WHAT'S IN A TITLE? POLITICAL CRITIQUE AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN EL "INFORME DE BRODIE"

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The eleven stories of *El informe de Brodie* were published as a collection in 1970, at the height of Borges's fame. Over the decades that have elapsed since publication, the attention paid to the volume has been patchy, with some of the stories suffering virtually total critical neglect. Examples of those that have escaped oblivion are "El evangelio según Marcos" and "La intrusa," which David Haberly, Sylvia Molloy and Donna Fitzgerald have analysed to good effect, emphasizing their Argentine roots and significance. The title story belongs in a class of its own, in at least two respects. First, Borges claims expressly in the prologue to *El informe de Brodie*, "Fuera del texto que da nombre a este libro y que manifiestamente procede del último viaje emprendido por Lemuel Gulliver, mis cuentos son realistas, para usar la nomenclatura hoy en boga" (*Obras completas* 2: 399); the title story is thus set generically apart from the other ten items in the collection. Second, "El informe de Brodie" has, with very few exceptions, either not been read at all or read with too much deference to Borges, as having little if anything in common with the other stories in the volume. For one reason or the other, readers of the secondary literature could be forgiven for believing that "El informe de Brodie" does not partake in the reflections upon Argentine identity, history, and nationhood that characterize the collection as a whole. Yet, there remains something puzzling about the relationship between the title story and the collection: if "El informe de Brodie" is "really" an odd one out, why use its title for the set of eleven stories, on which it sets the seal? Might we not consider envisaging the

title story as a synecdoche, or as a *mise en abîme*? These questions lie behind the present study, which argues that "El informe de Brodie" stands in a symbiotic relation to the other stories, which are in fact held together by a set of political concerns that are explained in the culminating story and paragraph of the collection. I shall demonstrate my thesis through a three-stage examination of "El informe de Brodie," beginning with an analysis of the formal and ideological properties of the story; this will be followed by consideration of thematic relations with the other ten stories in the collection; finally, the study will explore intertextual connections with works by Lane, Kipling, and others which have tended to be read without attention to political themes. The particular intertextual configuration of *El informe de Brodie* permits a more politicized reading of the collection than has been authorized by Borges himself and generally admitted by his readers and critics to date.[1]

"El informe de Brodie" and Her Imperial Majesty

In terms of raw narrative content, "El informe de Brodie" dramatizes issues of cross-cultural understanding experienced by a Scottish Presbyterian missionary over the time that he spends with a group called the Mlch, living—we are led to believe—somewhere in Africa or Brazil where it is known that Brodie "predicó la fe cristiana" (*OC* 2: 449). As an outsider, Brodie seeks to understand and record aspects of the Mlch language, customs, and society—which he describes alternately as a "nation" governed by a king and queen and a "tribe" in thrall to a set of witch doctors. The report that bears his name is written upon Brodie's return to Scotland and submitted to "el Gobierno de su Majestad" in London (*OC* 2: 454), at what we imagine is the high water mark of British imperialism.

Given his status as a missionary, Christian ethics play an unsurprising, but ultimately ambivalent, role in Brodie's account of the Mlch: repelled by their "prácticas sexuales" (*OC* 2: 449), which he could not bring himself to describe in his native English, and by their cannibalism, he nevertheless took a more permissive view of the tribe's trafficking with slave traders—"los cazadores de esclavos, por lo general musulmanes, cuyas

1 A leading exception is Daniel Balderston, Chapters 7 and 8 of whose book, *Out of Context*, are important precursors of the analysis being undertaken here.

cáfilas (caravanas) cruzan el reino" (*OC* 2: 451). This inconsistency alerts the reader to the likely presence of other ironies in Brodie's report which asks, certainly, to be read as an ethnographic document about a barbarous society, "los Mlch, que llamaré Yahoos para que mis lectores no olviden su naturaleza bestial" (*OC* 2: 449), and yet cannot conceal the ideological framework upon which it rests. In addition, the evocation of Swift and other literary references in Borges's multi-layered narrative underscores the intertextuality and multiple literary contexts of "El informe de Brodie." As Beatriz Sarlo has emphasized in a landmark study, the final paragraph gives an unexpected twist to the good Doctor's report, re-directing its discourse of civilization and barbarism against the very institutions of Her Majesty's Empire which Brodie had appeared to represent throughout its pages. Identifying "ciertos rasgos" of the Yahoos "que los redimen," Brodie concludes that the Yahoos represent, after all, "la cultura, como la representamos nosotros, pese a nuestros muchos pecados." In the very real setting of the streets of Glasgow, from where he writes, Brodie testifies to the disquieting presence of the Yahoos, shadowy beings "que me cercan aún" (*OC* 2: 454): they are agents of barbarism who, far from being confined to foreign lands beyond the pale of civilization, actually reside within its bounds, no lesser citizens of Empire than Brodie himself and, more pointedly, than "nosotros," the sinful readers. With this rhetorical coup, Borges dramatically turns the tables on his readers, challenging and indeed delegitimizing Western claims to superiority over others whom we have consistently styled as our moral, political, and cultural inferiors. Through his impersonation of "un misionero escocés, oriundo de Aberdeen" (*OC* 2: 449), Borges effectively critiques the ethical and ideological bases of nineteenth century Western imperialism, including the notions of the civilizing mission, racial superiority, the denigration of foreign institutions, and barbarism.

Beatriz Sarlo has come closer than any other critic to appreciating the pointed significance of the ideological critique that is conducted in "El informe." In the final chapter of *Borges, un escritor en las orillas*, Sarlo picks her way through the historical, ideological, and inter-textual layers of "El informe" and reads it convincingly as "una mezcla perturbadora de filosofía política en situación narrativa" (179). Yet, it is nevertheless surprising that in her study of "El informe de Brodie" Sarlo fails to extrapolate from the

mention of the British Empire (about which she remains vague throughout), to the subject of Argentina over the period encompassed by the reign of Britain's Queen Victoria (1837-1901). One textual detail in particular is crucial in this regard: at a certain point in his ethnographical narrative, Brodie remarks on the Mlch's rudimentary skill with numbers and observes, "Lo mismo, me aseguran, ocurre con las tribus que merodean en las inmediaciones de Buenos-Ayres [sic]" (*OC* 2: 451). On one level, this serves to characterize Brodie's mindset, fed on commonplaces about foreign peoples and places that he has heard of but perhaps never seen. On another level, it is a nod and a wink to the reader, who is invited to assume a connection between the tribal land of the Mlch and a specific part of South America. Already in the introduction to the story, Borges's narrator informs us extra-diegetically that Brodie's missionary work had taken him to parts of Africa and Brazil. Near the end of his report, Brodie tells us that, after fleeing the land of the Mlch, he found his way to a community of black men (sic) with whom he communicated in Portuguese and where he was given shelter by "un misionero romanista, el Padre Fernandes" (*OC* 2: 453). This information might indicate a close relationship between the land of the Mlch and Brazil. However, internal references to Muslims and the British monarch, plus the competing reference to Africa, call that one to one correspondence into question and suggest a more generalized frame of reference co-extensive with the sphere of influence of the British Empire around the mid-point of the nineteenth century. Within South America, this could include nations such as Peru, Chile, and, of course, Argentina. For the purposes of this study, the mention of Buenos Aires is specific enough to allow a reading which assumes an analogy between the land of the Mlch and the country of Belgrano, Sarmiento, and Borges's ancestors; this strategy in turn certifies a link that has never been explored between "El informe" and the accompanying "decameron" of stories which are gathered under its title. As a consequence, the title phrase and story do double duty in the collection: as a self-contained fiction that reworks the topos of civilization and barbarism in Argentina, and as a meta-narrative which holds a key to the thematics of violence, envy, conflict, etc. that runs through the entire collection.

ECHOES AND AFFINITIES: THEMATIC CORRESPONDENCES IN "EL INFORME DE BRODIE"

Exploring the idea of a link between the Doctor's report and the ten stories which accompany it, the reader need look no further than "El evangelio según Marcos," which immediately precedes it. A first reading of "El evangelio" is informed by the knowledge and recollections of details of the nine stories that come before, but not, as yet, by a reading of the title story, which closes the volume. A subsequent re-reading of "El evangelio" in the light of "El informe" reveals a plethora of affinities and foreshadowing which blur the lines of separation between the two stories. First, "El evangelio" anticipates Dr Brodie's Scottish theme, which it embroiders with several threads, including language, religion, genetics or miscegenation, and a dark fanaticism:

> [Los Gutres] eran oriundos de Inverness, habían arribado a este continente, sin duda como peones, a principios del siglo diecinueve, y se habían cruzado con indios. Al cabo de unas pocas generaciones habían olvidado el inglés; el castellano, cuando Espinosa los conoció, les daba trabajo. Carecían de fe, pero en su sangre perduraban, como rastros oscuros, el duro fanatismo del calvinista y las supersticiones del pampa. (*OC* 2: 446)

Through their Scottish ancestry, the Guthries function both as archetypal immigrants around the time of Argentine independence, and as the bearers of a particularly dour branch of Christianity, namely, Calvinism. As a result of miscegenation, they also exemplify not so much backwardness as degeneration, which is a distinction that Brodie also maintains in his report about the Mlch/Yahoos, who, he says, "pese a su barbarie, no son una nación primitiva sino degenerada" (*OC* 2: 453).

A second theme that "El evangelio" has in common with "El informe" is that of ethnic stereotyping. In his introductory thumbnail sketch of Baltasar Espinosa's character, the narrator of "El evangelio" comments on the lack of clarity in his political ideas and remarks that, "el país le importaba menos que el riesgo de que en otras partes creyeran que usamos plumas" (124). Doctor Brodie has wider experience and knowledge of the world than Baltasar, but he cannot suppress a racist remark about the queen of the Mlch, whom he describes, on the occasion of their first meeting, as "sonriente, joven y agraciada, hasta donde lo permite su raza" (*OC* 2: 450).

A concern with paternity is registered in both stories. In the second paragraph of "El evangelio," the narrator introduces "los Gutres" as a trinity: "eran tres: el padre, el hijo, que era singularmente tosco, y una muchacha de incierta paternidad" (*OC* 2: 444). A page or so later, Baltasar Espinosa recalls a conversation with his father who had told him that "Los gauchos suelen ignorar por igual el año en que nacieron y el nombre de quien los engendró" (*OC* 2: 445). Echoing the Christian resonances of the description of the Guthries, Doctor Brodie puts forward a doctrinal explanation for his failure to convert a single Yahoo, remarking, "La frase *Padre nuestro* los perturbaba, ya que carecen del concepto de la paternidad" (*OC* 2: 452). Whether in the remote setting of the Gutres' "estancia" or in the "morada" of the Mlch, the sexual act, far from contributing to the creation of a sense of legitimacy and identity, instead engenders uncertainty and operates totally within the realm of the imaginary.

The theme of instinctual behavior gives rise to a further commonality between "El evangelio" and "El informe," which is the narrative motif of a female who offers herself to a man for sex. In "El evangelio" it is the young girl "de incierta paternidad" who comes to Baltasar's bed, "descalza" and "desnuda": "No lo abrazó, no dijo una sola palabra: se tendió junto a él y estaba temblando. Era la primera vez que conocía a un hombre. Cuando se fue, no le dio un beso" (*OC* 2: 447). Doctor Brodie is similarly honored by the queen of the Mlch when she receives him in her Alcazar: "me miró, me husmeó y me tocó y concluyó por ofrecérseme, a la vista de todas las azafatas" (*OC* 2: 450). Brodie's moral and religious scruples lead him to decline the invitation, differentiating him from Baltasar, who succumbs to the virgin's offer of herself in the house of the Gutres. However, this does not detract from the narrative coincidence of two seductions: one attempted and apparently rebuffed; the other carried through to a ritual, and ominous conclusion.

Overall, the common thematic concerns and narrative details of "El evangelio" and "El informe de Brodie" can be seen as examples of those "ecos y afinidades" that Borges discusses, from a slightly different angle, in his 1932 essay "El arte narrativo y la magia" (*OC* 1: 231). There, Borges contrasted a narrative logic grounded in cause and effect with a narrative logic that operates on the basis of laws of sympathy and magic. To be exact, the affinities that I am pointing to between "El evangelio" and "El informe de

Brodie" are affinities, not within a single text as envisioned by Borges in "El arte narrativo y la magia," but between contiguous texts. As s/he reads the concluding story of Borges's collection, the attentive reader should be able to recognize material which re-works narrative situations, motifs, and themes already deployed in "El evangelio" and elsewhere. Admittedly, not all of the stories in the decameron display so full and conspicuous a resemblance with "El informe de Brodie," as "El evangelio" does. However, as Carter Wheelock, R. K. Britton, Lanin Gyurko, and others have shown, the stories are all related amongst themselves, through a common thematics of rivalry ("La intrusa," "El duelo"), a conflicted national history ("Guayaquil," "La señora mayor"), betrayal and guilt ("El indigno"), envy and rancor ("El encuentro"), and myriad forms of machismo-driven violence ("Juan Muraña," "El otro duelo"...). They are also all related with "El evangelio" and, consequently, by association, with the story that provides the title and rubric for the collection.

The "afinidades íntimas" (*OC* 2: 399) between "El informe de Brodie" and the rest of the collection contribute significantly to the broader picture of Argentina that is built up there. Taking the fictitious realm of the Mlch as a space that is analogous with Argentina, the Scottish missionary's report reinforces the view of Argentine customs as bloody, dark, and barbaric. Some further consideration of themes of empire and the historical experiences of colonialism and post-coloniality helps to tease out the finer political implications of the author's representation of Argentina in "El informe de Brodie" and the accompanying stories.

We have already commented on the imperial background to Doctor Brodie's missionary work, and on the institutional character of his report to "el Gobierno de Su Majestad" in London. In the wider context of Borges's work, the Scottish Presbyterian from Aberdeen takes his place alongside David Alexander Glencairn, sent to quell an uprising in "una ciudad musulmana" in India, as recounted in "El hombre en el umbral;" and Alexander Craigie, appointed "profesor de lógica occidental y oriental" at the University of Lahore, in "Tigres azules" (*OC* 3: 379). Together, Glencairn and Craigie function respectively as emblems of the military and ideological apparatus of Queen Victoria's administration in India and other outposts of the British Empire. Coincidentally, Brodie takes up arms and fights like a good Christian soldier alongside the Mlch when they are

attacked by the neighboring "hombres-monos." He corresponds more closely, however, to Craigie—a man more of the pen than of the sword, whose search for the elusive "blue tiger" of the story's title takes him to a remote village in India. Brodie's status as a missionary marks him out clearly as the bearer of the Christian message and an instrument of the "mission civilisatrice" pursued by European powers including Britain and France throughout the nineteenth century and thereafter.[2] In the Foucauldian terms of Edward Said's account of European imperialism, Brodie represents the protocols of Western discourse and has spent years in foreign places seeking to convert native peoples to a faith that is alien to their instincts and their world view. His earnest intentions to educate, redeem, and save may seem worlds apart from the repression and terror visited on a group of restless Indian Muslims by David Alexander Glencairn, but he nonetheless serves the interests of the protestant Empire of "su Majestad" and can reasonably be regarded as a symbol and mouthpiece of British imperialism.[3]

The Victorian frame of reference of Brodie's work as a missionary provides an important historical perspective on the subjects dealt with in the stories of *El informe de Brodie*. For the most part, these are dated in the early and middle decades of the twentieth century: 1910 ("El encuentro"), 1928 ("El evangelio"), the 1930s ("Historia de Rosendo Juárez," "Juan Muraña"), and the 1950s and 60s ("La señora mayor," "El duelo"). However, at least four stories hark back to the nineteenth century. They are "La intrusa," "La señora mayor," "El otro duelo," and "Guayaquil"—which narrates a modern-day re-run of the famous meeting that took place in that location between Simón Bolivar and General San Martín in August 1822. Of all the dates that pepper the narratives of the collection, that of 1910, "el año del cometa y del Centenario" (*OC* 2: 415) enjoys a certain pride of place,[4] being

2 Mary Louise Pratt illuminates this topic in her influential study, *Imperial Eyes* (149-50, 168 and passim). On the French dimension, see Majumdar (25).

3 Jean Pierre Bernès points out that Doctor Brodie "partage le patronyme de Sir Benjamin Collins Brodie, premier chirurgien de la reine Victoria, auteur de nombreux travaux scientifiques" (1259). Bernès offers an alternative explanation to Balderston, who argues a link between Doctor Brodie and the main character in the play, *Deacon Brodie*, co-authored by R L Stevenson and Henley (*El precursor velado*: 103-05).

4 Gyurko remarks on the mention of Halley's Comet, but has nothing to say about the Argentine centenary (142).

mentioned successively in "El encuentro," "Juan Muraña," and "La señora mayor." The prominence given to this detail fixes the reader's attention on the first century of Argentine history in the post-colonial period and invites consideration of the success of the creole nation-building project which, on the evidence of the stories in *El informe de Brodie*, has failed to achieve long-lasting progress, prosperity, and peace, right up to the time of publication of the collection in 1970. Haberly and Sarlo come close to this conclusion in their respective interpretations of "El evangelio" and "El informe de Brodie," as does Donna Fitzgerald in a more recent study-against-the-grain of "La intrusa." More specifically, Haberly reads "El evangelio" as consciously re-writing "El matadero" by Esteban Echeverría and other foundational fictions in the Argentine literary tradition. What is important to an appreciation of Borges's collection is that the historical perspective provided by "El informe de Brodie" makes the collection readable in its entirety as a reflection on the modern, post-colonial nation still beset, in the middle of the twentieth century, by the savage violence and depravity of the 1840s, as depicted by Echeverría in "El matadero" and elsewhere.

"El informe de Brodie" is far from monolithic, however. The volte face at the end of Brodie's communication to Queen Victoria opens up an unprecedented perspective on the subject of the Mlch/Yahoos, whom it defends after all as worthy of the imperial monarch's benevolent regard. In effect, this is a plea to the highest authority in the land, reminiscent of the letters sent to Emperor Philip II by Bartolomé de las Casas, advocating greater tolerance and understanding of a people or peoples hitherto assigned to the category of savages.[5] Assuming that the role of external arbiter is taken over, in Borges's story, by the modern reader, then Brodie's closing remarks translate into a plea for a critical reassessment of perceptions of Argentina that have characterized the nation in stereotypical terms of degeneracy and barbarism. This plea brings Borges into unexpected (for some, even scandalous) alignment with Gabriel García Márquez on the occasion of the Colombian author's Nobel Prize acceptance speech in

5 Fishburn and Hughes associate Brodie with the Domican missionary (40-41). Elsewhere, postcolonial critics have acknowledged the historical importance of Las Casas in a transnational framework, with Robert Young, for one, calling him "the founding father of European anti-colonialism" (75).

Stockholm in 1982. Addressing the Foundation, whose guests included royalty and other arbiters of taste and good judgment, García Márquez challenged them to abandon stereotypes of the peoples of Latin America and to revise fundamentally their European "ways of seeing:" "I believe that those clear-sighted Europeans who also struggle [...] for a wider homeland, more humane and just, could help us more if they were to revise fundamentally their way of seeing us" (210). Doctor Brodie's concluding words address us, sinners and readers, in a similar vein, and insinuate the need to revisit and reassess stereotypical representations of Argentina, its history, its customs, and its people, depicted at length throughout the pages of *El informe de Brodie*.

INTERTEXTUALITIES

The author's reference to *Gulliver's Travels* has been picked up on by Sarlo, who makes the discriminating observation that "[c]omo Swift, Borges encara un tema moral y político a través del informe de Brodie. Pero, a diferencia de Swift, no propone un término explícito de comparación entre los 'Yahoos' del informe y algún otro pueblo: no hay nobles Houyhnhnms en su relato, y esta ausencia es responsable de aquello en que ambos textos difieren" (174). The relative attenuation of moral themes in "El informe de Brodie" sharpens the story's political message, which owes a considerable debt to Swift—principally, to the satire of political institutions in the European nations (see Chapters Six and Seven of Part Two of the *Travels*), the rhetoric extolling the virtues of civilization and decrying various forms of savagery (Part Four, passim), the indictment of evils of colonization (Chapter Twelve of Part Four), and the coincidental use of the word "Tribe" in Gulliver's conversation with his last Master, a Houyhnhnm (258). Without underestimating the moral concerns of Swift's novel, or, for that matter, of Borges's story, the political commonalities between the two stand out quite noticeably.

The intertextuality of Borges's collection extends further than the names of Swift, Echeverría, and Bartolomé de las Casas, cited above. In the prologue to *El informe de Brodie* Borges mentions two other authors and texts that have a particular bearing on the style and politics of his collection: they are *The Thousand and One Nights; or the Arabian Nights' Entertainments* by Edward Lane (published in three volumes, first edition 1838-1843) and

three items from the collection *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888) by Rudyard Kipling. When considering *The Thousand and One Nights*, the name of Lane should be taken in conjunction with his successor, Sir Richard Burton (1821-1890), whose version of the *Nights* filled 10 volumes published over the course of a decade (London, 1900-1910); after his death, Burton was followed in the venture by his widow, who separately "authored" six volumes of stories which she claimed to have toned down in order to make them suitable for the drawing room. In "Las mil y una noches," the third of seven lectures collected in *Siete noches* (1980), Borges tells us that he first read *The Arabian Nights* in English translation (after Antoine Galland) and was familiar with both Lane's and Burton's versions of the tales grouped under that title. Of all modern Latin American authors, there is probably none so enthralled by the "marvellous Oriental fancy"[6] of the *Nights*, and none who wrote so knowledgeably and admiringly of their appeal. Significantly, Borges would comment on the scholarly apparatus that accompanied Lane's translation, comprising an "enciclopedia de las costumbres de los musulmanes" (*OC* 3: 240) which elaborated on Lane's earlier *Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* published in 1836. The focus on "modales y costumbres," which Borges (or his editor) rendered mistakenly as "Manners and Costumes…" in "Las mil y una noches" (*OC* 3: 236), acknowledges the pretensions to ethnographic exactitude of the compilers and translators of the *Nights*, which, according to Makdisi and Nussbaum, "Paradoxically […] became a touchstone for purportedly genuine knowledge about the Islamic East" (16).

The narrator of "El informe de Brodie" mobilises the full range of associations of the *Nights* in his introduction to the story. His reported discovery of the Brodie manuscript inside a copy of Volume I of Lane serves, at one level, as a guarantee of authenticity to the antiquarian, backed up by the reference to Paulino Kains, a real-life friend of Borges (Bernès 1272). At the same time, the finding-place of Brodie's text and the mention of "esmerada caligrafía" are trademark instances of meta-fiction, including a perfect image of embeddedness, where one fiction is found nesting and interleaved inside another. Expanding on the surface features of the text, the narrator draws attention to the presence, in the margins of Lane, of

6 This pithy phrase is Burton's in "The Translator's Foreword", Vol, I: xvii-sviii.

"extensas notas explicativas" glossed and queried by a reader "cuya letra es la misma del manuscrito." At this point, description gives way to exegesis, as the narrator interprets the notes written in the margins as evidence that "a su lector [ie. Doctor Brodie] le interesaron menos los prodigiosos cuentos de Shahrazad [sic] que los hábitos del Islam" (*OC* 2: 449). Behind its playful façade, the meta-fictional commentary reveals the promise of an anthropological and intercultural enquiry. Prompted by Borges's narrator, the reader somehow expects Brodie's report to display a comparative anthropological approach to subjects such as Islam, sex, and language. By the end of the story, which echoes some of the savagery and licentiousness typical of the *Nights*, the lessons learnt from that comparative study will be available for retrospective application, with necessary adjustments, to the other stories in Borges's collection.

Gilding the lily somewhat, Borges hints at a final intriguing parallel with Burton, to whom, in "Las mil y una noches," he would grant the distinction of having produced a "traducción antropológica y obscena" (*OC* 3: 240). In "The Translator's Foreword" to his collection of the *Nights*, Burton had written in autobiographical vein: "During my long years of official banishment to the luxuriant and deadly deserts of Western Africa, and to the dull and dreary half-clearings of South America, [the work of translating the stories of the *Nights* into English] proved itself a charm, a talisman against ennui and despondency" (vii). Could this be a source for the studied ambiguity surrounding the whereabouts of the Mlch and Brodie's sojourn with them? As well as undertaking his notorious expeditions to the Orient, Burton did, in fact, travel to locations in South America, including Santos in Brazil. If some sort of connection is allowed, then Brodie becomes a double, and a highly ironic one at that, of the doyen of popular English Orientalist literature, whose various achievements and service were recognized by Queen Victoria when she knighted Burton four years before his death.

Concerning the relevance of Kipling to the stories in *El informe de Brodie*, this is more complex than the comment in Borges's prologue suggests. There, Borges praises "In the House of Suddhoo," "Beyond the Pale," and "The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows" as "lacónicas obras maestras" worthy of imitation by "un hombre en los lindes de la vejez, que conoce el oficio"; Borges continues, "He intentado, no sé con qué fortuna, la redacción de

cuentos directos" (*OC* 2: 399). The emphasis placed on craft ("oficio") is consistent with other statements that Borges made about Kipling, whom he described as "un auténtico estilista [que] escribía con una perfección extraordinaria." At the same time, Borges also recognised Kipling's "gran amor" for the British Empire, which inspired so much of the Anglo-Indian author's poetry and prose. Significantly, Borges rejected criticisms of Kipling that were born out of hostility to his political opinions: "es una injusticia juzgar[lo] por sus opiniones sobre el Imperio Británico," and held fast to the view that "Kipling es uno de los escritores más geniales que ha dado la literatura al mundo" (Alifano 12). Yet, the aesthetic and the political are not so easily disentangled in Kipling's work. Scrutiny of a handful of *Plain Tales from the Hills* reveals substantial coincidences with Borges's Argentine decameron not only in regard to style but also at the levels of narrative composition and political observation.

A narrative feature shared by many of Borges's and Kipling's stories is their basis in triangular configurations of characters such as those found in "Three and – an Extra," "False Dawn," and "Lispeth." The title of the second of this trio references the embarrassing outcome of a nocturnal excursion in which the eligible civilian, Saumarez, discovers that he has mistakenly proposed in the dark to the younger Miss Copleigh, instead of to her elder sister. Written in a humorous vein, the story prefigures the more somber plots of Borges including that of "La intrusa," where sibling rivalry between the Nielsen brothers ends with the death of Juliana Burgos, "la mujer tristemente sacrificada" (*OC* 2: 404). A less obvious example of three-way plotting in Borges's collection is "El duelo," where Clara Glencairn de Figueroa and Marta Pizarro compete for attention and glory in their careers as painters. Not long into the narrative, we discover that what seems to be a binary relationship is in fact an unusual ménage à trois, including a third woman, Nélida Sara, "que, según dicen, había gustado alguna vez del doctor Figueroa [Clara's husband]" (*OC* 2: 430); the family motif is emphasized through the narrator's comment that, "Es típico de Marta Pizarro que, al referirse a ella, todos la definieran como hermana de la brillante Nélida Sara" (*OC* 2: 429).

Kipling similarly compounds two triangular relationships in "Lispeth," a love-story with a political sting in its tail. The eponymous Lispeth is a Hill-girl who works as "half servant, half companion, to the

wife of the then Chaplain of Kotgarh" (33). Finding a young Englishman injured on the Bagi road, she devotedly nurses him back to health, with some assistance from the Chaplain's wife. Unbeknownst to Lispeth, the new arrival has a fiancée waiting for him back in England, but neither he nor the Chaplain's wife think to say anything about this to her. No sooner does he recover than he returns to England, leaving Lispeth heartbroken and convinced that "You are all liars, you English" (37). The story is not reticent about rebuking the Chaplain's wife, to whom the words just quoted are addressed. Deftly, the narrator parodies her discourse of racial superiority, which abounds in references to "the uncivilized Eastern instincts" (35), "barbarous folly" (36), and "the vagaries of the heathen" (37). Expressions of imperial ideology at its most odious, these phrases are all the more censurable coming from the lips of an agent of the British Empire's civilizing mission, whom Kipling finds seriously wanting in cross-cultural understanding and Christian charity.[7] Her discourse and behavior provide a valid point of comparison with Doctor Brodie, as considered above.

Triangular plot-design is found, again, in "Beyond the Pale," which approximates closely to "La intrusa", "El evangelio," and "El informe de Brodie." "Beyond the Pale" is, without a doubt, a masterpiece of laconic narration, in the terms of Borges" eulogy of Kipling in the introduction to *El informe de Brodie*. More than that, it is a horrifying tale about the socially-sanctioned mutilation of a fifteen year old native Indian widow, Bisesa, who has her hands severed at the wrists by her uncle after he discovers that she has been admitting the White Englishman, Christopher Trejago, into her room as her nighttime lover. Under patriarchal law, Durga Charan stands in for Bisesa's erstwhile husband and has the power to implement a brutal honor code—uncannily reminiscent, for a Hispanist, of don Gutierre in *El médico de su honra* by Pedro Calderón de la Barca. On a more intimate level, he is also the rival of Christopher Trejago, in a love-triangle that may be real as well as symbolic...

As noted by Sullivan in a politically-inflected study, "Beyond the Pale" is presented as a cautionary tale, overtly warning White men against transgressing limits of "caste, race and breed." In the words of the narrator,

7 Kipling's mistrust of missionaries is commented on by McClure (51).

Trejago "willfully stepped beyond the safe limits of decent everyday society, and paid for it heavily" (162); by falling in love with a native woman, he commits an act of "folly," and, from the moment he starts to interpret Bisesa's first love letter, he is set on a course of inter-ethnic and intercultural misunderstanding. In this, Trejago resembles Baltasar Espinosa in "El evangelio según Marcos," according to the readings of that story carried out by Molloy and others. His Christian name, "the first syllable [of which] was always more than [Bisesa] could manage" (165) signals a likeness to Jesus Christ that he also shares with Baltasar. Reinforcing the clever symbolism of "Christ-opher" is the image of a wound that Durga Charan inflicts on him by "knife, sword, or spear" (167). These numerous Christian motifs in "Beyond the Pale" may be seen as a blueprint of Borges's practice throughout *El informe de Brodie*, which in 1985 Carter Wheelock viewed controversially as unified by imagery of death and crucifixion. And, just as we can track the figure of Baltasar back to Trejago, so the story of Bisesa provides a template for that of Juliana in "La intrusa" (a story headed by an epigraph from the Book of Kings): taken as a partner first by one man, then another, Juliana/Bisesa is finally sacrificed with cold disregard for the lessons of love and care preached by the gospels and followers of Jesus Christ.

Two other motifs link "Beyond the Pale" to Borges's 1970 collection and to the title story specifically. By a curious coincidence, removal of the hands is one of several forms of mutilation to which the luckless king of the Mlch is subjected, according to Doctor Brodie (*OC* 2: 450). In itself, this small detail is perhaps insignificant, yet it partakes of a wider current of bloodshed and barbarism that suffuses both Borges's and Kipling's collections and evidently fascinated both authors. A further overlap with Borges is the deceptively light-hearted mention, near the beginning of "Beyond the Pale," of "the old *Arabian Nights*" as "good guides" for appropriate behavior in the East (163). As a gloss on Trejago's relationship with Bisesa, this is a comment loaded with sick irony, and one which calls into question the notion that the *Nights* have any pedagogical value at all. In any case, the very same work is recalled by Borges's narrator, who, as we have seen, underlines the interest that Lane's collection apparently holds for Brodie as a breviary of Islamic customs, in an exact parallel with the comment made, tongue in cheek, by the narrator of "Beyond the Pale."

The analogy between Borges and Kipling could be extended to take in other works, including the Anglo-Indian author's canonical novel, *Kim*. That undertaking lies outside the scope of the present study, which is more strictly concerned with relations between *El informe de Brodie* and a selection of *Plain Tales from the Hills*. One observation can, however, be made, in support of the political argument and interpretation of the title story of Borges's collection, being outlined in these pages. Edward Said, in a key chapter of *Culture and Imperialism*, discusses the role of Colonel Creighton in the education of the boy Kim and makes a comment that is uncannily applicable to "El informe de Brodie." For Creighton is an ethnographer, scholar, educator, and soldier all rolled into one, and as much an agent of colonialism as Brodie, the ethnographer and scribe of Borges's story. Said comments,

> Of all the modern social sciences, anthropology is the one historically most closely tied to colonialism, since it was often the case that anthropologists and ethnologists advised colonial rulers on the manners and mores of the native people. (Claude Lévi Strauss's allusion to anthropology as "the handmaiden of colonialism" recognizes this.) (152)

Brodie is no less a "handmaiden" in Lévi Strauss's striking formulation, serving British interests in Africa and South America with the same zeal as Creighton in Kipling's India, yet coming to experience serious moral qualms about the situation of the Mlch, on whose behalf he pleads at the end of his Report to Her Majesty, Queen Victoria. A more benevolent voice, perhaps, than that of many military officers posted to India, and an individual differentiated from the generality of British public servants on those very grounds.

CONCLUSION

We may conclude, in the light of the foregoing, that Swift, Lane, Kipling, and Burton exert powerful pressure on "El informe de Brodie" and through it on the entire contents of Borges's collection. An examination of certain key works including *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Thousand and One Nights*, and *Plain Tales from the Hills* reveals a structure of common interests that binds those works and the eleven stories in *El informe de Brodie* tightly together. The historical context of Victorian imperialism is a major factor, crucial

to a proper understanding of the Doctor's report, its politics, and most of its intertexts. Needless to say, the political interpretation that I have put forward here runs directly against the grain of Borges's own statements of principle in which he admits holding opinions on political matters but insists, "no he permitido que interfieran en mi obra literaria" (*OC* 2: 399). Textual and contextual study of the title story of *El informe de Brodie* suggests that Borges's view is open to contradiction and that "El informe de Brodie" is infiltrated by postcolonial concerns.

In addition to sharing a repertoire of themes with the English and Anglo-Indian authors mentioned, the stories of *El informe de Brodie* also feature methods and techniques of narrative already used in *Gulliver's Travels*, the *Nights* and stories by Kipling. Satire and irony are the rhetorical lifeblood of Borges's stories and their literary precursors. *Gulliver's Travels* is an exemplary instance of modern satire. Intended as a parody of the genre of utopian travel accounts, it concentrates on satirizing European (including English) institutions through the description of imaginary lands and peoples whose thoughts and faults reflect pointedly back on the European nations. As intuited by Sarlo and elaborated on in the present essay, Borges adopts the same technique in "El informe de Brodie": just as the Yahoos of Part Four of *Gulliver's Travels* are a reflection, in a distorting mirror, of European readers including us, so the Mlch and the land they inhabit are a reflection, both of mankind as we know it and of Argentine reality in particular. In the case of the *Nights*, the fact that Doctor Brodie's report is discovered inside a copy of Lane's *Entertainments* suggests that the report is framed within a fantasy; however, the pretensions of Lane and Burton to linguistic, geographical, and anthropological exactitude also rub off on the document and legitimize a reading of "El informe de Brodie" and accompanying stories as a systematic reflection on Argentinian matters. As regards the Kipling stories, they depict a number of local colonial situations which the reader is meant to view from a relativistic and ironic perspective that recognizes the elements of hypocrisy and abuse that underpin them. In comparative light, Brodie's enthrallment by imperial ideology is the counterpart of the self-deceit practiced by Kipling's servants of the Empire.

Finally, the diverse material studied here shares a fascination with multi-lingualism and translation. Lane and Burton are at one and the

same time famous and infamous for their translations of Galland. Borges, in citing Lane in the introduction to "El informe de Brodie," translates a translator into a work which is also and already a translation: of Brodie's original text, which he penned in English. The prolific traffic between texts and languages, and between different religions and belief systems, makes "El informe de Brodie" one of the most vertiginous creations in Borges's narrative oeuvre. As such, it requires a very specific kind of reader: one who is fully alert to the "juego preciso de vigilancias, ecos y afinidades" (*OC* 1: 231) between the stories that make up the collection and those that are its precursors.

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