

BORGES AS REALIST

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I

Ever since French, Italian, German and English translations¹ of his short fictions helped turn him into an international phenomenon, Jorge Luis Borges has seemed both to epitomize and yet also to stand apart from a Latin American modernist avant-garde. His most iconic short stories, especially those collected in *Ficciones* and *El Aleph*, continue to vouchsafe for their author a status that is both canonical but also somehow that of an outlier — as if the canon in question had room only for him. Among those reading him for the first time or who simply recognize the name, it is, in my experience, still not uncommon to encounter mild surprise upon learning that Borges is a Latin American and not a European author. But however deceptively ambiguous his affiliation to Latin America may sometimes appear to be, Borges has nevertheless long since come to be numbered among the veritable icons of high modernism.

Even discounting this now long-established if idiosyncratic pattern of reception it will likely appear still more anomalous, if not downright perverse, to raise the question, even hypothetically, of Borges as realist. Without going so far as to place Borges's canonical fictions under the mantle of realism, whether in a conventionally generic or in a more strongly and rigorously theoretical sense, I want to propose in what follows that, at least in the case of a discrete and select group of his fictional narratives, the question of what may be, in the case of the latter, a certain *aspiration* toward realism can, nevertheless, not be discounted without discounting in turn essential qualities of their readerly and aesthetic reception, if not of their narrative form and method themselves.

Such an argument is, at the outset, invariably and doubly complicated: first by the stubborn and lamentable fact that, as both a term and a category, realism per se continues to be liable, at best, to ambiguation when not to misunderstanding and outright confabulation, especially when considered in relation to modernism.² The second complication, long since a question for analysis and debate within Latin American literary theory and criticism,³ is the fact that the standard cosmopolitan counterposing of modernism and realism itself tends to become more ambiguous and relativized in modern and

contemporary Latin American fiction since at least the epoch of the Boom novel and its more immediate precursors, beginning no later, certainly, than the publication of Alejo Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo*⁴ in 1949. (A continual and lamentable mediatized fixation on a stereotyped "magical realism" when—generally outside the region—talk turns to fiction from modern Latin America only further muddies the waters with respect to this question). Consider just two illustrative cases: Carpentier's incorporation—under the aegis of the "real maravilloso" ("marvelously real")—of Surrealist principles of montage in what are simultaneously realist and explicitly historical novels such as the aforementioned *El reino de este mundo* and Carpentier's *El siglo de las luces* (1962);⁵ or of analogously vanguardist elements, including purportedly Flaubertian techniques of narrative frame-breaking, in Vargas Llosa's great historical novel of Peru's Odría dictatorship, *Conversación en la Catedral* (1969),⁶ one of the signal triumphs of Latin American realist fiction. Meanwhile, even if his fictional works are still, in themselves, difficult to classify according to more familiar modernist typologies and stylistic tropes—adjectives such as, for example, "Joycean" or "Faulknerian" somehow do not resonate in the case of a fiction such as, for example, "The Library of Babel"—Borges has always seemed to stand apart even from this regional, Latin American de-centering of the modernism/realism binary, epitomizing something that, in ways perhaps analogous to the brandishing of the adjective "Kafkaesque," might readily invite facile and question-begging references to a modernism that is itself "Borgesian."

But, if successful, my argument will demonstrate how, after all, Borges, or at least the short fictions that adhere to what I will characterize in what follows as a definite and recurrent narrative formula unevenly employed by the author, constitute still another, highly discrete instance in which the gravitational pull, so to speak, of realism can come to mediate and, perhaps, overdetermine simultaneously "fantastical" literary qualities more obviously modernist or vanguardist in inspiration.⁷

As Daniel Balderston, one of the very few recognized Borges scholars to seriously consider Borges's realist affinities, notes in a 1993 study, critical interpretations and evaluations of Borges's prose fictions have, since at least the publication of Ana María Barrenechea's Borges scholarship in the late 1950s,⁸ largely coincided in positing their essential "irrealidad."⁹ And, needless to say, the many ostensibly anti-realist critical pronouncements and judgments to be found in Borges's own copious non-fictional writings and the author's long established advocacy of and identification with the literature of the "fantastic" (not always the best or most accurate translation of "literatura fantástica") have helped to drown out any contrarian attempts to assess Borgesian fiction's possible realist affinities, however muted, paradoxical and perhaps liable to denial or simply misrecognition on the part of the author himself.

Balderston restricts his unusual and otherwise extremely valuable revision-

ist case for detecting a definite realist vein in Borges to a survey of the nonfictional archival and historical contexts and subtexts discoverable in a series of short stories, including “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*,” “The Garden of Forking Paths,” “The Secret Miracle” and several others. Focusing analysis and interpretation here mainly on just two major and highly canonized exhibits—“Funes the Memorios” and “The Aleph” (but with additional, passing discussion of “The South” and “The Other Death”)—my own concern here will be less with contexts, as crucial as these are, than with the “texts” themselves—i.e., their form and content as narratives—on a more strictly immanent plane. I propose at least to question whether the customary, often dogmatic presupposition—i.e., the idea that no countervailing realist impetus or “aspiration” (independent of, when not superficially hostile to, any authorial intent or consciousness) could possibly contribute to their ultimate literary configuration—will not, in the end, result in readings of these Borgesian texts that are, at best, inadequate and, at worst, distorting and falsifying.¹⁰

My method here, in more positive terms, will be to undertake a close analysis, especially in “Funes,” of what I propose to identify as (1) an element or “strand” of intensively situated and localized realism, but one that is, at the same time, only made possible, in what will appear to be a paradoxical, recursive and even contradictory formal property of the narrative itself by (2) the explicitly “fantastical,” supernatural dimension of the story. For both expository purposes and for the sake of consistency, I will refer to (1) as the “creole” strand¹¹ and to (2) as the “pseudo-metaphysical” strand or dimension of the narratives under analysis and interpretation.

And so as to understand, if I am right, what might make such a “fantastical” or “pseudo-metaphysically” embedded realism possible, finally, I turn, as in most of my own previous work, to the critical theory—literary, narrative and social—of the great Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz, to the latter’s now classical theoretical concept of the “*ideia fora de lugar*” or “misplaced idea” (here in colonial and nineteenth century Brazil) and to Schwarz’s seminal and exemplary study of the later novels of Machado de Assis—a Latin American author and literary opus for which, as sometimes observed,¹² Borges and Borgesian fiction can seem to demonstrate a definite affinity.

II

“Funes the Memorios”¹³ is frequently considered to be one of Borges’s most brilliant and, ironically or not, one of his most memorable fictions. It is, by my lights, his single most consummately and artistically realized story and an indisputable masterpiece of the genre, surely one of the most stunning and nearly flawless short fictions ever written. Replete with echoes of classic nineteenth century and Victorian precursors—those of Poe and Stevenson seem

all but audible in “Funes”— it nevertheless seems impossible for it to have been written in that century or, indeed, much before it was, in the 1940s.¹⁴ I will assume the reader’s general familiarity with it here and omit any detailed summary, but it tells the story of Ireneo Funes, a poor young gaucho and leather-braider (referred to in the Spanish original as a “compadrito” and an “orillero”) whom the Argentine narrator loosely—and in this instance anachronistically—identified, as is frequently the case, with Borges himself, meets while summering along the Río Negro in the rural Uruguayan settlement of Fray Bentos.

In his first encounter with the narrator in 1884, Funes already demonstrates the skills, evidently unusual for an adolescent, semi-literate and rural plebeian, of remembering the complete names of the members of the local gentry (here the narrator’s cousin Bernardo—or as Funes addresses him, “Bernardo Juan Francisco”—Haedo) and being able to tell the exact time without the use of a watch or a clock. When he returns to Fray Bentos in the late summer of 1887, having spent the intervening seasons in Montevideo, the narrator learns that, after being thrown by a horse, Funes has suffered an injury that leaves him completely paralyzed. Yet as an apparent result of his fall, Funes’s already prodigious memory has become virtually perfect: he now forgets, literally, nothing. The narrator confirms this when, after having agreed to loan Funes a Latin dictionary and Pliny the Elder’s *Naturalis historia*, he visits Funes one night to retrieve the books and, upon entering the paralyzed youth’s bedchamber, hears him reciting, in Latin and from memory, a lengthy section from the *Naturalis historia* on the subject of memory, concluding with the lines: “ut nihil non iisdem verbis redderetur auditum.”¹⁵ There then follows the story’s best-known interlude—and surely the one for which the story itself is most often remembered—in which the narrator recalls the all-night conversation in which Funes was to recount some of his astounding feats of memory. These include an unwritten numerical system of his own invention, extending beyond twenty-four thousand and in which Funes assigns a unique name (“in place of seven thousand thirteen he would say . . . *Máximo Pérez*”) to each number. “We, at one glance,” the narrator explains,

can perceive three glasses on a table; Funes, all the leaves and tendrils and fruits that make up a grape vine. He knew by heart the forms of the southern clouds at dawn on the 30th of April, 1882, and could compare them in his memory with the mottled streaks on a book in Spanish binding he had seen once and with the outlines of the foam raised by an oar in the Rio Negro the night before the Quebracho uprising.¹⁶ (*Labyrinths* 73)

As breathtaking and unforgettable as Funes's confession of his superhuman handicap— simultaneously boastful and pathetic—surely is, however, its astonishing vividness is, nevertheless, in keeping, at least stylistically, with the narrative that precedes it. Indeed, the intensity of sensual detail found in the passage just cited concerning Funes's powers of memory seems almost a continuation of events remembered by the narrator himself as the story begins.

Among the most beautiful and memorable of these passages, for me at any rate, is the description of the narrator's first encounter with Funes in 1884, before his accident:

My first memory of Funes is very perspicuous. I can see him on an afternoon in March or February of the year 1884. My father, that year, had taken me to spend the summer in Fray Bentos. I was returning from the San Francisco ranch with my cousin Bernardo Haedo. We were singing as we rode along and being on horseback was not the only circumstance determining my happiness. After a sultry day, an enormous slate-colored storm had hidden the sky. It was urged on by a southern wind, the trees were already going wild; I was afraid (I was hopeful) that the elemental rain would take us by surprise in the open. We were running a kind of race with the storm. We entered an alleyway that sank down between two very high brick sidewalks. It had suddenly got dark; I heard some rapid and almost secret footsteps up above; I raised my eyes and saw a boy running along the narrow and broken path as if it were a narrow and broken wall. I remember his baggy gaucho trousers, his rope-soled shoes, I remember the cigarette in his hard face, against the now limitless storm cloud. Bernardo cried to him unexpectedly: "What time is it, Ireneo?" Without consulting the sky, without stopping, he replied: "It's four minutes to eight, young Bernardo Juan Francisco." His voice was shrill, mocking.¹⁷ (69-70)

The characters created by Borges throughout his prose fictions are, to be sure, rarely if ever vague or lacking in singularity and precision. In ways less comparable, say, to the character of the nameless librarian in "The Library of Babel," to the deathless Joseph Cartaphilus in "The Immortal" or to the spy Yu Tsun in "The Garden of Forking Paths" but more closely resembling Borges's various other regional, gauchesque and River Plate types, including, e.g., Pedro Damián in "The Other Death," Carlos Argentino Daneri (as we shall see) in "The Aleph" or even Herbert Ashe in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," Funes

emerges out of a remarkably rich and meticulously assembled matrix of realistic detail, simultaneously regional, cultural and historical. The latter include:

- a) the settlement of Fray Bentos, presumably, at the time, a fairly rural setting, although here indirectly identified (via speculation that Funes's unknown father may have been O'Connor, an English doctor employed there) with the meatpacking industry for which Fray Bentos is still known today;
- b) the nonfictional Uruguayan "nativist" poet Pedro Leandro Ipuche (1889-1976) who figures as one of the pseudo-factual contributors to the fictionalized collective memoir of Funes that in turn serves as the frame narrative for the story told by the nameless narrator;
- c) mention of a mate gourd belonging to Funes and emblazoned with the Uruguayan coat of arms ("las armas de la Banda Oriental"—a now archaic name for Uruguay— in the original);
- d) Funes's honorific invocation of the 1827 battle of Itzuaingó between an imperial Brazilian army and the "republican" forces of the then United Provinces of Argentina and Uruguay, here, out of formal respect for the narrator's recently deceased uncle Gregorio Haedo, a veteran of the conflict;
- e) Funes's adherence, in a note to the narrator requesting the loan of the Latin books, to spelling rules "of the type favored by Andrés Bello: *i* for *y* and *j* for *g*"; [Bello was a Venezuelan-Chilean poet, educator and philologist and one-time tutor of Simón Bolívar, 1781-1865];
- f) a passing reference to the 1886 Quebracho uprising during a period of political and civil upheaval in Uruguay—the implication here being that Funes himself, during the narrator's absence from Fray Bentos, may have witnessed or even participated in the conflict.

Together these constitute more than just the brush strokes of a *criollismo* intent on adding some regional flavor and local color. They give every indication, rather, of flowing from both an intimate and a broadly sweeping knowledge

of regional geography, culture and history itself, albeit here only sparingly and casually deployed—as it were, metonymically— by the narrative. Or such, at least, is the powerful effect achieved by Borges in “Funes”—an effect that must surely strike its readers as paradoxical and, to say the least, out of place in a narrative supposedly driven by an anti-realist philosophical credo, a “fictional *mise-en-scène* of the enslavement of discourse by direct experience,” to cite Beatriz Sarlo’s conventional and, in my judgment, unconvincing and rather tired reading of this story, which is fairly typical of much Borgesian criticism and interpretation.¹⁸ “Funes,” Sarlo continues in the same vein, is

a *conte philosophique* on literary theory [that] can be understood as a parable dealing with the possibilities and impossibilities of representation, because Funes experiences to the limit the problems of translating perception, experience, and memories of experience into discourse. Funes is enthralled by what Borges would have called the disordered chance of realistic representation. (31)

None of this may, in itself, be literally untrue, but like all such allegorizing readings—sounding, with its ritual evocation of “discourse,” more like a pastiche of the Yale School poststructuralism of the 1970s and 1980s than anything else—it fails to account for most of the plot elements and descriptive apparatus of Borges’s story. For a “parable dealing with the possibilities and impossibilities of representation,” the possibility of reality and its representation do not appear particularly subject to doubt throughout the better part of “Funes the Memorious.”

III

Whatever else it is, it would be perverse to deny that “Funes” is a microcosmic tour-de-force of artistic unity and integrity, displaying almost classical narrative poise and a near perfect sense of timing, from the narrator’s electrifying second, initially purely auditory encounter with the Latin-reciting Funes in the darkened room off the house’s second patio, his face invisible and detectable only thanks to the glow of his cigarette, to the simple, declarative sentence that concludes the story: “Ireneo Funes died in 1889, of congestion of the lungs” (75).¹⁹ The events it describes are, in the end, of course, impossible,²⁰ but this, strangely, does little or nothing to subtract from the total effect of a dense, richly and sensually textured and meticulously detailed historical *mise-en-scène* — an effect, especially considering the brevity of the narrative and the lack of any recourse to the kinds of mediating adjustments possible in novels and longer narrative forms, all the more remarkable. What could account for

it?

Although an answer to this question in no way requires recourse to any putative authorial consciousness or intention, it does appear possible that Borges was, on some level, aware of this paradoxical quality, if not specifically in “Funes” then more generally in his prose fictions after 1942, the year in which he first published, in May, in the magazine *Sur*, “La muerte y la brújula” (“Death and the Compass”). Readers of one of Borges’s most widely-read and cited shorter nonfictional works, his 1951 lecture entitled “El escritor argentino y la tradición” (“The Argentine Writer and Tradition”; first published in 1953²¹ and included—in English translation—in the *Labyrinths* anthology) will recall that, towards its conclusion, he adds a brief “confession” regarding “Death and the Compass.” Arguing against the then standard received wisdom according to which it is in the “gauchesque” tradition, culminating in *Martin Fierro*, that one must search for an authentically national Argentine literature, Borges cites Edward Gibbon’s observation in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* that, in the Arab book par excellence, the *Quran*, there are no camels. “I believe if there were any doubt as to the authenticity of the Koran [sic], this absence of camels,” Borges reasons, “would be sufficient to prove it is an Arabian work. It was written by Mohammed, and Mohammed, as an Arab, had no reason to know that camels were especially Arabian. . . . I think we Argentines can emulate Mohammed, can believe in the possibility of being Argentine without abounding in local color (174).²² Borges’s “confession” immediately follows:

For many years, in books now happily forgotten, I tried to copy down the flavor, the essence of the outlying suburbs of Buenos Aires. Of course, I abounded in local words; I did not omit such words as cuchilleros, milonga, tapia and others, and thus I wrote those forgettable and forgotten books. Then, about a year ago, I wrote a story called “*La muerte y la brújula*” (“*Death and the Compass*”), which is a kind of nightmare, a nightmare in which there are elements of Buenos Aires, deformed by the horror of the nightmare. There I think of the Paseo Colón and call it rue de Toulon; I think of the country houses of Adrogué and call them Triste-le-Roy; when this story was published, my friends told me that at last they had found in what I wrote the flavor of the outskirts of Buenos Aires. *Precisely because I had not set out to find that flavor, because I had abandoned myself to a dream, I was able to accomplish, after so many years, what I had previously sought in vain.*²³ (174-175, emphasis added)

Readers unfamiliar with the flavor, especially prior to 1942, of the outskirts of

Buenos Aires will of course have to take Borges and his friends at their word here, although, contrary to his self-deprecating dismissal of his early poetic evocations of those same outskirts, one can surely find something of this elusive quality in the superb and anything but “forgettable and forgotten” poetry of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), *Luna de enfrente* (1925) and *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929).

Be this as it may, however, one notes what seems to be a subtle but telling inconsistency in Borges’s reasoning in this essay. At pains to proclaim and defend the freedom of the Argentine writer to dispense with regional cults of authenticity and local color and to aim, no less than a Shakespeare or a Goethe or any of the classics of Western cosmopolitan literature, at a thematic and aesthetic *universality*, independent of the compensatory, hyper-nationalism typical of former colonies, Borges nevertheless implies that something other than outright literary universalism and cosmopolitanism is in play here. Argentine authors may even, like their Irish and Jewish counterparts according to Borges, be in a position to exploit to literary advantage their simultaneous intimacy with and estrangement from Western culture and civilization. But here too, clearly, the issue is not *whether* to reproduce the authentic “flavor”—that is, the *reality*—of local and regional experience but *how* best to achieve this. Borges’s discovery in composing “Death and the Compass,” although framed in the neo-Romantic terms of dreams and nightmares—“that voluntary dream which is artistic creation”²⁴ (178)—is that by practicing a certain degree of estrangement, here by “think[ing] of the Paseo Colón and call[ing] it rue de Toulon,” etc., the goal—clearly, that corresponding to a certain notion of *realism*—is, ironically, *more* likely to be achieved. The writer and artist may and doubtless will be obliged to hit upon this method spontaneously. “*A priori* discussions concerning the intent of literary execution,” reasons Borges, “are based on the error of supposing that intentions and plans matter a great deal” (178).²⁵ He is discussing Kipling and Swift and the evident gap between their “literary execution” and their “intentions and plans:” Kipling’s realization late in life that, whatever his literary accomplishments, they seemed disconnected from the imperialist apologetics he had taken to be their meaning and inspiration; and the fact that, after intending it as “an indictment against all humanity,” *Gulliver’s Travels* turned out to be “a book for children” (178).²⁶

But Borges appears, however accidentally or irrationally, to have discovered this principle in time to take advantage of it himself. It is not hard to read into this “confession” a prospective literary *apologia pro vita sua* in which Borges defends what was to become a subsequent practice, in his fictional as well as his nonfictional output, of ranging far beyond the suburbs of Buenos Aires and contemporary Argentine life and history—but without thereby losing—any more than had, according to Borges in this same essay, the minor Argentine poet Enrique Banchs by writing about superficially non-Argentine

slanted roofs and nightingales—a claim to be as if not more Argentine than the *gauchismo* of Ricardo Güiraldes or even *Martin Fierro*.²⁷ Echoes of the standard, even normative reception and defense of Borges as a kind of cosmopolitan anomaly, as Latin America’s only truly full-fledged member of a high modernist and effectively European avant-garde canon, may already be detectable here as well. But to take things this far is to risk what may turn out to be a flight forward that sacrifices the more subtle content of the discovery Borges claims to have made in “Death and the Compass,” a discovery the results of which may not, in fact, be universally registered or evenly distributed throughout the whole of his fictional output. At the very least, this seemingly paradoxical moment of simultaneous de-familiarization *and* of an almost Aristotelian experience of recognition (*anagnorisis*) deserves a more careful examination with respect to this output than it customarily receives in the orthodox Borges criticism and interpretation surveyed in Balderston’s *Out of Context* and, unfortunately, probably typified in Sarlo’s allegorizing, reductive and generically poststructuralist reading of “Funes.”

IV

There is, to be sure, nothing in “Funes” immediately or obviously analogous to the estranging, voluntary “nightmare” principle of distortion-cum-revelation that Borges claims to have applied in “Death and the Compass;” no practice of engaging in systematic, intentional and disorienting misnomers.²⁸ The setting here is evoked with considerable economy of means, but all the more vividly and brilliantly for that, in both the narrator’s opening, first encounter with the hero; in the second, nocturnal session with the now invalid Funes in his mother’s house “a la vuelta de la quinta de Laureles;”²⁹ and, to perhaps even more stunning effect in Funes’s memories and mental images of local flora (flowers and grape vines), clouds, water and houses. Still, it is likely to be a relatively familiar *mise-en-scène* for readers of *gauchesque* or River Plate regionalist literature, not to mention Borges’s many other forays into these sub-genres, from “The Other Death” to “The South” to “The Life of Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829-1874).”

But, adopting a less literal and more expansive perspective on the artistic and technical threshold Borges claims to have crossed in “Death and the Compass,” might we not speculate that the story of the hero’s superhuman memory itself serves to activate this principle of simultaneous *de-* and *re-familiarization* in “Funes?” Such a theory may not, ultimately, be provable—one cannot, any more than could Funes, “unread” Borges before reading him again—but suppose the matrix of intense, even hyper-realist local and regional detail that precedes, accompanies and, in effect, foregrounds the “fantastical” story of Funes’s infallible memory in fact derives its “reality-effect,”³⁰ negatively

and recursively, from the “irreality” of the latter. I have read “Funes the Memorious” innumerable times and could almost recite from memory many of its passages, but I find that the brilliance of its images, its precision of detail and the indelibly concrete sense of time and place these enable remain amazingly constant, seeming never to suffer a loss of intensity.

This is especially true of the passage, cited above, in which the narrator and his cousin, racing on horseback against the impending downpour, gallop down a sunken alley and spot Funes running above them along the town’s rustic and broken-down walkway (“un muchacho que corría por la rota vereda como por una estrecha y rota pared”). I cannot and no doubt will never be able to remember the first time I read “Funes,” but I am nevertheless convinced that the (for me) strangely and persistently unforgettable quality of this passage in particular is not only the result of the incomparable beauty of the language and imagery but of the manner in which its hyper-real, almost cinematic quality *contrasts*, on one level, with the later “irreality” of the story that begins after Funes’s paralysis and the narrator’s second encounter with him during the night of February 14 and into the early morning of February 15, 1887. I lack the words with which to describe this hypothetical dynamic as precisely as it probably deserves, but one can perhaps speculate that a species of feedback loop is in fact generated in “Funes” such that the negative and contrastive dynamic that works recursively to heighten the reality-effect of passages such as the above does not stop there but “rebounds” again so as to heighten, similarly, the details framing the narrator’s recounting of his final, nocturnal meeting with Funes, adding a paradoxical quality of verisimilitude even to Funes’s infallible and strictly impossible faculty of memory.

That is, to employ the descriptive and analytical terms suggested earlier, the “creole” and “pseudo-metaphysical” strands that together comprise “Funes the Memorious,” although distinct and, *grosso modo*, separable, have, by the story’s end, become so tightly interwoven with one another that they begin to appear inseparable.³¹

At this point it will be helpful, and perhaps lend some weight to my still largely occasional theory of a paradoxically Borgesian realism, to survey, briefly, the operative form taken by this dual-strand interweaving/feedback dynamic in several other examples from among Borges’s better known short fictions: in “The Aleph” especially but also, more briefly and schematically, in “The Other Death” and “The South.” (I make no claim here to having undertaken a systematic survey of the entirety of Borges’s fictional corpus in a search for further evidence of such a dynamic).

“The Aleph”³²

Here the scene has shifted from small town Uruguay in the 1880s to

Buenos Aires in the 1930s and 1940s, but, in many ways, it is “The Aleph,” at least among the fictions collected in *Ficciones* and *El Aleph*, that most resembles “Funes the Memorious.” As in “Funes,” the narrative opens with a carefully plotted, richly detailed and entirely plausible story—the story’s “creole” strand— that cleverly and subtly hints in its superb and memorable first sentences at the “fantastic” events that are to come when the narrator (here again openly named as “Borges”) encounters the Aleph in the basement of the house on Garay Street:

On the burning February morning Beatriz Viterbo died, after braving an agony that never for a single moment gave way to self-pity or fear, I noticed that the sidewalk billboards around Constitution Plaza were advertising some new brand or other of American cigarettes. The fact pained me, for I realised that the wide and ceaseless universe was already slipping away from her and that this slight change was the first of an endless series.³³ (3)

It is, of course, this very same “wide and ceaseless universe” that “Borges” will ultimately behold in its totality when Beatriz’s cousin and the narrator’s nemesis—the bombastic, third-rate poet Carlos Argentino Daneri—ushers him into the basement and shows him how to lie down and where to look so that he can see the Aleph. Beginning with the moment he actually sees it, the narrative shifts into its “pseudo-metaphysical” mode:

I arrive now at the ineffable core of my story. And here begins my despair as a writer. All language is a set of symbols whose use among its speakers assumes a shared past. How, then, can I translate into words the limitless Aleph, which my floundering mind can scarcely encompass? . . . Really, what I want to do is impossible, for any listing of an endless series is doomed to be infinitesimal. In that single gigantic instant I saw millions of acts both delightful and awful; not one of them occupied the same point in space, without overlapping or transparency. What my eyes beheld was simultaneous, but what I shall now write down will be successive, because language is successive. Nonetheless, I’ll try to recollect what I can.³⁴ (12-13)

Note how closely this parallels the moment in “Funes” when the narrator begins to recount his conversation with Funes the night before his departure from Fray Bentos:

I now arrive at the most difficult point in my story. This story (it is well that the reader know it by now) has no other plot than that dialogue which took place half a century ago. I shall not try to reproduce the words, which are now irrecoverable. I prefer to summarize with veracity the many things Ireneo told me. The indirect style is remote and weak; I know I am sacrificing the efficacy of my narrative; my readers should imagine for themselves the hesitant periods which overwhelmed me that night.³⁵ (72)

There then follow the results of this “hopeless” task, one of the most searingly beautiful and moving passages in all of Borges’s writings. I cite it in its entirety:

On the back part of the step, toward the right, I saw a small iridescent sphere of almost unbearable brilliance. At first I thought it was revolving; then I realised that this movement was an illusion created by the dizzying world it bounded. The Aleph’s diameter was probably little more than an inch, but all space was there, actual and undiminished. Each thing (a mirror’s face, let us say) was infinite things, since I distinctly saw it from every angle of the universe. I saw the teeming sea; I saw daybreak and nightfall; I saw the multitudes of America; I saw a silvery cobweb in the center of a black pyramid; I saw a splintered labyrinth (it was London); I saw, close up, unending eyes watching themselves in me as in a mirror; I saw all the mirrors on earth and none of them reflected me; I saw in a backyard of Soler Street the same tiles that thirty years before I’d seen in the entrance of a house in Fray Bentos; I saw bunches of grapes, snow, tobacco, lodes of metal, steam; I saw convex equatorial deserts and each one of their grains of sand; I saw a woman in Inverness whom I shall never forget; I saw her tangled hair, her tall figure, I saw the cancer in her breast; I saw a ring of baked mud in a sidewalk, where before there had been a tree; I saw a summer house in Adrogué and a copy of the first English translation of Pliny—Philemon Holland’s—and all at the same time saw each letter on each page (as a boy, I used to marvel that the letters in a closed book did not get scrambled and lost overnight); I saw a sunset in Querétaro that seemed to reflect the colour of a rose in Bengal; I saw my empty bedroom; I saw in a closet in Alkmaar a terrestrial globe between two mirrors that multiplied it endlessly; I saw horses with flowing manes on a shore of the Caspian Sea at

dawn; I saw the delicate bone structure of a hand; I saw the survivors of a battle sending out picture postcards; I saw in a showcase in Mirzapur a pack of Spanish playing cards; I saw the slanting shadows of ferns on a greenhouse floor; I saw tigers, pistons, bison, tides, and armies; I saw all the ants on the planet; I saw a Persian astrolabe; I saw in the drawer of a writing table (and the handwriting made me tremble) unbelievable, obscene, detailed letters, which Beatriz had written to Carlos Argentino; I saw a monument I worshipped in the Chacarita cemetery; I saw the rotted dust and bones that had once deliciously been Beatriz Viterbo; I saw the circulation of my own dark blood; I saw the coupling of love and the modification of death; I saw the Aleph from every point and angle, and in the Aleph I saw the earth and in the earth the Aleph and in the Aleph the earth; I saw my own face and my own bowels; I saw your face; and I felt dizzy and wept, for my eyes had seen that secret and conjectured object whose name is common to all men but which no man has looked upon — the unimaginable universe.³⁶ (13-14)

Here again I propose that the realism that both opens and concludes the narrative in “The Aleph,” tinged with both the humor and irony of the buffoonish Carlos Argentino Daneri’s humiliation of the narrator—literary as well as romantic—is recursively heightened by the intrusion of the supernatural element represented by the encounter with the Aleph. By interposing a strictly impossible fantasy experience of the infinite, the latter, like Funes’s infallible memory, somehow comes both to accentuate but also redeem the finitude of real, mundane events. It is worth noting as well that here the “creole” narrative strand, set in Buenos Aires, creates a mood that is strongly reminiscent of the musical genre indelibly associated with that city: the unwavering but hopeless love of “Borges” for Beatriz, even after death, has, of course, been taken as an allusion to Dante and Beatrice, but it surely would not be out of place in the bittersweet lyrics and melodies of a *tango*. Along those lines, it is perhaps not too far-fetched to liken the “creole” dimension of “Funes” to the other traditional and popular song form most associated with Argentina, the *milonga*.³⁷

“The South” and “The Other Death”

A comprehensive survey, much less an analysis of all of Borges’s short fictions in which there is to be found something approximating this dynamic form of “anti-realist realism” (to adopt an expression employed by Roberto

Schwarz when describing the late novels of Machado de Assis) would far exceed the scope of this essay. There are, in my view, strong suggestions of something like this dynamic in any number of Borges's fictions that lack any obvious Argentine/River Plate regionalist dimension. I think, for no obvious reason here, of "The Garden of Forking Paths," especially the narrator Yu Tsun's account of the flight by train from his urban flat (and the approach of his nemesis, Captain Richard Madden) to Stephen Albert's house near the small English village of Ashgrove.

I felt myself to be, for an unknown period of time, an abstract perceiver of the world. The vague, living countryside, the moon, the remains of the day worked on me, as well as the slope of the road which eliminated any possibility of weariness. The afternoon was intimate, infinite. The road descended and forked among the now confused meadows. A high-pitched, almost syllabic music approached and receded in the shifting of the wind, dimmed by leaves and distance. I thought that a man can be an enemy of other men, of the moments of other men, but not of a country: not of fireflies, words, gardens, streams of water, sunsets.³⁸ (*Labyrinths* 37)

But it is, clearly enough, in those stories in which Borges explicitly evokes the regional characters, settings and history he knows most intimately that something comparable to the reality-effect in "Funes" and "The Aleph" achieves maximum intensity. The two other exemplars that, for me, come most immediately to mind here are "The South" and "The Other Death." In both instances the "creole" plot-strand merges with the gauchesque: Juan Dahlmann's fatal journey from home in Buenos Aires back—in space or in time, or in both?—to his ancestral and provincial *estancia* in "The South" and the analogous ambiguity of the fate suffered by the poor gaucho Pedro Damián at the 1904 battle of Masoller, the final clash in an Uruguayan civil war. The "pseudo-metaphysical" element in both fictions appears to subvert the "creole" story-line by rendering ambiguous the facts regarding the respective deaths of both characters. In "The South" the reader is left to speculate whether, in the end, Dahlmann is about to die of stab wounds in a duel with a gaucho outside a *pulpería* (general store) or—as the narrative seems to hint—back in Buenos Aires, the journey to a hoped-for convalescence in the provincial, archaic and romanticized world of "the South" having been a hallucination suffered by the hero as he lies dying in a sanatorium.

In "The Other Death"—to my mind, and against the evident critical consensus, the more brilliantly realized of the two—the narrator, confused by conflicting and shifting memories on the part of those who claim to have known

Pedro Damián and witnessed his actions at Masoller in 1904, finally opts for the theory that, through an apparent act of divine intervention, Damián's biography itself has undergone a kind of bifurcation:

Damian handled himself like a coward on the battlefield at Masoller and spent the rest of his life setting right that shameful weakness. He returned to Entre Rios; he never lifted a hand against another man, he never cut anyone up, he never sought fame as a man of courage. Instead, living out there in the hill country of Ñancay and struggling with the backwoods and with wild cattle, he made himself tough, hard. Probably without realizing it, he was preparing the way for the miracle. He thought from his innermost self, "If destiny brings me another battle, I'll be ready for it." For forty years he waited and waited, with an inarticulate hope, and then, in the end, at the hour of his death, fate brought him his battle. It came in the form of delirium, for, as the Greeks knew, we are all shadows of a dream. In his final agony he lived his battle over again, conducted himself as a man, and in heading the last charge he was struck by a bullet in the middle of the chest. And so, in 1946, through the working out of a long, slow-burning passion, Pedro Damian died in the defeat at Masoller, which took place between winter and spring in 1904.³⁹ (*The Aleph and Other Stories* 72-73)

The developing plot that precedes and prepares this supernatural outcome, including the narrator's interviews with the now aged Uruguayans who led the defeated troops at Masoller and their shifting, inconsistent and, at one point, vain attempts even to recollect Damián or whether he ever existed at all, are a small masterpiece of story-telling, its realism here again somehow greatly intensified by the unreality of the denouement. Take, for example, the way in which Borges achieves this through the specific device of introducing photographic evidence into the narrator's quest to solve the mystery of Damián's "other death." "When I knew," he reports, as the story opens,

I would never see Damian another time, I wanted to remember him, but so poor is my memory for faces that all I could recall was the snapshot Gannon had taken of him. There is nothing unusual in this fact, considering that I saw the man only once at the beginning of 1942, but had looked at his picture many times. Gannon sent me the photograph and it, too, has been misplaced. I think now that if I were to come across

it, I would feel afraid.⁴⁰ (68)

Later, after he has begun to suspect the ghostly agencies that may explain the vacillating and lapsed memories of Damián on the part of his informants, the narrator, questioning whether his own memories have not also been haunted by the concatenations of Damián's supernaturally altered destiny, sheds further light on this fear:

I tried to call to mind Damian's features; months later, leafing through some old albums, I found that the dark face I had attempted to evoke really belonged to the famous tenor Tamberlik, playing the role of Othello.⁴¹ (71)

As with Borges's customary introduction of intra-textual literary references (here to Emerson's poem "The Past"), the mention of a letter from Gannon that had first informed the narrator of Damián's death in 1946, but that now also turns out to be lost and whose existence is ultimately denied by Gannon himself, the fact that a (lost) photograph of Damián is first cited as evidence only to have its very existence questioned somehow serves, contrary to its (so to speak) evidentiary disintegration, to accentuate its reality-effect. As the (intra-diegetic) proof of Pedro Damián's existence goes missing and finally evaporates, the underlying social and historical reality that his character nevertheless typifies increases rather than diminishes its grip on the reader.

V

What I have claimed to find, above all, in "Funes the Memorious" and "The Aleph," but perhaps more generally as one of various compositional and narrative methods in Borges, is, to summarize, an outwardly paradoxical form of realism for which a "pseudo-metaphysical" or (in more conventional Borgesian terminology) "fantastical" plot development comes to serve, via a contrastive, negative dynamic, as a vehicle for activating and heightening the potential for realism in an outwardly regionalist or "creole" narrative. It is the latter that then also serves to introduce and frame a subsequent but overdetermined "pseudo-metaphysical" denouement. Supposing that I am right about this, as yet, still essentially impressionistic and descriptive interpretive hypothesis, what could explain it?

As we have seen, Borges himself, writing in "The Argentine Writer and Tradition," appears to have had at least an intuitive grasp of this seemingly paradoxical dynamic in the case of his 1942 story "Death and the Compass." Here he "confesses" to the discovery that, in order to capture, accurately and successfully, the reality—the "flavor"—of local settings and experience with-

out falling back on the formulaic and inadequate devices and clichés of “local color”—and, in the particular case of Argentine literature and popular culture, the more obvious and vulgar trappings of the gauchesque tradition—he has had to estrange the mimetic representation of that reality, to distance it artificially from itself. In the case of the suburbs of Buenos Aires, he claims to have achieved this through the intentional and self-conscious use of foreign place and street names while “thinking” of familiar Buenos Aires locales. Without knowing with any certainty whether Borges himself entertained or drew such a conclusion, it seems reasonable to me to speculate that by inserting into fictional depictions of local characters, settings and historical events and contexts, the other-worldly or at least highly improbable, “pseudo-metaphysical” plot elements for which he has come to be best known, he achieves, whether intentionally or not, an analogous effect. De-familiarization here serves to penetrate the layers of habit and stereotype superimposed on what had become overly familiar, thereby restoring an immediacy and intimacy to what is, in fact, closest to home.

Having reached this tentative conclusion after many years of reading and having my students read Borges’s short stories, I was at length struck by how clearly it resonated, despite the somewhat changed context here, with the thinking of the Brazilian critical and literary theorist Roberto Schwarz, in particular his now classic essay “Misplaced Ideas.”⁴² Here Schwarz analyzes the flagrant contradiction between the imported ideas of European liberalism emulated and consumed by the nineteenth century Brazilian ruling class and the decidedly anti-liberal system of plantation-based chattel slavery upon which that class based its rule and which, along with the paternalistic and clientelist relations of what Schwarz terms “favor,” constituted the material basis for its mode of life. Classical liberalism, in Brazil, becomes a “misplaced idea.” Whereas, in the most developed capitalist societies of Europe, it remained “an ideology well-grounded in appearances,” liberalism in Brazil “came to stand for the conscious desire to participate in a reality that appearances did not sustain” (23). “In this context,” Schwarz continues, “ideologies do not describe reality, not even falsely, and they do not move according to a law of their own; we shall therefore call them ‘ideologies of the second degree’” (23). Such second-degree ideologies are, writes Schwarz, characterized by “the dissonance between representations, and what, upon consideration, we know to be their context” (27).

In a sequel to this essay,⁴³ Schwarz shows how such ideological “dissonance” foregrounds and shapes the fictions of José de Alencar, Brazil’s most prominent mid-nineteenth century novelist and playwright. Thanks to their fashion-driven, typically neocolonial embrace of second-degree ideology in the form of Balzacian plot formulas, novels such as Alencar’s *Senhora* (1875) collapse into an aesthetically debilitating duality in which only secondary characters such as servants and tradespeople are drawn from local Brazilian life

while Alencar's heroes and heroines, socially favored if at times fashionably poor in origin, are driven to their variously tragic fates and happy ends by the supposedly powerful but exotic social forces that make them appear to be imports themselves — say, for example, the ultimate power of money to dissolve and sweep away the class distinctions and moral proprieties of a modern bourgeoisie that doesn't (yet) exist in Brazil. "One novel," writes Schwarz, "but two reality-effects, incompatible and superimposed" (Schwarz, "Contradictions in Alencar" 59). In Alencar the "alternation between incompatible ideological presuppositions breaks the fictional spine of the book" (60)

This "ideological repetition of ideologies" is only overcome, according to Schwarz, in the later novels of Brazil's most celebrated author, Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, beginning in 1880 with the appearance of *Posthumous Memories of Brás Cubas* (*Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*) — to be followed by *Quincas Borba* (1891) and *Dom Casmurro* (1899) and including numerous shorter fictions, among them the novella *The Alienist* (*O Alienista*) (1881). Schwarz has written extensively and brilliantly on Machado in works—including his best known, *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism*—that it would be impossible to summarize adequately here. But again, readers can scarcely do better than refer to "A Brazilian Breakthrough," which I here take the liberty of citing at moderate length:⁴⁴

What had changed with this novel [*Posthumous Memories*]? Its stroke of genius was to move the narrative point of view to the upper-class position. Hitherto, the narrators in Machado's novels had always sympathized with those in a precarious, socially dependent situation, fretting over the arbitrary and unreliable behaviour of those who called the shots, as if to ask how such dependents could persuade their overlords to behave in a civilized manner, to make society more just and livable for all. At some point, however, Machado must have decided the task was hopeless—an important historical judgement—and dropped this formula. The replacement he hit upon was unexpected and extraordinary. Instead of a narrator siding with the weak, whose pleas led nowhere, he contrived one who not only sides with social injustice and its beneficiaries, but brazenly relishes being of their party. (Schwarz, "Breakthrough" 102)

This turning of the coat might seem odious, but it is more duplicitous than at first appears. For what, with high artistry, it achieved was a complete, intimate exposure of the very viewpoint it ostensibly adopted. Instead of bewailing the fickleness

of our liberal, slave-owning and paternalistic propertied class, Machado took to imitating it in the first-person singular, so as to provide plentiful and compelling natural illustrations of all the misdeeds of which its social dependents would accuse it, were they in a position to do so. . . . Not only the poor, but also the West—if I may put it like this—is made to get the feel of this kind of rule. If we were to extract an artistic maxim from these moves, we might say that the procedure consisted in joining the upper-class at its most self-satisfied, as if in order to praise it, but in fact to lay it open at its most unguarded. (Schwarz, “Breakthrough” 102-103)

And, most significantly for purposes of adapting Schwarz’s reading of Machado to the understanding and the possible social and historical explanation for a putative Borgesian “reality-effect:”

[*Posthumous Memories*] volatile and unreliable narrator, with his endless Shandean somersaults, is vehemently modern. *Brás Cubas* is a literary device that turns the crucial content of the Brazilian novel before the *Memoirs* into form. (Schwarz, “Breakthrough” 106, emphasis added)

The language of form and content here echoes Schwarz’s earlier reference, vis-a-vis Machado’s (so to speak) “sublation” of Alencar, to a complex variant of the so-called dialectic of form and content: “our literary material only achieves sufficient density when it takes in, at the level of content, the unsuitability of the European form, without which we cannot be complete” (Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas* 68).

VI

Extrapolating, in my own previous work,⁴⁵ from Schwarz’s insight into the “misplaced idea: and “second-degree ideology” as relations of form and content in Machado, I once proposed schematizing the said “dialectic of form and content” as follows:

Representing *content* and *form* as “C” and “F,” we might abbreviate their spontaneously dialectical, organic relationship as:

(1.) “C—>F,” or the *determination of form by content*.

If form is further specified as ideology, then “C→F” can be understood schematically to signify what, according to the logic of Schwarz’s argument, would count as “first-degree ideology,” or, again very schematically, the determination of “superstructure” (“F”) by “base” (“C”).

The logic of the “misplaced idea” or “second-degree ideology” might then be abbreviated as:

(2.) “F→C,” or the apparent—but illusory and “dissonant”—determination of content by form.

Here, “C,” then, might also represent the illiberal and unequal patron-client social relations, always directly and indirectly reflecting the dominant economic reality of chattel slavery, that Schwarz terms “favor”; and “F” the imported liberal ideas that the nineteenth century Brazilian elite privileged while attempting, to contradictory and ironic effect, their forceable superimposition onto a social reality in relation to which they could only appear “misplaced.”

Given the above, then, the “complex variant” of the dialectic of form and content that Schwarz attributes to *Posthumous Memories* and to Machado’s later novels becomes:

(3.) (F→C)→F, or the determination of form (in Machado) by a content that itself already contains “the unsuitability of the European form,” that is, by the reality of “misplaced ideas” or “second-degree ideology” correctly grasped as belonging to the level of content.

It will now perhaps become apparent how, under a form/content dialectic of the type “(F→C)→F,” there might also be subsumed the complex and seemingly paradoxical dynamic that synthesizes the “creole” and “pseudo-metaphysical” strands in stories such as Borges’s “Funes the Memorious,” “The Aleph” and “The Other Death” so as to produce the peculiar “reality-effect” we have sought to describe and analyze in these fictions. But this will work only if, as I further propose, we see in this dynamic—the enigmatical Borgesian device of de-familiarization and distancing for the purposes of recognition and re-approximation—a replication, on the level of form-determining content, of the “misplaced idea.”

This of course presupposes that, at some, perhaps not always conscious level, Borges fashioned such narratives at least in part out of a felt pressure to overcome Argentina’s and Latin America’s neocolonial practice of importing and imitating European and, more broadly (by the early twentieth century) metropolitan and “Western” literary and cultural models. Borges’s published remarks in essays such as “The Argentine Writer and Tradition” surely sug-

gest this to be a reasonable premise, but one does not, in my view, require its documentary or biographical proof to recognize in the “pseudo-metaphysical” dimension of these fictions a content that seems, outwardly, foreign and “imported” with respect to their local, regional or “creole” dimension.

That, to be sure, gibes perfectly well with what has, for decades, become the standard and even normative, canonizing reception of Borges noted at the beginning of this essay, i.e., that Borges’s most celebrated short fictions are “universal” and on a par with classical European literature, especially its high modernist canon, in ways that other Latin American literature, however broad and cosmopolitan its appeal, apparently is not. The location of those Borges critics who replicate this opinion need not be outside Latin America, needless to say, for this to hold true. Consider, again, Beatriz Sarlo’s passing judgment regarding “Funes the Memorious” as a “*conte philosophique* on literary theory,” not to mention the many other Argentine and Latin American critics and scholars of Borges noted by Balderston, from Barrenechea to Jaime Alazraki, who have advanced and promoted a similar idea.⁴⁶ This, again, is not to say that such interpretations are false in and of themselves, only that they are inadequate in that they fail to account for the rich vein of realism that is also present in Borges. Such readings and interpretations are, in the end, too one-sided, losing sight of the “complex variant of the dialectic of form and content” that, according to our hypothesis, is operative in “Funes” and the other short stories discussed above—albeit here thanks to formally literary means that outwardly may bear little resemblance to those identified by Schwarz in Machado’s *Post-humous Memories* and other late novels.

Taking what is still essentially a working hypothesis concerning Borgesian realism as a point of departure but drawing on Schwarz’s enormously rich and suggestive historical and materialist analyses in “Misplaced Ideas” and the other writings referenced earlier,⁴⁷ there opens up the potential for a concrete and detailed effort of Borgesian interpretation and critique capable of delving still deeper into the paradoxical intricacies of realism in stories such as “Funes the Memorious” and “The Aleph” and further, perhaps, than just those narratives with an explicitly Argentine and River Plate regionalist or “creole” content. By no means do all of Borges’s narratives display the form of “anti-realist realism” we have sought to identify and analyze above, but, at least in my view, those prose fictions that stand out as his most impressive and memorable—even, say, stories such as “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” “The Garden of Forking Paths,” “The Library of Babel,” “Death and the Compass,” “Theme of the Traitor and the Hero” and “The Immortal”—perhaps owe some essential facet of their artistic success to their formal mimicry of “second-degree ideology.”

I try to make it a rule to avoid the kinds of allegorizing interpretations resorted to, in the case of Borges, by Sarlo and De Man. Clichéd readings of Borges’s fictions as, say, allegories for the process of writing itself epitomize

what, after Hegel, dialectical criticism rightly condemns as a practice of “bad abstraction,” the antithesis of the concrete and the determinate. But in considering what, finally, could account for the negative, often counterintuitive pull of realism within the overarching unity of Borges’s fictional opus it would not be amiss to recall the narrator’s concluding reflection, previously cited, in “Funes the Memorious:”

Babylon, London and New York have overwhelmed with their ferocious splendor the imaginations of men; no one, in their populous towers or their urgent avenues, has felt the heat and pressure of a reality as indefatigable as that which day and night converged upon the hapless Ireneo, in his poor South American suburb.

NOTES

¹ The chronology here is neither especially surprising nor entirely uninteresting, given then prevailing Anglo-Saxon attitudes toward Latin America. For *Ficciones* (first published in Argentina, 1944): in France, 1951; Italy, 1955; Germany (presumably in the BRD), 1959; USA, 1962; UK, 1962. For *El Aleph* (Argentina, 1949): Italy, 1959; Germany, 1959; France, 1967; USA, 1970; UK, 1971. The well-known and widely distributed anthology *Labyrinths* [trans., Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, (New York: New Directions, 1962)]—a partial version of the 1949 *El Aleph*—is presumably based on Roger Caillois' earlier French translation/edition, *Labyrinthes*, first published in France in 1953; then, as *Labyrinths*, in the USA in 1962; in Germany (as *Der Zahir und andere Erzählungen*) in 1964; and, again as *Labyrinths*, in the UK in 1970. This information was gleaned from Lies Wijnterp, "Making Borges: the Early Reception of Jorge Luis Borges's Work in France and the United States" (PhD diss., Radboud University Nijmegen (The Netherlands), [1982] 2015), 71-72.

² This is something illustrated in what follows in Borges criticism and interpretation in the cases of Beatriz Sarlo and Paul De Man. For further comments on Sarlo and De Man, see, respectively, the end of section II above and endnote 48.

³ Within this trend I include my own published work in this field. See: *Modernism and Hegemony* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); *Reading North by South* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) and *Determinations* (London: Verso, 2001).

⁴ First translated into English as *The Kingdom of this World* in 1957. Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of this World*, trans. Harriet de Onís (New York: Knopf, 1957).

⁵ First translated into English under the rather ludicrous title of *Explosion in a Cathedral* in 1963. Alejo Carpentier, *Explosion in a Cathedral*, trans. John Sturrock (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1963).

⁶ Translated into English as *Conversation in the Cathedral*. Mario Vargas Llosa, *Conversation in the Cathedral*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1984).

⁷ I purposely and reluctantly omit any sustained consideration here concerning the question of how and where to situate even those short fictions of Borges selected for the present discussion in relation to what, for me, nevertheless remains the seminal theoretical corpus when it comes to literary realism, namely the work of Georg Lukács. Here I fully adhere to the judgment of Roberto Schwarz as concerns the ultimate pertinence of—or, perhaps better said, how best to contextualize—Lukács's great contributions to the study and theory of metropolitan (both European, mainly, but also North American) realism when it comes to peripheral and semi-peripheral regions such as Latin America. As Schwarz once expressed it in a 1994 interview with Eva L. Corredor (See: *Lukács After Communism: Interviews with Contempo-*

rary Intellectuals (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 1997)): "I think it is quite productive to work out in what sense [Lukács's] construction is inadequate to Latin America. I do not mean this as a criticism. Lukács has put together a model for the European history of ideas and for the European history of the novel which depends upon the general historical evolution from feudalism to capitalism and then to socialism. It is a powerful construction. He shows how this development is active in the work of philosophers and novelists. If you then turn to Latin America, you will observe that this sequence is not there and that, therefore, it is not universal. The sequence here goes from colonialism to the attempt at a national state. It is a widespread mistake to make these terms coincide with feudalism and capitalism. You know that colonialism and colonial slavery do not come before the mercantile states and that they are a thoroughly modern phenomenon. So the relationship is of a completely different order" (206-207). Schwarz, that is, no less than Lukács, adheres to the most basic principles of a realist *aesthetic*. The question for Schwarz becomes what *form* this realist aesthetic is bound to take in the altered social and historical reality of Brazil and more generally in regions such as Latin America. To answer this, Schwarz, of course, points to what he ironically terms the "anti-realist realism" of the later novels of Machado de Assis, especially to *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*, the subject of Schwarz's great monograph on Machado, *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism*, trans. John Gledson (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁸ See Ana María Barrenechea, "La expresión de la irrealidad en la obra de Jorge Luis Borges" in Ana María Barrenechea and Emma Susana Speratti Piñero, *La literatura fantástica en Argentina* (Mexico: Imprenta Universitaria, 1957), 54-72.

⁹ See: *Out of Context: Historical Reference and the Representation of Reality in Borges* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), Kindle Edition. "'Borges,' for many readers and critics," explains Balderston, "means 'irrealidad,' and the adjectives that have been created from the surname seem to refer to the unreal Since Borges positions himself in the essays in *Discusión* and *Otras inquisiciones* in opposition to the social realist mode of narrative fiction that was dominant in Latin America at the time of the composition of *Ficciones* and *El Aleph*, it is perhaps not surprising that readers and critics, eager to have it one way or the other, have embraced his 'fantastic literature' or denounced him as escapist, both reactions which assume that the stories have nothing significant to say about reality, history, or politics." But, writes Balderston, citing the handful of Borges scholars and critics who, at the time, gave some consideration to the possible realist aspects of fiction, "it should now be possible to reconsider the question of the relation of Borges's fictions to realities beyond the text." Kindle locations 45-54.

¹⁰ Inadequate as it no doubt is for the straightforward interpretation and critique of Borgesian fiction, the question for anyone who has studied and who acknowledges, as do I, even the differential crux that is the Lukacsian theory of realism must still be how to extrapolate and situate within such an interpretation and critique the fundamental Lukacsian category, both aesthetic and philosophical, namely that of totality. Here, however, I must confess that to answer this question when it comes to the short

fictions of Borges—or even just to the far more limited corpus made up of even just “Funes the Memorious” and “The Aleph”— would require a great deal more thought, research and work than have been possible in the preparation of the present essay. This would have to include as well a careful consideration of the specific place and valence of the short story form itself—a form that Lukács once, in reference to Gorki in *Studies in European Realism*, referred to as “the illustration of the socially typical by one striking incident”— within Lukács’s theory of realism generally, and therefore necessarily the specific relation of this form to the category of totality as well. This is work I cannot pretend (yet) to have carried through when it comes to Borges, nor am I aware of anyone who has. When it comes to Lukács, realism, the question of totality and Latin America, I can, however, refer the reader to an older work of mine, namely to my essay collection *Determinations* (Verso, 2001) and its penultimate chapter, “Mario Vargas Llosa: The Realist as Neoliberal.” The latter proposes a concept and term—“dismodernity”— aimed at capturing a social and historical form of totality specific to the Peru of Vargas Llosa (here also termed, in Aristotelian fashion, a specific “unity of action”) and that, so it is argued, is mimetically captured in a distinctive mode of epic realism typified in novels such as *Conversation in the Cathedral* and *The War at the End of the World*: “Because modern in *form*, such a [‘dismodern’] society is made up of a multiplicity of private individuals who then combine to constitute a *public*, a “civil society.” But insofar as those material factors that would be required to successfully reproduce this—reified—social relation of public whole to private parts are lacking or withheld, the social relations of these individuals themselves cease to individuate in the customary, “modern” sense, cease to reproduce the form of the individual on the level of its *contents* as a unified set of *actions*. “Dismodernity,” then, in order to assume its adequate mimetic/narrative form, must discover a formal mechanism that can adequately represent this specific, doubly problematic relationship of the individual character or hero to a unity of action that is not finally assignable to an individual social agent” (164). This mechanism, I argue, is metalepsis, at the time my own preferred term for Vargas Llosa’s self-consciously Flaubertian-modernist technique of interspersing dramatic dialogues distinct and separate in time and space—but a technique that, in novels such as *Conversation in the Cathedral*, is, in my view, anything but Flaubertian or modernist in the sense pretended by the author. Clearly, the Borgesian narrative mechanism that interweaves a “creole” with a “pseudo-metaphysical” strand outwardly “misplaced” in relation to the former cannot be considered as ‘metaleptical’ in precisely this sense. But might there not be a certain subtle family resemblance detectable here, reflecting what might perhaps be a mimetic relationship to an analogous if not homologous instance of “dismodernity” in the case of Borges’s fictions? This, at any rate, might be one possible avenue for exploring the Lukácsian question—that of totality— that for now must continue to go begging in the present inquiry into a putative Borgesian realism.

¹¹ “Creole” here by association with the Spanish terms “criollo” and “criollismo.” The latter is or was, according to one reasonable online definition, “the culturally assertive regionalist literature through which Spanish-speaking American writers represented the ethnic, faunal, plant and geographic uniqueness of their countries at a time when the new nations were celebrating the first century of their independence.” I employ

the term “creole” in conscious allusion to “criollismo” but in a somewhat narrower sense that comprises, in the context of Borges and Argentina, both the “gauchesque” tradition epitomized in José Hernández’s *Martin Fierro* but also the literary representation of traditional urban life, especially in Buenos Aires.

¹² See, for example, the work of Luis Augusto Fischer, *Machado e Borges, e outros ensaios sobre Machado de Assis* (Porto Alegre: Arquipélago Editorial Ltda., 2008).

¹³ “Funes el memorioso,” originally published in 1942 in the Buenos Aires daily *La Nación*, was first included in the 1944 collection entitled *Artificios*. [See Borges, *Obras completas 1923-1972*, (Buenos Aires: Emecé editores, 1974), 485-490.] References in what follows are to the James Irby translation of the story first published in the now legendary 1962 New Directions Borges anthology, *Labyrinths*.

¹⁴ It is surely significant that, as Gene Bell-Villada has noted, Borges first refers to a sketch of a work (one he says he “has not written and will not write”) that was eventually to become “Funes” in a short 1941 fragment dedicated to James Joyce, who had died in January of that year. Funes, already imagined with his infallible memory, is a “monster” whom Borges “evoke[s]...because a consecutive, straightforward reading of the four hundred thousand words of *Ulysses* would require such monsters.” See “A Fragment on Joyce,” trans., Esther Allen, in *Jorge Luis Borges, Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Elliot Weinberger (New York: Viking, 1999), 220-221.

¹⁵ “Nothing that has been heard can be repeated with the same words.” Funes clearly quotes these lines from Pliny the Elder with ironic if not sarcastic intent, since he, of course, can repeat anything he has heard or read with the identical words.

¹⁶ “Nosotros, de un vistazo, percibimos tres copas en una mesa; Funes, todos los vástagos y racimos y frutos que comprende una parra. Sabía las formas de las nubes australes del amanecer del treinta de abril de mil ochocientos ochenta y dos y podía compararlas en el recuerdo con las vetas de un libro en pasta española que sólo había mirado una vez y con las líneas de la espuma que un remo levantó en el Río Negro la víspera de la acción del Quebracho” (*Obras completas* 488).

¹⁷ “Mi primer recuerdo de Funes es muy perspicuo. Lo veo en un atardecer de marzo o febrero del año ochenta y cuatro. Mi padre, ese año, me había llevado a veranear a Fray Bentos. Yo volvía con mi primo Bernardo Haedo de la estancia de San Francisco. Volvíamos cantando, a caballo, y ésa no era la única circunstancia de mi felicidad. Después de un día bochornoso, una enorme tormenta color pizarra había escondido el cielo. La alentaba el viento del Sur, ya se enloquecían los árboles; yo tenía el temor (la esperanza) de que nos sorprendiera en un descampado el agua elemental. Corrimos una especie de carrera con la tormenta. Entramos en un callejón que se ahondaba entre dos veredas altísimas de ladrillo. Había oscurecido de golpe; oí rápidos y casi secretos pasos en lo alto; alcé los ojos y vi un muchacho que corría por la estrecha y rota vereda como por una estrecha y rota pared. Recuerdo la bombacha, las alpagatas, recuerdo el cigarrillo en el duro rostro, contra el nubarrón ya sin límites.

Bernardo le gritó imprevisiblemente: *¿Qué horas son, Ireneo?* Sin consultar el cielo, sin detenerse, el otro respondió: *Faltan cuatro minutos para las ocho, joven Bernardo Juan Francisco.* La voz era aguda, burlona” (*Obras completas*, 485-486).

¹⁸ See *Jorge Luis Borges: A Writer on the Edge*, ed. John King (London: Verso, 1993) 30.

¹⁹ “Ireneo Funes murió en 1889, de una congestión pulmonar” (*Obras completas* 490).

²⁰ Citing a work (*The Mind of a Mnemonist*) by the renowned Soviet psychologist A.R. Luria on the prodigious, “flash-bulb” memory of the 1920’s journalist Solomon Shereshevsky, Gene Bell-Villada ventures the opinion that Funes’s infallible memory may not, strictly speaking, be an impossibility. Be this as it may, this, it seems to me, does not subtract from the seeming contradiction in “Funes” between the hero’s superhuman, “pseudo-metaphysical” capacities and the strong, overall impression of realism in Borges’s narrative. (See Bell-Villada, *Borges and His Fiction: A Guide to His Mind and Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 108.

²¹ See, for the accurate chronology regarding “El escritor argentino y la tradición,” Daniel Balderston, *How Borges Wrote* (London & Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018).

²² “[Y]o creo que si hubiera alguna duda sobre la autenticidad del *Alcorán*, bastaría esta ausencia de camellos para probar que es árabe. Fue escrito por Mahoma, y Mahoma, como árabe, no tenía por qué saber que los camellos eran especialmente árabes. . . . Creo que los argentinos podemos parecernos a Mahoma, podemos creer en la posibilidad de ser argentinos sin abundar en color local” (*Obras completas* 270).

²³ “Durante muchos años, en libros ahora felizmente, olvidados, traté de redactar el sabor, la esencia de los barrios extremos de Buenos Aires; naturalmente abundé en palabras locales, no prescindí de palabras como cuchilleros, milonga, tapia, y otras, y escribí así aquellos olvidables y olvidados libros; luego, hará un año, escribí una historia que se llama *La muerte y la brújula* que es una suerte de pesadilla, una pesadilla en que figuran elementos de Buenos Aires deformados por el horror de la pesadilla; pienso allí en el Paseo Colón y lo llamo Rue de Toulon, pienso en las quintas de Adrogué y las llamo Triste-le-Roy; publicada esa historia, mis amigos me dijeron que al fin habían encontrado en lo que yo escribía el sabor de las afueras de Buenos Aires. Precisamente porque no me había propuesto encontrar ese sabor, porque me había abandonado al sueño, pude lograr, al cabo de tantos años, lo que antes busqué en vano” (*Obras completas* 270-271).

²⁴ “ese sueño voluntario que se llama la creación artística” (*Obras completas* 274).

²⁵ “[T]odas estas discusiones previas sobre propósitos de ejecución literaria están basadas en el error de suponer que las intenciones y los proyectos importan mucho” (*Obras completas* 273).

²⁶ “el caso de Swift, que al escribir *Los viajes de Gulliver* quiso levantar un testimonio contra la humanidad y dejó, sin embargo, un libro para niños” (*Obras completas* 273).

²⁷ Note, however, that Borges, in “The Argentine Writer and Tradition,” shares the opinion that *Martín Fierro* is, after all, Argentina’s great national masterpiece.

²⁸ That said, it is worth remembering one of the closing remarks of the narrator in “Funes” and the way that it too, albeit in a manner distinct from the intentionally and experimentally dislocating and estranging effects of—so to speak—Gallicizing the map of Buenos Aires, works contrastively to estrange and thereby accentuate the regional and provincial spatiality of the setting here: Funes “was the solitary and lucid spectator of a multiform, instantaneous and almost intolerably precise world. Babylon, London and New York have overwhelmed with their ferocious splendor the imaginations of men; no one, in their populous towers or their urgent avenues, has felt the heat and pressure of a reality as indefatigable as that which day and night converged upon the hapless Ireneo, in his poor South American suburb” (*Labyrinths* 74) [In the Spanish original: Funes “era el solitario y lúcido espectador de un mundo multiforme, instantáneo y casi intolerablemente preciso. Babilonia, Londres y Nueva York han abrumado con feroz esplendor la imaginación de los hombres; nadie, en sus torres populosas o en sus avenidas urgentes, ha sentido el calor y la presión de una realidad tan infatigable como la que día y noche convergía sobre el infeliz Ireneo, en su pobre arrabal sudamericano” (*Obras completas* 490).] Recall here also, in this regard, the narrator’s closing description of Funes’s face, after it has become visible in the early light of dawn: “Then I saw the face belonging to the voice that had spoken all night long. Ireneo was nineteen years old; he had been born in 1868; he seemed to me as monumental as bronze, more ancient than Egypt, older than the prophecies and the pyramids” (*Labyrinths* 75) [“Entonces vi la cara de la voz que toda la noche había hablado. Ireneo tenía diecinueve años; había nacido en 1868; me pareció monumental como el bronce, más antiguo que Egipto, anterior a las profecías y a las pirámides” (*Obras completas* 490).]

²⁹ An expression that, probably inevitably, loses most of its regional flavor in Irby’s translation: “around the corner from the Laureles house.” Hurley’s rendering in the Penguin edition of the collected fictions is, in this instance, moderately preferable: “around the corner from Villa Los Laureles.”

³⁰ I use this term advisedly and somewhat reluctantly, given its close association with Roland Barthes’ essay “The Reality Effect” (in *The Rustle of Language*, 1989) and the latter’s typically (post)structuralist skepticism and hostility towards realism, a spirit common to much of the normative Borges criticism and interpretation and that is typified in Sarlo’s reading of “Funes.” I use it here in the opposing spirit, such that to speak of a “reality-effect” does not imply the supposition that reality itself is reducible to an effect of language or discourse—and perhaps also an unknowable Kantian thing-in-itself.

³¹ The fact that Borges—whether consciously or intentionally here is ultimately a matter of indifference—situates this dynamic within the formal, generic context of the short story may seem providential, given how easily and readily this narrative form invites multiple re-readings and thereby facilitates the repeated, overlapping and ever closer, interweaving of these two strands—perhaps to the point that they converge on a kind of synthesis. That Borges, or any author, would or could have made such a calculation is, of course, both an illusory and, in the end, an unnecessary supposition. And in any event, it seems clear enough that Borges had already decided to concentrate his efforts as a writer of fiction on the short story well before 1942: his first collection of short fictions, *Historia universal de la infamia*, is first published in 1935. But it is, again, worth observing that the introduction and actualization of the paradoxical reality-effect operative, according to our theory, in “Funes” would all but preclude the formal and compositional strictures of the novel or any genre of narrative fiction exceeding a certain optimal length.

³² References here are to the Thomas de Giovanni translation in *The Aleph and Other Stories, 1933-1969* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970), 3-17. Once again, I assume the reader’s familiarity with this story and refrain from providing a detailed plot summary.

³³ “La candente mañana de febrero en que Beatriz Viterbo murió, después de una imperiosa agonía que no se rebajó un solo instante ni al sentimentalismo ni al miedo, noté que las carteleras de fierro de la Plaza Constitución habían renovado no sé qué aviso de cigarrillos rubios; el hecho me dolió, pues comprendí que el incesante y vasto universo ya se apartaba de ella y que ese cambio era el primero de una serie infinita” (*Obras completas* 617).

³⁴ “Arribo, ahora, al inefable centro de mi relato; empieza, aquí, mi desesperación de escritor. Todo lenguaje es un alfabeto de símbolos cuyo ejercicio presupone un pasado que los interlocutores comparten; ¿cómo transmitir a los otros el infinito Aleph, que mi temerosa memoria apenas abarca? . . . Por lo demás, el problema central es irresoluble: la enumeración, siquiera parcial, de un conjunto infinito. En ese instante gigantesco, he visto millones de actos deleitables o atroces; ninguno me asombró como el hecho de que todos ocuparan el mismo punto, sin superposición y sin transparencia. Lo que vieron mis ojos fue simultáneo: lo que transcribiré, sucesivo, porque el lenguaje lo es. Algo, sin embargo, recogeré” (*Obras completas* 624-625).

³⁵ “Arribo, ahora, al más difícil punto de mi relato. Este (bueno es que ya lo sepa el lector) no tiene otro argumento que ese diálogo de hace ya medio siglo. No trataré de reproducir sus palabras, irrecuperables ahora. Prefiero resumir con veracidad las muchas cosas que me dijo Ireneo. El estilo indirecto es remoto y débil; yo sé que sacrifico la eficacia de mi relato; que mis lectores se imaginen los entrecortados períodos que me abrumaron esa noche” (*Obras completas* 487-488).

³⁶ “En la parte inferior del escalón, hacia la derecha, vi una pequeña esfera tornasolada, de casi intolerable fulgor. Al principio la creí giratoria; luego comprendí que ese

movimiento era una ilusión producida por los vertiginosos espectáculos que encerraba. El diámetro del Aleph sería de dos o tres centímetros, pero el espacio cósmico estaba ahí, sin disminución de tamaño. Cada cosa (la luna del espejo, digamos) era infinitas cosas, porque yo claramente la veía desde todos los puntos del universo. Vi el populoso mar, vi el alba y la tarde, vi las muchedumbres de América, vi una plateada telaraña en el centro de una negra pirámide, vi un laberinto roto (era Londres), vi interminables ojos inmediatos escrutándose en mí como en un espejo, vi todos los espejos del planeta y ninguno me reflejó, vi en un traspasío de la calle Soler las mismas baldosas que hace treinta años vi en el zaguán de una casa en Fray Bentos, vi racimos, nieve, tabaco, vetas de metal, vapor de agua, vi convexos desiertos ecuatoriales y cada uno de sus granos de arena, vi en Inverness a una mujer que no olvidaré, vi la violenta cabellera, el altivo cuerpo, vi un cáncer en el pecho, vi un círculo de tierra seca en una vereda, donde antes hubo un árbol, vi una quinta de Adrogué, un ejemplar de la primera versión inglesa de Plinio, la de Philemon Holland, vi a un tiempo cada letra de cada página (de chico, yo solía maravillarme de que las letras de un volumen cerrado no se mezclaran y perdieran en el decurso de la noche), vi la noche y el día contemporáneo, vi un poniente en Querétaro que parecía reflejar el color de una rosa en Bengala, vi mi dormitorio sin nadie, vi en un gabinete de Alkmaar un globo terráqueo entre dos espejos que lo multiplican sin fin, vi caballos de crin arremolinada, en una playa, del Mar Caspio en el alba, vi la delicada osatura de una mano, vi a los sobrevivientes de una batalla, enviando tarjetas postales, vi en un escaparate de Mirzapur una baraja española, vi las sombras oblicuas de unos helechos en el suelo de un invernáculo, vi tigres, émbolos, bisontes, marejadas y ejércitos, vi todas las hormigas que hay en la tierra, vi un astrolabio persa, vi en un cajón del escritorio (y la letra me hizo temblar) cartas obscenas, increíbles, precisas, que Beatriz había dirigido a Carlos Argentino, vi un adorado monumento en la Chacarita, vi la reliquia atroz de lo que deliciosamente había sido Beatriz Viterbo, vi la circulación de mi oscura sangre, vi el engranaje del amor y la modificación de la muerte, vi el Aleph, desde todos los puntos, vi en el Aleph la tierra, y en la tierra otra vez el Aleph y en el Aleph la tierra, vi mi cara y mis vísceras, vi tu cara, y sentí vértigo y lloré, por-que mis ojos habían visto ese objeto secreto y conjetural, cuyo nombre usurpan los hombres, pero que ningún hombre ha mirado: el inconcebible universo” (*Obras completas* 625-626).

³⁷ Borges had composed and published in 1965 his own milonga lyrics. See the collection of poems entitled *Para las cuerdas* (*Obras completas* 953-974).

³⁸ “Me sentí, por un tiempo indeterminado, percibidor abstracto del mundo. El vago y vivo campo, la luna, los restos de la tarde, obraron en mí; asimismo el declive que eliminaba cualquier posibilidad de cansancio. La tarde era íntima, infinita. El camino bajaba y se bifurcaba, entre las ya confusas praderas. Una música aguda y como silábica se aproximaba y se alejaba en el vaivén del viento, empañada de hojas y de distancia. Pensé que un hombre puede ser enemigo de otros hombres, de otros momentos de otros hombres, pero no de un país: no de luciérnagas, palabras, jardines, cursos de agua, ponientes” (*Obras completas* 474).

³⁹ “Damián se portó como un cobarde en el campo de Masoller, y dedicó la vida a

corregir esa bochornosa flaqueza. Volvió a Entre Ríos; no alzó la mano a ningún hombre, no marcó a nadie, no buscó fama de valiente, pero en los campos del Ñancay se hizo duro, lidiando con el monte y la hacienda chúcaro. Fue preparando, sin duda sin saberlo, el milagro. Pensó con lo más hondo: Si el destino me trae otra batalla, yo sabré merecerla. Durante cuarenta años la aguardó con oscura esperanza, y el destino al fin se la trajo, en la hora de su muerte. La trajo en forma de delirio pero ya los griegos sabían que somos las sombras de un sueño. En la agonía revivió su batalla, y se condujo como un hombre y encabezó la carga final y una bala lo acertó en pleno pecho. Así, en 1946, por obra de una larga pasión, Pedro Damián murió en la derrota de Masoller, que ocurrió entre el invierno y la primavera de 1904” (*Obras completas* 574-575).

⁴⁰ “Supe que no vería más a Damián y quise recordarlo; tan pobre es mi memoria visual que sólo recordé una fotografía que Gannon le tomó. El hecho nada tiene de singular, si consideramos que al hombre lo vi a principios de 1942, una vez, y a la efigie, muchísimas. Gannon me mandó esa fotografía; la he perdido y ya no la busco. Me daría miedo encontrarla” (*Obras completas* 571).

⁴¹ “Quise traer a la memoria los rasgos de Damián; meses después, hojeando unos álbumes, comprobé que el rostro sombrío que yo había conseguido evocar era el del célebre tenor Tamberlick, en el papel de Ótelo” (*Obras completas* 574).

⁴² See the essay collection entitled *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture*, trans. John Gledson (London: Verso, 1992), 19-32.

⁴³ See “The Importing of the Novel into Brazil and its Contradictions in Alencar,” in *Misplaced Ideas*, 41-77. See also Ronald W. Sousa’s highly skilled translations of both essays in Roberto Schwarz, *To the Victor the Potatoes: Literary Form and Social Process in the Beginnings of the Brazilian Novel* (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2020), 1-47. Both were originally published in Schwarz, *Ao vencedor as batatas* (São Paulo: Duas Cidades, 1977).

⁴⁴ Schwarz provides an especially compelling and careful summary, both of his critique of Alencar and his claims on behalf of Machado and Posthumous Memories in “A Brazilian Breakthrough,” *New Left Review* 36 (Nov./Dec. 2005): 91-107. In Alencar “the substance and the form of the central conflict are alien to the crowd of lesser characters, who are nevertheless in charge of assuring a local feel to the book and of conveying the tenor of the society. One of the great effects of Balzac’s novels—the substantial unity between the principal conflict and secondary anecdotes—does not come off” (98). “The degree of uncertainty” in Alencar’s novels “was extreme. The social molecule composed of property and slavery, and poor dependents without rights, had a logic of its own that did not match the liberal coordinates to which the country officially aspired.” (101)

⁴⁵ See *Determinations: Essays on Theory, Nation and Narrative in the Americas* (London: Verso, 2001) especially chapters six, “The ‘Hybrid’ Fallacy, or, Culture and the

Question of Historical Necessity;" and twelve, "Nation and Novel: Critical-Theoretical Speculations and a North/South Postscript."

⁴⁶ It is worth noting here the striking similarity of Sarlo's approach to "Funes," if not to all of Borges's fictions in *A Writer on the Edge*, to the views expressed in a general review of Borges ("A Modern Master") published in the New York Review of Books by Paul De Man in 1964 and reprinted in Jaime Alazraki, ed. *Critical Essays on Jorge Luis Borges* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1987), 55-61. In it De Man writes, for example: "The stories that make up the bulk of Borges's literary work are not moral fables or parables like Kafka's, to which they are often misleadingly compared, even less attempts at psychological analysis. *The least inadequate literary analogy would be with the eighteenth-century conte philosophique: their world is the representation, not of an actual experience, but of an intellectual proposition.* One does not expect the same kind of psychological insight or the same immediacy of personal experience from *Candide* as from *Madame Bovary*, and Borges should be read with expectations closer to those one brings to Voltaire's tale than to a nineteenth-century novel. He differs, however, from his eighteenth-century antecedents in that the subject of the stories is the creation of style itself; in this Borges is very definitely post-romantic and even post-symbolist. *His main characters are prototypes for the writer*, and his worlds are prototypes for a highly stylized kind of poetry or fiction. For all their variety of tone and setting, the different stories all have a similar point of departure, a similar structure, a similar climax, and a similar outcome; the inner cogency that links these four moments together constitutes Borges's distinctive style, as well as his comment upon this style. His stories are about the style in which they are written" (57, emphasis added). To be fair, De Man's remarks also occasionally come strikingly close to observing the deeper, quasi-realist "style" sometimes at work in Borges. "Poetic invention," writes De Man, "begins in duplicity, but it does not stop there. For the writer's particular duplicity . . . stems from the fact that *he presents the invented form as if it possessed the attributes of reality, thus allowing it to be mimetically reproduced, in its turn, in another mirror-image that takes the preceding pseudo-reality for its starting point*" (58, emphasis added). It seems probable that De Man here has some instinctive level of insight into the workings of "(F→C)→ F" in Borges. But lacking, unsurprisingly, any accompanying grasp of the social and historical specificity and logic of the "misplaced idea" in Latin America and on the neocolonial and neo-imperial periphery, he inevitably falls back on formalist and structuralist/poststructuralist platitudes such as that the "points or domains of total vision" in stories such as "Funes" and "The Aleph" merely "*symbolize the entirely successful and deceiving outcome of the poet's irrepressible urge for order*" (60). Borges's style, he concludes, in a similarly predictable refrain "is a mirror, but unlike the mirror of the realists [one] that never forgets for a moment [that] *it creates what it mimics*" (60, emphasis added).

⁴⁷ See here as well his now likewise classic essay "Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination," in *Misplaced Ideas*, 1-18.