work, Borges explains,

> Mirrors are very strange things. Mirrors give you the sense of the double. They give the Scottish wraith. When a man sees himself, according to Scottish superstition, he is about to die. His real self comes to fetch him back. Then you have in German the Doppelgänger, the man who walks at our side and with ourselves… Then you have … the *alter ego*, the other I. Those things are suggested by the mirror. There is something strange in the fact of the visual world being reproduced in every detail in a piece of glass, in a crystal. (197)

My contention is that this idea of repetition through the mirror that appears in the fictional and non-fictional work of Borges is also associated with the metaphysical *angst* that would derive from the possibility that time could repeat itself. And Borges rhetorically shares these preoccupations with his readers. Through philosophical essays, short stories and even poetry, Borges addresses the topic of time as repetitive using the mirror as a metaphor that also permits him to discuss the problem of identity. Who am I? Am I the reflection on the mirror or am I the person that faces it? Am I strong enough to endure life as a repetition of occurrences and errors? All those metaphysical interrogations somehow appear through the work of Borges. Narrative and ultimately, language, are the vehicles that portray his examinations of those matters.

While discussing the characteristics of human language, Seargeant highlights its capability to reflect about itself (386). Beyond its informational role, he points out that language "is also a subject for communication" (386). He asserts that language does not only function as a tool but "as a concept" (386). He adds: "Given the fundamental role that language plays in life, it is a concept which becomes implicated in the beliefs and debates about wider human concerns" (386). That capacity of language of actualizing itself might then be interpreted as "an implicit statement about human understanding of the world" (386). As Arneson points out, when discussing the centrality of communication in postmodern times, "everyone experiences the world through language, used to negotiate one's "situatedness" within the lived world" (3).

Drawing from the previous remarks, I argue that through the fictional and nonfictional works of Jorge Luis Borges it is possible to enlarge our understanding of philosophy of communication. Owing to a particular use of language that transforms into

metacommunication or communication about communication, Borges invites us to situate ourselves in the lived world around us, mostly through his novel approach on the identities of the author and the reader and their relation to the text.

In Chapter Three, "Mirrors and the Horror of Repetition," I first explore how Borges, mainly drawing from Nietzsche's view on circular time and the concept of the eternal recurrence, invites his readers to reflect on time and identity through the short essays: "Circular Time" and "The Doctrine of Cycles". Secondly, I examine the thought of Borges, as a postmodern and postcolonial author that proposes a new approximation to the relationship among the author, the text and the reader. Remarkably, he was able to anticipate some contemporary communication scholars preoccupied with those topics. By bringing into conversation scholars Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Umberto Eco, I address the differences and similarities of their ideas about the notions of writing and reading. Finally, I explore the communicative resonances related to identity, authorship and repetitive time that are present in the following short stories by Borges: "The Other," "Borges and I," "Death and The Compass," and "Pierre Menard, Author of The Quixote."

3.2 Nietzsche and the Will to Affirming Existence

Jorge Luis Borges admired and studied the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. According to one of his biographers, Borges preferred not to mention Nietzsche in interviews during the 1960s and 1970s, due to the implicit influence of the German philosopher on fascist movements that were predominant at the time (Woodall 28–29). However, he is mentioned by Borges in different essays related to the problem of time. Nietzsche's most significant concerns are directed to understanding the ethical role of men throughout history. Müller-Lauter highlights the many contradictions that the

German thinker portrays in his philosophy (1). He affirms, "Nietzsche scholarship has hitherto concentrated mainly on the contradiction between the doctrines of the will to power, or of the overman, and the theory of the eternal recurrence of the same" (4). Müller-Lauter also states that for some scholars like Löwitt, these inconsistencies originate in his view of how humanity relates to the world in the absence of a divine power that could provide some organization and sense to the universe (5). Thus, Nietzsche is often perceived just as "a philosophical poet from whom conceptual rigor cannot be expected" (1). And, as Müller-Lauter remarks, "he has also been misused as a writer of aphorisms whose thinking offers a random selection of timely sayings" (1). Ultimately, Nietzsche might also have been perceived as a "critic of his time" (4). Furthermore, the possible inconsistencies of his work might have been a product not just of his own personality, but of "the contradictions of the modern world" (4).

According to Copleston, Nietzsche was driven not by the desire to destroy the Western civilization since he was in fact, "a philosopher of culture" (233). He admired the Greek civilization "as a lived culture" (232) and wanted the humanity to rise to a superior state of culture that responds not to the past but to the future: "Culture without man is meaningless: man is the bearer and creator of culture. If therefore we are to attain a higher state of culture, man himself must be elevated" (233). He then proposes the overman as the kind of man who "is endowed, not merely with physical vigour and strength, but also with intellectual power, independence of soul, artistic perception and appreciation, psychological insight" (235). Therefore, this type of man needs to conquer himself, does not fall into his own passions and, most importantly, "is a creator of values" (235). The overman "is the embodiment of Life, of ascending life—and Life is, according

to Nietzsche, the Will to Power" (235). This power refers mainly to "power of personality, of soul, interior power" (235). Although Nietzsche does not defend "an absolute morality" (238), he leans towards a moral that encourages a certain way to assuming life. Thus, for Nietzsche, "the "master-morality" is the expression of and tends to promote ascending life, fuller life, while the "slave-morality", pre-eminently Christian morality, expresses decadent life, descending and poorer life" (238). The overman that Zarathustra proposes needs to be courageous enough to assume the consequences of the Eternal Recurrence.

Copleston remarks that this theory promulgates that "there is a cyclical process in the universe and that all returns, even my action here and now, thus effectually barring all "supernatural" intervention and the "beyond" (243). Similarly, Heidegger stresses that "eternal recurrence is the inexhaustible fullness of joyful-painful life" (418). For Heidegger, Nietzsche's superman would be the man of the future, a man superior to what humanity has been so far. And a man that needs to be able to command the world. "Nietzsche is the first thinker who, in view of a world-history emerging for the first time, asks the decisive question and thinks through its metaphysical implication" (415). The question or questions posited, according to Heidegger, are: "is man, a man in his nature till now, prepared to assume dominion over the whole earth?... Must man as he is then not be brought *beyond* himself if he is to fulfill this task?" (415). Heidegger proposes that Nietzsche adjudicated a teaching purpose to Zarathustra. "As the advocate of life, of suffering, of the circle, is at the same time the teacher of the eternal recurrence of the same *and* of the superman" (419).

3.3 Nietzsche's contribution to philosophy of communication

Although Nietzsche has not been considered a philosopher mainly driven by communication concerns, some scholars highlight his preoccupation with explicating the origins of language and its functions as a social tool. Mangion affirms that for Nietzsche the ultimate purpose of language is "self-expression" (202), stressing that "communication always implicitly involves the other" (202). Mangion summarizes Nietzsche's contribution to philosophy of communication mainly in his reflections of non-verbal and verbal expressions that are found dispersed in different writings. For Mangion, Nietzsche describes gestural communication as associated to spontaneity, although it also involves intentionality. "Gestures must have a shared common meaning, and given that sensations of pleasure and pain are natural, the gestures that express or communicate them are also natural" (191). However, Mangion remarks, for Nietzsche, communication would emerge from the need of mutual understanding. "The value of language, together with logic… is that they enable humans to control and manipulate the world in order to enable human survival" (194). This vision of language seems to assign communication a very instrumental objective. Coincidentally with Herder, Mangion affirms, Nietzsche sees the goal of communication as "to express one's needs, one's feelings" (195). What the German philosopher finds problematic would be the use of language in society:

> From its original purpose as a medium for emotional communication, language
> has been transformed into a medium for the communication of thoughts, concepts
> and ideas. It is no longer a 'pure' medium because it no longer fulfills its original

purpose, and Nietzsche considers the misuse of communication as a sign of the

deterioration of both language and society. (195)

Preoccupied with this ill use of communication, Nietzsche differentiates between good

communication as the expression of personal feelings and bad communication as based

on intellectualization and abstractions (195). Mangion points out that today both types of

communication are identified as "communication as expression and communication as

representation, so that while the former communicates something about one's self the

latter communicates something about the world" (196). This vision drives Nietzsche to

determine the impossibility of human communication.

According to Mangion, Nietzsche also addresses the topics of consciousness and

identity in relation to communication. There is a need of awareness about a mental state if

we want to communicate it to others: "The need to communicate is the trigger that raises

mental states to self-conscious awareness of them: if it were not possible to raise those

mental states, one would not know what to communicate" (197). Nietzsche also

highlights the role of consciousness in providing humans with a "sense of self and

identity" (197). Isolation would have been detrimental to self-consciousness: "There is

therefore a strong social dimension to both consciousness and communication" (197).

Mangion also points out that Nietzsche formulates two contradictory views related to

self-awareness and communication. The social capacity of humans permits our survival

in the world. Nevertheless, "entering into a social life entailed a loss of individuality, for

the communication of that individuality required a medium that entailed, for it to

function, a displacement from individual experience to a generalization of experiences"

(198).

3.3.1 Nietzsche as an author of philosophical stories

       Borges' appreciation for Nietzsche may have been influenced by the German philosopher's writing style that included the combination of fiction and philosophy. This bold merging of genres results in a powerful and rhetorical appealing that have survived more than one hundred years. While some scholars deny that certain literary pieces may be recognized as part of a philosophical discourse, others, like Gooding-Williams, find that Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a good example of the opposite idea (670). Carnap (667) and Megill (669), according to Gooding-Williams, affirm that the story of Zarathustra may portray interesting metaphors but does not allow for philosophical arguments. Taking the opposite perspective, Gooding-Williams argues that "philosophical explanations need not involve deductive (or indeed any) arguments and can take the form of a narrative" (670). He also thinks that Augustine's "Confessions" illustrate that case. Augustine's book might be interpreted as "a philosophical account of religious conversion" (670). Gooding-Williams acknowledges that some scholars only accept the idea of "philosophical literature" (671). However, he points out that Beck (671) admits literature as part of philosophy in only two ways —either as a way of quoting "philosophical ideas" that the writer takes from others, or by exhibiting those ideas in the plot and characters of the literary piece "so that the reader can see philosophical models instead of having to think about abstract philosophical concepts" (671). Nevertheless, Gooding-Williams states that "some literary fiction is philosophically significant, precisely because it produces new philosophical vocabularies and thus new philosophical problems" (673). In this sense, he regards Nietzsche's Zarathustra as a fictional piece that "creates vocabulary, questions, and concerns that

stand at a distance from the mainstream of the western philosophy" (674) He adds, "The overman, the higher man, the will to power, and the eternal recurrence are first introduced or developed in Zarathustra" (674). And this fictional work "eschews traditional philosophical vocabularies, in favor of new modes of philosophical thought" (675). In my view, this potential for communicating philosophy through fiction was probably acknowledged by Jorge Luis Borges in his own literary work. Most of his fictional and non-fictional works deal with metaphysical enigmas that he shares with his readers.

3.4 Nietzsche's understanding of a new temporality

Richardson challenges the assumption by some scholars about Nietzsche's lack of a sound theory of the problem of time. He acknowledges that the German philosopher often contradicts his own vision of time throughout his different writings and did not develop an organized set of ideas on the topic (208). Nevertheless, Richardson argues that his notion of a new temporality, more than a theory, seems to be a project directly related to the will (223). In fact, Richardson agrees with the scholars that argue that Nietzsche is more interested not in developing a theory, but in analyzing the human response to time: "It is the temporal viewpoint built into our drives that Nietzsche most wants to describe" (209). Furthermore, Richardson argues that "a certain theory of time is nevertheless embedded in those diagnoses and evaluations of our views about time. Some of those evaluations are epistemic – assess views by their truth. And those diagnoses rest upon a considered theory about what "views" … really are and treats them as temporal" (209).

Richardson explicates Nietzsche's idea of the eternal return as "a new temporality" (222). The ideal of the overman as an individual ready to live and relive his life may not be easy to achieve, but it is possible to imitate: "This new way of "being in time' heals the unhealthy obsession with the past that characterizes our moral stance. It cures our species-typical ill will towards time, and overcomes our fear of becoming" (222). Furthermore, Richardson affirms, the eternal recurrence implies "a psychological challenge or test" (223). The challenge of reliving our lives asks for all our strength. As Richardson states, "this would be a Dionysian willing, and the way an overman wills. We are to live so that we can will eternal return. So his point is to offers us not primarily a theory, but a certain project or effort" (223).

Richardson also examines the desire to overcoming the past implicit in the eternal recurrence and the idea of circular time: "I try to change the meaning of that past – making it turn out to issue in an upshot that honors and ennobles it" (224). It is a way, Richardson says, of confirming the past "rather than resenting it (as beyond my control) or feeling guilty over it (as poorly done by me). This proves that I have overcome the "ill will" towards the past that Nietzsche thinks typifies humanity" (224). But changes do not stop here. I would then be able to modify my perception of the present. I would not embrace the present and would be willing to the change that the future implies. "The overman instantiates this stance at the broad cultural level: in the overman, who makes new values by destroying the old, the culture redeems itself by destroying itself (its present condition)" (225). Loeb proposes a defense of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence by stressing its relation to temporal identity. To the scholars that deny the possibility of human awareness of the different states of the self throughout the past and future

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experiences, he responds by arguing that "such awareness is indeed possible, and that it would serve to numerically differentiate temporally identical recurrences as well as to establish some kind of substantial concern and communication among numerically distinct recurring selves" (184).

Loeb highlights that in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche himself acknowledges that his theories do not come entirely from reasoning: "He courageously and honestly shows us the inspiring spirits or demons… that actually led him to his discoveries" (177). According to Loeb, he further compares his demons to "Socrates' daimonic inner voice" (177), identifying it as the philosopher "instinctive wisdom" (177). The demon then appears to be a mystical experience or revelation granted to Nietzsche: "So it is open to Nietzsche, in his public introduction of eternal recurrence, to completely omit his rationalistic proofs while still presenting what he regards as the most critically powerful grounds for believing in the truth of his doctrine" (177).

3.5 The Doctrine of Cycles

The main idea of this essay, published by Jorge Luis Borges in 1938, is to explore the possibility that the universe repeats itself. If in "A New Refutation of Time," Borges dares to challenge the whole idea of time, in "The Doctrine of Cycles," he focuses primarily on the fallacy of repetition. Drawing from Nietzsche, Borges describes "the Eternal Return" by stating that although the number of atoms might be limited, if there is an infinite time, they are subjected to multiple combinations which will result in the reiteration of the cosmos. Inviting the reader to share his thinking on this recurrence, he writes, "Once again you will be born from a belly, once again your skeleton will grow, once again this same page will reach your identical hands, once again you will follow the

course of the hours of your life until that of your incredible death" ("The Doctrine"

Selected 115). But just the calculation of the number of atoms involved in the universe

and their permutations makes this task challenging and improbable.

Borges affirms that Georg Cantor's work on mathematical series and numbers

proved this theory as wrong. "If the universe consists of an infinite number of terms, it is

rigorously capable of an infinite number of combinations—and the need for a Recurrence

is done away with" (117). What is only left is one opportunity in millions, "which can be

calculated as zero" (117). Borges recounts how before Nietzsche's formulation of his

hypothesis on the eternal recurrence, the same idea was already proposed by Pythagoras

and by the Stoics. Also, the early fathers of the Church rejected this hypothesis since the

repetition of the crucifixion of the Christ would not have any sense to them. For St.

Augustine, Borges affirms, "Jesus is the straight path that allows us to flee from the

circular labyrinth of such deceptions" (118). Borges suggests another example of

refutation of the theory of the eternal return by stating that John Stuart Mills thought of

repetition of occurrences as "conceivable—but not true" (118).

Borges hypothesizes that Nietzsche was aware of those previous refutations. But

he wanted humans to endure immortality. Knowing the importance of the use of

language, or more specifically, of grammar, Nietzsche places the revelation of the eternal

recurrence as a personal formulation of Zarathustra, since he "knew that the most

effective of the grammatical persons is the first" (119). Nietzsche wanted men to be able

to transcend their limitations by tolerating suffering. In fact, Borges highlighted how

Nietzsche wanted them to embrace grief. Borges writes on Nietzsche: "He wanted to fall

in love with his destiny. He adopted a heroic method; he disinterred the intolerable Greek

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hypothesis of eternal repetition, and he contrived to make this mental nightmare an occasion for jubilation" (120). For Nietzsche, Borges affirms, only the possibility of circular repetition was enough, and he finally agrees that time might be infinite. Borges also hypothesizes that according to the laws of physics related to energy, some progressions are unalterable. He notes, "Heat and light are no more than forms of energy… heat, however, will never return to the form of light" (122), cancelling the doctrine of cycles. Borges ends this essay by articulating a philosophical question: If Zarathustra is right, who can verify how two identical processes keep from agglomerating into one? The calculations would be prohibitive: "Without a special archangel to keep track, what does it mean that we are going through the thirteen thousand five hundred and fourteenth cycle and not the first in the series or number three hundred twenty-one to two thousandth power?" (122).

Some remarks of Richardson seem appropriate to examine Nietzsche's view of time. For Richardson, Nietzsche's eternal return implies the idea of time as a circle. "This model stresses to us how times are knotted together" (224). Present and past are tied. "We imagine that the future has already been, and that the past will be again, which conveys the relevance they really do have to meaning now. We imagine them all "present" together in the ring, which reminds us how meaning lies in temporal relations" (224). Richardson stresses how eternal recurrence might be interpreted as a metaphor characterized by a "casual determinism" based on will (224). "Time is bound together not by a back-looping causality, but by the logic of the meaning of intentional wills" (224). The intentionality mentioned by the German philosopher would point to seeking

acceptance of life with all its miseries and pleasures. This view seems more transcendental and heroic, although physically unattainable, as demonstrated by Borges.

3.6 Circular Time

In 1941, Borges again discusses the problem already examined in "The Doctrine of Cycles." In his short essay on "Circular Time," Borges attempts to offer a definition of the Theory of the Eternal Return, describing its three modes. The first, he affirms, has been ascribed to Plato and comprehends the philosopher's idea about the return of the seven planets to their initial point of departure. Once that this cycle is completed, there would be a perfect year. Astrologers took this thought and modified it. Since they believe that the destiny of humans depends on the celestial positions of certain planets, they argued that "if planetary periods are cyclical, so must be the history of the universe" (Borges "Circular" *Selected* 225). Borges calls this hypothesis "astrological" (225).

The second fundamental mode of the Theory of Eternal Return corresponds with Nietzsche, who Borges calls, "the most touching of its inventors or promoters" (225–226). And here it might be pertinent to point out Loeb's elaboration on Nietzsche's idea on eternal recurrence and circular time. Loeb affirms that "Nietzsche encourages us to imagine just a single finite (though unbounded) circular course (Kreislauf) in which is represented, not just the recurrence of all things, but also of all those moments of time that cannot exits independently of those things" (181). He adds, "since for Nietzsche time just is a series of those moments, it follows that time itself is destroyed, re-created, and repeated along with everything else. Thus, when I am re-created so as to relive my identical life, the time at which I am re-created and live my life is always exactly the same" (181–182).

Similarly, in his essay, Borges explains that the theory of eternal recurrence "is justified by an algebraic principle: the observation that a quantity of *n* objects—atoms in Le Bon's hypothesis, forces in Nietzsche's, elements in the communard Blanqui's— is incapable of an infinity number of variations" (226). Borges also highlights Hume's thought on the finitude of matter. "A finite number of articles is only susceptible of finite transpositions… in an eternal duration, every possible order or position must be tried an infinite number of times. This world, therefore, with all its events, even the most minute, has before been produced and destroyed, and will again be produced and destroyed, without any bounds and limitations" (Hume cited by Borges 226).

Borges elaborates on the last hypothesis based on "the concept of similar but not identical cycles" (226). Throughout centuries, many scholars have supported this thought. Borges stresses that for Marcus Aurelius, there is only present, since past and future do not exist. Marcus Aurelius, cited by Borges states, "to die is to lose the present, which is the briefest of lapses. No one loses the past or the future, because no man can be deprived of what he does not have" (227). For Borges, beyond the ethical meaning of the former thoughts, what Marcus Aurelius is trying to express, besides the negation of the past and the future, is "a negation of all novelty… this conjecture—that all of mankind's experiences are (in some way) analogous— may at first seem a mere impoverishment of the world" (227). The consequence would be that "universal history is the history of a single man" (228). That would be a radical thought and easier to negate. However, it might be considered that "the number of human perceptions, emotions, thoughts, and vicissitudes is limited, and that before dying we will exhaust them all" (228). Marcus

Aurelius' thought stresses that the things of the present are similar to the ones of the beginnings and the end of times, "for all things are of one kind and one form" (228).

Interestingly, this essay was written and published during a threatening historical moment, in the midst of the Second World War. Borges finished this essay suggesting that the repetition of the history of man can be interpreted as gloomy. However, he admits that in times of distress, it might be taken as an affirmation that no evil or despot would be able to completely defeat humanity (228).

3.7 Identity and authorship

As stated by Arneson, "philosophy of communication pertains to the study of ideas used to analyze, describe, and interpret communication as lived experience" (7). I argue that an approximation to the fictional and nonfictional works of Jorge Luis Borges permits us to enlarge our understanding of philosophy of communication. By reflecting on those works, we may better situate ourselves in the world around us. It is my contention that Borges attempts to interpret communication through his literary work. In some of his essays and fictional works, Borges anticipated other thinkers in addressing a postmodern debate on the identities of the author and the reader and their relation to the text. This discussion would preoccupy scholars from the second half of the 20th century. I propose and exploration on the visions on those matters by Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Umberto Eco.

3.7.1   A 'Barthesian' view on the death of the author

As stated on Chapter Two of this dissertation: "Dreams and Myths," French scholar Roland Barthes highlights that a contemporary approach to texts would result in the disappearance of the writer ("Death" *Image* 145). Now I examine his famous essay on

"The Death of the Author," where he opens his argument by alluding to how a character in Balzac's novella "Sarrasine" describes the protagonist. Barthes wonders whose voice is the one that describes Sarrasine. He ponders that it would be the one of another character, or the one of Balzac, and he even suggests that that voice would be attributed to "universal wisdom" (142). But he concludes that the matter is not relevant since "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (142). Barthes affirm that this negation of the author originates in the act of storytelling itself, "with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively… outside of the very practice of the symbol" (142). He argues that the function of the narrator in the form of a "shaman" (142) is that of a performer that acts as an intermediary between the story and the listeners. Thus, "the author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English Empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual" (142–143).

For Barthes, our society promotes the idea of the author highlighting this persona formed by "his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists… in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice" (143), when looking to deciphering a work of art by explicating the author through his life. Barthes claims that "the new criticism" (143) has helped to perpetuate this idea although writers like Mallarmé have tried to oppose it. For Mallarmé, he affirms, "it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality… to reach that point where only language acts… Mallarmé's entire poetics

consists in suppressing the author in the interests of writing (which is, as will be seen, to restore the place of the reader)" (143). Similarly, Valéry disparaged the figure of the author substituting it by that of linguistics, Valéry "militated in favour of the essentially verbal condition of literature, in the face of which all recourse to the writer's interiority seemed to him pure superstition" (144). Barthes also mentions how Proust's work was also concerned with the disappearance of authorial intent. For Barthes, Proust modeled his life after his book. He affirms that Proust, "by a radical reversal, instead of putting his life into his novel, as is so often maintained, he made of his very life a work for which his own book was the model" (144). Accordingly, Barthes highlights the role of surrealism in favoring language over meaning. Surrealism "contributed to the desacralization of the image of the Author by ceaselessly recommending the abrupt disappointment of expectations of meaning… by entrusting the hand with the task of writing as quickly as possible what the head itself is unaware of (automatic writing), by accepting the principle and the experience of several people writing together" (144).

Barthes also points out the role of linguistics in the fading of the writer: "The author is never more than the instance writing, just as I is nothing other than the instance saying I: language knows a 'subject' not a 'person', and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together', suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it" (145).

As a consequence, Barthes signals:

> Writing can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation,
> representation, 'depiction' (as the Classics would say); rather, it designates
> exactly what linguists, referring to Oxford philosophy, call a performative, a rare

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verbal form (exclusively given in the first person and in the present tense) in

which the enunciation has no other content (contains no other proposition) than

the act by which it is uttered. (145–146)

Barthes proposes a novel view on the book as a byproduct of many actors. It "is not a line

of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but

a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend

and clash" (146). He compares the act of writing to that of a copyist. "The writer can only

imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings,

to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them"

(146). Barthes also addresses the problem of meaning of texts by analyzing the authorial

correlation with literary criticism. He first claims that "once the Author is removed, the

claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit

on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (147). He argues that

the critics attempt to understand a book by analyzing the author, "historically, the reign of

the Author has also been that of the Critic" (147). However, Barthes claims that writing

originates in a "multiplicity" of factors that includes previous books, contributing to the

difficulty of assigning "an ultimate meaning to the text (and to the world as text)" (147).

Thus, this interpretation would be "anti-theological" (147), by obliterating the Godlike

character of the writer, and negating the possibility of a single meaning for every text.

He even alludes to investigations on the classic Greek tragedy that points out to its

equivocal character by incorporating "words with double meanings that each character

understands unilaterally (this perpetual misunderstanding is exactly the 'tragic')" (148).

Nevertheless, the public that attended those performances was able to decipher the

meanings, thus, "the reader (or here, the listener)" (148) was given the utmost importance.

When analyzing authorial activity, Barthes concludes by highlighting once more the role of the reader. He claims,

> a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space in which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. (148)

Barhes asserts that literary criticism has stressed the role of the author at the expense of the reader. "We know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (148). His views on the figure of the author as a construction of critics and the society would have provoked some replies and discussions that amplify the scope of his essay.

3.7.2 A Foucauldian response to Barthes

In 1969, Michel Foucault delivered a lecture that was published as an essay under the title: "What is an Author?"[3]. Appearing barely a year after the publication of Barthes' essay on "The Death of the Author", Foucault's essay seems to respond to some of Barthes' arguments (Wilson 339–340). In his text, differently from Barthes, Foucault states that he is not interested in analyzing the characteristics of the author and how he has been transformed into a distinct subject, highly valued as an individual, and

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[3] Originally entitled: 'Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?'

inextricably linked to literary criticism. Instead, Foucault attempts to examine "the relationship between text and author and with the manner in which the text points to this figure that, at least in appearance; is outside it and antecedes it" ("What" *Book* 281). Drawing from Beckett, he affirms that "who is speaking" (281) is not what is important. He then appeals to a present-day ethics that suggest that writing is never "completed" (281). He describes two main topics associated to the ethics of writing. One deals with the release of the need for "expression" (281). He compares the act of writing to "a game [jeu]" (281), which permits it to rebel against its own guidelines. "The point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor it is to pin a subject within language; it is, rather, a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears" (281). The other topic is about the treatment of death. In Greek tragedy, Foucault points out, the focus is on avoiding death or at least, "to perpetuate the immortality of the hero" (281–282). Nowadays, on the contrary, death is fostered and associated to the disappearance of the author: "The mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing" (282). For Foucault this idea is not new but has not been studied thoroughly. He affirms that it is not clear what might be considered the work of a writer. And he wonders whether all that an author has written, even drafts or meaningless pages might be considered as part of his work. He highlights the absence of "a theory of work" (282), referring here to the totality of the literary work of a writer.

Foucault is also preoccupied with "the notion of writing" (283), a concept that he sees as transferring "the empirical characteristics of the author into a transcendental anonymity" (283). Writing would be then associated with the realm of "the critical and

the religious approaches. Giving writing a primal status seems to be a way of retranslating, in transcendental terms, both the theological affirmation of its creative character" (283). However, he warns that "the notion of writing runs the risk of maintaining the author's privileges" (283). He differentiates between two positions, the one of those who support a view of the author tied to the "transcendental tradition of the nineteenth century" (283) and the position of the ones that reject it.

Rather than being concerned with the disappearance of the author, Foucault states that he finds it more relevant to discuss the space left by this fade. He also wonders about the significance of the name of the author. As all "proper names" (283), it might be mistaken for "a description" (283). It might be seen as an association of the name of an author with a certain type of literature or current of thought. He points out that an "author's name serves to characterize a certain mode of being of discourse… it is a speech that must be received in a certain mode and that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status" (284).

When examining the notion of the author function, Foucault affirms that "discourses are objects of appropriation" (285). He signals how any kind of text started to be considered as pertaining to an individual author when this author was penalized because of the contravention of norms that his work represented: "In our culture… discourse was not originally a product, a thing, a kind of goods; it was essentially an act" (285). This act, in turn, could be considered right or wrong. The author's ownership of the text was not only acknowledged but regulated by norms such as copyrights but still he was subjected to the risks derived from authorship and the possible transgressions of norms.

Foucault highlights a distinction between fictional and scientific discourse. In his view, there was a time when authorship was acknowledged for certain types of texts. In the middle ages, fictional books were predominantly anonymous and still accepted based on their "ancientness" (285). Nevertheless, scientific texts were validated by having an author. But this situation changed later during the Enlightenment, when authorship was substituted by "redemonstrable truth" (285). Thus, "the author function faded away, and the inventor's name served only to christen a theorem, proposition, particular effect, property, body, group of elements, or pathological syndrome" (285). Likewise, fictional works became now validated by the name of an author. Foucault argues, "Since literary anonymity is not tolerable, we can accept it only in the guise of an enigma. As a result, the author function today plays an important role in our view of literary works" (285).

When explaining the features of the author function, Foucault states that "it does not develop spontaneously as the attribution of a discourse to an individual. It is, rather, the result of a complex operation that constructs a certain being of reason that we call 'author' (286). Thus, literary critics attempt to highlight the individuality of the author by examining his themes, the hidden motivations that drive his artistic work. These attributions aid in the labor of constructing an author. Foucault finds similitudes between this building of an author by critics and how "Christian tradition authenticated or rejected texts at its disposal" (286). He explicates the criteria used by Saint Jerome to validate the authorship of texts and asserts that nowadays although authorship does not look very relevant, his function explicates the evolution and even discrepancies in his work. "The author is a particular source of expression that, in more or less completed forms, is

manifested equally well, and with similar validity, in works, sketches, letters, fragments, and so on" (286).

Foucault also addresses the issue of the function of the author as pertaining to some signs in the text that reflect him, such as the "personal pronouns, adverbs of time, and verb conjugation" (287). He stresses that the use of the first person in the text does not necessarily refer to the author but to "an alter ego whose distance from the author varies, often changing in the course of the work" (287). As a consequence, it is possible to identify in both —literary and scientific texts— different selves as part of the author function. Deepening in these thoughts, Foucault explore a stance of some authors that he calls "transdiscursive" (287). Those writers would be the ones that are authors not only of a determined text but "of a theory, tradition or discipline in which other books and authors will in their turn find a place" (287). He highlights some writers named as "founders of discursivity" (288). Their singularity resides in their capacity to inspire "the formation of other texts" (288). For him, Marx and Freud would be examples of this function of discursivity. Foucault observes, "They made possible not only a certain number of differences. They have created a possibility for something other than their discourse, yet something belonging to what they founded… Freud made possible a certain number of divergences – with respect to his own texts, concepts and hypotheses – that all arise from the psychoanalytic discourse itself" (288). However, Foucault makes a distinction between the formation of a science and the introduction of a discursive practice: "Unlike the founding of a science, the initiation of a discursive practice does not participate in its later transformations" (289). He explicates that a "reexamination of Galileo's text may well change our understanding of the history of mechanics, but it will

never be able to change mechanics itself… reexamining Freud's texts modifies

psychoanalysis itself, just as a reexamination of Marx's would modify Marxism" (289).

In other words, the scientific world of Galileo may be reexamined but not changed. On

the other hand, the discursive practices associated with Freud and Marx may transform

them after new considerations.

In the conclusion of his essay, Foucault states how he has been interested in

analyzing discourse not only from a historical perspective but from the viewpoint of an

examination of its relation to the author. He also says that fiction runs the risk of being

identified only with the author. He claims that it is necessary to reverse this idea.

Traditionally, for us "the author is the genial creator of a work in which he deposits, with

infinite wealth and generosity, an inexhaustible world of significations" (290). On the

contrary, he finds that the author constraints the possibility of multiple meanings: "The

author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we

fear the proliferation of meaning" (290). However, he warns about longing for a

"romantic" view of fiction as absolutely free from "a constraining figure" (290). He

thinks that when the historical conditions and modifications occur, "the author function

will disappear, and in such a manner that fiction and it polysemous texts will once again

function according to another mode, but with a system of constraint – one that will no

longer be the author but will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced" (291). In

that moment, different questions will arise: "What are the modes of existence of this

discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for

himself?... What difference does it make who is speaking?" (291).

3.7.3 Eco and the Role of the Reader

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As do the former scholars, Umberto Eco explores the issue of authorship and readership, but he proposes a Model Reader, thereby highlighting the participative nature of the reader in the process of interpreting a text. For Eco, the participative engagement of the reader of a text is more transcendent than the work of its author. Eco begins his essay on "The Role of the Reader" by elaborating on the particular relationship between a text and its reader as a matter of the process of communication. He states, "The very existence of texts that can not only be freely interpreted but also cooperatively generated by the addressee… posits the problem of a rather peculiar strategy of communication based upon a flexible system of signification" (*The Role* 3). Thus, Eco challenges the traditional approaches to communication based on a sender, a message and an addressee. He purportedly add context to this equation (4). The addressee would necessarily need to manage some codes, since some linguistic competence is needed in order to attempt interpretation.

In the case of a literary work, like Barthes and Foucault, Eco leans to the importance of the role of the reader as a non-passive addressee: "The reader as an active principal of interpretation is a part of the picture of the generative process of the text" (4). However, Eco does not postulate the death or the complete disappearance of the author. For him, the participative characteristic of the reader needs to be anticipated by the writer of the text. When describing his approach to the open text, he points out that it "cannot be described as a communicative strategy if the role of the addressee… has not been envisaged at the moment of its generation *qua* text." (3) The Model Reader would be "a possible reader… supposedly able to deal interpretively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them" (7). Interestingly, Eco proposes two

types of texts, the closed and the open ones. Those texts generate their own model

readers. The closed texts are directed to specific readers, and would rank from "children,

soap-opera addicts, doctors, law-abiding citizens, swingers, Presbyterians, farmers,

middle-class women, scuba divers, effete snobs, or any other imaginable

sociopsychological category" (8). The interpretations for that kind of text are more

limited and foreseen by the author. "They presuppose an average reader resulting from a

merely intuitive sociological speculation – in the same way in which an advertisement

chooses its possible audience" (8). Eco offers as examples of closed texts the cartoons of

Superman and the James Bond novels by Ian Fleming. Open texts, on the other hand,

welcome many more interpretations. The cooperation between the reader and the author

is here more evident. "An open text outlines a closed project of its Model Reader as a

component of its structural strategy" (9). It is possible to infer the type of reader that the

author is envisaging for his text. "Ulysses", by James Joyce, would illustrate an open text.

As Eco proposes, in this type of book, "the pragmatic process of interpretation is not an

empirical accident independent of the text *qua* text, but is a structural element of its

generative process" (9).

In order to develop his model for an ideal text, Eco prefers first to analyze

fictional narrative. Drawing from Van Dijk (1974), Eco differentiates "between natural

and artificial narrative… while the former is relating events supposedly experienced by

human or human-like subjects living in the "real" world… the latter concerns individuals

and actions belonging to an imaginary or 'possible' world" (12). He considers both types

of narratives for his model but acknowledges that "a fictional text is more complex" (12).

He contends that "narrative texts —especially fictional ones—are more complicated than

are many others and make the task of the semiotician harder. But they also make it more rewarding" (13).

Eco's ideal text presupposes that it would permit the model reader to actualize its content. This process is accomplished through different levels. At the base level would be the expression formed by the linear text manifestation, defined by Eco as "the text such as it appears verbally with its lexematic surface. The reader applies to these expressions a given code or systems of codes and subcodes, to transform them into the first levels of content" (15). Those codes might be recognizable since they belong to a common dictionary or lexicon shared between the text and the reader. Eco's model "considers an immediate connection between the text linear manifestation and the act of utterance… the addressee of any text immediately detects whether the sender wants to perform a propositional act or another kind of speech act" (16). The addressee then decides if he wants to accept the message of the sender. In other words, the addressee decides "if he [the sender] is lying or telling the truth, whether he is asking or ordering something possible or impossible, and so on" (16). Eco highlights that particularly in fictional narrative, there is a call for "an act of suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader" (16). His model proposes different levels characterized by the varied decisions that the reader may make. The model reader may even bracket some of his first assumptions about the meaning of the text; "he suspends his disbelief, waiting from more semantic information, to be actualized" (17) at a different level.

To actualize content, the model reader needs to go through different steps. The model reader would advance towards interpretation depending on different factors such as his encyclopedia, a term that Eco uses to designate the previous knowledge of a reader

of the subject read. Likewise, the reader needs to appeal to his basic dictionary formed by the group of definitions of things or lexicon "and immediately detects the most basic semantic properties of the semenes involved, so as to make a first tentative amalgamation" (18).

Context is also important for content inferences: "Contextual selections are previously established by a semantic representation with the format of an encyclopedia… and are only virtually present in a given text" (19). Eco remarks that those selections would be "coded abstract possibilities of meeting a given term in connection with other terms belonging to the same semiotic system" (19). A reader can interpret a text when he or she shares common frames with it. Drawing from Van Dijk, Eco defines frames as "cognitive knowledge representations about the 'world' which enable us to perform such basic cognitive acts as perception, language comprehension and actions" (20–21). But inferences can also appear through intertextual frames because "no text is read independently of the reader's experience of other texts" (21). Thus, individuals accumulate "encyclopedic knowledge" (21) from previous readings that they utilize when dealing with a text.

Eco also highlights the role of ideology in interpreting a text. For him, a reader carries with him some ideological biases, "even when he is not aware of this, even when this ideological bias is only a highly simplified system of axiological oppositions" (22). This ideological perspective may sometimes influence a reader to look for a 'hidden' meaning in the text, even when it is not apparent. Through this search, "even the most closed texts are surgically 'opened': fiction is transformed into document and the

innocence of fancy is translated into the disturbing evidence of a philosophical statement" (22).

When discussing topics and frames, the issue of intertextuality appears again. Eco asserts that "since every proposition contains every other proposition.., a text could generate, by further semantic disclosures, every other text… we have to decide how a text, in itself potentially infinite, can generate only those interpretations it can foresee" (24). As Eco stresses, intertextuality has always played a significant role in literature.

Narrative structures are also a vital component of the text. Eco distinguishes between two types of approaches to the content of a text, the fabula and the plot. The first one "is the basic stuff, the logic of actions or the syntax of characters, the time-oriented course of events… [or] a temporal transformation of ideas or a series of events concerning inanimate objects" (27). When defining the plot, Eco affirms that it "is the story as actually told, along with all the deviations, digressions, flashbacks, and the whole of the verbal devices" (27). Then, the plot is closer to the actual discourse. Eco explains that the fabula "is the result of a continuous series of abductions made during the course of the reading. Therefore the fabula is always experienced step by step" (31). The reader anticipates some occurrences in the text; those anticipations are confirmed or disconfirmed (32). The author often guides the reader through a series of probable directions of the story, characteristic of an open fabula. Other times, the writer offers fewer options guiding the reader to the author's own end (34). Eco stresses that the reader is very active and needs to make some decisions. He sometimes accepts "the textual truth" (37). But often, "the reader has to compare (if he has not yet done so) the world such as is presented by the text with his own real world, that is, the world of his

(presumed) concrete experience, at least such as it is framed by his own encyclopedia"
(37).

Eco concludes his essay by stating that "the aesthetic dialectics between openness
and closedness of texts depends on the basic structure of the process of text interpretation
in general" (37). In the end, it is the reader who chooses "to activate one or another of the
textual levels and… which codes to apply" (39). Closed texts do not really represent a
challenge for the reader. However, other narratives, such as those "that according to
Barthes (1973) are able to produce the 'jouissance' of the unexhausted virtuality of their
expressive plane" (40), have been intentionally organized "to invite their Model Readers
to reproduce their own processes of deconstruction by a plurality of free interpretive
choices" (40). Notwithstanding, Eco admits that there might be texts "that may be read as
an uncommitted stimulus for a personal hallucinatory experience, cutting out levels of
meaning" (40). And then, he appeals to a remark made by Borges on the issue of
readership and authorship in fiction. Eco says, "As Borges once suggested, why not read
the Odyssey as written after the Aeneid or the Imitation of Christ as written by Celine?"
(40). In the last lines of "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," in fact, Borges proposed
that Menard was using a "technique of deliberate anachronism and fallacious
attributions" ("Pierre Menard" *Collected* 95) in his work. By anachronism, he meant the
act of reading fiction. By alluding to Borges's remark at the end of his essay, Eco
suggests that a fictional text presupposes this condition, this characteristic of deliberate
anachronism. Eco concludes, "Everything can become open as well as closed in the
universe of unlimited semiosis" (40).

3.8 Borges and the mirror

For the purpose of exploring the communicative implications of the prose of Jorge Luis Borges, specifically on the subjects of identity and time, I now summarize two short stories where the author divides himself, apparently, into two *alter egos*, represented by his public *persona* and his younger self. Through these readings, I will discuss how Borges utilizes the metaphor of the mirror to invite his readers to participate in a hermeneutical communicational game and a reflection on authorship.

3.8.1 "Borges and I"

This story starts with the sentence: "It's Borges, the other one, that things happen to" ("Borges and I" *Collected* 324). There are then two Borgeses. One is the private, the other is the public man. The author writes,

> …news of Borges reach me by mail, or I see his name on a list of academics or in some biographical dictionary. My taste runs to hourglasses, maps, seventeenth-century typefaces, etymologies, the taste of coffee, and the prose of Robert Louis Stevenson; Borges shares those preferences, but in a vain sort of way that turns them into the accoutrements of an actor. (324)

The private Borges feels that is invaded by the public one and is slowly giving in to him. He affirms that "Spinoza believed that all things wish to go on being what they are—stone wishes eternally to be stone, and tiger, to be tiger. I shall endure in Borges, not in myself (if, indeed, I am nobody at all), but I recognize myself less in his books than in many others', or in the tedious strumming of a guitar" (324). He claims, "Years ago I tried to free myself from him, and I moved on from the mythologies of the slums and outskirts of the city to games with time and infinity, but those games belong to Borges now, and I shall have to think up other things" (324). He ends this story or

reflection by acknowledging that he does not know who is writing this text anymore: "I am not sure which of us it is that's writing this page" (324).

3.8.2 "The Other"

In this fictional story, Borges narrates an incident that, he affirms, happened to him in 1969. He writes about it in 1972. While he was sitting on a bench close to the Charles river in Cambridge there is a young man sitting beside him who sings a familiar tune in Spanish. The young man, who the reader learns, is the young Borges, is sitting at a bench in Geneva, close to the Rhone river. They engage in conversation and the older Borges describes to the young one his room and his books in Geneva. The boy does not believe that this old man is his older self. He argues that he is just dreaming about him. The old Borges responds that that dream lasts 70 years and asks him if he wants to know his future. Each Borges informs the other about their lives, their parents and other relatives. The old Borges tells the other, the young one, that he will write poetry and fantastic stories, and will be a teacher. He also informs him about the Second World War, and about politics in Argentina. The boy says that he feels sympathy for "the great oppressed and outcast masses" ("The Other" *Collected* 414). He responds that those masses are just an abstraction, and that only individuals exist: "Yesterday's man is not today's" (414). The young one asks him why he does not remember that encounter in 1918. The older Borges says that he tried to forget that odd encounter. They also speak about literature. The older describes them as "two men of miscellaneous readings and diverse tastes" (416). They cannot fool each other; they were similar and different. Then, they exchange money. The young Borges is terrified that the American bill that he receives is dated in 1964, and destroys it. They agree to meet the next day at the same

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bench but both know that neither of them will keep the appointment. The old Borges concludes that the encounter was true but while it was a dream for the young one, it was real for him. That is why he could remember it. The other dreamt the impossible date on the bill. This unfolding of the self has communicative implications that I will explore in the next segment.

3.8.2.1 The Man in the Mirror

I think I have created only one character and that is me. I imagine myself in different situations… what I have written, what I have dreamt up, exists in several mirrors, in several of my own shadows. But I've created no figures who live on their own.

(Enguídanos et al. *Conversations* 165–166)

In the two short stories just outlined, Borges directly demonstrates his will to divide himself as a person and as a character, as explained in the former quote. The mirror provides him with the perfect metaphor for a metaphysical reflection on the uneasiness felt by the author who sees himself confronted by his own image as a character. A particular communicative engagement between the author and his readers is also suggested. Although some scholars such as Williamson argue that Borges does not have the intention of communicating with his readers, driven by the idea of vanishing "behind the text, leaving the reader to create meaning for himself" (210), I propose that, on the contrary, Borges invites the readers to participate in a hermeneutical game that includes them as well as the author, as part of his reflection on the role of the writer.

In "Borges and I" there is a perceived tension that may be even identified as a competition between the two Borgeses, the private and the public man. The celebrated

author is slowly but surely taking over the realms of the private man. Describing the rapport of the two men, he writes,

> it would be an exaggeration to say that our relationship is hostile—I live, I allow myself to live, so that Borges can spin out his literature, and that literature is my justification. I willingly admit that he has written a number of sound pages, but those pages will not save me, perhaps because the good in them no longer belongs to any individual, not even to the other man, but rather to language itself, or to tradition. (324)

In the former quote it is possible to identify the theories that would be proposed, years after the first publication of this piece, by scholars Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Umberto Eco. Wood sustains that "Borges' fiction, in its most ample and philosophically mischievous measures, maps very convincingly on to a number of preoccupations we find in (French) critical theory" (33). Wood relates Borges' stories to the themes addressed by diverse critical theorists. Wood prefers to use the term "*discourse* (rather than material event) as the source of meaning in history; *ideology* as ubiquitous and unavoidable (rather than representing any given set of chosen political assumptions); *mythology* as an aspect of everyday contemporary life; and the realm of the *symbolic* as that of shared social existence" (33). Although those subjects vary from each other, Wood argues, they all are found in the Borgesian universe.

The fading of the author is clearly enunciated in "Borges and I." When we read that the pages written by Borges do not belong to anyone, but maybe "to language itself, or to tradition" (324), it is possible to identify Foucault's thesis on what is an author. The French scholar points out to a rejection of the concept of ownership by an author in

relation to a text. As we have seen in a previous section of this chapter dedicated to his essay on defining an author, Foucault highlights the relative novelty of the concept of the author, especially in fictional texts, which used to be considered anonymous by their readers: "Their anonymity caused no difficulties since their ancientness, whether real or imagined, was regarded as a sufficient guarantee of their status" ("What" *The Book* 285). This statement resonates with Borges' allusion to tradition. Similarly, for Barthes, the function of the author would be that of an intermediary between the book and its readers (*Death* 142) or a copyist, who does not exert originality but only blends texts using language (146). Both Barthes and Foucault coincide in signaling the role of the critic in creating the figure of the author (Barthes "Death" 147; Foucault "What" 286). And they also concur in anticipating the fading of the notion of authorship. While Barthes signals the new importance of the reader at the end of his essay (148), Foucault suggests that a change in historical conditions would open new systems of constraints not yet determined but undoubtedly far from the contemporary notion of the author (291) that was in control of the text and its interpretations.

In my view, the position of Borges on this matter would be more similar to that of Umberto Eco, who does not totally reject the idea of authorship but stresses the role of the reader in the communication process that engages author, text and reader (*The Role* 3–43). Like Eco, Borges anticipates that the reader still needs some guidance foreseen by the writer. He carefully crafted this particular short story by introducing a doubt that would challenge the reader's capabilities of interpretation. The final sentence of "Borges and I": "I am not sure which of us it is that's writing this page" (324) invites the reader to attempt an interpretation that the same reader may change with a second or third

examination of the text. As Wood affirms, the readers may think that they can easily interpret that the last sentence of the story belongs to the public man, the writer, since "the piece is written and published and we are reading it" ("Borges and Theory" *The Cambridge Companion* 33). However, he contends, "our interpretive certainty can't long survive Borges's implacable impersonation of doubt" (33). It might be that the private man is trying to make himself heard by using the pronoun "I". A certain hesitation has been masterfully implanted on us, the readers, by the author, who might be simulating his own disappearance in the text.

Similarly, in "The Other," Borges also uses the resource of the *alter ego*. If time in the previous short story was not fundamental for the reflection on authorial intent and readership, in this piece it plays an important role. Time shifts from present to past according to the viewpoint of each of the two Borgeses who see himself in the mirror. There is a double repetition implied here. The metaphor of the mirror suggests a reflected image: the old and the young Borges communicating with each other. The repetition of time is assumed as the only possible explanation for this impossible encounter. As seen at the beginning of this chapter, Borges analyzed the idea of eternal recurrence proposed by Nietzsche and other philosophers in his essays on "The Doctrine of Cycles" and "Circular Time." Although he acknowledged the physical reasons that negate this possibility, he also admitted that in a philosophical way, the theory of repetition of time might be based on the idea of the absence of novelty in the world. Drawing from Marcus Aurelius's thought that "universal history is the history of a single man" ("Circular" *Collected* 228), Borges suggests that repetition might be probable since all humans are united by a similar destiny and equal thoughts and feelings.

"The Other" describes the impossible encounter between the same man at two different times of his life. The narrator is Borges, the celebrated old writer who confronts his younger self, a naïve teenager who dreams of becoming a poet. The function of the mirror here points to notions of identity, raising questions of the possibility of the splitting of the self. Does the meeting occur between the same person at different ages? Is that possible? Or has time transformed them into two different individuals? A difference of more than 50 years separates the adolescent and the mature Borges. One is young, inexperienced and an admirer of the revolutionary movements of the beginning of the 20th century. The seasoned and successful author has forgotten his idealist dreams and is more cautious in politics and more individualistic. They also approach their work in a different manner. The young Borges is driven by creativity and imagination. The old one conforms to already known metaphors that have become his obsession: "old age and death; dreams and life, the flow of time and water" (Borges "The Other" *Selected* 415). Nuño also identifies some philosophical quandaries in this short story, specifically, the ontological problem of identity that appears when the old Borges tries to convince the young one that he is also Borges. Are there two Borgeses or just one divided by time and reunited by fiction? (171–173). This question inspires others like: Who am I? Am I the one that I was? Am I still the one who did this and that? Or… this and that happened to me, or did it happen to the other one? (Nuño 173).

As Kristal suggests, "the pathos of 'The Other' depends on the fictional premise that it is not a fiction but an autobiographical confession" (164). I think that Borges, the author, solves the fictional resolution of the story by appealing to the power of dreams and memory to overcome the problem of time. When the young Borges interrogates the

old one about why he never remembered that encounter, the seasoned man responds that

he purposely decided to forget it to keep his sanity. The young Borges, however, would

always believe that the encounter was just a dream. But if this piece has a literary

resolution, Borges had already planted a doubt in the reader, an ontological doubt that

each reader would probably answer in a different manner or would leave without any

answer at all. The perspective of the splitting of the self or the possibility of

communicating with our *alter egos* in the mirror might be too disturbing to accept for

most readers.

The next short story offers a game of mirrors and identity that also explores the

communicational engagement of author and readers in the interpretation of the multiple

symbols displayed in the plot.

3.8.3 "Death and the Compass"

The story "Death and the Compass" is about a triple crime that challenges the

cleverness of detective Erik Lönnrot. The lineal narration starts with the description of

the first murder, which occurred in a hotel where there was celebrated the Third

Talmudic Congress. One of the participants, Dr. Marcelo Yarmolinsky, was found dead

with a knife in his chest the day after his arrival. Lönnrot and police commissioner

Treviranus discuss the crime. One officer finds a note that says, "The first letter of the

Name has been written" (Borges "Death" *Collected* 149). Lönnrot is astounded by the

many books on Jewish themes of the victim and decides to take them home to examine

them. A reporter who interviews him writes that the detective is studying the multiple

names of God in order to find a clue about the crime.

The next murder occurs a month later in an abandoned place out of the city. The victim, an unimportant thief called Daniel Simon Azevedo, also appears with a knife in his chest. Again there is a writing, this time on a wall decorated with yellow and red rhombus, that claims: "The second letter of the Name has been written" (150). Exactly a month later, another crime is perpetrated. The day of the new murder, commissioner Treviranus receives a call from a man that asks for some money for information about the previous "sacrifices" (150). He finds out that the call came from a tavern with a questionable reputation. The owner, Finnegan, affirms that the last person who used the telephone was a certain Gryphius, who has been living in a rented room close to the bar for a week. That night, the man went out with a couple of friends who were disguised as harlequins. Their colorful rhombuses were remembered by a woman at the bar. The three of them were noticeably drunk and boarded a car. But before, one of the harlequins wrote on the entrance to the bar the predictable sentence, "The last letter of the Name has been written" (151). Treviranus found blood in the suspect's room and a book in Latin. He called Lönnrot, who observed that the book had some allusions to Judaism, and he explained that according to Hebrew customs, the day starts at sunset. Different newspapers offered versions about a possible complot against Jews. One of them highlighted the opinion of a certain Dandy Red Scharlach, a local criminal who assured that in his zone no one would dare to perpetrate those types of crimes. The next night, the commissioner received a letter signed by Baruch Spinoza with a map of the city. In the letter it is stated that there was not going to be a fourth crime. However, the location of the former three crimes was highlighted on the map, forming a triangle. Lönnrot studied the map and remembered the word 'Tetragrammaton,' already mentioned in the books of

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Yarmolinsky, the first victim. He subsequently concluded that in fact there was going to

be a fourth crime. He assured the commissioner that the case would be solved in the next

24 hours.

Lönnrot travelled to the South, to a villa called Triste-Le-Roy in a place

frequented by gunmen, thinking that probably the next victim would be Scharlach

himself. He was not sure but thought that he finally had all the elements to solve the

murders. He entered the villa, intrigued by its confusing decoration. It seems that it was

full of "superfluous symmetries and in maniacal repetitions: a glacial Diana in a gloomy

niche was echoed by a second Diana in a second niche; one balcony was reflected in

another; double stairways opened into a double balustrade. A two-faced Hermes threw a

monstrous shadow" (153). Lönnrot finally found a door and entered. He was not

surprised to discover inside other repetitions. Bedrooms and patios were in duplicate

form: "On the second floor, on the uppermost floor, the house seemed infinite yet still

growing. The house is not so large, he thought. It seems larger because of its dimness, its

symmetry, its mirrors, its age, my unfamiliarity with it, and this solitude" (154). A certain

decoration on the glass of a window caught his attention. There were rhombuses in

yellow, green, and red. He was stunned by a remembrance. Then, two men assaulted him

and took his weapon, and he faced Red Scharlach. Lönnrot asked him if he was looking

for the Secret Name. However, Scharlach explained that all the murders and puzzles were

part of a scheme to attract him, to make Lönnrot come to the trap in Triste-le-Roy.

Scharlach wanted revenge for the detention and imprisonment of his brother by Lönnrot.

He thought of weaving a labyrinth with all the murders and intrigues that he knew would

appeal to the detective. He knew that Lönnrot would complete the line with the three

murders with the location of the fourth one, making a perfect rhombus. After explaining

to him how all the crimes were executed, Scharlach was ready to shoot him. Lönnrot

attempted a final plea that thought would entice the intelligent man that was his

opponent. He said to him:

> I know of a Greek labyrinth that is but a straight line. So many philosophers have
>
> been lost upon that line that a mere detective might be pardoned if he became lost
>
> as well. When you hunt me down in another avatar of our lives, Scharlach, I
>
> suggest that you fake (or commit) one crime at A, a second crime at B, eight
>
> kilometers from A, then a third crime at C, four kilometers from A and B and
>
> halfway between them. Then wait for me at D, two kilometers from A and C,
>
> once again halfway between them. Kill me at D, as you are about to kill me at
>
> Triste-le-Roy. (156)

Then, after agreeing to the strange proposition, Scharlach "stepped back a few steps"

(156) and fired.

3.8.3.1 Mirrors and identity in a reading of "Death and the Compass"

It is evident that this short story is based on a game of mirrors. Probably one of

the darkest and most gothic of Borges's fictions, "Death and the Compass" occurs "in a

Buenos Aires of dreams" (Borges "Artifices" *Collected* 129). Many symbols of Judaism,

another of the Argentinian writer's favorite topics, gain relevance as the clues that would

guide detective   Lönnrot to his final destiny. Nuño calls this story "a Jewish labyrinth"

(118). In my view, the search for the four letters that would form the name of God as a

way to deciphering the mystery appeals to the intellectual curiosity of the detective but

also acts as a way to entice the reader as the classical detective stories usually do. For

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Nuño, the action of the words, endowed with a magical, fetishist power, permits the resolution of the story, since once the last letter is decrypted, the detective's search ends (123). However, the mystery behind the Tetragrammaton is not the main theme of this piece. A metaphysical reflection on the recurrence of time is insinuated through the metaphor of the mirror. In fact, a series of mirrors or doubles is present in the plot, specially at the end of the story. When Lönnrot enters the villa of Triste-le-Roy, he cannot help but notice all the dualities that abound in the strange architecture of the house. Statues, stairs, patios and rooms doubled in identical symmetry suggesting repetition as the great theme of the story. Even the character of Red Scharlach, Lönnrot's nemesis, might be understood as his *alter ego*. After all, both men share similar cleverness and identical ways of reasoning. But the text itself deserves a closer examination to discern its communicative implications.

Following Umberto Eco's description of open and closed texts, this piece might be approached in two different ways. A first reading probably suggests a classic detective story, a series of crimes, and a clever detective finally fooled by a cleverer criminal. If interpreted in this way, the purpose of the story would be just to entertain some audiences. As Eco stated in relation to closed texts, it would be oriented to a certain reader: "Some authors… have in mind an average addressee referred to a given social context" (Eco *The Role* 8). In this case, the model reader would be a fan of police stories. However, just at the end of the piece, it seems that its resolution escapes the conventional expectations of that reader. The detective not only becomes a victim but also offers his murderer a strange proposition. Lönnrot invites him to replay the game of murder in a new opportunity. That impossible suggestion totally transforms the story. By the tacit

acceptance of the readers of this pending end, new possibilities appear as well as new interpretations and endings. The story becomes an open text, where writer and readers cooperate in the role of authorship, enriching and amplifying the scope of the piece.

Hence, the theme of this short story is the possibility that time repeats itself. Nietzsche's eternal recurrence is assumed as certain in the last dialogue between the detective and the criminal. Interestingly, the duality formed by Lönnrot-Scharlach seems to be willing to repeat the fatal encounter acknowledging that a second opportunity would occur in the future. If the story were to repeat, will Lönnrot be again murdered by his enemy? That is the agreement of the two men. However, when the detective mentions another labyrinth, the "Greek labyrinth" (156), obviously alluding to Zeno's paradox, is he willing to die again or is that an invitation to deceive Scharlach in their next encounter? As Griffin proposes, "this 'Greek labyrinth' is not a physical but an intellectual one, it alludes to Zeno's dichotomy paradox which denies the possibility of motion" (13). Borges was always fascinated by this problem. In his essay on "The Perpetual Race of Achilles and the Tortoise," he describes how Zeno attempted to demonstrate that the fast Achilles would not be able to reach the lazy turtle once that it was given an advantage of ten meters. He also discusses some of the most famous refutations of this theory by thinkers of different times ("The Perpetual" *Selected* 43–47). Thus, he does not hesitate in placing the paradox in this short story, suggesting that Lönnrot in fact might be deceiving his nemesis, who would not be able to murder him next time. But other problems arise from the unusual end of this story. Being both *alter egos*, is it possible that Scharlach guesses the real intentions of the detective? Would he be aware of the impossibility of reaching his target in a hypothetical new opportunity?

As demonstrated, interpretations abound for this "open text." Williamson, for example, proposes an allegory to the deaths of the author and the reader in his explanation of the end of "Death and the Compass." He says, "The prison-house of language may prevent the author from communicating with his reader, but this, in turn, deprives the reader of interpretative certainty, so meaning becomes treacherous and unreachable" (212). For Williamson, both writer and reader are "mirrored" (213). He states, "The only place they can meet is in the negative utopia of Triste-le-Roy, where they finally cancel each other… for in the end it makes no difference who actually kills whom" (213).

It is interesting also to notice that in the prologue to "Artifices," the section of "Ficciones" where this story is included, Borges cunningly insinuates that after he wrote this short story he thought of adding some elements that would augment "the time and space" (129) of the piece. He describes those details: "The revenge might be bequeathed to others, the periods of time might be calculated in years, perhaps in centuries; the first letter of the Name might be uttered in Iceland, the second in Mexico, the third in Hindustan" (129). Accordingly, Borges used to make some comments in the forewords to his books that may suggest other endings or amplify the possibilities of a given text, engaging his readers in a sort of game of interpretations that seems never would be over.

3.8.4 "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote"

This short story is written in the form of a literary review about a certain French author called Pierre Menard. After Menard's death, a critic examines and attempts a brief description of his work, including manuscripts and published books, philosophical essays, poems, monographs and translations. However, the story centers on an ambitious

work by Menard, his unfinished attempt to write *Don Quixote*. The critic clarifies that the French author did not intend to write a new version of the novel of Cervantes; neither was he interested in reproducing the same text. "His admirable ambition was to produce a number of pages which coincided—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes" (Borges "Pierre" *Collected Fictions* 91). Although he was not capable of such a deed, Menard managed to write a couple of chapters of the first part of Don Quixote that exactly reproduced the original ones.

The critic's note aims to justify Menard's attempt. He describes the first and most obvious method of Menard. In order to write *Don Quixote*, he needed to become Miguel de Cervantes by learning seventeenth century Spanish and trying to reproduce Cervantes' life. But Menard rejected this idea, considering it "too easy" (91). "Being, somehow, Cervantes, and arriving thereby at the Quixote—that looked to Menard less challenging… than continuing to be Pierre Menard and coming to the Quixote through the experiences of Pierre Menard" (91). The critic transcribes a letter where Menard explains the reasons for this ambitious attempt. Menard argues that he finds *Don Quixote* an interesting, but not an indispensable, book. He calls it "a contingent work" (92). But he assumes this task, encouraged by its difficulty: "Composing the Quixote in the early seventeenth century was a reasonable, necessary, perhaps inevitable undertaking; in the early twentieth, it is virtually impossible" (93).

The critic highlights how the Quixote of Menard, even by using the exact same words of the original, is perceived as "richer" (94). While some of the remarks of Cervantes' book are seen as provincial nowadays, under the authorship of Menard they are perceived as brilliant (93–94). According to the critic, Menard was also able to

foresee how the books considered the greatest works of literature might lose, with time, their significance: "The Quixote, Menard remarked, was first and foremost a pleasant book; it is now an occasion for patriotic toasts, grammatical arrogance, obscene *[de luxe]* editions. Fame is a form—perhaps the worst form—of incomprehension" (94). And the genius of Menard would be in his will to spend many hours undertaking such a pointless endeavor, being able later to destroy those pages. A footnote to the short story indicates that Menard used to make a bonfire from his own work.

The critic concludes that Menard "enriched the slow and rudimentary art of reading by means of a new technique—the technique of deliberate anachronism and fallacious attribution" (95). Then, he states that this method permits us to attribute authorship of certain books to some writers, and it "fills the calmest books with adventure" (95).

3.8.4.1 Author, text, mirror, and reader

The game of mirrors that implies both the author and the reader become more evident in "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote." Griffin highlights how in this story the "emphasis is once more laid on the reader's role in forging meaning in a text" (9). That stress on the reader comes from an interest on identity. Referring to Borges's philosophical remarks on the self of writers and readers, Griffin proposes that "his speculations on pantheism, reflecting his readings of Spinoza and Schopenhauer, led to a further discussion of identity as he suggests that all men are one man, and one man all men" (9). It may be argued that a similar discussion of identity lays at the foundation of Barthes' idea of the death of the author and the raising of the reader (Wood 36–37). I think that the shifting identities suggested by the metaphor of the mirror can also be

applied to an examination of the communicative exchange determined by the roles of the writer and the reader in this short story. In my view, they are a reflection of each other since they need the other to complete the circle of communication and creation.

Wood finds coincidences between Borges's story, which was written in 1939, and the thesis of Barthes, mainly portrayed in his 1960s' essay on the death of the author. As Wood signals, Barthes' theory was already anticipated by different writers and literary critics. He names a few: Stéphane Mallarmé, Marcel Proust, Henry James, who speculated with the idea since the beginning of the 20th century (37). However, what Wood finds remarkable and similar between both Borges and Barthes and "makes them 'precursors' of each other, so to speak, is the sense not that the author is hidden or ghostly or inaccessible or not needed but that the reader *creates* the author" (37). In the short story, Wood remarks, there is a description of the futile attempts of Menard to become Cervantes and how he finally writes some chapters that contain the same exact words as the original Quixote, although they are perceived as different by the critic-writer of the piece: "After all, Menard is not a native speaker of Spanish, and he lives in the wrong country and the wrong century; many of the words both writers use have changed their connotations" (37). The critic even quotes a paragraph in both texts. The words are the same, but he points out that in Menard's version, the text has gained significance. For Wood, "this comic, half-truthful, unreal destiny of the writer is an ordinary activity for readers, who, whatever their nationality or century, become Cervantes as they read him—while fully remaining themselves… Pierre Menard, the unreal writer is a perfect, dizzying portrait of the real reader" (38).

Williamson explores the origin of Borges's stance on the relation of author and reader, stating that "the text becomes a screen between" them (210). He suggests that in the 1920s, when Borges was involved with the ultraist poetic movement in Spain, that idea seems to have started to develop for his writing. By that time, "writing is still a crystallization of the author's response to the world, and thus potentially a form of self-realization, while the reader, for his part, can relish the pleasure of the ambiguous, polysemic, and "un-authoritative" text" (210). However, with the story of Pierre Menard, Borges dares to express directly his novel idea on authorship, getting ahead "certain ideas developed by French theorists" (211). He adds, "Menard's rewriting of the Quixote is an attempt to subvert the status of Cervantes as the unique, original author of the great classic, by confusing the two roles, turning the author into a reader and the reader into a kind of author" (211).

I concur with Wood's and Williamson's discussion of the significance of Barthes's and Borges's contribution to the discussion on the death of the author and the elevation of the reader. The concept of an author-God that decides and dictates all that occurs in a text has evolved: "The writer doesn't have to die – or only as a person, not as function. In fact, the reader can welcome the writer as a companion once the old authorial deity has been fired" (Wood 38). Wood also briefly examines the French scholar's latest views of the author where he seems to accept his presence, but in a minor protagonist stance. He states, "Barthes's self-deprecating irony here approaches the tone of Borges when he invents authors too improbable to oppress us – authors who are themselves expressions of the reader's power and freedom" (39). Williamson also points out that "Barthes replaced the author by an impersonal agent – language or writing – which, he

argued, destroys authorial voice, origin, and personality" (211). Thus, Pierre Menard might be identified with the common reader, "who repeats the words of the text he reads and changes their meaning as he adjusts them to his own subjectivity" (211). Furthermore, Borges himself suggested that every new interpretation enriches a story (Burgin 132). When interviewed about "Pierre Menard," his first short story, he described it as "a kind of essay" (21). He adds that the theme of this piece is based on the idea that "every time a book is read or reread, then something happens to the book… it's really a new experience" (22). In a different interview, Borges also highlights the role of the reader, his collaborative engagement in the act of creating with the author. In case that this participation is not reached, he affirms, reading would be useless (Yates "A Colloquy" 161–62).

Likewise, some of the remarks expressed by Foucault on his analysis of the function of the author might be identified in this short story. When the French philosopher highlights that the figure of the author is relatively new and is a construct created by some elements of society such as the literary critic (286), it is obvious that in the story the character identified as the narrator uses his resources to construct rhetorically the idea of Menard as a genius writer. Foucault stresses that "once a whole system of ownership for texts came into being, once strict rules concerning authors' rights, author-publisher relations, rights of reproduction, and related matters were enacted… the possibility of transgression attached to the act of writing took on, more and more, the form of an imperative peculiar to literature" (285). The author, he argues, became part of "the system of property that characterizes our society" (285). Authorship in the short story might also be interpreted as a matter of possession. Who owns the rights

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for Don Quixote? Cervantes or Menard? In Borges' story, Menard never finished the totality of the project. But if he had, ownership, according to the economic standards of the society, would not be clear. If he would, his transgression of the system of property would also have been considered problematic.

3.8.4.2 Interpreting "Pierre Menard" through Eco's communicational steps as part of The Role of the Reader

Since Umberto Eco's examination about the role of the reader proposes a series of steps for the process of interpretation of texts, I turn now to a brief analysis of "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" that offers a possible route to a hermeneutical reading of this short story.

As established before in this chapter, Eco addresses the role of the reader of texts as a communicative issue that transcends the classical figures of sender-message-addressee, adding context and other elements to the communicative act. As would be the case with most of the stories by Jorge Luis Borges, this piece is an *open* text, subject to multiple interpretations, thus enriching the experience of each reader. Likewise, being a fictional work, "Pierre Menard" might be considered an *artificial* text which differentiates it from the non-fictional or *natural* ones. At the first level of Eco's process of interpretation there are different codes and subcodes that comprehend a basic dictionary, formed by the lexicon shared by the text and the reader. The words used in the story need to be understood by the addressee. If he or she does not understand some terms, difficulties arise; the same happens if the story is written in an unknown language. At this level, not only language and words need to be shared by reader and text but also some common references of framework. Does the reader know that this is a fictional

text? Is it assumed that a reader would know this feature of the text since its author is a recognized writer of fiction? Furthermore, there is still a possibility that the reader, not knowing Borges's work, may be confused and think that the voice of the narrator corresponds to a real literary critic, the piece taking the form of an essay. A common context is also important here. Is the reader familiar with the work of a literary critic? Does the reader connect the symbols read with verbal utterances previously heard that are part of his personal encyclopedia? In this level it is important to stress that the reader compares the text with his previous knowledge on different matters as detailed as symbols, semantics, language and in a more general sense, like literary genres, the work of Miguel de Cervantes, and other stories by Borges.

In order to advance to each level of interpretation, the addressee needs to actualize information. He or she makes a decision about accepting or rejecting the message. Is this story credible or too absurd to be believed? Is a French author who decides to rewrite a well-known classic just driven by madness? After all, Menard—according to the story—used to burn his own work, what may be a clue to his madness. At this point, if the reader rejects the message, the reading usually stops and the communication is broken. However, sometimes, the reader may exert a right to suspend his disbelief, waiting for more information that confirms his initial suspicion that Menard is an insane person. The reader may then bracket his disbelief until he advances more in the reading of the story.

Some intertextual frames may also aid with interpretation. If the reader is already familiar with the Quixote, or with other stories by Borges, those books may provide more information and amplify the interest on the story. For instance, a reader familiar with the

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Quixote, who read the story and knows the characters and actions described, may experience more interest in the reading of "Pierre Menard". However, a reader who never read or found the Quixote boring would lose interest in the short story. Ideology also plays an important role on deciphering a text. As Eco states, "an ideological bias can lead a critical reader to make a given text say more than it apparently says, that is, to find out what in that text is ideologically presupposed, untold" (22) Thus, astute readers may also look for interpretations beyond the story told. Is the story of Pierre Menard a hidden critique of authorial power? Is Borges attempting to liberate readers from the oppressive command of authorship? Or is it just a satire and humoristic critique of certain literary circles? The idea behind Eco's model lies in the significance of the reader as a co-creator of meaning together with the author.

Eco also highlights that narrative structures offered by the author aid in the communicative act of interpretation. What happens in a text needs to be actualized by the reader through his understanding of the plot and fabula. The plot would be the discourse, how the story of Pierre Menard is told, which words are chosen. Are there deviations and digressions? One example may be the veiled allusion to the religions of the enemies of the critic at the beginning of the story: "A deceitful catalogue that a certain newspaper, whose protestant leanings are surely no secret, has been so inconsiderate as to inflict upon that newspaper's deplorable readers—few and Calvinist (if not masonic and uncircumcised) though they be" (Borges "Pierre" *Collected* 88). And the fabula corresponds to the actions narrated and how they are interpreted. The long description of the works by Menard that occupy more than a page of the story may be interpreted as humoristic by some readers. That makes them anticipate possible deviations, twists or

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outcomes from the text as they advance reading the story. Some pages later, the readers may confirm or disconfirm this supposition. At the end of the story, the addressees decide if they accept its truth or not, after comparing it to their previous readings of Borges, Cervantes, or other authors.

3.8.4.3 Language, tautologies, and Platonism in "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote"

In this short story, there is another theme beyond the issue of authorship and readership, and that concerns the consequences of the use of language. Nuño highlights the concept of tautology in this story. He defines tautology as the repetition of different thoughts that possess the same validity (97). For Nuño, Pierre Menard assumes the tautologic condition of language and of our culture, since to replicate something makes it sound different. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary to bring some resources that are outside language, like intention, declarative force, and context. That would be the hermeneutic game of the story, making Menard the author of a consecrated tautology transmuted into a creative input (97). Nuño also hypothesizes that if for Borges in the end, a man is all men, why could a book not be all the books and the same, with the possibility that the author be either Cervantes or Menard? (98). Identity is challenged since tautologies admit this possibility. Similarly, Nuño points out that Borges proposes that the true interpretation of the Quixote is what Menard meant with his version. In the story, Menard's Quixote is more subtle than Cervantes', since the Spaniard could not avoid situating his story in his provincial Spain and time while Menard *chose* the 17th century for his narration, reaching a certain objectivity or separation from that age (103–104). Nuño also affirms that Borges incorporates some elements from Plato's

metaphysics within the story. That would become manifest when Menard observes that the Quixote is a contingent, unnecessary book, meaning that there are eternal objects in the world of literature that are unrepeatable and necessary, and others, like the Quixote, less unique and more susceptible to repetition (106–107). According to Nuño, there are similar divisions in Plato's philosophy. The Idea of the Good, as part of the world of the archetypes, is not at the same level as other ideas. It is more transcendent. As an example, he proposes the idea of a table or a book, objects easily reproduced, while the idea of kindness is just one or is not (109). However, in this sense, Nuño affirms, Cervantes and his Quixote are favored by being able to be reread, reinterpreted and appreciated though different ages (110).

I conclude this chapter by pointing out that "Pierre Menard" and most of the stories by Borges emerged from his interest in intertextuality. In the former story, allusions to other books is part of the game of reflected mirrors that Borges utilizes to invite his readers to collaborate in the interpretation of the story. As Merrell observes, the narrator in "Pierre Menard" feels amazed at how his "enriched texts bears allusion to works by Bertrand Russell, William James, and others, while Cervantes's relatively impoverished novel does no more than make reference to early seventeenth-century Spain" (18). Intertextuality, the main theme of the next chapter of this dissertation, is key to understand the scope of Borges' metaphysical obsession with time, books, and encyclopedias, as part of his search for communicative engagement with his readers.

Chapter 4:

Encyclopedias and Other Books

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter Four, "Encyclopedias and Other Books," I argue that Jorge Luis Borges keenly anticipated current theories of the deconstruction of texts, hermeneutics, and intertextuality by the incorporation of these themes as part of his fictional work. I continue the discussion of authorship and readership by reviewing some of the main aspects related to hermeneutics and the deconstruction of texts as explicated by Hans Gadamer, Jacques Derrida, and Paul Ricoeur. To amplify the understanding of these topics I explore the thoughts of Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, and other scholars on intertextuality. I also consider the role of translation as part of the hermeneutical approach that Borges carried out as translator of the works of different Western writers. I then focus on the analysis of Borges' essay: "John Wilkins' Analytical Language," which intrigued Michel Foucault. The French scholar reflects on how Borges addresses the work of Wilkins by anticipating the infinite possibilities of a metaphysical approach to language. I also examine two short stories: "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbius Tertius" and "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim." Both stories exemplify the rhetorical appeal developed by Borges to invite his readers to participate in a communicational game of intertextuality and hermeneutics.

4.2 Hermeneutics, language, and meaning

Several postmodern scholars have addressed the issue of interpretation with novel approaches that remark the role of language to decipher meaning. In the issue of interpretation, Gadamer also favors the position of letting the text speak by itself,

although he recognizes the importance of tradition and context as fundamental for hermeneutics. Jacques Derrida goes beyond the traditional stance in the Western society that places writing as secondary in relation to the spoken world. Language would encompass both speech and writing. He also discusses the issue of presence and absence in writing proposing that a signature, for example, suggests a past or a future presence of the signer. And Paul Ricoeur studies the metaphor as a purveyor of the creative power of language. Their theories illuminate the intersection between hermeneutics and works of art such as literary fiction.

4.2.1 Gadamer against objectivism

Gadamer's project is oriented to see hermeneutics as a logical response to the rhetorical tradition that highlights meaning in the study of texts. His work permits to appreciate the linguistic nature of human beings. For him, language is the tool that allows the experience of interpretation and comprehension of truth. As he affirms, his project is not directed to discuss a new model of understanding but to demonstrate that "understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood" (Gadamer xxviii).

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer is preoccupied with the objectivism and rationality championed by the Enlightenment and wonders about the meaning of knowledge from the viewpoint of the natural and the human sciences (4–8). He criticizes the subordination of the humanities to the sciences. And favors an approach to different works of art such as plastic, drama and literature that goes beyond the aesthetic dimension. Anchored on the work of Heidegger, Gadamer attempts to understand "what is the being of self-understanding?" (86). He affirms, "the experience of the work of art includes understanding, and thus itself represents a hermeneutical phenomenon—but not

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at all in the sense of a scientific method" (87). For him, "understanding… can be illuminated only on the basis of the mode of being of the work of art itself" (87).

Gadamer also addresses the "mode of being of literature" (153) in relation to his position on hermeneutics. Discussing the possibility that literature offers for both, reading aloud and silently, he contends, "Meaning and the understanding of it are so closely connected with the corporeality of language that understanding always involves an inner speaking as well" (153). He stresses how reading a book differentiates from other artistic activities that need to be completed at a time. Reading, on the contrary, offers the liberty to close a book and continue with it later (154). Thus, reading is inextricably united to the reader. "Literature is a function of being intellectually preserved and handed down, and therefore brings its hidden history into every age" (154). Gadamer also suggests that "world literature has its place in the consciousness of all. It belongs to the "world" (154). Contrasting literature with other types of writing, he explains that there are not essential differences. All are rooted on language and meaning. Literary prose or poetry and scientific texts, however, may differ in "the claims to truth that each makes" (156). The second one seems more propense to privilege a right to be acknowledged as the vehicle for truth. He also highlights the difficulties in the interpretation of a text. "In deciphering and interpreting it, a miracle takes place: the transformation of something alien and dead into total contemporaneity and familiarity… the capacity to read, to understand what is written, is like a secret art, even a magic that frees and binds us" (156). Time and place seem to stop and disappear when reading, and the reader who understands the author's meaning "produce and achieve the sheer presence of the past" (156).

Since hermeneutics has been always related to interpretation of texts, the same happens to other artistic expressions. But interpreting goes beyond the aesthetic realm, it "has to be acquired" (157). Consequently, "Aesthetics has to be absorbed into hermeneutics… understanding must be conceived as part of the event in which meaning occurs, the event in which the meaning of all statements… is formed and actualized" (157). Tradition and history (or context) play an important role on Gadamer's hermeneutics. However, he warns about the tendency to "reconstruct" the process of how a work of art was produced in order to determine its meaning. "What is reconstructed, a life brought back from the lost past, is not the original" (159). That is why he affirms, "a hermeneutics that regarded understanding as reconstructing the original would be no more than handing on a dead meaning" (160).

When discussing the elements of a theory of hermeneutic experience, Gadamer highlights how the reader in search for meaning does not rely on his or her own understanding. "Rather, a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something" (271). But this openness, he warns, "involves neither "neutrality" with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices" (271). The reader needs to be aware of his biases, an attitude that differ from the stance of the scholars from the Enlightenment. He sustains, "the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power" (273). The Cartesian view on doubt and its reliance on method and the rationality favored by the Enlightenment, still highly influence nowadays scientific thought (273). However, Gadamer proposes a new valorization of tradition by hermeneutics. He says,

"understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated" (291).

For Gadamer, language has a determinant influence on the new ontology of hermeneutics (383-385). In his view, hermeneutics requires a "verbal" (385) component. "The concern of hermeneutics", (386) he explains, "belongs traditionally to the sphere of grammar and rhetoric. Language is the medium in which substantive understanding and agreement take place between two people" (386). And understanding occurs when we allow the text to speak itself. It is not about "reconstructing the way the text came into being. Rather, one intends to understand the text itself" (390). Gadamer compares this process with the one that happens in a conversation. When two people speak, meaning arises not only by interpreting each other but by creating a common space. "This is what takes place in conversation, in which something is expressed that is not only mine or my author's but common" (390). Similarly, he expresses that "understanding what someone says is not an achievement of empathy in which one divines the inner life of the speaker" (483). He acknowledges that understanding is possible by drawing from "occasional sources" (483). However, "this determination by situation and context, which fills out what is said to a totality of meaning and makes what is said really said, pertains not to the speaker but to what is spoken" (483). Gadamer concludes that "using scientific methods does not suffice to guarantee truth" (484). And that would demonstrate "the limits of method, but not of science" (484). For achieving truth, he favors "a discipline of questioning and inquiring" (484).

4.2.2 Jacques Derrida on deconstruction

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida challenges some of the rhetoric on language concepts taken for granted in the Western civilization like the one that affirms that the written language is considered an auxiliary to speech. This assumption, Derrida remarks, comes from the idea that speech would be considered internal, closer to thought, while writing is external. Thus, speech organizes our concepts of sign and truth as logocentrism. However, he argues that the possibility of writing may help the possibility of language. Grammatology implies then, the study of writing as a total renewal and a change of level. Through deconstruction it is possible not to abolish but to go back to the roots of all the premises that originated the contemporary concepts of linguistics. In the first part of the book, "Writing before the Letter", he explicates how writing originated, and why a supremacy of speech over writing was established. In the second part, "Nature, Culture, Writing", Derrida deconstructs different texts such as Saussure's Course in General Linguistics, Lévi-Strauss's Tristes Tropiques, and Rousseau's Essay on the Origin of Languages.

Derrida proposes grammatology as a science of writing, noting "that it was thought and formulated, as a task, idea, project, in a language implying a certain kind of structurally and axiologically determined relationship between speech and writing" (27). He ties this science to "phonetic writing, valorized as the telos of all writing" (27) and to history. He adds, "Before being its object, writing is the condition of the epistémè… writing opens the field of history—of historical becoming" (27). For him, the beginnings of writing and language are united. Derrida opposes the conventional view of writing as secondary to the spoken world (30-31). However, he acknowledges the difficulties of establishing "a science or a philosophy of writing" (93).

Derrida explains his thoughts on logocentrism as related to ethnocentrism. For him, logocentrism would exercise a function of a regulator of "the concept of writing… the history of metaphysics, and the concept of science" (3). Writing, then, would be located in a secondary position to its "phoneticization" (3). The search for truth as the objective of metaphysics, he adds, would be "the debasement of writing, and its repression outside "full speech" (3), while science would have always been dominated by the rule of the "imperialism of the logos" (3). Grammatology proclaims the end of logocentrism and ethnocentrism. When discussing the end of the book and the beginning of writing, Derrida accounts a discrete undertaking that he affirms has been occurring for twenty centuries assigning a protagonist role to writing. He affirms that the "death of the book undoubtedly announces … nothing but a death of speech… and a new mutation in the history of writing, in history as writing" (8). He clarifies that the death of speech is a metaphor that would mean its new situation as secondary to writing (8). Likewise, he affirms, "the concept of writing exceeds and comprehends that of language" (8). Derrida's theories challenge traditional approaches to the book and writing. He affirms, "the idea of the book, which always refers to a natural totality, is profoundly alien to the sense of writing" (8). For him, the conventional approach to the book pretends to categorize it as the container of knowledge in a logocentric way, opposing "the disruption of writing, [being] against its aphoristic energy, and… against difference in general" (18). The book would be destined to disappear in favor of the text (18).

It seems to me that with these last remarks, Derrida in some way was anticipating that writing would take other forms different than the book, which resembles the revolution that the Internet has represented in the last twenty-five years. During this

period, the supremacy of the book seems to have diminished and/or evolved to other forms of reading and writing that comprehend more diversified text such as eBooks, personal blogs, and social media. All those forms of communication call for the personal involvement of authors and readers in the process of writing and interpreting texts.

4.2.2.1 Derrida on communication and meaning

In *Signature Event Context*, Derrida defies traditional assumptions about the nature of communication that conceives it as associated to meaning. He points out, firstly, that there is not a single understanding of meaning and secondly, that communication is beyond the realm of "semantics, semiotics, and… linguistics" (1). In fact, Derrida highlights that it is possible to "communicate a movement or that a tremor [èmbranlement], a shock, a displacement of force can be communicated—that is, propagated, transmitted" (1). Thus, communication cannot be reduced just to semantics or linguistic exchanges.

Derrida is preoccupied with the notion of context as associated to communication. He thinks that "a context is never absolutely determinable, or rather… its determination can never be entirely certain or saturated" (*Signature* 3). Derrida addresses the issue of writing as "a means of communication" (3). This posits that writing would have the possibility of "extending enormously, if not infinitely, the domain of oral or gestural communication" (3). Derrida analyzes the *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* by Condillac as "an explicit reflection on the origin and function of the written text" (4). Condillac, he affirms, says that humans write since "they have to communicate" (4). And the act of communication needs previous thoughts or reflections that would be the message to be communicated. Then, men "invent the particular means of communication,

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writing" (4). For Condillac, Derrida remarks, writing implies an absence, the one of the addressee. Thus, he suggests that Condillac places writing as a subordinate activity in relation to spoken communication, only born by the necessity of communicating with absent addressees. Writing and all its forms of expression such as painting and the use of different alphabets, would become a means of representation, "but the representative structure which marks the first degree of expressive communication, the relation idea/sign, will never be either annulled or transformed" (5). However, Derrida goes beyond the notions of absence expressed by Condillac. His idea of absence in writing involves not only the addressee but the "sender" (5) or author. He also highlights the condition of iterability or repetition as inherent to writing. "My communication must be repeatable—iterable—in the absolute absence of the receiver or of any empirically determinable collectivity of receivers. Such iterability… structures the mark of writing itself, no matter what particular type of writing is involved" (7). Derrida even wonders what would happen to a writing characterized by an undisclosed encryption. If both the only sender and the only receiver are death, could be still considered writing? His answer is affirmative as long as it is "organized by a code, even an unknown and non-linguistic one" (7). He implies that "all writing must, therefore, be capable of functioning in the radical absence of every empirically determined receiver in general" (8).

Derrida also examines the work of Husserl on the subject of the absence of the referent. For Husserl, then, "an utterance [énoncé] whose object is not impossible but only possible can very well be made an understood without its real object (its referent) being present, either to the person who produced the statement or to the one who receives it" (*Signature* 10-11). In *Logical Investigations*, Derrida affirms, Husserl also admits the

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possibility of the absence of meaning, which can be in three different ways. First, "I can

manipulate symbols without animating them" (11). And that may occur, for example, in

"mathematical symbolism" (11). Second, "certain utterances can have a meaning

although they are deprived of objective signification… "squared circle" marks the

absence of a referent… as well as that of a certain signified, but not the absence of

meaning" (11). In the third place, Derrida points out to "what Husserl calls Sinnlosigkeit

or agrammaticality" (11). Language is lost in those cases, "or at least no "logical'

language" (11). For Derrida, Husserl attempted to examine "the system of rules of a

universal grammar, not from a linguistic point of view but from a logical and

epistemological one" (12). Husserl highlights a crisis of meaning based on the idea that

all linguistic symbols, spoken or written might be a citation, "put between quotation

marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new

contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable" (12).

In a similar manner, Derrida also analyzes the work of British language

philosopher John L. Austin, particularly in his book *How to do Things with Words*.

Austin, according to Derrida, "has shattered the concept of communication as a purely

semiotic, linguistic, or symbolic concept" (13). However, Austin acknowledges the

validity of context, and accepts "the communication of an intentional meaning, even if

that meaning has no referent in the form of a thing or of a prior or exterior state of things"

(14).

Derrida addresses again the issue of presence/absence in writing when he

discusses signatures. He says, "a written signature implies the actual or empirical

nonpresence of the signer. But it will be claimed, the signature also marks and retains his

having-been present in a past now or present [maintenant]" (20). Signatures are also related to a possible future, where they will represent the signer. And they have effects that are dependent on their capacity to be read, "a signature must be able to be detached from the present and singular intention of its production" (20). This means that it needs to be able to be reproduced by the signer and to be recognized, regardless of the historical moment.

He concludes his essay by stating that communication "is not the means of transference of meaning" (20). That does not mean that writing is going to disappear, "in accord with McLuhan's ideological representation" (20). Derrida suggests "the increasingly powerful historical expansion of a general writing, of which the system of speech, consciousness, meaning, presence, truth, etc., would be only an effect, and should be analyzed as such" (20).

Derrida also proposes that communication "is exceeded or split by the intervention of writing, that is, by a dissemination irreducible to polysemy" (20-21). Then, writing "is not the site… of a hermeneutic deciphering, the decoding of a meaning or truth" (21). He then proposes deconstruction as a means of "reversing and displacing conceptual order as well as the nonconceptual order with which it is articulated" (21). As an example, he suggests that writing has been traditionally placed secondarily to traditional conceptual orders. Here he might be alluding indirectly to speech. Then, he finalizes, "writing, if there is any, perhaps communicates, but certainly does not exist. Or barely, hereby, in the form of the most improbable signature" (21). And he concludes his essay by incorporating his own signature at the end of the text.

4.2.3 Ricoeur on metaphor and language

Ricoeur sees metaphor as "an extension of the meaning of words; its explanation is grounded in a theory of substitution" (3). In *The Rule of the Metaphor*, he aims to record the importance of metaphor as a conveyor of the creative power of language. Ricoeur outlines how metaphor is related to linguistics, semantics, poetry, and philosophy, highlighting the unifying character of metaphor among different disciplines. He also defines metaphor as "the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality" (7).

Ricoeur affirms that when referring to texts, he does not speak only about "something written" (219), but he discusses "the production of discourse as a work" (219). Thus, "pragmatical categories" (219) would become part of the realm of "discourse" (219), which he associates to "the arena of a work of composition or arrangement, 'disposition' (to echo dispositio, the term in ancient rhetoric), which makes of a poem or novel a totality irreducible to a simple sum of sentences" (219). The arrangement already mentioned follows certain guidelines, "a codification that belongs no longer to language but to discourse." (219). The codes used here include specific, "literary genres… that regulate the praxis of the text" (219). A primordial characteristic of this type of text is "style… as what makes the work a singular, individual thing" (219).

Ricoeur also appeals to the hermeneutical component of the text. "To interpret a work is to display the world to which it refers by virtue of its 'arrangement', its 'genre', and its 'style'"(220). He differentiates between his idea of hermeneutics from the one supported by other scholars such as Dilthey and Schleiermacher, who portray a "romantic and psychologizing conception" (220) that seeks to find "an intention hidden behind the work" (220). However, he is more interested in addressing "the right to pass from the

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structure (which is to the complex work what sense is to the simple statement) to the world of the work (which is to the work what the denotation is to the statement)" (220).

4.3 Authorship and readership through intertextuality

Several authors in the 20th century proposed a novel viewpoint on authorship that acknowledges the confluence of different texts in the creative act of writing, amplifying the hermeneutical experience. Bulgarian-French researcher Julia Kristeva is credited with creating the concept of intertextuality. Lara and Vijila (2018) point out that Kristeva "coined" (95) the term intertextuality as a derivation from the studies on texts by Mikhail Bakhtin. They define intertextuality as "a connection… between a work of art like music, painting, novels, movies" (95). The term is ample enough to include different types of artistic creations although it has been primarily used as a convergence of texts. Lara and Vijila also highlight two aspects of intertextuality. First, the influence of the setting that surrounds an author on his work. Second, the impact of an artist or writer on his or her "culture or society" (96). They also distinguish between two types of intertextuality: deliberate and latent (96). The first one refers to the intention of an author to incorporate into his work references from other texts, maybe just by adding "slight changes in characters or the settings" (96).

Lara and Vijila propose as an example the *Ulysses* by James Joyce, derived from Homer's ancient book but set in modern Dublin. The second type of intertextuality, the latent, denotes "dormant or hidden" (96), meaning that it belongs to the unconscious on the part of the author, who writes under the influence of previous texts. One example of such writing might be, according to Lara and Vijila, *The Illiad* by Homer, and *The Mahabharata* by Vyasa. Although they are written in diverse continents and times, they

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resemble each other. Both texts are long epic accounts of wars and struggles in a poetic

form. Their coincidences are attributed by Lara and Vijila to Levi Strauss' idea of the

"collective unconscious of society" (96).

The foundations of intertextuality can be better understood by explaining the most

important postulates of Mikhail Bakhtin on text, language, authorship and readership.

Likewise, the theories of Julia Kristeva illuminate and delve into the work of Bakhtin,

Barthes and other scholars.

4.3.1 Mikhail Bakhtin

In *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, Bakhtin approaches the study of language

and its use. His remarks on the heterogeneity of speech genres and how they interplay

offer an interesting insight on the nature of language. His analysis on the text is a

philosophical one but close to the realms of other disciplines like linguistics and

literature.

Bakhtin approaches the text "as any coherent complex of signs" (103), widening

its reach by including any artistic work such as "the study of music, the theory and

history of fine arts" but also all other manifestations that belong to the human sciences

(103). He is interested in studying, particularly, "the specific nature of thought in the

human sciences that is directed toward other thoughts, ideas, meanings, and so forth,

which are realized and made available to the researcher only in the form of a text" (104).

Bakhtin addresses the topic of authorship in relation to a text highlighting that there is not

only a "writer or speaker" (104) but different forms of "authorship" according to diverse

types of texts (104). In his view, texts can be utterances as part of "speech

communication" (104), but also can be understood "as a unique monad that in itself

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reflects all texts (within the bounds) of a given sphere. The interconnection of all ideas (since all are realized in utterances)" (105). Texts, then, speak to each other establishing "dialogic relationships" (105) among themselves.

Bakhtin acknowledges two poles of the text. On one hand there would be language, since "each text presupposes a generally understood… system of signs" (105), but also there would be non-linguistic communication that Bakhtin identifies with the sounds of nature that lack meaning and intentionality. Language has this feature of repeatability that permits reproduction of texts. However, "each text (as an utterance) is individual, unique and unrepeatable, and herein lies its entire significance (its plan, the purpose for which it was created)" (105). The second pole alluded by Bakhtin corresponds not to the repeatable signs characteristic of language "but with other texts (unrepeatable) by special dialogic (and dialectical, when detached from the author) relations" (105).

In the realm of spoken communication, Bakhtin is preoccupied with the notion of uniqueness and reproduction of a text. There is a certain uniqueness to a text. And he poses the example of "a fingerprint" (106). That fingerprint might be reproduced many times. However, "the reproduction of the text by the subject (a return to it, a repeated reading, a new execution quotation) is a new, unrepeatable event in the life of the text, a new link to the historical chain of speech communication" (106).

Bakhtin identifies two consciousness or subjects as part of the text. One would be the text itself, what he identifies as "the object of study and reflection" (106) and its "framing context" (106) that includes the responses to the text. There is a dialogic relationship there that encompasses "two subjects and two authors" (107). He adds, "the

text is not a thing, and therefore the second consciousness, the consciousness of the perceiver, can in no way be eliminated or neutralized" (107). He places "all possible disciplines in the human sciences" (107) in the middle of the pole of the language and the pole of the "unrepeatable event of the text" (107). When addressing the issues of inventiveness of the text, he affirms, "any truly creative text is always to some extent a free revelation of the personality, not predetermined by empirical necessity" (107). That is why this type of text "admits neither of causal explanation nor of scientific prediction" (107). However, he acknowledges "the internal logic of the free nucleus of the text" (107) which facilitates its comprehension.

On the issue of authorship, Bakhtin differentiates between the creator and how he is depicted in his own creation. "We find the author (perceive, understand, sense, and feel him) in any work of art" (109). In the case of a painter, he offers the example, it is possible to "feel" (109) the artist in the painting. However, "even in a self-portrait" (109) what we only perceive would be "the artist's depiction" (109). In the case of a writer, he claims, "the image of the narrator in a story is distinct from the I, the image of the hero of an autobiographical work (autobiography, confessions, diaries, memoires, and so forth)... They are all measured and defined by their relationship to the author as a person… but they all are depicted images that have their authors, the vehicle of the purely depictive origin" (109). In the case of a literary work, Bakhtin wonders about the true originality of writers. "To what degree are pure, objectless, single-voiced words possible in literature?" (110). He points out to the difficulties for "authentic creativity" (110) since he affirms that "any truly creative voice can only be the second voice in the discourse… the writer is a person who is able to work in a language while standing outside language,

who has the gift of indirect speaking" (110). He further explicates this idea by stressing that "our own discourse becomes and object and acquires a second—its own—voice" (110). The author of a fictional book is located in an external position to "the world depicted (and, in a certain sense, created) by him. He interprets this entire world from higher and qualitatively different positions" (116). Bakhtin is alluding here to the privileged stance of the creator, something that could be identified with the authorial intent. But those worlds meet at some moment. "The planes of the characters' speech and that of the authorial speech can intersect, that is, dialogic relations are possible between them" (116). The world where the characters interact may meet but differ from the real world where the author lives. "The speech of the characters participates in the depicted dialogues within the work and does not enter directly into the ideological dialogue of contemporaneity, that is, into the real speech communication in which the work as a whole participates and is communicated (they participate in it only as elements of this whole)" (116). But the author contributes to that real speech communication located in the actual world.

Bakhtin defines dialogical relations as those that "can be reduced neither to the purely logical (even if dialectical) nor to the purely linguistic (compositional-syntactic). They are possible only between complete utterances of various speaking subjects" (117). Dialogic relations need "a language, but they do not reside within the system of language" (117). He highlights that dialogic relations are "relations (semantic) among any utterances in speech communication. Any two utterances, if juxtaposed on a semantic plane (not as things and not as linguistic examples), end up in a dialogic relationship" (117). He identifies the notion of understanding to dialogue "the viewpoint of a third

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person is revealed in the dialogue (one who does not participate in the dialogue but understands it). The understanding of an entire utterance is always dialogic" (125). Comprehension then, is an important aspect of dialogue. "The person who understands inevitably becomes a third party in the dialogue… but the dialogic position of this third party is a quite special one" (126). The writer would be the first part; the second, would be the addressee or reader in the case of a literary work. But the author "with a greater or lesser awareness, presupposes a higher superaddressee (third), whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical time" (126). Bakhtin clarifies that the third party "is not any mystical or metaphysical being… he is a constitutive aspect of the whole utterance, who, under deeper analysis, can be revealed in it. This follows from the nature of the word, which always wants to be heard, always seeks responsive understanding, and does not stop at immediate understanding but presses on further and further (indefinitely)" (127).

On the dialogic feature of texts, Bakhtin assumes that it manifests since "the text lives only by coming into contact with another text (with context). Only at the point of this contact between texts does a light flash, illuminating both the posterior and anterior, joining a given text to a dialogue" (162). He insists on the dialogic nature of this encounter which is different than "a mechanical contact of "oppositions", which is possible only within a single text (and not between a text and context, among abstract elements (signs within a text), and is necessary only in the first stage of understanding" (162). He warns about converting "dialogue into one continuous text, that is, erase the divisions between voices (changing of speaking subjects), which is possible at the extreme" (162). The result would bring "maximum reification" (162), a feature that

"would inevitably lead to the disappearance of the infinitude and bottomlessness of meaning (any meaning)" (162).

4.3.2 Julia Kristeva

Bulgarian-French scholar Julia Kristeva situates her theories on intertextuality beyond the conventional studies on language. She is interested on literature and semiotics and the work of Russian scholars, mainly Mikhail Bakhtin. As she states on the introduction to her article, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel", she acknowledges Bakhtin's pioneer work on going beyond the traditional structural approaches to literature. In her view, Bakhtin would conceive literature "as an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning)" (65). In fact, she describes his work as "a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character), and the contemporary or earlier cultural context" (65). The notion of rewriting is important in her reading of Bakhtin. The Russian scholar would conceive "the word as a minimal structural unit, which would relate "the text within history and society, which are then seen as texts read by the writer, and into which he inserts himself by rewriting them" (65). The author engages in "a process of reading-writing" (65), allowing for other texts previously read to participate in the writing of the new one.

When discussing the notion of dialogue for Bakhtin, Kristeva describes "three dimensions or coordinates… writing subject, addressee, and exterior texts" (66). The position of the word is "defined horizontally (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as vertically (the word in the text is oriented toward an anterior or synchronic literary corpus)" (66). Furthermore, she affirms, "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of

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another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity" (66). From the former assumptions it might be inferred that the relation among author-reader-text is enriched by the previous readings of all the actors, stimulating the dialogic function of the word "as minimal textual unit" (66) that acts both as "a mediator, linking structural models to cultural (historical) environment, as well as that of regulator, controlling mutations from diachrony to synchrony, i.e., to literary structure" (66).

Kristeva also highlights the notion of ambivalence for Bakhtin. For the Russian scholar, dialogism would be "writing as both subjectivity and communication, or better, as intertextuality. Confronted with this dialogism, the notion of a "person-subject of writing" becomes blurred, yielding to that of ambivalence of writing" (68). Ambivalence is related to the roles of history as part of a text and of the text as part of history, or society (68). "Bakhtin considers writing as a reading of the anterior literary corpus and the text as an absorption of and a reply to another text" (69). Kristeva also stresses that for Bakhtin logic reasoning derived from science as understood in the Western culture does not coincide with poetic language. It is needed then a "poetic logic" (70). Bakhtin differentiates between the monological or realistic novel and the polyphonic one, based on a carnivalesque structure. The latter would characterize most modern novels from the 20th century like the ones by Joyce, Proust, and Kafka.

Kristeva proposes a "radical… typology of discourses" (76) based on the theories of Bakhtin. When discussing literary narratives, she speaks of monological and dialogical discourses. The first one corresponds with "description and narration (epic); secondly, historical discourse; and thirdly, scientific discourse" (76-77). Monological discourse implies "a prohibition, a censorship" (77); and a submission "to the rule of 1 (God)… this

discourse refuses to turn back upon itself, to enter into dialogue with itself" (77). On the

contrary, dialogical discourse encompasses "carnivalesque discourse… as well as the

polyphonic novel" (77). In this type of discourse, "writing reads another writing, reads

itself and constructs itself through a process of destructive genesis" (77). Opposite to

monological discourse, the carnivalesque one would be characterized by "an

antitheological (but not antimystical) and deeply popular movement" (78) that is still part

of the Western culture although it has been censored. Its features include transgression of

norms, and a sense of community since the "sense of individuality" (78) disappears. As

she remarks, "within the carnival, the subject is reduced to nothingness, while the

structure of the author emerges as anonymity that creates and sees itself created as self

and other, as man and mask" (78). The role of language in carnivalesque scenes is

ambivalent. "Language parodies and relativizes itself, repudiating its role in

representation… it provokes laughter but remains incapable of detaching itself from

representation.. the carnivalesque structure is anti-Christian and antirationalist (79).

Drama and comedy are together and involved with parody. However, "the laughter of the

carnival is not simply parodic; it is no more comic than tragic; it is both at once, one

might say that it is serious" (80). It seems that the polyphonic novel based on the

carnivalesque structure might be a response towards the monological and realistic novel

that constrains imagination and creativity. The polyphonic text invites dialogue by

encouraging numerous perspectives and exchanges among different actors and previous

texts.

In her discussion on Socratic dialogue, Kristeva relates it to carnivalesque

discourse. She draws from Bakhtin to highlight its dialogic nature and appeal to boldness:

"Socratic dialogues are characterized by opposition to any official monologism claiming to possess a ready-made truth… the subjects of discourse are nonpersons, anonyms, hidden by the discourse constituting them" (81). And the Socratic dialogue would originate other types of speech such as the Menippean discourse. This type of discourse was born in ancient Greece owing its designation to philosopher Menippus of Gadara, who was also a satirical writer. "Menippean discourse is both comic and tragic, or rather, it is serious in the same sense as is the carnivalesque; through the status of its words, it is politically and socially disturbing" (82). Interestingly, it encourages a sense of liberty "from historical constraints, and this entails a thorough boldness in philosophical and imaginative inventiveness" (82). The sceneries for this type of discourse were varied and bold. They encompass houses of bad reputation, jail cells, pubs, and more importantly, "the word has no fear of incriminating itself. It becomes free from presupposed "values"; without distinguishing between virtue and vice, and without distinguishing itself from them, the word considers them its private domain, as one of its creations" (82). Menippean discourse might be for Kristeva an antecedent of the modern novel. She contends that together with "carnivalesque discourses… stands against Aristotelian logic… it develops in times of opposition against Aristotelianism, and writers of polyphonic novels seem to disapprove of the very structures of official thought founded on formal logic" (85).

The former reflections take Kristeva to affirm that the modern or 'subversive novel' relies on defying traditional modes of expression. "The writer's interlocutor, then, is the writer himself, but as a reader of another text. The one who writes is the same as the one who reads. Since his interlocutor is a text, he himself is no more than a text

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rereading itself as it rewrites itself" (87). Kristeva also points out the challenges of semiotics nowadays. "Dialogism situates philosophical problems within language; more precisely, within language as a correlation of texts, as a reading-writing that falls in with non-Aristotelian, syntagmatic, correlational, "carnivalesque" logic" (89). Then, the role of "contemporary semiotics is precisely to describe this "other logic" without denaturing it" (89).

In "The Bounded Text", Kristeva addresses again the role of semiotics as part of translinguistic practices, described as the ones that "operate through and across language, while remaining irreducible to its categories as they are presently assigned" (36). She moves away semiotic practice from discourse, affirming that

the text is therefore a productivity, and this means: first, that its relationship to the language in which it is situated is redistributive (destructive-constructive), and hence can be better approached through logical categories rather than linguistic ones; and second, that it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another. (36)

Kristeva then approaches "the text as intertextuality" (37) by highlighting its situation as part of a certain culture. She also suggests that an examination of the novel would demand "dealing with linguistic units (word, sentences, paragraphs)" (37) as part of a "translinguistic order" (37). She hypothesizes that in "the novel's textual order" (38), writing derives from speech.

One of her most significative theories regarding the novel is that in Medieval times occurred a shift from the symbol to the sign in the Western culture. She associates

the symbol with the cosmogony and the epic, which stand for virtues or characteristics

that she calls "universals—markings" (38). She affirms that "the symbol does not

"resemble" the object it symbolizes, the two spaces (symbolized-symbolizer) are separate

and do not communicate" (38). The symbol is therefore restrictive, opposites such as "the

good and the bad are incompatible… the contradiction, once it appears, immediately

demands resolution" (39). Later, the symbol starts to be displaced, "the semiotic practice

of the sign first clearly appeared, during the Renaissance, in the adventure novel, which is

structured on what is unforeseeable and on surprise" (40) providing the narrative with

conclusions that deviate from the norms previously imposed by the moral narrations that

characterize the symbolic. Kristeva suggests that all modern literature, and even "all art"

(41) originates from that evolution.

4.4 Translation as hermeneutics

Some scholars have addressed translation as another topic relevant to

interpretation and meaning. In fact, Gadamer compares hermeneutics with a translation

from a different language. He explains that in a conversation between two people who

speak different languages, the role of the translator is crucial because he "must translate

the meaning to be understood into the context in which the other speaker lives" (386).

That does not allow the translator to make things up. Still meaning "must establish its

validity… in a new way" (386). Consequently, "every translation is at the same time an

interpretation" (386). Gadamer highlights the difficulties of translation that may come

from trying to adapt a new language to our own. In fact, being able to speak in a foreign

language is not about translating every word, but being able to think in that language.

"The hermeneutical problem concerns not the correct mastery of language but coming to

a proper understanding about the subject matter, which takes place in the medium of language" (387). In relation to the translation of texts, Gadamer thinks that it is a matter of "interpretation, and not simply reproduction" (387). The translator, even when he tries to be as much true to the text, always would need to "make difficult decisions" (387). He would stress some aspects and eliminate others. Gadamer compares the relation between the text and the translator to a conversation. "When a translator interprets a conversation, he can make mutual understanding possible only if he participates in the subject under discussion; so also in relation to a text it is indispensable that the interpreter participates in its meaning" (389). This is what Gadamer calls: "hermeneutic conversation" (389), or said in another way, "finding a common language" (389).

4.4.1 Borges as a writer and translator

Translation is a relevant topic for Jorge Luis Borges' creative work. Besides being a writer, he was a translator but also suggested a theory on translation in some of his essays on the subject. He also thought that translation amplified and enriched the meaning of the original texts. Likewise, he often introduced translation as a role of some of his fictional characters, as we have seen in "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" (Borges *Collected*).

Translation becomes a function of the hermeneutics or interpretation of texts, and even a tool for intertextuality. The barrier of different languages need the mediation of a skilled interpreter. As Soukup affirms when discussing the need for hermeneutics, "when people speak different languages… they must rely on gestures, or better on a translator… hermeneutic arises with mediation—the god at the crossroads, the barter of gods, the translator intercepting language" (18).

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Constantinescu draws from Leone to affirm that "translation, as a trope and a literary device is a visible manifestation of mediation" (173). Borges would favor translation as a way to improving the main text. He would not mind incorporating changes in the original since he was against the idea of a final and fixed text. Constantinescu affirms, "a text is an axis of countless intertextual relationships. The equation of relationships between texts and their cultural influence, the precursors they create and the texts they inspire is not an obstacle to translation" (173). It seems to me then that author and translator engage in a collaborative work where both are equally necessary for enlivening the text in different languages. Constantinescu points out that "translation from one language to another is a special case of rewriting a draft, involving choice, chance, and experimentation" (175). The text would gain from the "incommensurability of any two languages" (175) offering new opportunities to those who attempt this task. Likewise, for Borges, according to Constantinescu, it is still valid to add alterations to translations when necessary: "In the passage of time the meanings, connotations, and associations of words can change, justifying repeated translations of the same work" (175).

Levine states that for Borges the whole work of a writer is more relevant than the author: "Art matters more than the individual artist, and translation dramatizes the error readers make upon thinking, for example, that they're reading Borges or Valéry when, in fact, the aesthetic experience has been produced by Ibarra in conjunction with a Borges or Valéry" (44), highlighting the fruitful alliance between authors and translators of fictional texts.

Levine draws from Kristal to suggests that texts might be appropriated by both readers and translators: "Texts are inevitably appropriated by readers, and become for the creative mind pretexts for the act of writing and, ultimately, the resurrection of a kindred imagination" (45). Likewise, when discussing Borges view on different approaches to translation, she remarks, "what remains is the continuing elaboration of the work of art despite the intentions of individuals" (45). Borges always defended the idea that texts are never completely finished. He also affirmed that "as there are endless interpretations by diverse readers of any given text, there is no one way to translate" (46).

Although Borges was an artist and not a theorist, he addressed two types of translation on some of his essays on the topic. According to Levine, he describes two ways of translation "in terms of aesthetic positions, that is, the art-centered classical approach and the artist-centered romantic approach" (47). He clearly favored the former, which he considered more distant from the individual author and his personal characteristics and more related to the accuracy and excellence sought by the classics in a work of art. When examining Borges' discussion on the many translations of *The Thousand and One Nights*, Levine affirms that for him, "each literature, each culture, each era appropriated the Nights according to its own deforming mirror; the better translations were better because they, in turn… brought something new into the target literature and language" (53).

Stewart incorporates the element of culture to the significance of translation in the work of Borges. By analyzing the short story: "Averroes' search", Stewart refutes "the common view which sees language as an entity neutral with respect to culture and history" (321). In that short story, Borges narrates how the Muslim medieval scholar

Averroes fails to find the proper meanings for the words 'comedy' and 'drama' from his attempt to translate from Greek the Poetics of Aristotle.

According to Stewart, a traditional approach to language sees it as "something secondary and accidental which is only an inessential corollary to our basic understanding and perception of the world" (321). The story by Borges would challenge these assumptions. Averroes fails because he is unable to figure out the real meaning of two cultural manifestations that were familiar to the Western world but not to his own Islamic background. "The point is not that a correct definition of tragedy and comedy are in principle impossible but rather that the possibility of the very understanding of the concepts of tragedy and comedy is culturally conditioned" (325). For Stewart, "in the story, the Arab world with its culture and language represents what philosophers used to call a "notion", a "world-view" or an "épistème", and what contemporary thinkers tend to refer to as a "conceptual scheme" or "paradigm"" (326). And that represents a restriction "to the cognitive structures and conceptual categories that the Arab world of his day had at his disposal" (326).

4.5 Intertextuality and a philosophy of language

As stated before in this project, Borges was always willing to blend different genres in his writings which sometimes have been read as essays that become short stories or tales that pose provocative philosophical quandaries. One of his essays, entitled "John Wilkins' Analytical Language", intrigued and amused French philosopher Michel Foucault. It is significative that Foucault chose a portion of this essay as an introductory reflection on language, imagination and creativity in the Western world for his book: *The Order of Things*.

4.5.1 John Wilkins' Analytical Language

Borges starts this short essay, written in 1942, by discussing how the English philosopher John Wilkins was ignored on an edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica. He affirms that excluding him "would be inexcusable if we consider Wilkins' speculative work" (Borges "John" Selected 229). The Argentine writer describes some of the work of the English philosopher as "full of happy curiosity" (229) highlighting the variety of topics that he addressed, among them, "the possibility and the principles of a world language" (229). Borges refers to *An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language*, published by Wilkins in 1668. After mocking the efforts of the Royal Spanish Academy Grammar for periodically editing a new dictionary to define Spanish words, he stresses that Wilkins anticipated a language where "each word defines itself" (230).

Borges explicates the system proposed by Wilkins as based on an idea that Descartes already had planned, but using numbers instead of words. Wilkins' system, however, contains different categories and subcategories based on a clever combination of consonants and vowels with the result that "every letter is meaningful" (230) and would be easier to learn at school as an "universal key and a secret encyclopedia" (230). When describing the categorization of Wilkins' language, Borges alludes to "a certain Chinese encyclopedia called the Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge" (231) that offers a bizarre way of categorizing animals. After alluding to different ways of organization, he states that "there is no classification of the universe that is not arbitrary or speculative" (231). And he reinforces this idea by affirming, "we do not know what the universe is" (231). Borges suggests that Hume already observed that the universe may

have been the product of an inexpert god who neglected his imperfect work. Thus, "the impossibility of penetrating the divine scheme of the universe cannot, however, dissuade us from planning human schemes, even though it is clear that they are provisional" (231). But Wilkins' language would be "not the least remarkable of those schemes" (231). His language would not be arbitrary but full of significance.

Borges ends his essay referring to a reflection of Chesterton on language that stresses the impossibility of naming all the richness and secrecies that form the universe. In this short article, Borges again blends both a non-fictional essay with some fictional parts, like the apocryphal allusion to the Chinese Encyclopedia, offering his own reflection on the infinite possibilities of a philosophy of language.

4.5.2 Foucault and Borges' Chinese Encyclopedia

Michel Foucault begins the preface to *The Order of Things* stating that his book originated on an essay on John Wilkins by Jorge Luis Borges, where he mentions a Chinese Encyclopedia that uses a bizarre method for the categorization of different animals. The encyclopedia, called the *Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledges*, describes animals as

> (a) those that belong to the emperor; (b) embalmed ones; (c) those that are trained; (d) suckling pigs; (e) mermaids; (f) fabulous ones; (g) stray dogs; (h) those that are included in this classification; (i) those that tremble as if they were mad; (j) innumerable ones; (k) those drawn with a very fine camel's-hair brush; (l) etcetera; (m) those that just have broken the flower vase; (n) those that a distance resemble flies. (Borges "John" *Selected* 231).

Foucault's book emerged from the reflection on the absurdity of the categorization described by Borges. He explicates that through Borges' story we become aware of the restrictions or our way of thinking which does not allow to conceive such an enumeration. Our world and our system of reasoning, Foucault seems to signal, is characterized by many limitations. In Borges' classification what amazes him is "the alphabetical series (a, b, c, d)" (xvi) that bounds together real animals with those that can only be imagined. And he reasons that this absurd organization only might be situated in "the non-place of language" (xvii). The laugh of Foucault is uncomfortable since he is aware of the difficulty of finding a "*common locus*" where to place this seemingly incongruent order systems. Comparing the effects of utopias and heterotopias on language, he affirms that the first ones find their place in the realm of the "fantastic" (xviii), while the second ones upset us by destroying language. "Heterotopias (such as those to be found so often in Borges) desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences" (xviii). For Foucault, the absurd categorization of the Chinese Encyclopedia results perturbing since it points out to the possibility that there might be other ways to organize things very different to what we do in the Western society (xix).

Stories like those of Borges, Foucault seems to point out, open up the possibility of different interpretations to systems of order. Foucault highlights how we establish order in our world. On one hand, there are "the fundamental codes of a culture – those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values…" (xx) that would influence how men understand order in their lives. On the other hand, there are "scientific theories or the philosophical interpretations which

explains why order exist in general, what universal law it obeys, what principle can account for it, and why this particular order has been established" (xx). However, there is another space in between those viewpoints, a "more confused, more obscure, and probably less easy to analyse" (xx). He then hypothesizes that "this middle region" (xxi) would encompass "the pure existence of order and of its modes of being" (xxi). *The Order of Things* is dedicated to analyze this dark region. He pretends to study "the episteme in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility" (xxii). Foucault call this endeavor "an archaeology" (xxii), differentiating it from a historical account.

He proposes an investigation of how our current systems of thinking and ordering have varied from those of the classical philosophers, and especially after the arrival of the modern age. He points out that the idea of language has changed significantly since classical times, and from the beginning of the nineteenth century "loses its privileged position and becomes, in its turn, a historical form coherent with the density of its own past" (xxiii). He signals that, contrary to conventional assumptions, man is a "recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form" (xxiii).

4.5.3 Intertextuality and meaning in Borges' Chinese Encyclopedia

For Wicks, Foucault's allusion to the Chinese Encyclopedia and its arbitrary classification would represent two different attempts to find truth. The first one, from the perspective of the philosopher, in the case of Foucault; and the second one, from the

viewpoint of the artist, as in Borges, thus enlarging the reach of literature in metaphysical matters.

Wicks suggests that Foucault decided to highlight Borges' classification since it shows that for the Argentinian writer any attempt to categorize the world is random and probably useless. "For Borges, the Chinese Encyclopedia excerpt represents, in recognition of a universe experienced by him as inscrutable, the arbitrariness of every classificatory scheme, no matter how coincident with appearances that scheme might be" (83). Wick distinguishes two tendencies among the scholars that attempt to interpret Foucault's allusion to that encyclopedia. One would be represented by Shumway, who "recognizes that various kinds of world-orderings are imaginable, and that although some given ordering style might be internally coherent, it could appear incoherent from the standpoint of another classificatory style, and vice-versa" (82). Other scholars like Sheridan, would claim that in the encyclopedia's categorization "the incoherency is regarded as an intrinsic property of the taxonomy itself" (82). For Wicks, this second explanation is more similar to Borges' view since the writer points out that "every classification is "arbitrary and conjectural" and amounts thereby to a fruitless groping in the epistemological dark" (82).

However, what Wicks finds more significant is that Borges equalizes both interpretations. "By ascribing an equal value to rational and nonrational modes of classification insofar as they are both manifestations of fictional, conjectural, imaginative or speculative thought, he allows the entrance of truth, if truth is expressible by means of fictional expression" (83). Wicks suggest that Foucault would express a similar position that Borges. He affirms that Foucault "can be interpreted as saying that as far as the

pursuit of metaphysical truth is concerned, there is hope, but that in the pursuit of this truth, it is more rewarding to be artistic rather than scientific" (94).

Similarly, Wood points out that what Foucault insinuates with his evocation of the bizarre Chinese Encyclopedia is how Borges forces "our abrupt arrival to the limits of our thought" (*Borges and Theory* 30). He proposes that "what is vanishing before our eyes… is the conceptual ground on which any sort of coherent thinking about these creatures could occur" (30). He then suggests that for both Borges and Foucault, "classifications are forms of convenience for the mind" (30). Thus, the French philosopher finds them provocative "when they are designed to make things difficult for the mind" (30).

For Wood, when Foucault highlights what "is possible to think" (31), he concurs with the thought of Thomas Kuhn on the issue of "the paradigm" (31). Wood signals, "In both Kuhn's and Foucault's view, the interesting and important movements in history are not gradual or cumulative, but abrupt and radical: wholesale shifts of conceptual scenery" (31). Wood also stresses that the subtitle for *The Order of Things* is "An Archeology of the Human Sciences" (31), demonstrating Foucault's interest in that specific field. "Hence the notion of an archeology, or history as archeology: a set of mind is to be reconstructed not described" (31). However, what is more significant for Wood from this encounter of Borges and Foucault resides not only in the evident intertextuality, since Foucault's book originates in Borges' text. And it does not reside in the uncomfortable laugh of the French thinker. Wood states, "it is Borges the writer who matters here, the inventor of several crucial forms of the modern imagination, whose fictions are essays and whose essays are preludes to fiction" (31). Thus, his work shares similar preoccupations with one of the most representative thinkers of contemporary philosophy.

4.6 Encyclopedias and books

Borges' philosophical approach to language, the issue of time as subjected to interpretation, and the blend of communication genres and different texts become more evident in his short stories disguised as essays or literary critic notes. I have chosen "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" and "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim" to examine those intersections.

4.6.1 Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius

The story is narrated by a fictional Borges who recalls the first time that he listened about Uqbar, a distant and unknown land that awakes his curiosity. Borges and his friend and writing associate Bioy Casares are discussing a plot for a novel at Borges's house. When their attention turns to a mirror, Bioy Casares tells him that he read that "Mirrors and copulation are abominable, for they multiply the number of mankind" (Borges "Tlön" *Collected* 69). Bioy attributes the sentence to wise men from Uqbar. And he adds that he read that affirmation in the Anglo-American Cyclopaedia, in an entry dedicated to Uqbar. Intrigued, Borges and Bioy start a search for the unknown country in different encyclopedias. Bioy Casares finds in Buenos Aires an exemplar of the Anglo-American Cyclopaedia that includes an article on Uqbar. They compare two exemplars of the same volume and discover that they are copies of the tenth edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica but the one that contains the information on Uqbar has four additional pages. They study the article and find out about the region's geography and history. In a section on language and literature, they learn that the writers of Uqbar favored fantastic literature, mostly about "the two imaginary realms of Mle'khnas and Tlön" (70). The article points to other books as bibliographical references. Borges and

Bioy look for them in vain at the National Library. Their mutual friend Carlos

Mastronardi finds an exemplar of the Anglo-American Cyclopaedia in a bookstore but

the book does not include any information on Uqbar.

In the second part of the story, Borges describes how he received as an

inheritance a book from Herbert Ashe, and English man who was a friend of his father.

The book was entitled, "A First Encyclopedia of Tlön. Vol. XI. Hlaer to Jangr" (71). He

also found the engraving "Orbis Tertius" inside the volume. To his surprise, Borges

discovers that the book thoroughly describes not a fake country, like Uqbar, but a whole

new planet called Tlön. The volume alludes to other books that according to Borges

intrigue different scholars. Other friends like Alfonso Reyes join the search for evidences

of Tlön in additional books. They conclude that the new world was "the work of a secret

society of astronomers, biologists, engineers, metaphysicians, poets, chemists… guided

by some shadowy man of genius" (72). Borges categorizes this "impossible" new world

as idealistic, since it follows the tenets of Berkeley's thought. "For the people of Tlön, the

world is not an amalgam of objects in space; it is a heterogeneous series of independent

acts—the world is successive, temporal, but not spatial" (72-73). He then describes with

details the language of this planet's southern hemisphere pointing out to their lack of

nouns, and their preferences for "impersonal verbs… functioning as adverbs" (73). On

the opposite hemisphere, on the contrary, "the primary unit is not the verb but the

monosyllabic adjective" (73). He explains, "There are things composed of two terms, one

visual and the other auditory: the color of the rising sun and the distant caw of a bird"

(73). He adds, "the fact that no one believes in the reality expressed by these nouns

means, paradoxically, that there is no limit to their number" (73).

When discussing the culture of the planet, he states that science does not exist but philosophies "proliferate" (74). "The metaphysicians of Tlön seek not truth, or even plausibility—they seek to amaze, astound. In their view, metaphysics is a branch of the literature of fantasy" (74). Some Tlönian philosophers deny time, others contend "that all time has already passed", making life just memories, while others affirm "that the history of the universe… is the handwriting of a subordinate god trying to communicate with a demon" (74). When explaining the arguments for materialism in Tlön, Borges tells a story of nine lost copper coins that involves a paradox similar to that of Zeno and that highlights the possibility that the coins already exist although they are not seen (75). Borges writes about the specific geometry and literature of the planet. "Books are rarely signed, nor does the concept of plagiarism exist: It has been decided that all books are the work of a single author who is timeless and anonymous" (76-77). He also points out that "literary criticism often invents authors" (77). In a classic allusion to idealism, Borges ends the second part of the story by describing how objects in Tlön often duplicate. He explicates, "they also tend to grow vague or "sketchy", and to lose detail when they begin to be forgotten" (78).

While the former text is signed in 1940, Borges adds a postscript, supposedly written seven years later. There, he accounts his discoveries on Tlön. He finds evidence of the existence of a secret group, among whose members was George Berkeley, who was responsible for the creation of a country: Uqbar. But with time, they realized that their task needed the collaboration of successive generations. In the 19th century, an American millionaire called Ezra Buckley decided to change the goal of the organization to a more ambitious endeavor, by trying to build a whole planet by themselves. And they

started the task by writing The First Encyclopedia of Tlön. Then, some objects from this imaginary world started to materialize, a compass with an inscription in a Tlönian language was sent to a certain lady; some heavy sacred Tlönian cones appeared in the pocket of a man assassinated in a gaucho fight; and The First Encyclopedia of Tlön was discovered in Memphis. Borges fears that the Tlönian world is slowly taking over the Earth.

4.6.1.1 Tlön as a game of intertextuality and hermeneutics

Probably one of the most puzzling short stories by Borges, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" was first published on 1941 as part of *The Garden of the Forking Paths*, and later *Ficciones*. In the prologue of the book, Borges refers to this story as his attempt "to write notes on imaginary books" (Borges "Tlön" *Collected* 67). Likewise, in an interview with Richard Burgin, he acknowledged it as one of his "best stories" (Burgin *Conversations* 49). However, Borges also admitted that he did not include it on a *Personal Anthology* given the difficulties of the story for readers not used to his work. He was told that its complexity would scare new potential readers (49–50).

Borges always felt fascination for encyclopedias and all types of books. As he recalled in one conference on the book, even after he became blind, he was able to appreciate the more than twenty volumes of the *Encyclopedia of Brokhause* that he received as a gift, affirming that the book is one of the possibilities of happiness that we humans have (Borges "El Libro" *Borges Oral* 24–25). For my examination of "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", I propose a reading that highlights its hermeneutical features as related to intertextuality, philosophy of communication, and language, as intended in this chapter.

The tone of the beginning of this piece resembles that of the classical detective story. But instead of investigating a crime, the protagonists engage in an intellectual search for clues about an imaginary world whose only evidence of existence, during the first part of the story, might be found in books. For the readers of this story things start to complicate when they enter the intertextual game developed from the very beginning that involves both real and apocryphal texts, and real and invented characters. "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" starts with a quote from an apocryphal encyclopedia (*Anglo-American Cyclopedia*) that is supposed to be a reprint of a real one (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Likewise, Borges (the character) finds evidence of a book on the remote land of Uqbar (apocryphal) by fictional writer Silas Haslam, and could not find an entry for the region in *Erdkunde*, the real book of famous German cartographer Carl Ritter (a real person). Allusions to other books such as the *Tao Te Ching* and the *1001 Nights* (Borges "Tlön" *Collected* 77) appear in the story, as well as to real and fictional persons. Real friends of Borges are transformed into characters in the piece and contribute to the search for evidences of Uqbar and Tlön. Adolfo Bioy Casares, Carlos Mastronardi, Alfonso Reyes, Néstor Ibarra, and Xul Solar, among others, were writers and artists contemporary to Borges. And many of the philosophers most appreciated by him are mentioned although do not participate in the story as characters: Berkeley, Schopenhauer, Kant, Leibniz, Hume, as well as Spinoza, Russell, and Zeno.

A contemporary definition of a text goes beyond a written one, as proposed by Bakhtin when he encompasses under this term many artistic manifestations (103), and also by Kristeva's acknowledgement of the power of speech as part of the verbal communication that precedes the novel (*The Bounded* 53). When referring to the text,

Barthes ("From Work" *Image*) affirms that it "cannot be contained in a hierarchy, even in a simple division of genres. What constitutes the Text is… its subversive force in respect of the old classifications" (157). Then, it is possible to infer that the participation of all those fictional and non-fictional books and characters are part of an extreme understanding of intertextuality. Characters and books from the past interact and influence the occurrences in the story.

Furthermore, it is valid to inquire what the stance of the reader and the author in this intricated piece would be. As Barthes points out, the text "asks of the reader a practical collaboration" (163). Ott and Walter differentiate between two approaches to intertextuality among media and literature scholars. The first, proposed mainly by some scholars influenced by Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva, support the idea of the role of the reader or audience as primordial for the elaboration of meaning. On the opposite, other researchers presuppose the protagonist role of the writer to the creation of intertextuality. This assumption considers that "far from being a consequence of the death of the author (as the first version would suggest), intertextuality is an identifiable stylistic device consciously employed by the author or in the case of media texts, by the producer" (430). Ott and Walter highlight how the former approaches to intertextuality offer, on one hand, "an interpretive practice unconsciously exercised by audiences living in a postmodern landscape and a textual strategy consciously incorporated by media producers that invite audiences to make specific lateral associations between texts" (431). In fact, they associate intertextuality with "decoding" (431) in the first case, and "encoding" (431) in the second stance.

Ott and Walter's address to intertextuality as a merging of both understandings is compelling. They acknowledge that the term "represents a clear shift in thinking about who creates texts" (431). The position that stresses the role of the reader or the audience also implies that meaning and interpretation would never be final. "Since a text exists within an endlessly expanding matrix of intertextual production, readers continually bring new texts to bear upon their readings of that text" (431). That would be a 'Barthesian' approach to the subject. Similarly, Julia Kristeva, "locates text construction with the audience" (431). Following the same path than Barthes and Kristeva, Ott and Walter draw from Derrida and Scholes to affirm that "audiences create texts by, at once, isolating them from other texts and opening them to the endless play of textuality" (432). Texts are then seen as "plural, unstable, and contradictory", as a byproduct of the interpretations of heterogeneous audiences. However, Ott and Walter also affirm that "*some* texts also deploy intertextuality as a stylistic device in a manner that shapes how audiences experience those texts" (434). For this project, the term 'text' includes other elements not necessarily identified with the printed word, as suggested by Ott and Walter.

In "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", the readers would make sense of the story by applying their previous knowledge on the books and characters mentioned. Similarly, audiences used to Borges' writing style would be able to sort the real elements from the fictional ones. Furthermore, the scope of their cultural knowledge would be influential in their understanding. A reader knowledgeable on topics such as philosophy and language would have a different experience than a lesser informed one. The other type of reader would probably be more interested in the actual plot than in the intriguing quandaries that characterize the meticulous description of the cosmogony of Tlön.

Likewise, the number of times that an individual approaches the reading and the rereading of the text would modify possible interpretations, making readers active participants in the experience of the text. Nevertheless, it would be challenging to deny the role of Borges as the author that uses his 'stylistic devices', as mentioned by Ott and Walter (434). For the former scholars, intertextuality might be considered as a textual strategy. They analyze three different types often found in media analysis of popular culture. According to Ott and Walter, they are: "parodic allusion, creative appropriation, and self-reflexive reference" (435). The first one "describes a stylistic device in which one text incorporates a caricature of another, most often, popular cultural text" (435). It is usually displayed as through the resources of mimesis and hyperbole of the first text. Although parody has traditionally been related to "comment critically and/or comically on the original text… parodic allusion offers no commentary on the original text" (436). In other words, it does not pretend to be better than the first text. "The reference to other texts characteristic of parodic allusion are woven into the fabric of a larger text or narrative" (436).

Creative appropriation or inclusion "refers to a stylistic device in which one text appropriates and integrates a fragment of another text" (437). The first text is copied and may be also transformed with the use of technology. Ott and Walter offer examples from popular music bands that appropriate some parts of the songs of other groups. Self-reflective reference, on the other hand, is about "a mode of writing that deliberately draws attention to its fictional nature by commenting on its own activities". The writer that in the middle of his text alludes to its fictional nature might be an example of this category. Differently from the previous two types, self-reflective reference offers indirect

clues that only would be understood by an audience that has "specific knowledge of the text's production history, the character's previous credits, or popular reviews" (439). Examples of this category are found in popular music and sitcoms that incorporate remarks about their fictional features. For Ott and Walter, "the intertextual allusions found in postmodern texts allow viewers to exercise specialized knowledge and to mark their membership in particular cultures" (440). Likewise, audiences and readers of intertextual materials "not only become more sophisticated at reading them, but also more sophisticated at deploying them" (442).

In the case of "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", I identify a possible parodic allusion when Borges utilizes the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a well-known and respected book, as the basis for this story. A book for frequent consultation, this encyclopedia, by the time Borges wrote his story, was considered as a purveyor of truth. Encyclopedias, as well as libraries, are a repeated theme in the Borgesian universe. Opposite to the uncertainty of labyrinths, encyclopedias represent the universe in an ordered way, the same organized world that the secret society attempts to create as Tlön. An encyclopedia, somehow, validates the existence of this new planet. A subtle parody of the power of language and writing as creation is insinuated as the main theme of this complex story.

4.6.1.2 Tlön as an idealist and postmodern cosmogony

Similar to "The Circular Ruins" (Borges *Collected*), already discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, the topic of creation dominates the making of Tlön. However, while the former short story can be read as an allegory to the pains of individual artistic creation, the second responds to the power of language and writing as a collective, long

effort for building a new world. Borges, the character, discovers that this new organized

planet has been meticulously planned,

> I now held in my hands a vast and systematic fragment of the entire history of an
>
> unknown planet, with its architectures and its playing cards, the horror of its
>
> mythologies and the murmur of its tongues, its emperors and its seas, its minerals
>
> and its birds and fishes, its algebra and its fire, its theological and metaphysical
>
> controversies—all joined, articulated, coherent, and with no visible doctrinal
>
> purpose or hint of parody. (Borges "Tlön" *Collected* 71–72)

For Thomas (2018), Borges stresses in this story the "creative power of language" (86). It

is through language that we "can produce images that shape the world of our experience.

They are the elements of our subjective life that define the field of our potential relations

with the rest of the reality" (86). Furthermore, Borges proposes "that concepts become

material through their realization in human perspectives" (86). Idealism, one of the

philosophical movements more appreciated by the Argentinian writer, is at the foundation

of this story. Nuño (2012) affirms that when Borges writes about the *hrönirs*, the

duplicated objects that frequently appear in Tlön, he is appealing to the Platonic concept

of the archetypes (72-73). The same object, for example, a lost pencil, according to

Borges, might be found twice. And the second pencil is as real as the first one, the

archetype. Thomas suggests that "concepts propose potential ways of feeling the presence

of objects of experience" (88). He adds that "philosophical and scientific inquiry produce

propositions that, in the attempt to elucidate our reality, lead to the discovery of new

objects that confirm the dreams of philosophers and scientists" (88). However, in the

fictional world of Tlön, this is accomplished without intention. "Tlönian idealism aims at

creating an infinite universe" (88). That is why in their literature there is only one storyline, but multiple versions, and their books on metaphysics "invariably contain both the thesis and the antithesis… A book that does not contain its counterbook is incomplete" (Borges cited by Thomas 88).

On idealism, Nuño also highlights that for Plato it is acceptable that in our world dominated by the senses there might be plenty of imperfect copies of the superior or intelligible world. In his story, Borges adds another element, the *ur*, that would not necessarily be a copy but an object created by suggestion, by hope and thus, of brief condition. Borges describes some objects that appear to fade only when no one remembers them. "The classic example is the doorway that continued to exist so long a certain beggar frequented it, but which was lost to sight when he died" (Borges "Tlön" *Collected* 78).

When Borges describes the notion of time in the Tlönian world, he revisits all his own theories about this topic. He writes that one of its philosophical currents "goes as far as to deny the existence of time", since the past depends on the capacity to remember while the present escapes continuously and the future is based on "hope" (Nuño 74). And he describes other bizarre explanations for time like the one depicted by a school of philosophy that claims, "that while we sleep here, we are awake somewhere else, so that every man is in fact two men" (74). Nuño remarks that in the story, Borges states that time is composed by successive mental states that do not occur in space (55). Nuño also alludes to Borges' cyclical conception of time when he claims that in Tlön, there are theories that defend the idea that all time has already passed and the current lives are only a remembrance of the past (62).

Interestingly, Borges also seems to revisit his own ideas on authorship and intertextuality when describing the literature of Tlön. He affirms that "books are rarely signed, nor does the concept of plagiarism exist: It has been decided that all books are the work of a single author who is timeless and anonymous" ("Tlön" *Collected* 76-77). Like some postmodern scholars (Barthes 1988; Derrida 1976; Foucault 2006), he even insinuates that literary critics are responsible for creating the figure of the author. Borges ironically writes, "literary criticism often invents authors: It will take two dissimilar works… attribute them to a single author, and then… determine the psychology of that most interesting *homme de lettres*…" (77). As Nuño suggests, the thought of a single author invokes an ideal text that needs to be anonymous and at the same time, comprehend all the other books in a sort of combination of cabalistic creativity (71).

4.6.1.3 Tlön as a labyrinth created by men

The postscript, supposedly added in 1947, adds a new dimension to a story that would have remained amusing and imaginative without it. The character Borges reveals how he finds some evidences that verify the transition from an idealist conception to a material and very real world. Thomas affirms that "the key feature of these final events is the seduction of the world by Tlön, a process analogous to the appearance of the hrönir… the document's importance alter reality generating truth" (91). Thus, the objects that start to materialize signal the end of one world to welcome a new, ordered system that resembles the ideologies that allured humans during World War Two. Here it is valid to remember that Borges usually avoided moral remarks in his stories. However, when he wrote the story on Tlön, in the middle of the war, being a lucid intellectual, he could not escape to the anguish that the historical moment brought. Aware of the dangers of the

extreme ideologies that seduced Europe and provoked the war, he opted for looking for refuge in his intellectual affairs. With this short story he was probably addressing the current preoccupations of many of his contemporaries who would perceive uncertainty for the future of the humanity.

4.6.2 The Approach to Al-Mu'tassim

In this short story, the narrator is a literary critic who writes about the novel *The Approach to Al-Mu'tassim*, by an Indian attorney called Mir Bahadur Ali. The critic describes the novel as a mix between the classical detective tale and the account of a mystical quest. And points out that there have been two editions of the book. He read the second one but suspects that the first edition might have been better. In the last edition, the author changed the name to *The Conversation with the Man called Al-Mu'tassim: A Game of Shifting Mirrors*. The story is about a law student from Bombay who abandoned his Islamic faith. But one night the students gets involved in a street scene of unrest and violence between Hindus and Muslims. He thinks that he killed a Hindu and flees from the police. Seeking for refuge, he finds a circular tower where he encounters a wicked man who is a thieve of "the gold teeth of the cadavers the Parsees bring… to that tower" (Borges "The Approach" *Collected* 83). The thieve despicably speaks about a band of horse thieves from Gujarati. Exhausted, the student sleeps and when he wakes up, the thieve had disappeared. Reflecting on the recent occurrences, he realizes that he was able to kill another man for futile reasons. He remembers that the thieve also despised a woman from a "caste of thieves" (84). The student reasons that the "the wrath and hatred of a man so thoroughly despicable is the equivalent of a hymn of praise" (84) and decides to look for that woman.

The student travels around India mingling with the members of the lowest castes and getting involved in dreadful behaviors. But unexpectedly, he finds in the face of an evil interlocutor a glimpse of humanity that shocks him. And he thinks that the man he is facing is somehow reflecting (like a mirror) the kindness of another being. He then decides to look for that man, Al-Mu'tassim, the original source of "this brightness" (84). After encountering many people that resemble in kindness the elusive Al-Mu'tassim, he is faced with a curtain that precedes a lighted space. The novel ends when the student "draws back the bead curtain and steps into the room" (85).

The narrator (the critic), points out that Bahadur was indeed able to compose an interesting plot but failed to create Al-Mu'tassim as "a real person" (85). Instead, he created and allegorical character to God, that would be perceived according to the religion of the perceiver: "a single, unitary God who molds Himself to the dissimilarities of humankind" (85). The critic suggests that other ideas would have enriched the novel, like the notion of a God looking for "Someone, and that Someone, in search of a yet superior… to the End—or better yet, the Endlessness—of Time. Or perhaps cyclically" (85). The critic concludes by highlighting the fact that most contemporary books owe to previous ones, suggesting that Bahadur's might have taken some elements from a Rudyard Kipling's tale, and from the Persian classic *Conference of the Birds*, by Farid al-din Attar. He also mentions the possible influence of a Kabbalist scholar from Jerusalem who "revealed that the soul of an ancestor or teacher may enter into the soul of an unhappy or unfortunate man, to comfort or instruct him" (86).

In a final footnote, the critic describes Farid al-din Attar's book stating that it is about a group of thirty birds that search for the Simurgh, a king of birds. They travel

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around the world experiencing different adventures. Many quit the seemingly impossible endeavor while others die, but the final 30 survivor birds "look upon their king at last: they see that they are the Simurgh and that the Simurgh is each, and all, of them" (87). In the final paragraph of the footnote, the critic highlights the many similarities between Al-Mu'tassim and its seeker, like in the Persian classic. But in the last sentence, he states, "another chapter suggests that Al-Mu'tasim is the 'Hindu' that the law student thinks he murdered" (87).

4.6.2.1 Al-Mu'tassim as an Exercise of Intertextuality

In the prologue to *Artifices*, that is included in *Ficciones*, Borges described "The Approach to Al-Mu'tassim" as one of his stories on imaginary books. This description might be considered accurate. However, the particular imaginary book alluded in the story echoes some other real books as insinuated in the plot. Furthermore, in the Spanish edition of this prologue Borges also adds a puzzling detail to his brief description of the story. He writes that in that particular short story *the narrator, through B, has a premonition or guess about the remote existence of Z, to whom B does not know*[4] *(*Borges *Ficciones* 12*)*. Only after reading "The Approach to Al-Mu'tassim" this statement would make sense. Interestingly, Borges appeals here to the role of the narrator, who also might be identified with the writer since the story is told in first person. Thus, in this particular short story I find a blend of theory and art that through the resource of fiction, permits Borges to expose some of the ideas that he discusses on his lectures and essays on the topic of intertextuality and authorship.

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[4] My translation from Spanish.

As stated previously in this dissertation, intertextuality is understood as the set of relationships that connect a text with other books from diverse origins and even ages (Bakhtin; Kristeva). In fact, "The Approach to Al-Mu'tassim" includes direct allusions to imaginary and real books that preceded the story. Borges subtly theorizes on intertextuality using it as a device that attempts to reach a communicational engagement with his readers by offering them connections to other texts and authors that they may have been familiar with.

The story might be read as outlining two different plots. In the first one, it appears to be just a review of a literary critic on a novel. However, when the critic describes meticulously the argument of the novel he is reviewing, the plot of that fictional book captures the attention of the reader of the short story. Consequently, I find the first plot more related to a discussion on intertextuality and authorship. And the second, the search for Al-Mu'tassim, a reflection on a quest for meaning that is characteristic of metaphysical inquiries.

On the issue of authorship, it is interesting that Borges adopts the role of a literary critic in some of his short stories. Bakhtin states that the writer might take diverse "professional forms of authorship" (153). Those may include different types such as "novelist, lyricist, writer of comedies, of odes and so forth" (153). "Forms of authorship can be usurped or conventional… the novelist can assimilate the tone of the priest, the prophet, the judge, the teacher, the preacher, and so forth" (153). All these professional forms "are renewed in new situations. One cannot invent them (just as one cannot invent language)" (153). By adopting the tone of a reviewer, Borges detaches himself from the

idea of the author that already knows the end of the story. As a character, he only would suggest possible endings, leaving the final decision on the reader.

Novel approaches to intertextuality explore particular relationships among different texts. Manyaka addresses intertextuality as a relation between a host and a parasite text. This author uses these metaphors from the ecological world to describe how "a parasite is a species which lives and feeds on another, the host" (102). Drawing from other authors such as Bloom, Manyaka states that "a writer's work is invariably inhabited by a long chain of parasitical presences – echoes, allusions, ghosts of previous texts and feed upon the guest for survival" (102). In this statement there is an attribution related to authorship and novelty that assumes that "there is no originality in writing, as anything in any text might have been present in the writings of other times" (102). For Manyaka, the host would be "an equivalent of an older writer or precursor writer who influences or acts as a source of inspiration to new writers and who is also in turn 'sucked' by new writers" (102). However, this relationship is not necessarily unbalanced. Manyaka finds that there is some sort of exchange between host and parasite texts. "the precursor text, in a way gets clarity and is supplemented by the new text" (102).

Furthermore, according to Manyaka, "as soon as the precursor text starts to gain clarity from the new text, we get a reversal of the host and parasite relationship, where the precursor writer becomes the parasite and the new writer becomes the host" (103). This last possibility does not seem to be the case when analyzing the particular relationship between Borges' "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim", and the Persian classic "The Conference of the Birds", by Farid al-din Attar, or even Rudyard Kipling's "On the City Wall". However, it is possible to speculate that some of Borges' readers may have

felt the urge to consult the mentioned books in order to confirm or deny the intertextual connection astutely suggested by the Argentinian author.

Interestingly, in Kipling's "On the City Wall" the main subject might be about the problems of identity experienced by Indians during the ruling of the British empire (Kipling) One of the characters, Wali Dad, experiments a feeling of unrest similar to the conflicts that torment the student in the novel. But while in Borges' story, the student struggles with his identity as a Muslim and searches for Al-Mu'tasim to give some meaning to his own life, in Kipling's the character seems to be torn between his identity as an Indian and his fondness for his English education. Likewise, in Kipling's story there is a bloody riot that allows a Muslim leader to escape for his freedom. Here might be the source of inspiration for Borges creating the novel's protagonist, the student who participates in a revolt and kills a man, an action that triggers his flight from the authorities.

In the poem "The Conference of the Birds," the birds assemble and decide to start a long journey in search for a king (Attar). Their expedition permits them negotiate multiple experiences that provide them with knowledge about the nature of life and the inner self. When they finally acknowledge that they themselves are the Simurgh they are looking for, they achieve a state of enlightenment. In Borges' story, the allusion to the classical Persian by Attar is found casually at its end, as a long footnote. Furthermore, in that footnote Borges also insinuates that the identity of Al-Mu'tasim might be the Hindu that the student thought he killed, complicating thus the options for a single and definite end. This offers the reader a novel "intertextual" resolution that completely changes the

meaning of the story. The reader now has multiple options and the opportunity of deciding which end would be more sensible.

In my view, those ends would be four. At the beginning of the story, the character of the literary critic mentions a first edition that he considers the best. That edition would depict Al-Mu'tasim as a man, a prophet or a wise man but still human, and that would be the end of the story, a reunion of the student with his master. However, in the 1934 version, the novel would lower its quality, according to the critic-narrator, by falling on the cliché of adjudicating the identity of Al-Mu'tasim to God. The literary critic finds this comparison deficient since it would be oriented to please readers of different creeds by allowing them to identify Al-Mu'tasim with the deities of their particular religions. "Those declarations are an attempt to suggest a single, unitary God who molds Himself to the dissimilarities of humanity" (Borges *The Approach* 85). Then, the explanation on the poem by Attar directs the reader to a different conclusion, that the student himself is Al-Mu'tasim. Here again appears the use of the metaphor of the mirror, one of Borges' favorite resources in relation to the issue of identity. Not in vain the complete name of the novel in its second edition is changed to: *The Conversation with the Man called Al-Mu'tassim: A Game of Shifting Mirrors*. Nuño suggests that in this story, Borges seems to alleviate the horror that mirrors provoke in him. That horror might cease and transforms into a way to unite what was considered opposite (43). Thus, seeker and searched would be the same. He also proposes that one of the philosophical sources favored by Borges reveals a Platonian influence. And he mentions Plotinus, who in his fifth Ennead alludes to a principle for identity based on the idea that *anything is all things* (43). Lopez-Baralt points out to the "enlightenment" experimented by the student. "It remains clear that the

student has been "illuminated" by Al-Mu'tasim all the time, much like the Simurgh that Badahur evokes in his stories was in the end all the birds that flew in search of him" (*Islamic Themes* 78). Lopez-Baralt even proposes, "the "enlightened" reader, in turn, reconstructs or "reflects" the text he is reading, which momentarily… includes both him and the author's written word. We come so close to Al-Mu'tasim that finally we *are* Al-Mu'tasim" (78).

This last version looks very solid. However, although readers and scholars may seem to accept it, at the very end of the footnote appears the reference to the Hindu, providing a different perspective to the story. It seems possible then that the spiritual journey that the student experienced was set by this person from a different religion than the student in order to teach him a lesson on humility and tolerance, as opposed to violence and fanatism. Four different interpretations are suggested here and all of them, added to the ones triggered by re-readings of the text enrich the experience of the readers and point to the communicative engagement established between author-text-reader. An engagement that transcends time and welcomes novel hermeneutical experiences.

For Borges, time is the main unsolved philosophical question. And through his fiction, he suggests some theories on the function of time in literature, and in the act of reading. Time seems to be subjective and to disappear in reading. Once that readers are involved in the storytelling created by the author, they engage in a continuous present time marked by the actions on the reading. Time also repeats, may become cyclical when reading. Every new reading (and every reader) adds to the text, enrich it with new interpretations based on different historical moments and contexts, and even previous understandings. Time also permits and even welcomes the participation of other texts in

the experience of reading. The real ones, explicitly evoked by the author. For instance, when Borges alludes to Kipling's and Attar's books in "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim", and the Encyclopedia Britannica, in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius". But also, the apocryphal, imaginary books that are part of his immensurable labyrinthic libraries. In the following and last chapter, "Labyrinths: The Infinite Library", I will explore the view of Borges on time as fragmented, non-linear, and infinite as an anticipation to current theories on semiotics and hypertextuality.

Chapter 5:

Labyrinths: The Infinite Library

Labyrinths in Borges naturally take an architectural form and allude
to Daedalus, the prototypical architect. In their *arche* they conceal their mystery
and the hint of an origin. But they are ultimately representations of the self.
(González-Echevarría "The Aleph" 127)

A man sets out to draw the world. As the years go by, he peoples a space with
images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes,
rooms, instruments, stars, horses, and individuals. A short time before he dies, he
discovers that the patient labyrinth of lines traces the lineaments of his own face.
(Borges quoted by Macadam "The Maker" 139)

5.1 Introduction

In this fifth chapter, "Labyrinths: The Infinite Library," I examine some themes

that enrich the study of philosophy of communication through a reflection on language as

a communicative living experience (Arneson 7). In my view, some theories of semiotics,

as conceived by Charles S. Peirce, Umberto Eco, and other authors, enlarge the scope of

the field of communication. In a work of art, such as literature, the science of signs

participates in the creation of meaning. In this chapter, I also explore some ideas on the

labyrinth, conceived both as a physical and a mental space, and depicted as a metaphor of

the infinite in many texts by Jorge Luis Borges. I argue that Borges' conception and use

of the labyrinth in many of his works anticipated the influence of technologies like the

Internet on human communication. The immediacy and incommensurability of the

Internet provide a framework for a discussion on media ecology that contemplates the

basic tenets of this technological tool. Throughout an approximation to the work of

Marshal McLuhan, Lance Strate, and other media ecology scholars I focus on the impact

of cyberlanguage, hypertext, and electronic storytelling on rhetoric and philosophy of communication. Finally, I analyze Borges' essay "The Total Library," and the short stories: "The Aleph," "The Library of Babel," and "The Garden of the Forking Paths." I contend that Borges' work, specifically in the former writings, is hermeneutically provocative and is attentive to issues related to human communication. The existential emptiness and despair invoked by the Borgesian labyrinth rhetorically appeal to some metaphysical inquiries that pertain to philosophy of communication.

5.2 Semiotics: Origins and Evolution

American philosopher Charles S. Peirce is considered one of the fathers of semiotics (Deledalle-Rhodes 242; Eco *Theory* 14). In fact, the pragmatist philosopher left numerous writings from the second part of the 19th century that manifested his interest in the interpretation of signs as a scientific endeavor. Likewise, French scholar Ferdinand de Saussure, whose work: *Course on General Linguistics* was very influential on the development of a theory on linguistics, is regarded as a pioneer of the field (Petrilli 150). Although both scholars studied the sign and its derivations, they followed different paths. According to Petrilli, Saussure's semiology was concerned with what is today acknowledged as "code semiotics" while Peirce's work focused on "interpretation semiotics" (150–152).

Petrilli contends that "Founded upon the notions of *langue* and *parole*, the Sausserian model of sign was immediately associated with the mathematical theory of communication; similar term used by both approaches include *code* and *message, transmitter*, and *receiver*" (150). This approach suggests a dyadic relationship between an emitter and a receiver. Petrilli affirms, "in code semiotics the sign is divided into two

parts: the significant (signifier) and the signifié (signified), which refer respectively to the sign vehicle and its content. These parts are conceived to be in a relation of equality or equal exchange… a perfect correspondence between communicative intentionality and interpretation" (150–151). Eco points out that "insofar as the relationship between signifier and signified is established on a basis of a system of rules which is 'la langue', Saussurean semiology would seem to be a rigorous semiotic of signification" (*Theory* 14). He also affirms that scholars that envision semiotics as part of communication theory seem to favor Saussure's view. For Eco, Saussure's definition of the signified may be considered vague. In his opinion, he positioned it "between a mental image, a concept, and a psychological reality, but he did clearly stress the fact that the signified is something which has to do with the mental activity of anybody receiving a signifier" (14–15).

Both Petrilli and Eco highlight the wholeness and appropriateness of Peirce' contribution to semiotics. Elaborating on Peirce's interpretation semiotics, Petrilli argues that "he identifies the signs' meaning in the interpretant, that is to say, in another sign, which takes the place of the preceding sign. Insofar it is a sign, the interpretant subsists only by virtue of another interpretant, and soon in an open-ended chain of interpretants" (152). Petrilli adds, "Such a procedure characterizes semiosis as an open process generated by the potential creativity of the interpretant… the sign stands to someone in the sense that it creates an interpretant sign in the mind of the interpreter" (152). Eco finds the theories of Peirce "more comprehensive and semiotically more fruitful" (*Theory* 15). He thinks that the triadic relationship between "a sign, its object and its interpretant" offers an interaction that transcends human activity. Differently from Petrilli, Eco argues

that Peirce's semiosis does not necessarily imply human communication. He contends, "the Peircean triad can be also applied to phenomena that do not have a human emitter, provided that they do have a human receiver, such being the case with meteorological symptoms or any other sort of index" (16).

Petrilli finds that "Peircean semiotics unites logic and sign theory: the acquisition of knowledge is only possible through signs and interpretation" (152). From his analysis on Peirce's work, Eco offers his own view on semiotics and communication theory. He contends that "those who reduce semiotics to a theory of communicational acts cannot consider symptoms as signs, nor can they accept as signs any other human behavioral feature from which a receiver infers something about the situation of the sender even though this sender is unaware of sending something to somebody" (16). Eco wants to suggest a wide definition of a sign. He affirms: "I propose to define as a sign everything that, on the grounds of a previously established social conventions, can be taken as *something standing for something else*" (16). In his view, signs need to include natural and non-intentional signs. The first ones include all natural phenomena and "human behavior not intentionally emitter by its senders" (16–17). An example of this might be the development of symptoms of a determined disease by a person. Non-intentional signs comprehend the cases when "a human being performs acts that are perceived by someone as signaling devices, revealing something else, even if the sender is unaware of the revelative property of his behavior" (17–18). Thus, gestures are considered non-intentional performative human acts.

While reflecting on the goals of semiotics, Eco states that the scholar of this discipline needs to differentiate between "the abstract theory of the pure competence of

an ideal sign-producer… or whether he is concerned with a social phenomenon subject to changes and restructuring, resembling a network of intertwined partial and transitory competences rather than a crystal-like and unchanging model" (28–29). He also associates semiotics to semiosis in a Peircean way. For Eco, "semiosis is the process by which empirical subjects communicate, communication processes being made possible by the organization of signification systems" (316). Eco highlights the practicality of his approach since it is based on method and not on moral assessments (316).

In *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, Eco proposes a philosophical view on semiotics whose main concern would be the sign. He contends that a general semiotics "studies and describes languages through languages. By studying the human signifying activity it influences its course. A general semiotics transforms, for the very fact of its theoretical claim, its own object" (12). He further explains his approach to a philosophy of language by acknowledging that humans are "signifying animals" (13). He states that "to see that their ability to produce and to interpret signs, as their ability to draw inferences, is rooted in the same cognitive structures, represent a way to give form to our experience" (13).

5.3 Umberto Eco and the Metaphor of the Labyrinth

In his essay, "From the Tree to the Labyrinth," Umberto Eco reexamines his notions on the dictionary and the encyclopedia as part of his theories on semiotics and philosophy of language. He recalls the humanity's search for knowledge tracing its origins to Greek classics, showing an evolution throughout the participation of many Western scholars. And he analyzes the metaphor of the labyrinth as a depiction of the infinite possibilities that the encyclopedia offers for the spread of wisdom and meaning.

Eco begins his essay by comparing the reach and limitations of the dictionary and the encyclopedia. For him, the dictionary's objective would be to offer a definition of the main characteristics of an object, which enable it to differentiate from others. He specifies that this definition "ought to contain only those properties defined by Kant as analytical (analytical being that a priori judgement in which the concept functioning as predicate can be deduced from the definition of the subject)" (3). Thus, the dictionary's definition provides us with "knowledge of a language" (3) while other attributes of the object pertain to the realm of the encyclopedia, which is oriented to illustrate "our knowledge of the world" (3).

Eco points out that the origins of the dictionary can be traced back to the Porphyrian Tree, that consists on the observations of the Neo-Platonist philosopher Porphyry to Aristotle's classifications or categories as stated in his *Posterior Analytics*. This "tree of knowledge" is based on the classification of things into genus and species. As stated by Eco, the Porphyrian Tree has been very influential for many centuries. He says, "it is through this model, and not the more problematical discussion in the real Aristotle, that the idea of a dictionary structure of definition is transmitted, via Boethius, down to our own day, even though present-day proponents of a dictionary-based semantics may not know to whom they are indebted" (6). Eco observes that The Porphyrian Tree is based on classifications, not definitions. He contends, "A dictionary classification, then, does not serve to define a term but merely to allow us to use it in a logically correct fashion" (15).

According to Eco, the term "encyclopedia" comes from the Greek tradition and it was first related to a "complete education" (21). The word was adopted by European

scholars in the 16th century and later, who used it to designate it "as the sum total of knowledge, or the "world of science," or "the circle of doctrine" (22). Like the Porphyrian Tree that originated the dictionary, encyclopedias also count on a system of classification. However, what separates them is that the "Porphyrian tree claims to use the terms of its disjunctions as primitives, not susceptible of further definition, and at the same time indispensable for defining something else, while in the encyclopedic index each node is referred to the notions that define it and will be presented in the course of the overall discussion" (26). Eco also highlights the relation of encyclopedias to history and theory: "The encyclopedia does not claim to register what really exists but what people traditionally believe exists— and hence everything that an educated person should know, not simply to have knowledge of the world, but also to understand discourses about the world" (26).

Significantly, encyclopedias assume that attaining all knowledge is not possible. With a flexibility that could be considered parallel to the philosophical search for wisdom, they seem to accept that total knowledge is a work in progress, a desirable but unattainable goal. Eco affirms, "Precisely because knowledge is never complete, Ramus begins to conceive of an encyclopedia that can also take into consideration the constitution of disciplines as yet unknown or ill-defined" (36). He adds, "It is with Francis Bacon that the idea first appears of an encyclopedia based upon data derived from scientific experimentation and criticism of the erroneous opinions expressed in the past (the idola)—an open repertory, in other words, in a continuous process of development" (36). Bacon explores diverse systems of classifications throughout his work. And suggests the notion of the labyrinth to designate the search for knowledge. Eco mentions

Bacon's Instauratio Magna, where he proposes, "But the universe to the eye of the human understanding is framed like a labyrinth; presenting as it does on every side so many ambiguities of way, so many deceitful resemblances of objects and signs, natures so irregular in their lines, and so knotted and entangled" (37). For Eco, what Bacon is stressing is that the notion of the labyrinth does not represent "itself as a logical division but as a rhetorical accumulation of notions and topics arranged under loci, the Latin verb invenire (= to find or discover) no longer means to find something one already knew existed… but truly to discover some new thing, or the relationship between two or more things, that one was previously unaware of" (37).

Similarly to Bacon, Emmanuel Tesauro explores the idea of finding new knowledge. And he finds in the metaphor a convenient tool. As Eco points out, Tesauro's "model of metaphor is proposed as a means of discovering unfamiliar relations among the elements of knowledge, though Tesauro's interest, unlike Bacon's, is rhetorical rather than scientific" (38). Thus, Tesauro proposes a categorical index that comprises countless metaphors which permit "to unearth analogies and similarities that would have passed unnoticed had everything remained classified under its own particular category" (38). Eco accounts some examples of Tesauro's Categorical Index: "under the category of Substance, are to be recorded as Members the Divine Persons, Ideas, the Fabulous Gods, Angels, Demons, and Sprites; then, under the Member Heaven, the Wandering Stars, the Zodiac, Vapors, Air, Meteors, Comets, Torches, Thunderbolts, and Winds; and then, under Earth, Fields, Solitudes, Mountains, Hills, and Promontories" (38). Eco acknowledges that those classifications may seem incongruous. However, they would allow for the type of discovery that Bacon suggested, and that fosters the development of

networks among different "objects of knowledge" (41). For Eco, Tesauro offers "a procedure to pursue the infinite paths of a labyrinth, in which the subdivisions according to categories are nothing more than provisional and ultimately arbitrary constructions designed to contain somehow or other material that is in a constant state of ferment" (42).

When discussing the implications of the encyclopedia for semiotic systems, Eco contends that "The encyclopedia is dominated by the Peircean principle of interpretation and consequently of unlimited semiosis" (51). He explicates this assertion by pointing out to the multiple explanations that emerge from semantic progressions. "Every expression of the semiotic system is interpretable by other expressions, and these by still others, in a self-sustaining semiotic process, even if, from a Peircean point of view, this flight of interpretants generates habits and hence modalities of transformation of the natural world" (51). Thus, novel understandings appear, adapting to new environments and conditions.

Eco draws from Santarcangeli; Bord; and Kern (52) to explicate three types of semiotic labyrinths. The classical only offers one way to its center, and one way to return to the entrance, that is, retracing the former path. The parallel with Ariadne's thread is evident here. But, "the unicursal labyrinth, then, does not represent a model for an encyclopedia" (52). The second labyrinth is the Mannerist or Irrweg. This labyrinth offers diverse paths or choices, "but all the paths lead to a dead point— all but one, that is, which leads to the way out… If it were "unrolled," the Irrweg would assume the form of a tree, of a structure of blind alleys (except for one)" (52). The network, the last type of labyrinth, is characterized by the connection of all its parts. It does not have a stable form, since it is always changing, self-correcting and adapting to new situations. "A

network is a tree plus an infinite number of corridors that connect its nodes. The tree may become (multidimensionally) a polygon, a system of interconnected polygons, an immense megahedron. But even this comparison is misleading: a polygon has outside limits, whereas the abstract model of the network has none" (54).

Eco based his metaphor of the labyrinth on Deleuze and Guatari's rhizome. Among the attributes of the rhizome is its interconnectedness. Other of its features include its capacity to regenerate if fragmented; its lack of hierarchies; and its acceptance and even fostering of incongruities. However, since it does not acknowledges external influences, "it is a short-sighted algorithm in the sense that every local description tends to be a mere hypothesis about the network as a whole. Within the rhizome, thinking means feeling one's way, in other words, by conjecture" (55).

In relation to semantics and language, Eco contends that a network of words may be represented as a labyrinth. "Any node can be taken as the point of departure or type of a series of other nodes (tokens) that define it (let's say the point of departure is dog and that this node is defined by its links with animal, quadruped, able to bark, faithful, etc.)" (57). Every term defined may convert "into the type of another series of tokens" (57), thus multiplying the scope of the connections. As Eco points out, "A network model implies the definition of every concept (represented by a term) through its interconnection with the universe of all the concepts that interpret it, each of them ready to become the concept interpreted by all the others" (57). The former attributions offer implications for the notion of the labyrinth as a metaphor of the infinite. "From a concept assumed as type it would be possible to retrace, from the center to the outermost

periphery, the entire universe of the other concepts, each of which may in its turn become the center, thereby generating infinite peripheries" (57).

5.4 Understanding the Internet

According to Cantoni and Tardini, the World Wide Web was originally created by Tim Berners-Lee between 1989 and 1990 as the fusion of the technological advances that occurred during the 1970's and the development of the Internet (29). The revolution that represented the invention of the Internet has evolved from those years towards the integration of different media under a single platform, and transforming how we experience communication. Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) opens many possibilities for the communication act such as "spoken conversations as well as written interactions; one-to-one communications as well as one-to-many or even many-to-ones" (43). Real-time and delayed exchanges are also possible as well as emitting/receiving messages and "documents of all kinds" (43).

Most of the exchanges on the Internet utilize different tools such as video, audio, chats, and file-sharing. But all seem to be grounded on digital or electronic texts. Those type of texts have characteristics that clearly differentiate them from traditional media such as the book or the letter. Cantoni and Tardini highlight that they are "directly inaccessible to human senses" (54), meaning that they "need the mediation of other tools (hardware and software) in order to be seen and read" (54–55). Likewise, "electronic texts are inaccessible as a whole, since it is possible to access only a part of an electronic text at a time, namely the part that appears on the monitor" (55). At the same time, "electronic texts are immaterial, since they are physically just a sequence of bits" (55). But this immateriality does not prevent their capacity to be replicated. Electronic texts

can be printed and stored in other media. Thus, availability may not be as direct as that of the books that we can measure and know its dimensions end extent. However, an electronic book, for example, can be easily retrieved from a web site anytime and from anywhere with Internet access, something that does not happen to print material.

Other features of electronic texts are related to their capacity to be altered anytime depending on the will of the author, which represents a considerable advantage compared to the printed book. Cantoni and Tardini also point out to the capacity of electronic texts to become "multimedia documents" (57). They affirm, "elements belonging to different semiotic codes can be integrated, such as pictures, images, audio, video and animations" (57). Similarly, interactivity is another feature that separates electronic texts from traditional ones, like TV or cinema. Potentially, many receivers of messages are able to interact or provide some type of instant feedback to the senders of messages. Besides, electronic texts provide the possibility of adapting their communications to specific individuals or groups.

Cantoni and Tardini define hypertext "as a particular kind of electronic text whose textual elements are connected to one another by means of links" (72). They acknowledge that hypertext may also offer "iconic elements, sounds, animations or videos" (72). They highlight that the World Wide Web is grounded on hypertextuality, as a system of links that direct users to other electronic texts and web sites. Cantoni and Tardini recognize that the idea of hypertextuality appears before the internet as part of literary studies that challenge the traditional assumptions on authorship, writing and reading, and even "the notion of text itself" (72). It seems that they relate hypertextuality to intertextuality, as discussed in the previous chapters in this dissertation. In my view,

intertextuality would be a term better suited for relations among different texts. And hypertextuality responds more to the links that promote interactivity in the users of the Internet.

Drawing from Nielsen, Cantoni and Tardini affirm that "hypertexts are basically composed of two elements: content units, or 'nodes', and links" (73). The first ones refer to "the minimal fruition units perceived by the readers; they are something that readers have to receive at once, in total, without having the possibility of choosing to receive only parts" (73). The links, on the other hand, are "connections between nodes" (75). Links usually take the user to another document or to another part of the same document. Interestingly, Cantoni and Tardini compare them to "uttering a performative sentence" (76) since the user does an action "such as buying and selling products, sending messages, subscribing to services, voting in online polls" (76). Using links is part of the function of interactivity of hypertexts that takes the form of a certain "dialogue" (77) between the reader and the text. Furthermore, Cantoni and Tardini see hypertexts "as new languages" (78) composed of "syntactic rules and basic elements" (78). These languages activate only when the readers or users of the Internet decide to engage with hypertexts. Like with any written text, a hypertext would become 'alive', when it is read. If it is not, "it remains a virtual/potential communication" (78).

5.4.1 The Classical Rhetorical Canon and the Hypertext

Cantoni and Tardini also compare hypertexts with the classic five stages adopted by the good orator, "*inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria, actio*" (80). In the creation of a speech, *inventio* corresponds to the creative process of gathering the main ideas that would be deployed in the speech. Similarly, "*inventio* is to be regarded as the activity of

finding out the idea behind what a hypermedia work/title actually is" (81). *Dispositio*, as in classical rhetoric, would be about establishing a hierarchy to the ideas presented. Since one of the features of hypertext is "nonlinearity" and even "multilinearity" (80), this step might be challenging. However, Cantoni and Tardini find that in fact, hypertexts and even printed texts might not be as nonlinear as supposed since they may "force readers to a reading session that –in extreme cases– could even be absolutely linear" (82). And they offer as an example the multiple notes and bibliographic entrances that many books have. Besides, "hypertext designers do not specify the *dispositio* of nodes, since they do not determine the exact sequence in which they will be accessed" (83). That would entitle the readers with the ability of choosing the order of their reading, and making them "co-authors of the text they are reading" (83). But, of course, it all depends on the amount of freedom that the authors volunteer to offer to the readers.

For *elocutio*, which in ancient rhetoric referred to the best way or order of the speech, Cantoni and Tardini assert that web designers frequently use hypermedia to better appeal to readers. By carefully deciding on multiple elements such as type fonts, images and videos, colors and texts, they decide on "the internal semiotic structure and the appearance of each single element" (86). *Memoria* implies the recalling of the ideas and words of the speech by using the famous mnemotechnies developed by Cicero in ancient times. For Cantoni and Tardini, memory also plays a relevant role in hypertext's creation. They point out that "hypermedia can remember the nodes the reader has already visited" (89). By using certain navigational devices like the "back button" (89), readers leave a trace that is recorded by browsers and other applications permitting to know "the history of a user" (89). Finally, *actio,* which is in ancient rhetoric the actual "performance

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of the speech" (89), is similar to "navigation style and rules, interactions, multimedia playing… the specific kinds of interaction of the reader with the hypertext, or… with other users" (89). Thus, Cantoni and Tardini see *dispositio* and *actio* as related given that the choices offered by interactivity produce "a merging of the role of the 'author' and 'reader'" (90).

When discussing different theories of hypertextuality, Cantoni and Tardini affirm that "hypertext is modelled on the example of an encyclopedia, conceived as a system of references and of display of possible links among its entries" (93). For them, hypertextuality is more related to "playful and experimental" (95) practices that place it far from communicative objectives. "It is not sufficient to pile up different semiotic objects by means of all manners of links: it is, rather, necessary to plan what one has to say, to whom, and how, taking full responsibility for what is communicated, as in every real communication" (95–96).

On the topic of time in websites, Cantoni and Tardini point out certain aspects such as how time is perceived by the senders and the receivers of the message. They remark that receivers usually think that their moment of browsing for any information is coincidental with the time when that information is produced. They somehow expect synchronicity between both actions (105). However, this is not always the case. Currency becomes a key issue. One related to the credibility of the messages. On their part, senders of messages through the web have more control over what is published than those of more traditional media, like the publishers of books. The former, for example, can easily erase or correct some information on their sites without the awareness of the receivers, making their messages short-lived.

5.5 McLuhan as semiotician

Danesi provides an illuminating approach on the effects of cybermedia on language and semiotics throughout his reflection on McLuhan's work. In his article, "The Medium is the Sign. Was McLuhan a Semiotician?," he states that Marshall McLuhan was indeed an unintentional semiotician since he studied the effects of media on human beings. In his work, "he saw media as unconscious extensions of our inbuilt sensory and cognitive systems… these extensions are, ipso fact, signs as the semiotician would construe them" (114). Danesi argues that today's cyberlanguage might be considered a byproduct of the digital media that permeates to other more traditional forms of language (120).

For Danesi, "a medium can be defined as the physical means by which some system of "signs" (pictographs, alphabet characters, etc.) for recording ideas can be actualized" (115). McLuhan was aware "that changes in media (like changes in signs) leads to changes in social structure and in knowledge systems" (115). Danesi finds three transcendental changes of paradigms, as stated by Kuhn, that strongly modified "the world's social structure" (115). The first would be the evolution of pictography to alphabetic communication. The second is related to the invention by Guttenberg of the movable type, with its consequent widespread of writing and reading. Similarly, the third stage would occur during the 20th century, "after advancements in electronic technology established sound recordings, cinema, radio, and (a little later) television as new media for communicating information and, above all else, for providing distraction to larger and larger masses of people" (116). Danesi does not take lightly this fusion of information of entertainment that preoccupied the Canadian scholar. He highlights that when discussing

electronic media, McLuhan argued that "while they do in fact make information more available and accessible to larger and larger groups of people… the media also engender a general feeling of alienation and 'disembodiment' in people" (114). Danesi suggests a fourth stage in the development of media that would transform the "Global Village" envisioned by McLuhan into a "Digital Galaxy" (116).

In relation to the role of representation in semiotics, Danesi proposes that it would be "the use of signs, (pictures, sounds, etc.) to relate, depict, portray, or reproduce something perceived, sensed, imagined, or felt in some physical form" (116). For Danesi, on the other hand, the referent would be "something to which we desire to *refer* in some ways as it "presents itself" to our consciousness through our senses, emotions, and intellect" (116). For the representation of the referent there is needed a sign, which is "a particular physical form" (117). The task of semiotic analysis would be the finding of meaning in the referent-sign relationship. However, this is constrained by social conventions, by communal experiences, and by many other contextual factors that put limits on the range of meanings that are possible in a given situation" (117).

Danesi contends that signs might be seen as extensions of what they represent. This is coincidental with McLuhan famous claim that "the medium is the message" (117). For Danesi, "This idea is, in effect, a basic principle of semiotic theory. The form of the sign and that to which it refers are dynamically intertwined, one suggesting the other" (117). He also highlights how media enlarge our "bodily and cognitive processes" (118). Similar to how writing and reading encouraged "linear thinking processes in the brain" (119) and electronic media almost nullified distances approaching peoples from around

the world in a "global village", digital communication introduces significant changes to language.

Danesi observes that different critics to the digital world are preoccupied with the evident changes to language that electronic media, specially the Internet, nowadays encourage. He contends:

> Cyberlanguage is marked by what can be called an efficiency of structure that manifests itself in such phenomena as abbreviations, acronyms, and the use of numbers, all of which are designed to make the delivery of linguistic communication rapid and highly economical, but which many equate with a paucity of reflection and overall understanding. (120)

Scholars of the field of linguistics have studied a tendency of all complex languages to abbreviation in order to gain speed and efficiency in portraying messages. This is called The Principle of Least Effort (PLE). Danesi explains that linguist scholar George Zipf, for example, argues that "many phenomena in language could be explained as the result of an inborn tendency in the human species to make the most of its signifying resources with the least expenditure of effort (physical, cognitive, and social)" (121–122). Danesi finds this tendency most evident in the Internet: "Emails, text messages (SMS's), and the like are the media through which, and in which, such forms develop. To increase the speed at which such messages can be input and received, a series of common abbreviations, acronyms, and other reduced structures have crystallized that are now part of a common cyberlanguage" (123). Although the use of acronyms and other abbreviations is not new and in fact, have been very popular in written language, their adoption by users of the Internet involve some interesting implications. "The

Internet is changing not only language itself in specific ways, but also assigning linguistic authority to people in truly radical ways that have obvious implications beyond language, reaching into the very structure of social interaction and ritual. McLuhan knew this, arguably, before anyone else did" (124).

Communications through the Internet demand high speed and quick responses. Delaying the answering to the huge amounts of emails and electronic messages that one person receives might be misinterpreted "even penalized by social ostracism or various other forms of reprobation" (123). Danesi concludes that "As McLuhan anticipated, digital forms of communication are indeed reshaping language and, as a consequence, social interaction and rituals. Unlike traditional forms of writing, such as the poem and the novel, the new cyberforms are created by the "common person" in our lifetime", and that would eventually modify our methods of communication "(for better or worse)" (125).

5.6 From Intertextuality to Hypertextuality: Writing in the Era of Cyberspace

While revealing some of the details of his own writing, in *Apostillas al Nombre de la Rosa* [5], Umberto Eco discusses some aspects of intertextuality. He affirms that books always speak about other books, and every story tells a story that was already told (9). For him the poetic effect of a text resides in its capacity of generating multiple readings. This is what Eco calls the echo of intertextuality (6, 9).

To those who wonder why in Eco's famous novel *The Name of the Rose* the assassin monk name recalls Jorge Luis Borges, and why he pictured him as an evil character, he responds that he wanted a blind man watching over a library. For him, a

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[5] Postscript to The Name of the Rose

blind librarian could only be Borges. The fact that he was evil responds to the development of the story. At the beginning, he never knew what he was going to do. The characters evolve according to the world where they lived. And the narrator is a prisoner of his own decisions, he affirmed.

Eco highlights the writer's intention of "building" a certain type of reader for his/her book. After the book is finished, he points out, there occurs a dialogue between the text and its readers, excluding the author, whose function already ended. But while the book is being written, there is a double dialogue. The one between that text and all other texts written before, and the dialogue between the author and his model-reader. Writing, Eco affirms, is to build through the text a model-reader (21). Some writers only want to appeal to the temporary tastes of most readers. But others may want to 'create' a new kind of reader. This last type of writer would like to reveal to his audience what they should want, even if they do not know it. This writer aspires to help readers to discover themselves in reading.

For Eco, the term "postmodern" is today applied to anything that appeals to the one who uses it (28). He suggest that what is considered modern reaches some limits because it has produced a metalanguage that speaks about its impossible texts. The postmodern response to the modern lies in acknowledging that since the past cannot be destroyed, it may be revisited with irony, without naiveté (28–29).

The detective novel, similar to a metaphysical inquiry, responds to a conjecture. The labyrinth would be the ideal structure for a ramification of conjectures (Eco 23). In my view, this multiplicity of possible developments in a work of fiction is precisely what

enriches the communicational relationship between authors and readers, but also it is the link that unites different writers through intertextuality.

5.6.1 Intertextuality as Influence

Preoccupied with the view of intertextuality as a copy or lack of originality, Eco addresses again this problem in his essay: "Borges and my Anxiety of Influence." He reflects on what he calls "a relation of influence between two authors" (118). Traditionally, he contends, one can speak about two types of influences. The one and reciprocal between contemporary authors. And the one that relates one writer to a predecessor. However, Eco proposes a third component that he designates as "the universe of the encyclopedia" (119), which encompasses different elements of the "universal culture" (119). He argues that Borges, as other writers, often employed this element in his stories.

For Eco, "books talk to each other" (122), and authors may have sometimes been aware of their influences on their writing. But often, they are not. He offers as an example the effects of Borges on his own writing. He describes his association with him in three ways. First, when he was "fully conscious of Borgesian influence" (121). On the second place, the moments when he did not recognize his influence until some readers pointed it out. And finally, when Borges himself acknowledged "proudly" (121) that he acquired some elements from "the universe of culture" (121).

After Eco read *Ficciones* in 1956, he became one of the few Italians interested in Borges. Most of the Italians by that time preferred the "illegible books" (123), based on the signifier that deconstruct language. Borges, on the contrary, "worked on the signifiers" (123), meaning that he was concerned with the world of ideas. But in the

1960s, Borges called the attention of "the structuralist and semiological movement" (123). Eco contends that "Borges carried out his experimental work not on words but on conceptual structures, and it was only with a structuralist methodology that one could begin to analyze and understand his work" (124). Fascinated by Borges, Eco is aware of the influence of "The Library of Babel" in his celebrated novel *The Name of the Rose*. He admits that the idea of a blind librarian called Jorge da Burgos occurred to him as he was "obsessed by Borges' library" (124). But he did not recall if the name Burgos was intentionally alluding to the Argentinian writer, or was his conclusion after learning that the Spaniard city of Burgos was at medieval time a producer of "paper instead of parchment" (124), which was an element of the story. Eco also acknowledged that he was impressed by Borges' story "Death and the Compass"[6], where two opposed characters reflect each other. In *The Name of the Rose*, Jorge and William, murderer and detective, also play a similar game. But Eco recognizes other influential books in his novel as well. And highlights that labyrinths and burned abbeys were common in medieval times. He reflects on the possibility that *The Name of the Rose* would have been possible without Borges. And he concludes that it is not the case. But he also suggests that the same occurs with the work of Borges and other writers. "Borges's work also consisted in taking from the immense territory of intertextuality a series of themes that were already whirling around there, and turning them into an exemplary pattern" (Eco 129).

Deepening in the meaning of intertextuality, Eco proposes that even the books that have not been read by a writer may become influential in his or her work. They are

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[6] Already analyzed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

part of a "long intertextual journey" and act as a "mental heritage" (132) that accompanies and enriches the work of authors.

5.6.2 Hypertextuality and Digital Writing

The revolution represented by the computer media and the Internet offers amplified functions for intertextuality and new possibilities for storytelling. Murray discusses the extraordinary capacity of the computer for encompassing the functions of other media. She points out that it shares similarities with TV and the telephone. But also the computer performs "like a library in offering vast amounts of textual information for reference, like a museum in its ordered presentation of visual information, like a billboard, a radio, a gameboard, and even like a manuscript in its revival of scrolling text" (27). The richness of the computer network allows it to reproduce almost any form of cultural representation. This poses a challenge to the traditional methods of storytelling. The urge for telling stories continues to appeal to human beings. But now those stories are not necessarily linear but "multiform" (29).

Murray utilizes "the term multiform story to describe a written or dramatic narrative that presents a single situation or plotline in multiple versions… that would be mutually exclusive in our ordinary experience" (30). She also defines hypertext as "a set of documents of any kind (images, text, charts, tables, video clips) connected to one another by links" (55). She then explains that "stories written in hypertext can be divided into scrolling "pages" (as they are on the World Wide Web) or screen-size "cards" (as they are in a Hypercard stack), but they are best thought of as segmented into generic chunks of information called "lexias" (or reading units)" (55). While the pages on a book are united by a sequence and "paper index cards" may not necessarily follow a sequence,

both "screen-based pages and cards become lexias" (55), and they "are connected with "hyperlinks" (or "hot words"), that is, words that are displayed in color to alert the reader/viewer that they lead someplace else" (55). Likewise, Murray points out that hypertext writing allows for experimentation. "Stories written in hypertext generally have more than one entry point, many internal branches, and no clear ending" (56). For her, they are similar to the "multiform" stories written by postmodern authors like Borges (56).

When examining the potential dimensions of digital media, Murray compares the "capacity of electronic media" to an enlarged "encyclopedic expectation" (84). She contends,

> Since every form of representation is migrating to electronic form and all the
> world's computers are potentially accessible to one another, we can now conceive
> of a single comprehensive global library of paintings, films, books, newspapers,
> television programs, and databases, a library that would be accessible from any
> point of the globe. It is as if the modern version of the great library of Alexandria,
> which contained all the knowledge of the ancient world, is about to rematerialize
> in the infinite expanses of cyberspace. (84)

Thus, electronic writing offers innumerable possibilities to authors by expanding their capacity for including details in different formats, varied viewpoints, and encyclopedic volumes. "It offers writers the opportunity to tell stories from multiple vantage points and to offer intersecting stories that form a dense and wide-spreading web" (84). Do this capabilities change the relation between author and reader already discussed in the preceding chapters? Murray suggests that the participation of the reader, or better said, an

interactive reader, would allow him or her more control and involvement on the reading act (130–133).

When discussing the symbolic value of the labyrinth in storytelling, Murray differentiates between the classical stories that included it as part of "a heroic narrative of adventure" (130), and the literary maze "derived from the academic literary community" (132). The first one obviously refers to the classical Greek story of the labyrinth in Crete that guarded the Minotaur. Navigating this place "embodies a classic fairy-tale narrative of danger and salvation". Murray states, "its lasting appeal as both a story and a game pattern derives from the melding of a cognitive problem (finding the path) with an emotionally symbolic pattern (facing what is frightening and unknown)" (130). Bravery and cleverness, and "romantic love" (130) are important symbolic elements here that appeal to the emotions of the reader. "Like all fairy tales, the maze adventure is a story about survival. The maze is a road map for telling this story" (130). What is expected from this type of story is "a win-lose" situation where the action always moves forward "toward a single solution, toward finding the one way out" (132).

The other type of labyrinth that Murray distinguishes refers to the postmodern hypertext narrative favored by authors like Borges. "Full of wordplay and indeterminate events, these labyrinths derive not from the Greek rationalism but from poststructuralist literary theory and are unheroic and solutionless… they offer no end point and no way out" (132). As stated also by Eco (*Apostillas*), Murray affirms that this type of maze corresponds with "philosopher Gilles Deleuze's "rhizome," a tuber root system in which any point may be connected to any other point (132). She points out "the postmodern hypertext tradition celebrates the indeterminate text as a liberation from the tyranny of

the author and an affirmation of the reader's freedom of interpretation" (133). Thus, creating a digital labyrinth would keep some resemblances to the work of writers like Borges. Open ends, different alternatives and the feeling that the game is never over. Every reading may reveal a new interpretation as in Borges' stories, but the digital storytellers engage more in the process of wandering, their pleasure might derive from the endless navigation and the negation of closure. As Murray suggests, "electronic closure occurs when a work's structure, though not its plot, is understood" (174). She clarifies that this type of end is very distant from the classical storytelling. It is less emotional and more rational. For Murray, "the refusal of closure is always… a refusal to face mortality" (175). Hypertexts and electronic games "offer us the chance to erase memory, to start over, to replay an event and try for a different resolution" (175).

5.6.3 Storytelling and the Internet

Media ecology scholar Lance Strate approaches the study of storytelling as narrative, which makes it "derived from the medium of language" (3). Strate highlights that storytelling is an attribute unique to human beings. Only our species is able to translate thoughts into symbolic language through talk. He affirms:

Language and other forms of symbolic communication give us the ability to engage in what Alfred Korzybski refers to as time-binding (1993), the ability to preserve information over time, accumulate knowledge by passing it on from generation to generation, and evaluate it in order to make progress in our understanding of the world; time-binding, according to Korzybski, is what separates us from other classes of life. (2)

Drawing from linguist Edward Sapir's theories of linguistic relativism, Strate proposes that "different media provide us with different tools for thought, and help us to construct different views of the world" (5). For scholars like McLuhan, language would be synonymous with medium since "media are languages in their own right" (5). For media ecology scholars, every medium fosters certain predispositions. They vary according to the preferred symbolic use that might be visual or auditive; "their ability to communicate over space… or over time" (5); and other characteristics such as "storage capacity… [and] the accessibility of information" (5).

Likewise, for him, "[m]edia ecology scholars take the position that the same kind of environmental effects based on media biases influence the way that we think, feel, act, perceive the world, organize ourselves collectively as a society" (6). Strate also affirms that "narrative… emerges out of language, and therefore as a medium within a medium" (7). In his view, "[t]he storyteller does not invent narrative form, but rather lives within narrative as an environment" (7).

Storytelling, therefore, is part of the human condition. Stories appeal to human beings and help us to make sense of the world around us. "The stories we tell help us to understand, in simplified fashion, what it means to be living in time, with memory and anticipation, following a journey from childhood to adulthood, from youth to old age, and from life to death" (8–9). He adds, "all forms of religion and spirituality are grounded in storytelling" (9).

Strate also stresses the social component of narrating. Storytelling emerges from human exchanges. He suggests that storytelling (or narrative) might be seen as a communication process that relates authors and audiences. "It becomes easy to lose sight

of this fact because we tend to focus on texts rather than contexts, to pay attention to the content and ignore the medium, which brings us back to "the medium is the message" as a call to pay attention" (9).

But narrative also offers some unique characteristics that distinguishes from other communication media. Those are "character, plot, and setting, that is, agents performing actions in some kind of sequence, constituting a distinct whole that is greater than the sum of its parts" (10). But still, what most appeals to media ecologists is how "narrative changes and evolves in response to changes in media and technology" (10). One of those variations is the evolution from an oral to a writing/reading culture.

Communication based on orality was characterized by the incapacity of storage of information which triggered the appeal to repetition in order to stress memory and tradition. "Oral narrative is therefore characterized by multiformity, each performance differing according to occasion, audience, and mood of the performer, and all the more so from one performer to the next, and from one generation to the next" (11). The constraints of orality were present in this type of performance. Those would be the use of a single performer, being this a bard or a singer, only relying on his memory and able to adapt his message to different audiences, and possibly languages or dialects. Orality was also basically based on drama.

On the opposite, the printed word brought different topics beyond drama and, most importantly, a renewed interest in the visual form narrative. In fact, Strate affirms, only after the consolidation of the "print culture" it is possible to "move away from an external narration of events and toward an inner thought world, ultimately leading to the stream of consciousness narration in the early 20th century" (13). And in the same

century, it originates what Ong calls 'secondary orality', characterized by "audiovisual narrative" (13), which becomes the most significant contemporary media.

The shift from oral cultures to printed ones also signal the evolution of characters and plots. In oral cultures, characters frequently respond to stereotypes of heroes and villains. However, the introduction of the printed world allowed the creation of more realistic protagonists. As Strate says, "narrative characters are humanized, and lowered in relation to ourselves" (14). Similarly, the linear storytelling favored by oral and literacy cultures evolve to a more sophisticated narrative where inner thoughts are considered as, or even more important, than external actions. "In the 20th century, we encounter the breakdown of linear narrative in literature as well as in audiovisual media, reflecting the new secondary orality and electronic culture" (16). Strate highlights the role of "modernist and postmodernist literature and independent and avant-garde filmmaking… [and] the introduction of hypertext narratives" (16) that promote interactivity as part of technological media.

Regarding literature, narrative prose imposes over poetry. "Prose opens the door to the new narrative form that appears in the wake of the printing revolution, the novel, along with the short story, and which quickly become the main manifestation of narrative in print culture" (18). Likewise, literature offers two distinct branches: fiction and non-fiction narratives, placing the representation of reality as an option but not a primordial objective of storytelling.

Strate emphasizes the necessity of studying storytelling as a medium. The attributes of storytelling call attention to its effects on human beings. He contends,

the seemingly universal phenomena of using personal narrative to make sense of our world, the ways in which we turn ourselves into the heroes of our own stories, the extent to which the internal monologue or dialogue of consciousness amounts to an inner self playing the role of narrator or storyteller, all point to the idea of narrative as a process of abstracting and mediating, mapping the territory, creating a view of the world, and constructing our perceived environment. (19)

Electronic media have become widely accepted that nowadays we take them for granted, without a necessary reflection on their influence. But they are also part of a creative world that encompasses a rich use of language. According to Strate, authors such as Tolkien, Joyce and Orwell have been able to envision new worlds that "began with the medium of language" (20).

Electronic media offer the opportunity of hypertext to promote the participation of audiences in the creative processes of fiction. Strate recalls that in oral cultures, audiences often interrupted and influenced the performances of storytellers. He suggests that we are experiencing something similar nowadays. He estates, "new media are participatory in nature, whether by way of direct and immediate feedback mechanisms and opportunities for interaction and collaboration, or through programmed interactivity with the medium itself, or through the users' ability to upload and disseminate material in the form of blogs, podcasts, video sites" (22). Thus, Strate envisions narrative departing from the notion of "text" (23), and thus becoming an "environment" (23). He concludes, "In conjunction with the electronic media and especially the new media, narrative will increasingly involve interaction and collaboration in its creation, and its reception, social narrative as a form, and social storytelling as an activity" (23).

5.7 Borges as a creator of labyrinths

In *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, Ferber points out that "Anything impenetrable or inextricable might be called a labyrinth" (106). He also observes that there is a distinction between a maze and a labyrinth. While the former points to many different ways, the labyrinth offers just one route. Nevertheless, this difference is overlooked by most writers, who use both terms as synonymous. Interestingly, Ferber also says that "the first metaphorical use of ''labyrinth'' is found in Plato's *Euthydemus*, where Socrates likens a fruitless philosophical inquiry to falling into a labyrinth, where we think we are at the finish but the path turns and we are back at the beginning" (106). This quality of the labyrinth to highlight a sense of confusion and multiplicity is one of the fundamental themes in Borges' work. In an interview, he acknowledged that the labyrinth meant for him "a symbol of feeling puzzled and baffled" (Dembo 86). He explains that the first labyrinth that he remembered was in a design in a book that his mother gave him. As a little boy, he did not want the book to stay at his bedroom, he was scared that the minotaur would emerge from that drawing. Not by chance, he later incorporated the labyrinth as an image of terror and the infinite. A fear that he admits he appreciates. "I not only feel the terror of it; I not only feel now and then the anguish, but also, well, the kind of pleasure you get… from a chess puzzle of from a good detective novel" (88). About that particular anxiety that the labyrinth inspires in him, he acknowledged, "I feel it now and then, but I don't try to cherish it nor do I feel especially proud of it… I do my best to discourage it" (88). It seems that Borges knew the power behind the symbol of the labyrinth since it appeals to human anxieties. And consciously decided to incorporate it to his writing.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore some metaphysical and communicational metaphors that connect Borges and his readers. I will address the topics of the infinite and the totality, and their relation to storytelling as a medium, and to the unsolved problem of time in the essay: "The Total Library," and the short stories: "The Babel Library," "The Aleph," and "The Garden of the Forking Paths."

5.7.1 "The Total Library"

In this short essay, Jorge Luis Borges describes authors and philosophers that have envisioned a total library: Cicero, Democritus, Huxley, Lewis Carroll, Lasswitz. This last writer proposes changes to the alphabet plus multiple combinations of symbols that would be able to include all that is possible to imagine in all languages. Borges states: "The totality of such variations would form a Total Library of astronomical size. Lasswitz urges mankind to construct that inhuman library, which chance would organize and which would eliminate intelligence" (Borges *Selected* 216). It is significative that Borges equates the immeasurable collection of books derived from an infinite combination of letters and grammar symbols as "not human", and even able to abolish reasoning. He suggests that this totality does not necessarily means more intelligence but would lead to chaos.

Borges estates that this Total Library would encompass everything. And by everything, he means such diverse things as "the detailed history of the future, Aeschylus' The Egyptians, the exact number of times of the Ganges have reflected the flight of a falcon, the secret and the true name of Rome, the encyclopedia Novalis would have constructed, my dreams and half-dreams at dawn on August 14, 1934, the proof of Pierre Fermat's theorem, the unwritten chapters of Edwin Drood, those same chapters

translated into the language spoken by the Garamantes, the paradoxes Berkeley invented concerning Time but didn't publish… the song the sirens sang, the complete catalog of the Library, the proof of the inaccuracy of that catalog" (216). The list goes on and on. However, Borges warns that a library of those dimensions would also include tones of inaccurate data. "For every sensible line or accurate fact there would be millions of meaningless cacophonies, verbal farragoes, and babblings" (216). The seemingly chaotic enumeration cited by Borges in this essay, as well as the ones in the short stories "The Library of Babel," and "The Aleph," might be considered an example of the rhizome described by Eco (*From* 55). De Toro also alludes to the figure of the rhizome as a typical resource utilized by Borges. In his view, the rhizome does not need a "center or origin" (81). It does not encourage ordering nor embrace "binarisms such as subject/object, and I/you since the various elements cannot be subsumed by a superior system" (81). But the rhizome permits "the crossing of different systems (historical events, social groups, theories, etc.) into one contiguous site, thus the various formations function without hierarchy" (81). Thus, this type of reasoning allows for the merging of different pseudo categories resulting in an explosive creativity that, I think, challenge conventional approaches to the theme of time and infinity.

This short essay is reminiscent of the astonishing dimensions of information storage and retrieval that characterize the Internet. Although the Internet is not the result of the imagination of a writer, it seems that through his philosophical fiction, Borges was able to anticipate it. The Internet's capacity to connect and process an extraordinary and diverse amount of data has revolutionized contemporary communication. Furthermore, the Internet is a virtual place with no physical location. But there, as Cantoni and Tardini

propose, "almost every kind of communication is allowed" (43). And that sense of boundless might be as overwhelming as walking in the library described by Borges.

Borges ends his essay by stressing the human mind's capability for "the invention of horrible imaginings" (216). Together with other human inventions, he situates the horror of the total library, "whose vertical wildernesses of books run the incessant risk of changing into others that affirm, deny, and confuse everything like a delirious god" (216). This end makes me reflect on one of the most compelling innovations provided by the Internet: its possibility for the storage of electronic texts. E-books represent a revolutionary step with characteristics that completely differentiate them from printed texts. They offer the possibility to transcend the barriers of time and space. The ubiquity of electronic texts allows them to be retrieved, read, and reproduced many times, and by different users. There is also a sense of unfinished task associated to the work of the authors of electronic texts. It seems that their writings are never done since they can be easily modified as many times as they wish. This can represent an opportunity for self-correction. Or may encourage authors to modify their opinions according to fads or marketing demands. In any case, in the Internet abound errors, contradictions, and misinformation as in "The Total Library" described with horror by Jorge Luis Borges. Years after the publication of this essay, Borges would take his metaphysical preoccupation on the isolation, anxiety and lack of communication that are features of the metaphor of the labyrinth to the realm of fiction with a short story about an infinite library.

5.7.2 "The Babel Library"

This story is narrated by an old librarian who describes a very particular library that he compares to the universe. He meticulously describes it as a labyrinth of infinite floors formed by hexagonal galleries of shelves full of books. Those books have the exact same format with identical number of pages, and each page, the same number of lines and letters. Curiously, the names of the books "neither indicate nor prefigure what the pages inside will say" (Borges "The Babel" *Collected* 113). The narrator is aware of this oddity and manifests his will to explicate it. But before, he estates that there are two axioms about the library. One claims that the library is eternal. The other, that "there are twenty-five orthographic symbols" (113). From the first axiom, the librarian concludes that the universe (the library) is infinite and the work of a god, while the imperfect human beings are the result of "malevolent demiurges" (113). The second axiom leads the librarian on a discussion on language. He points out that the 25 orthographic symbols refer to 22 letters plus the space, the comma, and the period. The multiple, infinite combinations of those symbols would prove that the library contains all the knowledge of the universe.

The librarian admits chaos on the combinations of letters in the books. "For every rational line or forthright statement there are leagues of senseless cacophony, verbal nonsense, and incoherency" (114). He even affirms that for some, "books in themselves have no meaning" (114). The presence of different languages in the books is also suggested by the narrator. And also the influence of languages on each other. The librarian speaks of a certain book whose language was "a Samoyed-Lithuanian dialect of Guaraní, with inflections from classical Arabic" (114). A wise librarian once determined the totality of the library, since "its bookshelves contain all possible combinations of the

twenty-two orthographic symbols… that is, all that is able to be expressed, in every language" (115). The realization of that totality was happily received by all human beings. They felt that the solutions for all problems of the universe could be found in the books of the library. Furthermore, men realized that their personal "Vindications" (115) might be somewhere in the infinite bookshelves. Many rushed in a vain search for the justifications of all the actions of their lives. The librarian thought that those vindications were real but the chance for a man to find his own was minimal.

Continuing with his narration of the history of the library during his lifetime, the librarian explains that there was a search for books that would explain the mysteries of the universe. That search also brought some officers called "inquisitors" (116) who tirelessly looked for shameful writings, but no one found any, neither the revealing nor the outrageous books. That fact brought hopelessness to everyone. The realization that wisdom was in some books but may never be found because of the immensurability of the library was excruciating for many. One sect proposed that men try to reproduce the sacred books by chance, just by randomly organizing symbols. Another sect, the "Purifiers" (116), tried in vain to eliminate all books that were considered valueless. The consequence was that many books which were probably valuable were lost in that turmoil. However, humans finally realized that that task was impossible given the number of books of the library. They also understood that "each book is unique and irreplaceable, but (since the Library is total) there are always several hundred thousand imperfect facsimiles—books that differ by no more than a single letter, or a comma" (116).

The librarian also describes a belief on a type of sacred man called the Book-Man. This godlike man might be the only one who has been able to read "a book that is the

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cipher and compendium of all other books" (116). Many men looked frantically in the labyrinth of the library for that divine being in vain. The librarian at least hoped that this special man has been granted the honor of examining the total book. "If the honor and wisdom and joy of such a reading are not to be my own, then let be for others" (117). Thus, the library and his life would be justified.

The librarian also discusses how for some, the library is just full of incoherencies. Since it contains all books, the combination of all symbols and letters create confusing and contradictory books. However, for the librarian, books entitled "*Combed Thunder*" or "*The Plaster Cramp*" (117), only are proof that those apparent nonsensical words might be part of a secret code. "There is no combination of characters one can make … that the divine Library has not foreseen and that in one or more of its secret tongues does not hide a terrible significance" (117). He ends the story by theorizing that the humanity may perish while the library would continue its existence, since it is eternal. He concludes, "*The Library is unlimited but periodic*… the same volumes are repeated in the same disorder—which, repeated becomes order: the Order. My solitude is cheered by that elegant hope" (118).

5.7.2.1 Eco and the Borgesian Library

When comparing codes and languages in *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, Umberto Eco estates that codes may provoke diverse interpretations while a natural language is "self-interpretable" (177). Inspired by the Borgesian library, he affirms:

There are no fictional difficulties in imagining a Borges-like library with

thousands and thousands of enormous rooms, each structured as a bugeye

megahedron with thousands and thousands of walls hosting billions of shelves, the whole construction free from gravitational laws. Whether such a universe exists or not is a metaphysical problem; whether it can physically exist or not is a cosmological question; whether our imagination can conceive of it or not is an interesting psychological puzzle; what matters for the present purposes is that the structural logic of this code permits descriptions of this type. (176–177)

In a lecture on Borges, offered at the University of La Mancha, in Spain, Eco compared the library that nurtured the character of Don Quixote with the library described by the Argentinian writer on his short story "The Library of Babel". While the former library would have books that encourage the reader to leave and look for adventures, the second would be one place "*from where one cannot exit*, where the search for the true word is never-ending and hopeless" ("Between" 51). Borges conceived his library as the universe, from where there is no escape and where everything is. Through the infinite mixture of symbols in the books all can be predicted. As Eco remarks, "it is impossible to conceive any combination of characters that the Library has not foreseen" (52). I concur with Eco's vision. I think that "The Library of Babel" may invoke the human existential desperation, and even the feeling of vertigo, that comes from the realization that it is impossible to encompass the totality of the world.

For Eco, Borges' use of language would make him an experimentalist that deconstructs it "dismantling it down to its deepest roots" (58). Furthermore, he affirms, "Borges renews and revitalizes language, but he does not treat it as the scene of a *jeu de massacre*" (58). Contrary to other writers, "Borges should be taken for a conservative, a delirious archivist of a culture of which he declares himself to be a respectful guardian"

(58). When discussing the characteristics of language, Eco points out its "two faces: the signifier and the signified. The signifier organises sounds; the signified, ideas. It does not mean that the organisation of ideas -which constitutes the form of a given culture- is independent of language" (59). Eco highlights that Borges' experimentalism with language would take place "on two forms: the front of the signifier, by playing with words (since it is through the destruction and reorganisation of words that one reorganises the ideas), and the front of the signified, by playing with ideas, letting words insinuate new and unexpected horizons" (59). Thus, while other writers are more concerned with decomposing language even to the point of making it disappear, in a very postmodern way, Borges worked on using "ideas in order to interpret other ideas" (59). He was more concerned with experimenting with "the limits of what is possible and thinkable" (59). On the issue of intertextuality, Eco contends,

> Borges, however, had transcended intertextuality and anticipated the era of hypertextuality, where not only one book tells about another but it is also possible to penetrate one book from inside another. Borges had outlined in advance the World Wide Web, not so much by drawing the shape of his library but by prescribing in each page the way to surf on it. (61)

That would be a remarkable achievement of Borges, by anticipating the characteristics of a new technology through his preoccupation with enlarging the reach of language and a philosophical point of view based not on certainties but on possibilities. This is what Eco suggests when he affirms that Borges prefers to undertake "the tasks and possibilities of the Babel's librarians" (61). And those would be "celebrating the ancient universe of knowledge as a dance of atoms, as an interlacing of quotations, as an agglomeration of

ideas tending to produce not only whatever has been or is, but also whatever will be or could be" (61).

For Eco, "the real hero of the Library of Babel is not the Library itself but its Reader, a new Don Quixote -restless, adventurous, tirelessly inventive, alchemically combinative- able to master the windmills that will keep on turning, indefinitely" (62).

5.7.2.2 The Question of Infinity

For Merrell, what Borges addresses with "The Library of Babel" is the metaphysical inquiry about the finitude of the universe explored by many scientists and thinkers (21). Interestingly, scholars from both the sciences and the humanities address this short story. What appears behind the surface is again the theme of time. Scholars from the field of physics and mathematics have attempted to examine the implications of this short story.

Merrel recounts how mathematician William G. Bloch calculated the possible number of texts in the Borgesian library. The result was overwhelming. "To give a more concrete feeling for the magnitude of the Library, if we walked 60 miles a day for 100 years, we would travel a distance slightly less than what light covers in two minutes" (22). That trip would take "at least 15 billion years!" (22). Borges cleverly adds another conundrum to his story. He mentions the futile search for the Book-man, the librarian who was able to read a book than contains all the other books. However, the chances to find that text is minimal. Mathematically, there is a minimal probability of success for this endeavor. But again, as mentioned earlier, there is still the possibility of conceiving this enormous, labyrinthically built space.

Merrell contends that Borges' stories invite us to "enter" them. The librarian of "The Library of Babel" "is somewhere within the Library, which is the "reality" of which he writes, toiling away at his laborious task. This tells us that we, too, are here, reading the short story, striving to understand the consequences of our reading; at the same time we are within the Library, that is, within our own "reality" (22).

The metaphysical aspect of the question on infinity appeals to scholars like Fishburn, who contends that the Borgesian library is "a clear metaphor for the universe" (58). She stresses the pseudo Kabbalistic search of the librarians who tirelessly look for The Book, a type of revelatory text that would permit them to attain the mysteries of their world. "But, as in the Bible story of the Tower of (precisely) Babel, where man's presumption to attain knowledge was punished by chaos and confusion, the search leads to mayhem" (58). Fishburn adds, "the story ends with an "elegant hope' of survival, but of the Library, not its inhabitants" (58). In my view, the librarian-narrator of this story and all the inhabitants of the library embody a characteristic of individualism. They are not part of a community but they are driven by a frenzy search for the possession of knowledge. Internet users, with their solitary and time-consuming searches might resemble this vain, unreachable approach to knowledge.

5.7.2.3 Hypertext and the Chaotic Library

Hypertext, as an innovative feature of electronic media, might appeal to the state of confusion that persists in the Borgesian Library. The linear reading that characterizes printed material is defied by the interconnection among texts. In the Internet —as Cantoni and Tardini explain— "elements can be arbitrarily connected to each other; by means of links every object can be made the sign of any other object. In this way, the hypertextual

structure can proceed endlessly" (95). Nevertheless, these authors also explain that

hypertext is not completely new. It already existed in printed books in the form of

footnotes, appendixes, and other grammatical resources. What might be considered a

novelty then is the "re-definition of the notion of 'text' itself, about the roles of

writers/authors and readers/users…" (72). As a consequence, I think, the role of writers

and readers is substantially modified, adding an element of uncertainty to the act of

reading. What we read today in the Internet may well disappear the next day or in just a

few hours, given the dynamism that characterizes it.

Cantoni and Tardini highlight that hypertext is a process that relies on links to

different documents and a diverse range of media or hypermedia (text, video, audio,

animation). This interactivity of the Internet ―they claim― permits to associate

hypertext to dialogue. The reader/user types a command or a question and there is an

electronic (and impersonal, I would add) response that stimulates further interaction. May

this interaction be always considered actual communication or at least, a reliable source

of information? It seems dubious. Synchronicity is not always exercised when using the

Internet. The responses are not always timely and appropriate. Regarding information, the

ubiquity allowed by hypertext may represent a twofold possibility. We may welcome the

enormous amount of data that is available for us about any given subject. Or hypertext

may take us to an endless exploration, making us bounce from one site to another,

without any guarantee that we would find what we are looking for. Or if what we find

makes sense at all. In Borges' infinite library some readers affirm that nonsense is normal

while the reasonable is "a miraculous exception" ("The Library" *Collected* 98). Probably

many Internet users would see themselves mirrored in Borges' story.

5.7.3 "The Aleph"

This short story opens when Borges, as a character, describes in first person her nostalgic feelings after the death of a woman called Beatriz Viterbo. He realizes that the world is changing and the woman who was the object of his love would not be able to see those changes. Borges recalls how he started to visit her father every April 30th, the day of her birthday, in order to remember Beatriz.

One year, in one of those visits, he meets Carlos Argentino Daneri, her cousin. He is a failed intellectual, and an aspiring poet. Borges describes him as "passionate, versatile, and utterly insignificant" ("The Aleph" *Collected* 275). Besides being a cheesy poet, Carlos undertakes the task of writing a total poem, a work that he was planning to call "The Earth" (276). According to Borges, the poem was "centered on a description of our own terraqueous orb and was graced, of course, with picturesque digression and elegant apostrophe" (276). He also thought that it was as pompous and boring as his author. The objective of Carlos Argentino Daneri was to "versify the entire planet" (277).

Two weeks after their encounter, the poet called Borges and invited him to meet in a famous café near his house. There, he recited some parts of his awful verses, and announced that he was going to publish the first part of the work. Borges was afraid that Daneri's intention was to ask him to write the preface for that book. However, what the aspiring poet asked him was to help him to convince another intellectual, Alvaro Melián Lafinur, to write the preface. Although Borges agrees, after they said goodbye to each other, he decides that he would not call Lafinur under any circumstances.

Some months later, Daneri calls Borges again, this time informing him that the owners of the café told him that they were going to demolish the house where he lives, in

order to extend the bar. Daneri is furious since that was the family house for many years. And he also confessed that he needed "to have the house so he could finish his poem—because in one corner of the cellar there was an Aleph". He explained that an Aleph is one of the points in space that contains all points" (280). That revelation intrigued Borges, who immediately went to the house thinking that Daneri became mad.

Informed by the poet that the Aleph was in the cellar, Borges goes downstairs in the dark cellar following the instructions by Carlos Argentino that specified that the strange object could only be appreciated lying on the floor, and in the shadows. To encourage him, the poet tells him, "within a very short while you will be able to begin a dialogue with *all* the images of Beatriz" (282). Carlos left him in the dark and closed the door of the cellar. For a moment, Borges thought that the intention of the poet was to kill him. But then, he saw the Aleph.

Borges acknowledged the difficulty of using language to describe the curious object, and what he saw through it. "The Aleph was probably two or three centimeters in diameter, but universal space was contained inside it, with no diminution in size. Each thing… was infinite things, because I could clearly see it from every point in the cosmos" (283). In the vertiginous moments that followed, he could peek every single corner of the world:

> I saw the populous sea, saw dawn and dusk, saw the multitudes of the Americas, saw a silvery spiderweb at the center of a black pyramid, saw a broken labyrinth (it was London), saw endless eyes, all very close, studying themselves in me as though in a mirror, saw all the mirrors on the planet (and none of them reflecting me)… saw clusters of grapes, snow, tobacco, veins of metal, water vapor, saw

convex equatorial deserts and their every grain of sand… I wept because my eyes

had seen that secret, hypothetical object whose name has been usurped by men

but which no man has ever truly looked upon: the inconceivable universe. (283–

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When asked by the poet about his experience, Borges refused to admit his vision and

recommended him to leave the city for a more peaceful place in the country, implying

that Carlos was mad. When going back home, Borges felt that all the places around him

were a "déjà vu" (284) of his experience.

The story ends but there is a postscript dated on March 1943, where he recounts

that the poet's house was finally tore down. And a first volume of his poem was

published, granting him a very valued literary prize that Borges himself was also after to.

He then describes different meanings for the word 'aleph'. Borges wondered how Daneri

came up with that name. He also thinks that the Aleph that he saw was a fake one since a

similar object was already described by the 19th century British consul in Brazil, Captain

Richard Burton, as found in a column of a mosque in Cairo.

Borges concludes the postscript wondering if he was really able to see that object

when he peeked through the Aleph. "Our minds are permeable and forgetfulness; I

myself am distorting and losing, through the tragic erosion of the years, the features of

Beatriz" (286).

5.7.3.1 The Universe in an Encapsulated Labyrinth

As Stabb recalls, "the microcosm idea—the notion of an entire life, or an entire

universe being compressed into one point in space" (61) is a recurrent theme in Borges'

prose. As already seen in "The Library of Babel," Borges associates the universe (that

time in an enlarged way) with his metaphysical obsession with time and the infinity. However, he also uses the metaphor of the magical minimal object—in this case, the Aleph—to encapsulate the totality. In this particular piece, he makes direct allusions to Jewish mysticism since the meaning of the word Aleph corresponds to "the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet" (González-Echevarría 125). That letter is "believed to contain all others, and by extension, the universe" (Fishburn 59).

In my view, there are two distinct forms to examine this story. The first one would propose a traditional reading focused on the plot and characters. The second, responds to Borges' obsession and awareness about the impossibility of solving the metaphysical problem of time. Some scholars, such as Stabb, defend the first form suggesting a humoristic interpretation of the story. They allude to the parodic nature of the characters and situations. For them, Carlos Argentino Danesi would be a caricature of the narrow-minded writers of the literary circles of Buenos Aires in the early 1940s, precisely when Borges was denied the National Literary Prize. The verbose and corny Carlos would represent the provincial intellectuals centered in grandiose works that would gain them fame despite their lack of real talent. And the character of Beatriz Viterbo appears to be both an allusion to Dante's "Beatrice", and a reference for Norah Lange, one of Borges' impossible objects of romantic affection (Williamson 214).

Although I agree with some of the former assumptions as part of the surface of the story, I find more metaphysical and communicational implications in the piece. I concur with Murray's analysis of the metaphor of the labyrinth, when she suggests that in certain dramatic stories, "a labyrinthine hypertext might be the ideal medium for capturing the interior monologue as a sort of the mind itself" (177). Likewise, González-

Echevarría affirms that the Borgesian labyrinth is not always a physical one but a "representation of the self" (127). For him, "the story's main concern is the desire to attain a totalizing vision of space and time" (125). Murray proposes that the labyrinth "could potentially offer the equivalent of Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy, not as a translation of it but as a similarly affecting universal portrait of paralysis and self-awareness" (177).

I find some keys in the piece that reinforce the idea of the labyrinth as a more internal than external quest. The cellar where the Aleph is located might be interpreted as a labyrinth that shows to the Borges' character a door to unsuspected and chaotic knowledge. Once that he peers into the Aleph, he is able to uncover certain perturbing realities. He not only sees the wonders of the universe, all at once and vivid, but the rotten corpse of his beloved. And also "the obscene, incredible, detailed letters that Beatriz had sent Carlos Argentino" (Borges, "The Aleph" *Collected* 283). Thus, the ugly occurrences behind the magic object reveal the real nature of the world. After those terrible discoveries it is not difficult to imagine why the betrayed Borges denies to his love rival that he ever saw anything through the Aleph. As Fishburn argues, the experience does not provide any transcendental outcome in the character Borges. Furthermore, the magical object does not comply with the grandiosity invoked by the experience. At the end of the story, "the uniqueness implied in the name of the microcosmic disk is severely compromised by a long list of other universal mirrors and finally even another more genuine Aleph is suggested" (Fishburn 59).

But this short story also provides some implications for the use of language as the vehicle for the generation of ideas. When discussing the capacity of conceiving ideas

about the totality of the universe that is present in Borges' stories, Eco points out that the

immensurability proposed by that unique object, the Aleph, responds to a "Borgesian

experimentalism (applied to ideas and not to words)" (Eco, "Between" 61). And he adds,

"It must be possible to see everything at the same time and then, changing the

combinatory rules, to see something else, each new sight providing a new Celestial

Emporium" (61). This last allusion refers to the Chinese Encyclopedia, already discussed

in Chapter Fourth of this dissertation, where the seemingly absurd categories of animals

envisioned a novel view on the possibilities of language and imagination.

5.7.4 "The Garden of Forking Paths"

This story begins with a book on World War I. The book narrates a statement by

Dr. Yu Tsun, a Chinese professor of English, who confesses his betrayal of England, the

country where he lived and taught at the time. Dr. Tsun became a spy for the German

Empire. He does not become involved in these affairs because of ideological reasons. As

he explains in his statement, he considers Germany "a barbaric country" (Borges, "The

Garden" *Collected* 120–121). He did it because of his resentment towards his Western

leader. He thought that Germans considered Asians inferior people. He wanted to show

him that a Chinese "could save his armies" (121).

Tsun knows the name of the French city that keeps the English artillery park.

However, he cannot find a way to communicate this vital information to his leader in

Germany. He then plots an elaborate plan that would offer the Germans the key to his

finding. But Tsun knows that Captain Richard Madden is after him, and he needs to flee

from Staffordshire to execute his plan. He leaves the city by train, miraculously escaping

Madden, and goes to the house of famous sinologist Stephen Albert in the country. The

sinologist welcomes him into his "garden of forking paths" (123). Coincidentally, that is the name of the infamous novel written by Ts'ui Pen, one of Tsun's ancestors. That man, "was governor of Yunan Province and… renounced all temporal power to write a novel containing more characters than the *Hung Lu Meng* and construct a labyrinth in which all men would lose their way" (122). Unfortunately, the unfinished novel became a big failure, full of non-sense occurrences while the labyrinth was never built. All these facts brought shame to Tsun's family.

But Albert claims that he solved the mystery of Ts'ui Pen. It turns out that the writer left a letter that Albert possesses, where he affirms, "*I leave to several futures (not to all) my garden of forking paths*" (125). As the sinologist explains, the novel was in fact, the labyrinth. "The phrase 'several futures (not all)' suggested to me the image of a forking in *time,* rather than in space…" (125). Albert elaborates that a fictional character usually "meets diverse alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the work of the virtually impossible-to-disentangle Ts'ui Pen, the character chooses—simultaneously—all of them. He *creates*, thereby, 'several futures', several *times*, which themselves proliferate and work" (125). The two men continue discussing the novel and Albert proposes that Ts'ui Pen was not an ordinary writer but also a philosopher preoccupied with the problem of time. However, in the large novel, he never mentions this. Tsun offers some hypotheses but Albert suggests that the novel was actually a riddle. The fact that the writer never mentions the word 'time' reinforces his theory. He contends, "To always omit one word, to employ awkward metaphors and obvious circumlocutions, is perhaps the most emphatic way of calling attention to that word" (126).

For Albert, the ingenuity of Ts'ui Pen was able to elaborate a theory of time based on "an infinite series of time" (127) that open up "*all* possibilities" (127). As an example, he enumerates similar options: "In most of those times we do not exist; in some, you exist but I do not; in others, I do and you do not; in others still, we both do" (127). Although moved by these explanations that vindicate his ancestor, Dr. Tsun continues with his plan and shoots Albert, just moments before Captain Madden arrives and arrests him. Condemned to be hanged by treason, Tsun reflects on the success of his plan. Once that the news of his assassination of the sinologist appears on the newspapers, his German boss deciphers that the name where the artillery park is kept is Albert, and they bombard it. However, deep in his heart, Tsun regrets the murder of the sinologist, which leaves him in an "endless contrition and… weariness" (128).

5.7.4.1 "The Garden" as a Multiform Story

According to Murray, multiform stories are characteristic of postmodern authors, like Jorge Luis Borges. When examining "The Garden of Forking Paths," she affirms that this story is about "a labyrinth because it is based on a radical reconception of time" (30–31). What Albert, the sinologist and future victim elucidates for an amazed Yu Tsun is the capacity of choosing that men have among multiple and different alternatives. I think that we can extrapolate that capacity to writers and readers, but also to what every human being decides when making any existential choice. The fact that we choose one or another path (or alternative) does not eliminate the other possible outcomes. This is what brilliantly Borges suggests when he makes Albert say that the writer Ts'ui Pen cleverly "creates various futures, various times which start others that will in their turn branch out and bifurcate in other times" (Borges cited by Murray 31). Murray affirms that "Time in

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Ts'ui Pen's world is not an "absolute and uniform" line but an infinite "web" that "embraces every possibility". Albert tells his future murderer that they are living in a world of similarity bifurcating time, full of many realities" (31). Those realities outlined by Borges include the simultaneous existence of both characters, Albert and Yu Tsun, and the disappearance of one or both of them. Likewise, other realities may contemplate the possibility of the death of Albert, or that he even was not a human but a ghost (Borges "The Garden" *Collected* 127).

As Murray points out, "the notion of multiple possible worlds seems at first to absolve the narrator of moral responsibility and to make the deed much easier" (31). Murray signals that Tsun just uses the murder of Albert as a way to alert his bosses in Germany on the name of the city that needs to be bombarded. This makes Murray affirm that "since Yu Tsun does not believe in the German cause, the murder is a deeply meaningless act of pure communication" (32) Murray's contention on the communicative intention makes me reflect on two aspects of this short story. The first would be the metacommunicative characteristic suggested by the text. The focal point that moves forward the plot is precisely a discussion on communication. Broken the habitual links of communication with his boss in Germany, how can Tsun pass him a vital information? The other aspect points towards the ethical component of communication. Once reached the communication goal, does this mean that a communicative act can discard responsibility? Although Borges' short stories usually avoided moral remarks, in "The Garden of Forking Paths," the murderer awaits his execution with a contrite heart. The eventual triumph of achieving his goal does not eliminate a final sense of remorse on his part. Murray adds: "the fact that Yu Tsun's experience of life is only a slender thread in

the infinite web of his possible lives does not change the fact that he is firmly embedded in his single lived reality" (32).

5.7.4.2 "The Garden" as a Metaphysical Exploration on Time

For Sarlo, in his stories, Borges imagines the *mise en scène* for a quandary not specifically outlined in the plot, but introduced as a fiction that comprehends both theory and narrative (95). Borges basically works with paradoxes, logic phenomena and dilemmas. His is a philosophical fiction where the ideas are not necessarily discussed by the different characters. Ideas, in fact, are the substance of the stories and develop from inside the plot. His ideas are based on the examination of an intellectual possibility showed as a narrative hypothesis (95).

In this short story there are again two main perspectives. Firstly, the viewpoint of "The Garden of Forking Paths" as a classical detective story, and secondly, its interpretation as a metaphysical exploration on the topic of time. I contend that the story comprehends both perspectives. A naive reader that approaches the work of Borges for the first time would find satisfying this piece as the police story where the murdered, the victim and the motive are gradually revealed. He or she even would enjoy the historical references to the First World War. But a "model reader" –as proposed by Eco in *The Role of the Reader* and discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation–, a reader used to the Borgesian prose and his way to develop plots, would look for something else. As Williamson suggests, "The Garden of Forking Paths" negates the purposive thrust of a thriller by ramifying time into an infinite labyrinth in which roles become interchangeable and all the characters might end up as one and the same" (212).

From the beginning of the story we readers know that the assassin is Dr. Yu Tsun; later we identify the victim as the sinologist Stephen Albert, but the reason for the cold blood assassination still evades us until the last paragraphs. As stated by Murray, the act of violence would be reduced to an extreme and ingenious communicative act (32). The emitter (Tsun) kills Albert using him as the sign that would be interpreted by the receiver (Tsun's boss in Germany). But other elements play an important role on the story, augmenting the scope of interpretations by a model reader. The most significative, the discovery of the real labyrinth built by Dr. Tsun's ancestor by the sinologist Stephen Albert. That discovery alone might be considered a secondary story or sub-plot. However, it actually becomes a turning point that changes the focus of the story. Albert cleverly solves a riddle unnoticed by many generations of readers. Ts'ui Pen announced that he was going to retire to write a book, and later declared that he was withdrawing from the public life to build a labyrinth. That is another extreme communicative act from the writer directed to the future readers of his novel. Since Ts'ui Pen's palace was in the middle of an intricated garden, many interpreted that he was in fact going to build a physical labyrinth (Borges, "The Garden" *Collected* 124). But Albert finds out that the writer actually fulfilled both purposes: writing a novel and building a labyrinth.

The metaphor of the labyrinth includes an intentional will to conceal Ts'ui Pen's real plans. When Yu Tsun asks Albert why time is never mentioned in the chaotic endless novel, he responds, "to *always* omit one word, to employ awkward metaphors and obvious circumlocutions, is perhaps the most emphatic way of calling attention to that word" (126). Furthermore, the use of the metaphor of the labyrinth transforms in the story in a brilliant theory on time. As Stephen Albert explains to Tsun:

The Garden of Forking Paths is an incomplete, but not false, image of the

universe as conceived by Ts'ui Pen. Unlike Newton and Schopenhauer, your

ancestor did not believe in a uniform and absolute time; he believed in an infinite

series of times, a growing dizzying web of divergent, convergent, and parallel

times. That fabric of times that approach one another, fork, are snipped off, or are

simply unknown for centuries, contains *all* possibilities. (127)

Then, Albert enumerates some of those possibilities, that they exist at the same time; that

one of them exist but the other does not; that they are friends or enemies at another times

(127).

When discussing the intersections among science, literature and philosophy,

Merrell alludes to the different definitions of time mentioned in the story. Merrell states

that quantum theory is grounded on the illogical, and contemplates many possibilities. In

fact, he affirms, "quantum theory – comparable to Borges' tales – is based on the idea

that all possible events, no matter how fantastic or silly, might occur… Many of these

imaginary situations are of inconceivable improbability; and yet, they tell us something

about mathematics, physics, and ourselves and our world" (27). Borges' work has called

the attention of mathematicians and other scholars from the science field. Bloch wrote a

book for the analysis of some of the most intriguing arithmetical quandaries exposed by

Borges. In an examination of the conception of the cosmos in some of the stories by

Borges, when referring to "The Garden of Forking Paths," Bloch highlights the writer's

sympathy towards "Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence, [which] indicates that Borges

was willing to consider cyclic or recurrent structures as tokens of, or synonymous with,

infinity" (68).

For Nuño, most of Borges' fiction present some type of variation on the theme of time. In "The Garden of Forking Paths," he identifies time as a protagonist itself. Nuño states that playing with models of temporality has as an outcome different views on the universe. And how time is managed in each story would determine a different ontology (113). This story offers an open, dynamic, multiple view on the universe. The notion of the infinite is introduced as a universe that contains multiple possible universes, a time that unfolds in an infinitude of times (114). Stressing the power of language to create worlds, Nuño suggests that since the labyrinth is in a book, it becomes a labyrinth of symbols, time and infinity. And since the garden is the novel by Ts'ui Pen, the fork is not located in space but in time. The recipe for building this labyrinth is very simple: choosing simultaneously all the options offered by a situation (119). The creative idea behind this cosmogony of infinite possibilities is founded on the thought that time constantly bifurcates towards countless futures. Paradoxically, Ts'ui Pen descendant, Dr. Tsun, closes the door to the multiple possibilities that the situation offers him, and takes the option of accomplishing his task as a spy (120). That decision, as any metaphysical choice, will have consequences. For Tsun, they are his endless regret and exhaustion.

Conclusion

Throughout this project I have explored how Jorge Luis Borges' work is hermeneutically provocative for philosophy of communication since through his fictional worlds, he is able to transform intriguing philosophical enigmas into compelling stories that offer different interpretations and alternatives amplifying the participation of the reader in the experience of storytelling. Borges was engaged in fostering a communicative relationship with his readers, offering them different alternatives to the

act of reading, permitting them to become co-authors with the writer, and defying traditional approaches to the text. From my research and the examination of some of Borges' fictional and non-fictional works, I propose the following concluding remarks for this project:

1- Jorge Luis Borges certainly was not a philosopher nor developed philosophical theories, but he committed to the quest for wisdom and truth that characterizes metaphysical inquiries. With his philosophical short stories and essays, he developed his own philosophy of communication rooted in his use of language for the search of meaning, and the continuous *praxis* of writing. He embodied the virtues of a true scholar by living a life of quiet and steady work, stoically overcoming his own physical limitations. And he attempted not to respond, but to explore, existential questions on the meaning of life throughout his work.

2- Borges' contribution to rhetoric and philosophy of communication also lies in his communicative engagement with his readers, proposing an original triadic relationship among author-text-reader that encourages a hermeneutical approach to his work. He welcomed intertextuality as a participation in the rich cultural tradition represented by former writers and thinkers. And he also anticipated hypertextuality, understood as a device that permits and promotes interactivity among different media.

3- As a postmodern and postcolonial writer located in the borders of different cultures, he was aware of the historical contexts that determined his work and thinking. Although anchored in his own culture and traditions, he rejected the

limitations of provinciality and approached universal metaphysical dilemmas, such as time and existential meaning. Through the metaphors of labyrinths, dreams, myths, mirrors, encyclopedias, memory, and imagination, he offered a cosmopolitan perspective that transcends his lifetime and inspires thinkers from different disciplines.

4- The relation between rhetoric and philosophy of communication and works of art such as literature seems not sufficiently explored yet. Hopefully this dissertation contributes to this conversation by highlighting how the storytelling tradition constitutes a rich field for the exploration of human communication.

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