

BORGESIAN TEXTS, MURDERS, AND LABYRINTHS  
IN *FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS* BY PABLO DE SANTIS

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Libraries, labyrinths, mysteries, and the search for meaning and order in what appears to be a disorderly, random universe are themes one immediately associates with the work of Jorge Luis Borges. Many critics have labored over that work, producing countless pages of bibliography that, along with the original works, fill academic libraries worldwide. Many authors of fiction have either consciously or subconsciously looked to the fiction and criticism written by and about Borges as a source of inspiration for their own works of fiction. In a study of Borges's influence in contemporary Argentinean literature, Reinaldo Laddaga points out that “gran parte de lo mejor, lo más complejo y más intenso de la literatura argentina de los últimos veinte [años] ha sido escrito bajo la influencia de Borges” (207). Along with many others, Pablo De Santis also joins the ranks of those whose work either intentionally or unintentionally echoes that of Borges in both thematic and structural elements. De Santis's early works made him a household name in Argentinian adolescent literature. His first adult novel, *La traducción* (1997), a finalist for the Premio Planeta, was followed by *Filosofía y Letras* (1999), *El teatro de la memoria* (1999), *El calígrafo de Voltaire* (2001), *La sexta lámpara* (2005), and *El enigma de París*, which earned him the Premio Iberoamericano–Planeta in 2007. Diego Bagnera, in a review of De Santis's *Filosofía y Letras*, mentions the similarities between the two authors without going into details on said similarities. It is the purpose of this study to perform a close examination of the way in which *Filosofía y Letras* echoes “El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan” on

several levels. Both texts ultimately aim to question our notion of reality and both do so through self-reflection, murder, detection, labyrinth construction, and multiplication/bifurcation.

Both Borges's and De Santis's fictions claim to be non-fictional accounts of events that transpired prior to their recording. In the first case, we have the final pages of a confession dictated and signed by Yu Tsun, a Chinese teacher of English who is acting as a German spy in England during World War I. Yu Tsun dictates his confession from jail, while awaiting execution for the crime of espionage. The claim that the story is not a work of fiction is furthered by the fact that it begins with a reference to an event documented in a history book written by Liddell Hart, upon which Yu Tsun's confession is supposed to shed some light (*Obras completas* 1: 472). In De Santis's novel, the narrator, Esteban Miró, likewise claims to be recording a non-fictional account of the true events that transpired at the Instituto de Filosofía y Letras, as directed to do so by the authorities of the Institute. It is significant that both narrators would claim that their texts are non-fictional, as one of the themes explored in both works is the fictional nature of reality.

Key elements in both narratives' questioning the nature of reality are two secondary texts to which the primary texts refer. Whereas both works make references to a secondary text whose contents are a key to understanding the meaning of the primary text, neither gives us full access to that secondary text. All we have are third-party descriptions, which are, by definition, unreliable. In Borges's short story the secondary text is the novel/labyrinth written by Yu Tsun's ancestor, Ts'ui Pên, entitled, significantly, *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*. Yu Tsun initially describes his ancestor's novel as "un acervo indeciso de borradores contradictorios [...] en el tercer capítulo muere el héroe, en el cuarto está vivo" (*OC* 1: 476). In De Santis's novel, the secondary text is a short story known as *Sustituciones*, a work consisting of numerous, frequently contradictory narratives attributed to an author by the name of Homero Brocca, who later turns out to have been invented by a literary critic in order to produce criticism without the challenge of having to analyze an original text. Like the labyrinth/novel written by Ts'ui Pên, the contents of *Sustituciones* appear irreconcilable to each other:

Había papeles escritos a mano, en máquinas eléctricas, en máquinas de escribir, fotocopiados, impresos en páginas de periódicos... algunos estaban arrugados, otros lisos, manchados, recortados, pegados con cinta adhesiva... Los encabezaba el mismo título: *Sustituciones* por Homero Brocca. Bastaba una ojeada para ver que todas aquellas versiones no coincidían ni en una línea. (36)

The novel's narrator, Esteban Miró, has been hired by Professor Emiliano Conde, the critic who initially invented Brocca for his own purposes, in order to edit a series of papers that, according to Conde, comprise Brocca's only remaining work, *Sustituciones*. Unlike Ts'ui Pên's novel, however, the narratives that comprise *Sustituciones* turn out to have been written by many different authors, most of who were at one time patients in a mental hospital known as "casa de reposo *Spinoza*." The patient who initiated the experiment eventually adopts the identity of Conde's Brocca and attempts to "write reality" by committing a series of murders that continue the narratives of *Sustituciones*. The only version of the text we do see is the one Miró turns in to Conde, which contains elements of Miró's own invention:

Como la entrega definitiva del trabajo me había tomado de sorpresa, no había comprobado si tenía errores. Algunas partes del cuento estaban en las versiones, pero había frases que eran mías y que había agregado para tratar de darle alguna coherencia. "Nadie se dará cuenta de la improvisación," pensé. Al fin y al cabo, para ser fiel a aquel original, había que incluir alguna sustitución. (79)

Thus, although one of the chapters in *Filosofía y Letras* reproduces Miró's version, while other chapters include the text of some of the other versions, the original text, like that of Ts'ui Pên's novel, is still unavailable to readers.

One of the key links between Ts'ui Pên's seemingly incoherent text and Brocca's numerous versions of *Sustituciones* is the fact that they both serve as a commentary upon the uncertain nature of our concept of reality. Prior to becoming the victim of Yu Tsun's fatal gunshot, Stephen Albert explains the logic behind the novel written by the ancestor of his would-be killer:

*El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* es una enorme adivinanza, o parábola, cuyo tema es el tiempo [...] A diferencia de Newton y de Schopenhauer, su

antepasado no creía en un tiempo uniforme, absoluto. Creía en infinitas series de tiempos, en una red creciente y vertiginosa de tiempos divergentes, convergentes y paralelos. Esa trama de tiempos que se aproximan, se bifurcan, se cortan o que secularmente se ignoran abarca *todas* las posibilidades. No existimos en la mayoría de esos ejemplos. En algunos existe usted y no yo; en otros, yo, no usted; en otros, los dos. En éste, que un favorable azar me depara, usted ha llegado a mi casa; en otro, usted, al atravesar el jardín, me ha encontrado muerto; en otro, yo digo estas mismas palabras, pero soy un error, un fantasma. (OC 1: 479)

As one enters the labyrinth of Ts'ui Pên's novel one is confronted with numerous possible realities, all of which are true in different realms of reality. In Brocca's text, one version of reality replaces another, in an endless game of substitutions. Behind each substitution, however, there is an author, a god-like figure who controls the outcome through writing. According to one of the doctors at the Casa *Spinoza*, Brocca's purpose in writing is to influence reality: "para él no tiene sentido escribir, a menos que pueda actuar sobre la realidad" (103). It is, in fact, Brocca's "writing of reality" that leads to the chain of events that comprise the plot of *Filosofía y Letras*, namely a series of murders whose investigation leads to the revelation of the Author.

The murder mystery plot, or an inversion thereof, is another element that links Borges's story to *Filosofía y Letras*. Numerous critics have studied Borges's inversions of the detective plot, and he is credited by most, including Jeanne C. Ewert, as one of the initiators of metaphysical detection. Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney define metaphysical detective fiction as follows:

A metaphysical detective story is a text that parodies or subverts traditional detective-story conventions—such as narrative closure and the detective's role as surrogate reader—with the intention, or at least the effect, of asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot. Metaphysical detective stories often emphasize this transcendence, moreover by becoming self-reflexive (that is, by representing allegorically the text's own process of composition). (2)

The subversion of the traditional detective plot in "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" is obvious. The murder takes place not at the beginning of the story but at its end. We witness the crime, but there is neither a de-

tective nor a detection process that leads to the solution. Instead, readers themselves have to take on the role of detectives and be guided along only by the murderer in order to understand the crime's solution. It is not until Yu Tsun explains at the closing of his confession that he killed Stephen Albert in order to perform his duty as a German spy and communicate to Berlin that Albert was the name of the city that needed to be attacked that we understand the murderer's motive. According to Jeanne C. Ewert, the act of the reader assuming the role of the absent or failed detective is a key element in metaphysical detective in which the "new reader must first learn to play the game of detection by herself" (186). Ewert further explains: "if the reader of metaphysical detective fiction must give up her dependence on the detective, she must also give up her expectations of the methods of conventional detection" (186). Nevertheless, as Merivale and Sweeney have pointed out, detection is not the point of metaphysical detective fiction. The "questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot" (2) are posed prior to the crime's commission, when Albert explains to Yu Tsun the secret behind his ancestor's labyrinth, thus posing the question about the nature of time and the possibility of multiple realities.

The philosophical discussion in *Filosofía y Letras* is likewise enclosed in an inverted detective plot. There are several murders that take place. The first one happened years earlier in the abandoned fourth floor of the building that houses the Instituto de Filosofía y Letras and was ruled an accident by the police. The second murder is that of the superintendent, which also takes place on the fourth floor, but is ruled a suicide. Only Esteban Miró, the librarian, in another echo reminiscent of "La biblioteca de Babel," knows that there is a killer responsible for the crimes. Miró is able to know this because he associates the presence of a rope tied to a dead body with the literary leitmotif that repeats itself in each version of *Sustituciones*. Possessing that knowledge, Miró joins in the investigation, turning into the aide of another metaphysical detective named Gaspar Trejo, who has taken it upon himself to solve the mysterious deaths that take place in the building. In aiding Trejo with the investigation, Miró takes on a role similar to that of the detective's aide in traditional detective fiction. Just like the aide in Poe's and Conan Doyle's stories, the detective's aide is also the narrator of the book. Furthermore, Trejo resembles an investigating

figure out of Poe in that he is a former professor of logic. Nevertheless, Trejo has abandoned traditional logic, turning, instead, to a view of reality more similar to Borges's: "para construir mi propia materia, la Ciencia de los Indicios. Quería convertir en filosofía la tendencia a buscar la realidad en los detalles irrelevantes" (90). Trejo's method is consequently quite different from the methods of traditional positivistic detection which is based on the notion that reality conforms to the laws of logic:

Reúno pruebas, pero no las examino individualmente hasta que tengo suficientes como para armar mi museo [...] En general ubico las cosas en vitrinas que tengo en mi casa y las miro como si no supiera qué son. Poco a poco armo la red que las une. Redacto en mi imaginación el catálogo del museo, donde cada cosa tiene su lugar. El método combina la razón con la intuición. Con la razón sola no se llega a ninguna parte. Sólo admitiendo que la realidad es en gran parte imaginaria se puede alcanzar la verdad. (90)

Although Trejo is unable to surmise Brocca's involvement with the murders, his idea that reality is, to an extent, imaginary does reflect the mystery's solution. It is, after all, Brocca's imagination that serves as the driving force behind the construction of the novel's plot, which is also composed of "reality." It is not until the building's night guard steps out and reveals himself as Brocca the Author that the readers find out about his plan to construct reality through writing. Thus, in both "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" and *Filosofía y Letras*, the task of the explanation is left to the criminal himself.

In Borges's story, the solution points to a secret code used by Yu Tsun to communicate to Germany the name of the city to be bombed. The act of coding and decoding is a central theme in the story, and, as Donald Shaw points out, "the irony is double, because by murdering him, Yu Tsun involves Albert, the code-cracker, in a new coded message" (62). Coding and decoding messages is also a theme that appears in *Filosofía y Letras*. We come to find out that originally, perhaps during Brocca's internment, Casa *Spinoza* was a political internment facility for intellectuals opposed to the military regime in Argentina: "muchos salieron de allí adictos al régimen, de otros nunca más se supo nada" (95). Prior to his attempted suicide and internment at the Casa *Spinoza*, Brocca was involved in an extremist militant group. A possibility arises, although it is never confirmed, that

the original secret message in *Sustituciones* was aimed at communicating with that group. Ironically, the code of the original is recoded prior to its publication in a magazine: “Pero ya antes de ser publicado, el jefe de redacción de esa revista hizo algunas alteraciones en el texto para pasar un mensaje secreto a sus agentes. Esta fue la primera transformación. Meses después ya varias agrupaciones políticas usaban el cuento para transmitir sus mensajes” (37). The code here is a written one, as is the one hidden in Ts’ui Pên’s novel that, when cracked, leads to an understanding of multiple realities that bifurcate in time. In Borges’s narrative, the written code precedes the physical one of Albert’s murder. In *De Santis*, too, the written code of *Sustituciones* is soon replaced by the physical code of murder. This code, however, is not meant to influence governments or political organizations, but the very reality in which the characters exist. The recipients in charge of cracking this code are the readers, and the message is strongly suggestive of Borges—what if life were a fiction controlled by an Author?

Miró feels the presence of the Author in his life long before Brocca steps in to reveal his purposes. At the first and only conference dedicated to Brocca’s work, as insults are exchanged between Conde’s competitors, Professor Víctor Novario and Professor Selva Granados, Miró reflects:

El intercambio de acusaciones no terminaba de interrumpir del todo el tema; mientras cundían los *imbécil* y los *infeliz*, el desarrollo del tema continuaba, como si el análisis de la obra de Brocca necesitara como instrumento esa guerra verbal. Y percibí, por primera vez, en medio del caos, que algo del fantasma de Brocca se hacía presente, como si él hubiera escrito, en algún tiempo lejano, esa ruidosa escena que dos actores desaforados y unos pocos extras representaban para mí, y de la que yo también formaba parte. (50)

After the final revelation of Brocca’s identity, as Miró reads Brocca’s final novel, awaiting the last pages in order to find out his own destiny from the Author who is busy typing Miró’s life in the next room, Miró reflects on the god-like qualities of the Author:

era como un dios oculto en el fondo de los papeles, que determinaba nuestro destino y nuestra muerte. No le interesaba matar, sino escribir: el crimen era apenas un alimento para la tensión de la trama. La vida ya se había convertido para él en una serie de bloques narrativos que había que unir a través de maniobras audaces e impulsos demoníacos. (216)

Brocca allows Miró to live, having predestined him as his messenger to the outside world, in the final substitution of the novel. As Brocca perishes with the sinking building, Miró is able to step outside, and although the pages of Brocca's novel are lost forever, Miró is able to recreate them in the "informe" we have in front of us entitled *Filosofía y Letras*. The recreation of Brocca's novel by Miró reflects the latter's recreation of the original version of *Sustituciones* into which he inserted elements of his own invention. Thus, although Brocca originally controls Miró's life through writing, the final substitution turns the librarian into a new author, thus giving him control of his own destiny as well as, ironically, control over the work of the original Author. The question of a god-like Author controlling people's lives seems to echo the question posed by Borges regarding the existence of a "Compañía" in "La lotería de Babilonia." Is there a Company that controls people's lives or is it possible that life is nothing more than "un infinito juego de azares" (OC 1: 460)? The figure of an author is also central in "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," and, although Ts'ui Pên is nowhere near as dangerous as Homero Brocca, there are certain similarities between the two. Both authors withdraw from society into solitude to complete their work, and both characters set out to construct labyrinths through writing, which are in turn reflected in the physical labyrinths encountered by the characters in both narratives.

The symbol of the labyrinth as representative of the novel is another element both works share in common. The first labyrinth to appear in "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" is a physical one, comprised of the path Yu Tsun needs to take in order to reach Albert's house from the train station. As some children playing nearby instruct him to turn left at every crossroads, Yu Tsun is reminded of the path towards a labyrinth's center. At the center would be Albert's house, where another labyrinth awaits. As he proceeds through the labyrinth towards the house, Yu Tsun contemplates the lost labyrinth of his ancestor:

lo imaginé inviolado y perfecto en la cumbre secreta de una montaña, lo imaginé borrado por arrozales o debajo del agua, lo imaginé infinito, no ya de quioscos ochavados y de sendas que vuelven, sino de ríos y provincias y reinos... Pensé en un laberinto de laberintos, en un sinuoso laberinto creciente que abarcara el pasado y el porvenir y que implicara de algún modo los astros. (OC 1: 475)



Although Ts'ui Pên's labyrinth is not a physical one, his descendant is not far from the truth when he imagines a labyrinth covering past and future. In fact, the labyrinth turns out to be a labyrinthine novel that is also a riddle about time. As he proudly dreams of the lost labyrinth, Yu Tsun, however, dismisses his ancestor's novel as "insensata" (OC 1: 476). He has read its contents, but was unable to decipher them on his own. Upon the first reading, Yu Tsun is, in a sense, unable to find his way through the labyrinth without a guide. Albert takes on the role of the guide, offering Yu Tsun a sort of Ariadne's thread as he reveals the metaphysical mystery behind the novel and the labyrinth. That the novel and the labyrinth are one and that they represent a riddle about endless possibilities in time is the key to understanding the novel and thus, metaphorically, traversing the labyrinth without losing one's way. The author of that labyrinth is Ts'ui Pên, but just as Brocca's work in *Filosofía y Letras* has been edited and rewritten by others prior to reaching the readers, Ts'ui Pên's work has also been altered. In a way, Stephen Albert admits to having tampered with the text in order to restore it to its original meaning much in the same way Miró edits and compiles Brocca's text in *Sustituciones*: "He confrontado centenares de manuscritos, he corregido los errores que la negligencia de los copistas ha introducido, he conjeturado el plan de ese caos, he restablecido, he creído restablecer el orden primordial, he traducido la obra entera" (OC 1: 479). In a way, Ts'ui Pên's labyrinth becomes Albert's labyrinth, a labyrinth into which he calmly guides his killer prior to reaching his end.

Brocca's labyrinth in *Filosofía y Letras* echoes Ts'ui Pên's labyrinth in "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan." The original labyrinth in De Santis's novel is the building which houses the Instituto de Filosofía y Letras as well as its library. This connection between Brocca's novel and the building is the very nucleus of his theory: "Las ideas teóricas de Brocca eran confusas variaciones alrededor de un núcleo nítido. El edificio y la novela guardaban una complicada correspondencia que él era encargado de vigilar" (215). The labyrinth of the building contains within itself a micro-labyrinth which is the fourth floor, described by Miró as follows:

Empezaba otro mundo sin ruido, sin vida. Un silencio absoluto nacía en aquellos papeles muertos juntados año tras año y que superponían, a la deteriorada arquitectura, un dibujo de pasillos estrechos, puentes, columnas vacilantes, pasajes clausurados. Por primera vez me fue revelado que

aquel orden no era casual, que había un plan detrás del aparente caos de papeles; adiviné, más allá de los zigzagueantes muros formados por las carpetas, la profundidad de un orbe cerrado que nada tenía que compartir con los pisos inferiores. Desde alguna parte reinaba, invisible, el Arquitecto. (40)

The Architect whose reign is reflected in this labyrinth is, of course, Brocca, the Author. Brocca is not, however, the architect of the building itself, which existed before and continues to exist, albeit in ruins, after him. Brocca simply takes possession of someone else's work and makes it his own. He utilizes this labyrinth to set up what Robert Rawdon Wilson terms a "godgame," which

occurs in literature when one or more characters creates an illusion, a mazelike sequence of false accounts, that entraps another character. The entrapped character finds himself entangled in the threads of (from his point of view) an incomprehensible strategy plotted by another character who thus takes on the roles both of a game-master since he invents rules for the other character to follow, and of a god as well. (6-7)

Wilson further points out that "the godgame is a larger category than the literary labyrinth and includes it as a genus includes a species" (8). In his "godgame," Brocca takes on the role of god/Author, trapping the rest of the characters in his game on two levels, both of which are related to the image of the labyrinth. On the physical level, the labyrinths of the building and the fourth floor are examples of what Wilson terms "mimic or weak labyrinths" which are "those labyrinths that create the illusion of physical appearance and which suggest, at least in broad lines, the commonly recognized attributes of historical labyrinths" (11). This labyrinth, however, is also a symbol of Brocca's novel, which constitutes the real "godgame," thus becoming a "strong labyrinth," one whose structure goes beyond the physical. Wilson defines the "strong labyrinth" as follows:

The order of a strong labyrinth is a sequence of alternatives; from the viewpoint of the character within, it is a string of necessary decisions. In explicit terms, the labyrinthine order is a series of exclusive disjunctions of the form, "Either A or B but not both" or "Either A or B or C but not one." The movement through such a labyrinth proceeds by decisions sequentially taken. (12)

These decisions are not made by the labyrinth-maker but by the players who are the characters trapped within the labyrinth. Although they are characters in somebody else's labyrinth, their movements within that labyrinth (or within the novel represented by that labyrinth) are not controlled by the Author: "Brocca provocaba al destino, pero su argumento no estaba cerrado del todo. En su gigantesca trampa narrativa siempre habría lugar para el libre albedrío y la sorpresa" (215). This idea is reflected in one of the versions of *Sustituciones* posted on the walls of the Casa *Spinoza*. The version is a game-book in which the reader gets to decide the next move, cited by Miró as follows:

Te encargan transportar un cadáver desde el frente de batalla.

Si decides llevarlo, pasa a la página 2.

Si no, pasa a la página 3.

Pasé a la página 3.

El comandante superior del ejército te hace un juicio sumario por traición y te condenan. Al amanecer te ahorcan en la plaza mayor. Entierran tu cadáver en una fosa anónima.

Pasé entonces a la página 2. Seguí al personaje a través de distintas posibilidades. [...] De todas maneras el final era el mismo:

Escoje una viga y efectúa la última sustitución. (162-63)

Not only do all the choices in this one version lead to the same end, so do all the other versions, reflecting the way in which all the characters' decisions in Brocca's godgame lead to the novel's pre-planned ending. Brocca himself admits to that as he sends Miró off to get the manuscript published: "al principio un argumento puede tomar cualquier dirección, y crear la ilusión de que todo camino es posible; al final debe ser inexorable" (218). This is an inversion of the argument in Borges's short story, according to which the further into the future one goes, the more possibilities are true. In Ts'ui Pên's labyrinth, the choice is not A or B or C, since all can and do occur in the endless bifurcations that lead to endless possibilities.

By choosing the novel as the structure for the labyrinth of endless possibilities, Borges also makes a metafictional reflection about the nature of reality and its connection to writing. W.H. Bossart has affirmed that "in

making the labyrinth a book, and in suggesting that it also represents the underlying ontological structure of the everyday world, Borges advances the thesis that there is no clear-cut distinction between fiction and reality” (32). The same thesis is also advanced by Pablo De Santis in *Filosofía y Letras*, where one encounters several levels of reality, all, in one way or another, connected to writing. According to Brian McHale,

the dominant of postmodernist fiction is *ontological*. That is, postmodernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions like the ones Dick Higgins calls ‘post-cognitive’: ‘Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?’ Other typical post-modernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world which it projects, for instance: What is a world? What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects? How is a projected world structured? And so on. (10)

In *Filosofía y Letras*, each level of reality represents a distinct ontological world whose existence is, nevertheless, dependent on one of the other worlds (or levels of reality) within the novel. On one level, Brocca is a deceased author whose work has been lost in the sinking of a ship named the *Gorgona*. On another level, however, Brocca’s entire existence has been constructed by Conde in an attempt to further his career as a critic. This is the level that most closely resembles what we would term “reality” in our world, and it is at this level that the narrative most closely resembles a traditional detective story as the murderer is discovered to be a deranged lunatic, the night guard, who thinks he is writing a novel based on reality. The notion of reality, however, is further complicated as the night guard announces that he is, in fact, Homero Brocca, and that all the people and events in the novel are mere elements in his novel’s plot. Brocca’s figure, initially exposed as fictional, is now revealed as real and the people presumed real are transformed into mere parts of a fictional narrative. Thus, the ontological status of each world or level of reality is revealed to be a written construct of a character at the next level. In the end, Miró reads Brocca’s last chapter in order to find out his own future, thus giving Brocca the final authorship over reality. We have to remember, however, that

Miró is actually reconstructing the entire sequence of events in his own writing. Thus, even the world in which Brocca is the author and all others the characters in his novel becomes a construct of Miró's writings, which, in turn are the fictional creation of Pablo De Santis. It can therefore be said that De Santis is writing about Miró writing Brocca, who wrote Miró, who is also writing Conde, who wrote Brocca, who came to life and wrote Conde in an endless ontological game of flowing realities, all controlled by writing. The levels of ontological existence in Borges are no less complex, as Floyd Merrell points out:

The first level is that of *pure abstraction of mathematical logic*, the story of Tsui Pên, and his construction of the infinite, self-reflexive, self-contained book with the same title as Borges's story. The second level consists of a *simulation model*, the author's representation of a fictive world as an alternative to what we ordinarily consider to be the "real." The third level is the *topological depiction* of Tsui Pên's book, a story that contains Borges's story that in turn contains the story of the book. And the fourth level entails the subjective, *time-bound grasp of the story* or stories at whichever level. (57)

Merrell goes on to point out that while the four levels create a whole that "appears to be quite orderly" (57), it is not. The paradoxes contained in each level play upon other levels and interact with them, demonstrating a dynamic postmodern view of a flowing reality defined by "nonlinearity, intertextuality, 'hypertext'" (Merrell 57), quite similar to the view put forth by De Santis in *Filosofía y Letras* as the roles of author, character, and text become unstable categories representative of "reality."

The metafictional game played by each author is extended to the title of each work. Borges plays that game on several levels. Firstly, Ts'ui Pên's novel is entitled *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*, just like the short story written by Borges, leading readers to wonder if the short story is, itself, a labyrinth built for the careful reader/critic. Furthermore, the short story collection *Ficciones* is divided into two sections, the first of which is dated 1941 and entitled *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*. This section comprises of seven different stories, the last of which shares its title. All seven stories are metaphysical in nature, posing questions and creating contradictions about time, the universe, and existence that would lead some readers to wonder if the entire collection is supposed to represent Ts'ui Pên's mysterious labyrinth. The intertextual reference at the end of "Examen de la

obra de Herbert Quain” both confirms and complicates this possibility by entering yet another level to the list of complex possibilities:

A fines de 1939 [Quain] publicó *Statements*: acaso el más original de sus libros, sin duda el menos alabado y el más secreto. Quain solía argumentar que los lectores eran una especie ya extinta [...] Afirmaba también que de las diversas felicidades que puede ministrar la literatura, la más alta era la invención. Ya que no todos son capaces de esa felicidad, muchos habrán de contentarse con simulacros. Para esos “imperfectos escritores”, cuyo nombre es legión, Quain redactó los ocho relatos del libro *Statements*. Del tercero, *The Rose of Yesterday*, yo cometí la ingenuidad de extraer *Las ruinas circulares*, que es una de las narraciones del libro *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*. (OC 1: 464)

What is clear here is that, much like in the game played by De Santis, authors, readers, and characters create and read each other in an endless web of postmodern possibilities.

In chapter 33 of *Filosofía y Letras*, the surviving characters, immediately after having discovered the dead body of Víctor Novario, find a blue notebook whose first page contains the following words:

Filosofía y Letras  
(novela)  
por Homero Brocca  
Capítulo XXXIII: La muerte de Novario. (195)

Thus, *Filosofía y Letras* comes to be the title of three separate narratives, which converge into one. The first narrative is Brocca’s, composed of real events authored by Brocca in order to further the novel’s progression. The second one is Miró’s, composed of re-writing the events controlled by Brocca. Significantly, Miró’s narrative mirrors Brocca’s not only in plot, but also in structure, demonstrated by the coinciding chapter numbers. Miró’s authorship of the novel appears to echo another story by Borges in which he writes of Pierre Menard’s authorship of the *Quijote*: “su admirable ambición era producir unas páginas que coincidieran—palabra por palabra y línea por línea—con las de Miguel Cervantes” (OC 1: 446). Like Pierre Menard, Miró recreates Brocca’s text without consulting the original, which has been destroyed by the final collapse of the building. Ultimately, however, *Filosofía y Letras* is the title of the novel written by De

Santis, whose characters are as fictional as Pierre Menard and Yu Tsun are in the world(s) created and controlled by Borges.

Borges creates worlds in order to pose metaphysical questions about life and existence. He does so by constructing labyrinths, inventing authors and novels, and creating mysteries, riddles and games that challenge readers to reexamine their own notions about reality and the universe. Although the questions De Santis poses may be slightly different than those posed by Borges, there are quite a few echoes of the latter in the former. He takes the mystery, the labyrinth, the author, and the novel and creates a riddle whose solution likewise causes readers to examine their beliefs about reality in a postmodernist world where fiction and reality are no longer stable and separate categories. In this world, made popular by Borges, where intertextuality frequently defines literature, and where author and character are just as uncertain categories as life and fiction, it would not be hard to claim that, in a sense, by echoing his themes and methods, De Santis becomes the author of Borges.

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