

THE DECOMPRESSION OF META-BORGES IN "BORGES AND I"



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Inspired by the strategic operation of mental spacing and conceptual blending in semantics engineered by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, it will be the intention of this piece to subject a slightly modified extension of this operation in the effort to resolve the rather problematic issue of the "I" in Borges' *Borges and I*. By selecting this rather succinct and enigmatic text of this stripe with its elements of contradiction that play freely upon its multi-faceted surface, we may perhaps discover a textual situation that displays a more profound conceptual richness in this particular story. Although we are here inspired by the critical work of the mental spacing and conceptual blending project, we hereby retain the spirit of said project without becoming too absorbed in honouring the strict letter of its program. Moreover, this piece will implicitly demonstrate two items peculiar to the selection of this text and the spirit of the program: 1. As an anomalous text wherein the subject of the "I" is loose and creative, we may come to recognize a new direction for the conceptual blending technique that does not doom the entire theory to defeasibility, and 2. To map out, using elements of the blending technique, the theoretical apparatus of the "I" in Borges' rather clever and playful attitude toward conventional language use

and logic. Borges' characteristic novel combinations informed by his bibliophilic reading which continue to challenge scholars across disciplines makes his writings a prime candidate for research in the conceptual blending theory milieu.

THE TEXT

Borges and I presents its readers with a perplexing riddle: who is the author? The narrative, set in Buenos Aires, proceeds by detailing a first-person account of the narrator's feelings of detachment and resignation that the other part of him, the dominant ego or subject of the exposition, is eclipsing his own unique and honest life as a scribe of the people. The narrator speaks of a Borges as someone who is only interested in the acclaim of being a recognized author rather than having any true investment in the craft itself. It is a somewhat sorrowful account of the narrator who tells of his slow and inevitable surrender to the demands of the ego. Apart from the salient significance this story has for psychoanalytic study, we will here limit ourselves to a few overarching philosophical themes and linguistic nuances.

One could have recourse to more quasi-hermeneutical understanding of this question of authorship as found in Foucault's "What is an Author?" or immerse oneself in the post-structuralist tradition that has since decentered the notion of authorship and authorial presence (and thereby critiquing and overcoming the archaic notions of authorial intentionality as tied to the finitude of origin and telos, author as authority, and the entire gamut of logocentric apparatuses that have hitherto edified in our understanding of text). However, these more oblique and speculative approaches, although highly intriguing and worthy of our efforts, will not suffice here, for our concern will be the idea of the "average reader", what- or whoever that may be. In league with the conceptual blending program, we must consider what this "average reader" obtains from Borges' story in terms of direct cognitive data. How does the average reader structure his or her thought in relation to the text, and what indicators exist within the text to trigger the semantic relationships between the textual elements that create for this reader "mental

spaces"? A preoccupation of this scope would not be an abandonment of the deeper meanings lodged within the text, but that we must put these more profound instances on provisional hiatus to witness how meanings are generated through the integration network of input spaces: the concrete textual data that furnishes the mental spaces through the use of metaphor, allegory, and symbolic imagery. We must first of all carve out these input spaces by itemizing all the textual elements before proceeding toward a more in-depth analysis. Adding to the text any additional meanings by way of interpretation that includes into the analysis the use of epic similes and such will not be in accord with our project here of determining the average reader's abilities in his or her mediation of the text. As a caveat, I do not hold that there is such a thing as an average reader, but rather would assert that this provisional term is utilized as an idealized model for the purposes of brevity.

One of the many advantages that the theory of conceptual blending presents is that it is a mental constructivist theory which allows for a more open-ended strategy for interpretation, as opposed to the phenomenological enterprise that holds up certain ideas we have about the world as prototypical, as bracketed off by an *epoche*, and therefore homeostatic—unless we consider Bachelard's phenomenology of the poetic image that renders it variational and not constitutive.¹

Within the fundamental question of authorship in this story, we are confronted with the implicit understanding that, yes, Borges wrote this story as is evidenced by the fact that his name appears upon the cover of the book in which the story appears. But what is curious is the first-person account of the narrator who refers to Borges as someone other, but as an other that shares a great deal of similar traits to the narrator. It is by an abstractive move that we the readers are encountering Borges upon the terrain of the story, through the point of view of the (unnamed) narrator we may assume to be Borges himself, speaking of another Borges. Among the

¹ See Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. Bachelard's examples are an exception to the phenomenological tradition insofar as they deviate greatly from the Husserlian model, and are more akin to Merleau-Ponty (see *Phenomenology of Perception*).

plethora of clues offered throughout this rather brief piece, the riddle becomes compounded and smears the initial divisions between what the reader may have assumed were two different entities held together by some asymmetrical identity relation. Already, the reader is called upon to incorporate two separate input spaces (narrator and Borges) and perform a blend of identity. As we will postulate, there are three possible solutions or interpretations that we will here subsume categorically. There is Borges the “true” author of the piece, the narrator Borges, and the Borges who is rendered in third-person. Depending upon our focus, we may derive three possible mappings of this text. The first possibility is that the narrator and the narrated Borges are not under the same referential identity, maintaining the autonomy of two independent subjects where one openly reflects upon the other. A second possibility would be that the narrator and the “true” author Borges are one and the same person (which would seem to appeal to our commonsense, although assuming the reader’s privileged knowledge of the authorship of the book in which the story appears), but that this single entity is split up in terms of affects of the individual that are characterized in such a way as to grant the illusion of two subjects. The last, most bizarre and intriguing interpretation is that there are three subjects separated only by their temporal order: the narrator that appears in the story, the diegetical Borges portrayed in third-person, and a “meta-Borges” that functions as an over-author – or the narrator of the narrator. Whenever an author portrays him- or herself in writing, there is always the trouble of dualism, between life and work, a true etymological sense of (auto)bio-graphy. Borges ushers this problematic to a new limit by depicting himself depicting himself, making a kind of textual rendering of the famous painting *Las Meninas*, bringing into focus yet another paradox of (self)reflection and problematizing our complicity with our knowledge of the author and the subject. Each of the following three readings of the story will entail different mapping results. Our aim is not to discover the “right” reading, although it will be obvious that the “meta-Borges” option will stand out as the most intriguing and viable one.

SOLUTION 1: THE NARRATOR IS NOT BORGES

In the opening lines, the framework is established that the reader is possibly dealing with two entities: a narrator and Borges. The separation of the two (id)entities by a principle of difference is textually supported by the opening disjunction of *being acted upon* versus *not being acted upon*: "The other one, the one called Borges, is the one things happens to" (Borges "Borges and I" 246).

Notice here that mention of "the other one" implies a deictic indication of two figures in a relationship insofar as we may presuppose a "one" as distinct from the mentioned "other one". This "other one" in this curious formulation is "called" Borges, as if there was some element of doubt as to the real identity of the subject, as if we are dealing with an entity that merely wears the name of Borges. There is a distinct feel of the facetious in this line, a tonality that may assist us later in the mapping of this possible scenario. Moreover, there is an implication that things do not happen to the "one" who is speaking, a clear case of non-agency. This non-agency does not render the subject inanimate, but sets up a disturbing sequence of what will follow as we attempt to disclose the true identity of the author. As a sidebar, this could be interpreted as a literary move denoting a vulgar dualism between mind and body where physical actions in space occur upon the body that wears the name Borges, while the mind is the patient that is indirectly affected by the events in space, yet this mind retaining the true hold on the name and person of Borges. This would place the narrator in a strange and privileged space of "mind" and Borges-the-subject as merely a "vessel". The anaphorical relation to Borges is threefold: narrator (the one), Borges (the other one), and the hidden author Borges who is the mind behind the mind of the narrator. Notice also the use of the article "the" to denote the "other one" as if to render this "other" as an object or a role. This predication appears to diminish the autonomy of the subject, thereby strengthening our case that this subject-Borges is actually a body-object in relation to the narrator who is the subject. Just as we speak of "the" president or "the" lawyer, we are speaking of assigned roles that are filled by individuals but are not enough in themselves to describe the individual qua individual. What is the meaning of this "the one called Borges"? Is there some entity that

"fills in" this role? If so, who in this instance is filling this role? In our second interpretation, we will posit the narrator as the prime candidate for filling this role, but for now we will maintain that there are two distinct entities seeing as we cannot rule out that the narrator's attitude toward Borges may be that of slight apprehension and alienation.

The pronoun "I" refers directly to the narrator when he relates his excursions through Buenos Aires, and there is a space-building operation when he refers to the streets of Buenos Aires and the various items in his view (the archway, the grillwork on the gate) as meronymous properties of this space. Moreover, there is an implied mention that these walks have occurred more than once, which allows him to state that in one particular instance he stops mechanically (now): "I walk through the streets...perhaps mechanically now, to look at the arch"(Borges "Borges and I" 246).

Two curious eruptions: the first being the operator "perhaps" as setting up a conditional instance in time, as a scenario unique to the form of this space at this particular time. This implies the other occasions where the narrator stopped in a non-mechanical fashion, not a habitual stopping (or, a second variety of a semelfactive "stop"). The second item would seem to strengthen the case of the "narrator is Borges" by appealing to the interpretive distinction we made earlier with the dualism aspect of the narrator and Borges. Above, we posited that the narrator was the mind and the one called Borges was the body; however, it appears that an inversion has taken place, for it is the body that can stop mechanically now (perhaps a brief allusion to Descartes' provisional doubt on the existence of others as merely automata). This mechanical stopping suggests the automatic functioning of a person without conscious interference—or that the body is merely the manipulated object, controlled by the agentive mind. This may add a new shade of meaning to Borges' use of the word "happen" here insofar as "happen" is not necessarily a physical event, but a mental one, and that we can only perceive change with the mind (another strong Cartesian influence) even if it is the body that is subjected to pain and pleasure. Could this be a story related by the point of view of the body about the mind? If so, what of the contradictory nature of the body having such thoughts and an

almost mental agency, for as shown later, this body has opinions about the mind? Is this a clever inversion? Body-animism? For now, we may be content to add these items as input spaces for our future consideration.

The narrator encounters Borges only through the physical deposits of Borges' life activity, and it is in these clue-saturated lines that the reader learns how the narrator and Borges are related. The artifacts listed (mail, a list of professors, a biographical dictionary) are all pronominal referents to Borges. As the story proceeds, the narrator lists his own preferences and contrasts these to Borges' (hourglasses, maps, classical typography, coffee, Stevenson's prose) who shares the exact same preferences, yet enjoys them in a slightly different fashion. The first two items, hourglasses and maps, sets up an epistemic clue of representations of space and time, and familiarity with Borgesian text produces an understanding in the reader that these forms are leitmotifs throughout his work. And, indeed, what is Borges doing in this story but being inventive with the a priori categories of space and time? But this aside, the narrator appends a special quality to Borges' appreciation of these items, that Borges is ostentatious about them, that he is vain like an actor (Borges "Borges and I" 246). This inaugurates yet another mental space of Borges-as-actor, as false, with a functional connector to denote identity relation. Are we to suppose that the narrator is genuine and Borges is false? This may also reify the Cartesianism in this story insofar as the body *acts* and is *acted upon* while the mind *reflects*. Insofar as we must consider the indicating items in the list of preferences, we have pointed out the representations of space and time, but what of typography, coffee and Stevenson's prose? Where do these fit in? Granted, we could list them as shared input spaces of the narrator and Borges, with a subsatial mapping of a Borges' relation with these items in contradistinction to the narrator's. But the narrator only knows Borges through these artifacts and his relation to these artifacts, and to know *of* someone is not necessarily to know them personally in any degree of substantiality, for this would be equivalent to stating that we *know* Plato the man through his dialogues. Moreover, to know of something is not a proper prepositional attitude that can be computed as a truth function in a system of logic—

not that we must restrict ourselves to truth operations. So, if the narrator only knows *of* Borges (through a mediation of artifacts), this strengthens the position that they are indeed separate entities. Itemizing what the narrator knows thus far may prove useful for this idea of mediation through artifacts:

- a) Narrator knows Borges through the mail; therefore Borges receives mail.
- b) Narrator knows Borges is a professor.
- c) Narrator knows Borges through biographical mention; therefore he knows that Borges is a writer.
- d) Narrator knows Borges appreciates the same things, albeit differently, but despite the conspicuity of their highly specialized interests, this does not lend itself to the logical conclusion that they are one and the same person.

When someone is castigated for acting stupidly, this does not mean that the recipient of the comment is inextricably bound up in the essence of stupidity which functions to define the totality of one's being, but that it is a temporary trait of that individual under a very select circumstance to fit this descriptor. But notice here that the narrator is not imputing to Borges that he is acting vain, but that he has the property and propensity of an actor to be vain. The copula functions to unite the two roles to the idea of vanity: Borges is vain, an actor is vain. Hence, we may feel comfortable for the moment in mapping the identity relation between an actor and Borges. However, the narrator is very quick to indicate that he does not have a hostile relationship to Borges. So, the narrator does not view vanity as negative, he tolerates it, or he is resigned to this fact.

A very perplexing situation occurs at this critical juncture of the text, for the narrator makes a jarring claim that his very existence depends on Borges' writing. Had the narrator said otherwise, that his existence depended on Borges as body, this would make more sense (although there would be a symbiotic dependence between narrator-mind and Borges-body). This presents itself as the first unraveling flaw in the Cartesian reading. Does this suggest that the narrator only exists as a fictional device? If so, the narrator possesses no autonomy, and so it makes no sense that the narrator is the mental agent of the subject-Borges. Rather than clarifying how it is the

case that the narrator's very existence depends upon the artifice of writing, the narrator launches into an extempore critique of Borges' writing (and if the narrator and Borges were one, this could be seen as a self-effacing move, perhaps jeopardizing the earlier claim of ostentation; if they were separate, then the critique could be seen as the narrator's criticism of himself or how he has been rendered). The problems here multiply. Is Borges as subject the progenitor of the narrator? How is one's existence dependent upon a piece of text? In colloquial speech, we could say that a writer's existence, understood as financial livelihood and acclaim, is dependent upon textual production and publication. But this cannot be the case in this instance, for the presupposition fails when we keep in mind that the narrator and Borges are (in this reading) separate entities, and it seems inconsistent to assert that someone else's writing could sustain the narrator. We would have to concoct very fantastic scenarios indeed for this to be the case, such as the narrator is a mentally unbalanced individual who is obsessed with Borges' writings, or if the narrator is a publisher who requires Borges to produce texts by a specific date in order to meet print deadlines, etcetera. But as soon as we entertain the absolutely fantastic, we build meanings into the text in a forceful manner that may radically deviate from a more sensible interpretation. Borges has once again presented us with a profoundly complex riddle.

The narrator asserts that some of Borges' writing is valid (Borges "Borges and I" 247), which implies that there are some of Borges' writings that are not valid, and therefore insufficient to validate the narrator's existence. But despite this issue of validity, it is the normative claim of the narrator, and so therefore should be mapped accordingly as the narrator's belief in a conditional world space. In this space we would include the narrator's belief that "the pages" cannot save him, which reiterates the position that the narrator's existence is dependent upon Borges' writing. Within this sphere of the narrator's belief, he adds that some of Borges' writing is not good for either Borges or himself. In addition, to include the real world, albeit still through the filter of the narrator's belief, where goodness or the lack thereof is predicated of Borges' work, it may not be good for someone (which implies that it may be good for someone due to

the hypothetical “may”). This statement is vague in its attempt to be critical of Borges’ writing and its validity in reference to the narrator. The narrator’s belief as opposed to Borges’—this Borges who has not made one explicit appearance in the text as an agent of dialogue or activity—is the suspicious quotient in suspecting that there is a split in the structure between two entities. Moreover, in a mapping, the entire story is based on the narrator’s account, and so a matter of his belief or interpretation of the event. The paradox becomes quite clear when we consider that in order for the narrator to have a belief or an interpretation, that he is acted upon, which is already contradicted in the first line of the story. If anything else, Borges’ writing “happens” to the narrator and, if we are to believe that the narrator’s existence is dependent upon Borges’ writing, then it would appear that Borges—not the narrator—is the agentive force, and that Borges is narrating the narrator in narrating Borges (!).

From the textual information provided, we cannot determine a real world scenario, and so it is contingent upon the reader to provide the “antidote” or “pharmakon” to this logical paradox. This requires the reader to take refuge in objective particulars: the story was written by Borges, it is about him, and he is attempting to pleasure us with a logical puzzle. However, a reconstruction of the truth behind the text is of little interest compared to an attempt to perform a dynamic multi-mapping network wherein we may witness what can be generated if we depend (much like the narrator) solely on the text before us.

The narrator makes it abundantly clear that at some point in time, he will perish, that he will perish *in* Borges, and that only “some instant of myself can survive in him” (Borges “Borges and I” 246). Beyond the fatalist nuance of this statement, the narrator once again carves himself out as distinct from Borges, and this “instant” may be reminiscent of the idea of memory itself. That the narrator will perish *in* Borges is a troubling statement on this view of two autonomous entities, unless this is merely a figural device. But even then we would be hard pressed to make this link without recourse to the fantastic. A statement such as “I allow myself to live” (Borges “Borges and I” 246) casts a similar suspicion to the reading that posits Borges and the narrator as two distinct entities. The narrator is “giv-

ing everything to him" (Borges "Borges and I" 246), but it is not clear as to exactly *what* is being given. There is an idea of sacrifice and submission to be mapped into this relationship between the narrator and Borges.² And it is in the following line when we encounter another property of the absent Borges, as one who falsifies and magnifies. If taken very seriously, the reader may gain comfort from this assertion on the grounds that it *is* Borges who is the narrator, who is merely deceiving us with this fanciful construction.

If the narrator were just a body, he/it would not have recourse to the intimate information about Borges' preferences, less so of Spinoza whom he freely cites. The Spinozist insertion speaks of how things "desire" to persist as they are in their intrinsic nature.³ This Spinozist segue, at first blush jarring and seemingly out of place (unless this is meant as a follow-up on the more Cartesian-inflected lines earlier which informed our hypothesis of the narrator being the mind and Borges being the body), follows upon the idea of perishing. In this crucial turn, we encounter these lines: "I shall remain in Borges, not in myself (if it is true that I am someone)" and "but I recognize myself less in his books than in many others or the laborious strumming of a guitar" (Borges "Borges and I" 246). These telling lines give us the information that the narrator will both remain and perish in Borges, but his uncertainty about his own existence is also deserving of some attention, recalling yet again a recurrent Cartesianism of provisional self-doubt. That he may not identify entirely with Borges, and more with some of the elements of Buenos Aires culture is indeed an instance of constitutive misrecognition detailing both his nostalgia (which the Borges subject seems to lack owing to his ostentation, but yet perhaps once felt) and his strong commitment to the culture in which he resides.

² In turning to the work of Georges Bataille, a true notion of sacrifice entails a complete disregard for the acquisition of an object, and is merely the expenditure of excess energy (cf. Bataille, *The Accursed Share v. 1*). Are we to think of the narrator's sacrifice as being without telos, without purpose, as truly an "accursed share"?

³ And it behooves us to mention that, for Spinoza, all things are already predetermined, and so the perishing of this narrator in Borges is already an accomplished fact in terms of time.

If we are not to commit too heavily to the idea that there is an empirical separation between this narrator and Borges, then there is cause to believe on this rather short account that an advocacy is being tendered toward a separation of being and thinking; this clue already divests this story as serving a Cartesian end, for the equivalence of being and thinking is absolutely necessary for the rationalist project to work.

There are more doubts that the narrator raises as to the reliable existence of things. Not only is he fatalist insofar as he, despite desiring to persist in his own state, will perish in Borges, but this doubt is extended toward both an empirical and rationalist version of the real. If it is true that the narrator is indeed someone, then we are forced to posit two separate beings, that the narrator is real and Borges is merely a construct of the narrator's mind or that we are being given a story from a non-entity who is acting as Borges' ambassador to the real. In literary language, this does not present us with a great deal of difficulty, but in terms of logic it is a paradox. More interesting is the narrator's confession of having once attempted an escape from Borges: "I tried to free myself from him and went from the mythologies of the suburbs to the games with time and infinity, but those games belong to Borges now and I shall have to imagine other things" (Borges "Borges and I" 247). If we are to follow the narrator's earlier claim that he resides in Borges, how would escape be tenable, or even possible for that matter? Let us tender that at some point in time, it could have been the case that the narrator was not in Borges. The immediate question would emerge as to where this narrator resided prior to Borges, what is the nature of this narrator (is he narration itself, a figural representation finding itself in a peculiar situation where the mask changes place with the mask-wearer?), and the origin of this narrator. During this period of escape, the narrator spoke of his spiritual re-communion with the people, occupying himself with "the mythologies of the suburbs" and "the games of time and infinity" (Borges "Borges and I" 247) that he now states belong strictly to Borges. The narrator claims that he has surrendered everything over to Borges, these items included, which gives more flesh to our initial paradox of the existential property of the narrator as distinct from Borges insofar as possession that

can be surrendered (implying a clash of wills) is usually a quality we ascribe to autonomous agents. We garner the impression that this surrender was particularly violent and sorrowful, that it was done in a despairing resignation. The narrator, defeated, has now to imagine other things that will sustain him, that will continue to ensure his autonomy as it degrades and denatures with the ever-increasing power of Borges. But even this brief respite of a person cornered gives way to resigned cynicism, for the narrator acknowledges that even these newfound occupations will be surrendered to Borges eventually. At first speculative blush, one may assume that the narrator is an analogue for future time that constantly dissolves in the static moment of the present (played by Borges), but, again, although this reading is of great interest to the temporal aspects of this story, we leave that in lieu of our current trajectory.

The narrator mentions a second possible recipient of his surrenders: oblivion. As innocuous as this may seem, oblivion presents us with a signature event: death. We know that death is usually something that happens to living things, though we are liberal in our application and usage to extend it metaphorically to such linguistic occurrences as "the death of an era" or "a dead option." So, again, as we are presented with what appears to be a decisive clue, we are given yet another enigma where even the signal feature of death is not enough in itself to declare the existence or autonomy of the narrator as distinct from Borges.

Lastly, there is a troubling line that highlights this perplexing text, a one line flourish dropped at the end of the text which we are left to ponder: "I do not know which of us has written this page" (Borges "Borges and I" 247). The operating words of "which" and "us" reifies the division between two separate entities, both capable of writing. The question of authorship is left to the reader to determine — or to leave as an aporia, an open-ended text. But what we do discover is that there are too many epistemic lacunas and doubts that do not fully satisfy our demands to prove that, indeed, two separate entities exist in this story.

SOLUTION 2: THE NARRATOR IS BORGES

This formulation would strike the reader as more sensible, for even when considering fictional texts that utilize fictional characters, they are being “narrated” into existence by an author who wrote the book. It is only by our suspense of disbelief that we attribute any degree of reality to the characters as independent speakers. But even in this reading solution, we are still confronted with a nascent rationalist enterprise in all its misleading ornament, for we are presented with a host of salient clues that posit dualism in all its import. The average reader may or may not clue into this as an act of natural language, but by the same token we do not preclude this possibility. In a rationalist understanding, we must retreat to form and regulative principles to better assist our understanding of the text; but in the project we are undertaking, we only grant provisional license to a rationalist reading as another way in which we can make the requisite connections within the body of the story. As with any reminiscently metonymic enterprise, we must consider this solution as containing under its banner a few constituent movements – or subsets of interpretation.

- a) Thematic relation: Is there a thematic to the roles that distinguish between the two aspects of a single entity, Borges, as between ACTOR and PATIENT? If so, and if the figural usage is dependent upon the idea of its one day “perishing”, does this entail that the function of narration as it pertains to Borges is a finite, and thereby telic operation?
- b) Abstractive relation: Can we assert that “Narrator” is merely an abstraction from the identity description of Borges, or conversely:
- c) Hyperonymy relation: Could we consider the narrator as being a hyponym of Borges, just as he may also have other constituent parts of his psychological manifestations acting as hyponyms to assist in the description of this identity of Borges?
- d) Inchoative relation: Could we consider the narrating function as an inchoative development inhering and subsisting in Borges, as a change of state?

Doubtless, we could here construct other possible scenarios that would equate Borges with the narrator, but these may suffice now

for brief illustration on how we could go about enumerating the scenarios that would then go into a mapping of this text. What we know from the confines of the text, and what we bring to it in terms of our own shared meaning, is that the narrator appears to assert an independent existence apart from the entity known as Borges. This indicates that the narrator believes some proposition p and thereby sets into motion for us a counterfactual instance for mapping. That is, if the narrator is not Borges, it is possible that the narrator believes that p whereas Borges may believe that *not-p*. Despite this logical difference, the reader may still hold to the notion that the narrator and Borges are one and the same. Our question is, assuming a general competence among readers of this story, what indicators exist in this story that would cause us to dispute against the literal-logical reading of this text wherein Borges and the narrator are two distinct entities?

Ostensibly, if we were to rewrite the subtext, it would sound to us as if Borges was asserting that his narrator most definitely refers to himself (but can we trust this Borges whose vanity and pretension, his propensity for magnifying and falsifying things, may lead us astray from the truth?). The narrator, in this formulation, is a property predicated of Borges, but only if we suspend the existence of the narrator as autonomous and allow our cognition to split an individual into "parts" or "moments" of self. We perform this operation whenever we make the statement, "he was not himself today", in which instance we do not mean it literally, for it would be preposterous to claim that some person p can suddenly not be that person p . So, perhaps when the narrator critiques Borges for being vain, we are not to take this literally, just as we are comfortable with splitting a psyche into distinct parts. Creating these separations of the self is intrinsically part of our everyday understanding and mediation of the self. Yet, a nagging doubt remains, and we are given a very jarring instance where we are not satisfied with the proposition that Borges and the narrator are just two parts of one whole, and so we must examine the reasons why this is the case. One possibility is that the example of this separation of the self is not conventional; that is, we do not commonly make this crucial and conscious act of separation between our narrating and non-narrating self. As speak-

ers, we are always engaged in narrating on some level or another. But to the degree that Borges' story hyperbolizes and objectifies the narrative function as an entity we feel serves as a subject-in-itself worthy of a capital N narrator gives us cause for suspicion. And, to give credit to the stylistic skill and brevity of Borges' work, there are no explicit mentions that Borges are one person in any traditional understanding of selfhood. Through syncopation, the readers are given only scant clues and fanciful details that may or may not yield more clues in solving this riddle, if this riddle will yield at all to solution. Moreover, despite the almost salve-like quality of the lines which state the narrator's demise *in* Borges, thereby indicating unity of the subject and object in a somewhat Hegelian fashion, there are a host of other more contrary clues that do not settle the matter entirely.⁴ Certainly we can repose and declare this a mere surrealist document that personifies things, non-things, non-people and the like. And, granted, we do personify these items in conventional language, but not to the extent to which we may confuse a more metaphorical understanding for a literal one. Borges goes to great pains to make this separation between this textual Borges and the narrator almost explicitly literal, yet undecidedly so.

In a brief list of textual clues given throughout this text, we learn that if Borges is the narrator, Borges has a relationship with himself that is not hostile, Borges justifies his own life by writing, Borges gives everything to Borges (or oblivion), Borges falsifies and magnifies himself, Borges once attempted an escape from Borges, and one day Borges will perish in Borges. These are troubling propositions, but they follow from a declaration that the narrator is Borges. We may not wish to remain committed to this reading either on this basis.

More troubling still is the notion that Borges not only resides in himself, but that he is not himself (where the narrator claims that he is not in Borges, but will one day perish in him). This sets up a logical contradiction where Borges both is and is not. Temporally speak-

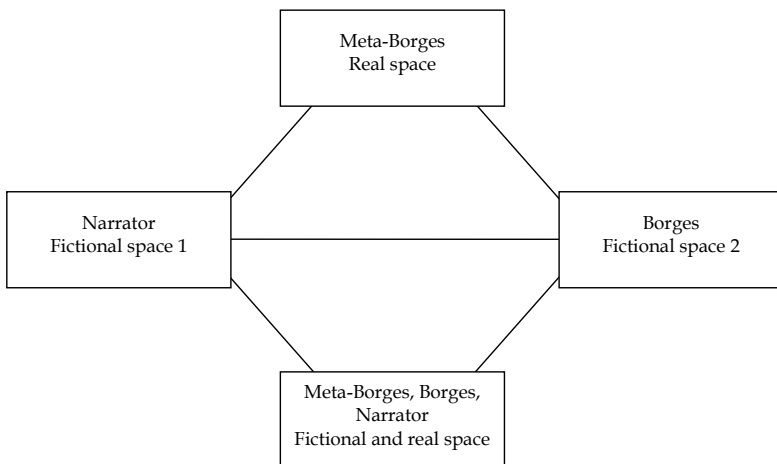
⁴ A Hegelian reading of this text, carefully following the movement of determination-negation throughout, would prove quite intriguing, but we omit this "gesture" for lack of space.

ing, we could assert this as in "I am now, and I will one day (in death) no longer be." However, the added clause problematizes even this explanation, for it is implied that the narrator (who is Borges) will perish in Borges, and will survive as a kind of residual presence in Borges. This is to say that Borges, if he is also the narrator, will be both alive and dead at the same time. The reader must now settle the disjunction of Borges or not-Borges, and the riddle of authorship. In a binary system of opposites, harkening back to the Parmenidean rule, something is or is not (and we should mention here that the Greek *ouk estin* for Parmenides was not an allowable utterance lest one lapse into a logical contradiction—just as modern science cannot claim the non-existence of something without violating the law of induction). Are we to infer that in some bizarre postulation that Borges somehow represents the narrator who represents Borges (who, in turn, represents the narrator in a vicious circle)? This would, indeed, set up a circular paradox, one that is linked to the idea of naming and identity. On this point, we could perhaps just hang up the entire operation and withdraw, claiming that the text is an irresolvable paradox and nothing more, but speculation drives us on to quest further for some sort of reasonable explanation. In order to do this, we may require taking our leave of reasonable explanation and going forth into uncharted terrain. We have yet to consider the Borges behind the curtain, the progenitor of this discourse. This will unduly complicate matters, but it is necessary if we are to be thorough in our mapping. Our next possible solution will perhaps be as equally bizarre as the text that inspired it.

SOLUTION 3: META-BORGES

For this solution (a somewhat quasi-Kantian one), we must posit one real person, meta-Borges (the author of *Borges and I*), and two fictional beings: the narrator and Borges-as-he-appears in the story. This amounts to these three implicit statements:

- a) I, meta-Borges, am fictionalizing myself (where I=narrator and Borges).
- b) I, meta-Borges, have split my fictional self into two.
- c) I, meta-Borges, have personified both Borges-as-he-appears and the narrator.



Note here that if the meta-Borges exists then so do both Borges-as-he-appears and the narrator. For the readers, the narrator entails the existence of Borges-as-he-appears, and when put into a larger counterfactual operation, it appears in this fashion:

$$MB \rightarrow (B \rightarrow N)$$

Meta-Borges (in this formulation) acts as the antecedent of the Borges-Narrator conditional. What is at issue here is proving the existence of the Borgesian ego, and to do this we must prove the existence of the narrator (at least textually), and ultimately to do this we must prove that the meta-Borges exists, as the over-author and origin point of the two sub-Borges. So, in a simple operation of *modus ponens*, asserting the existence of the meta-Borges as given ("there is an author who wrote the text about a narrator and an ego"), we prove the textual existence of the narrator, who in turn by the same logical process proves the existence of the absent Borges ego.

In this solution, meta-Borges satisfies the intentionality of the text as separate from the intentionality of the narrator in the text, thereby positing the meta-Borges (the author) as the guiding Reason of the text.

In a more commonsense view, the meta-Borges is the real author that lurks behind the text, who sets the semi-fictional characters of Borges and narrator into motion. These are meant to be extensions

or projections of the real Borges and how he reflects upon himself. As a self-reflexive critique, artfully done through figural representation, he utilizes the innovative strategy of textually abstracting these properties of himself as if they were two distinct entities rather than two attributes of himself. With the assistance of the narrator, the task of performing a metanarrative is fulfilled insofar as the narrator can openly reflect on the semi-fictional Borges and ostensibly on the issue of writing and experience. Using the narrator as the mouthpiece, meta-Borges comments on the more repugnant features of his being, shedding light upon his occasional inauthenticity, but also salvaging himself with the use of the narrator to whom we feel a kind of pity. The narrator is constrained, and there is a direct pathos that is evoked, that this "false Borges" is some kind of tyrannical force that keeps the narrator in bondage, as evidenced by the narrator's lack of free will in having to surrender everything to Borges the ego. And no doubt, in the real writer's life, such constraints exist in the mind: control of subject matter, use of hyperbole (as a means of distorting, magnifying and falsifying real events), editing of content, etc. The narrator is set up as a journalist and martyr, for he both reports back to Borges all that he sees and experiences, and sacrifices his whole "being" to an enterprise that will most likely not justify or save him. The narrator is aware of his own mortality, destined that his utility will one day be at an end. And though the narrator has made attempts to flee the constraints of being in Borges, these have all come to naught, and he still holds out the vague hope that he will be justified through Borges writing. In Spinozistic terms, the narrator cannot but be more than a mental complement to Borges.

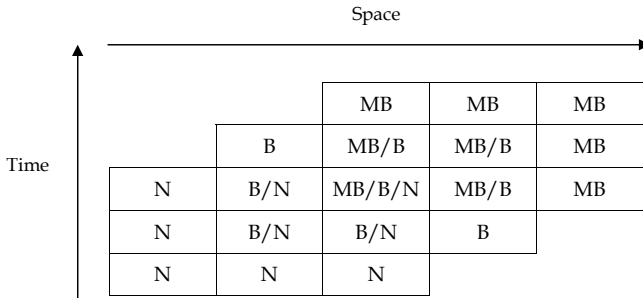
How do we know to make these divisions in this poetic portrait of Borges, to splice the narrative into three "figures", two of which are transfigurations of the One that is meta-Borges? The reader's knowledge is given cues throughout the text. Firstly, the reader understands that Borges was a real writing being, that he lived in a particular time and occupied a variety of spaces we could trace through the movements he made and the documents he left behind. We know of Borges in almost the same way the narrator knows him:

through artifacts.⁵ Through the narrator we become privy to the intimate details of Borges such as his eclectic preferences, that he was a professor, a writer, that he received mail. We also learn about how vain he could be, how he postured under the nominal banner of writerdom. However, we are also given clues conveyed by the narrator, for the narrator resides in Borges, and so we could state that the narrator also represents some of the characteristics of Borges – if only by an extension of being part of the same being known as Borges.

Essentially, this story boils down to an issue of time and the ego. Through an enumeration of pronoun references, we learn very little aside from the fact that the references to the narrator and Borges are roughly equal in number, and that there are two special instances when they are united by “ours” and “us” to denote a shared situation. But what requires more serious consideration is how these three figures can be mapped. For this, I employ a cell method where we can graphically depict the distribution of sub-entities in the meta-Borges schema. The benefit of this method, inspired by Fauconnier and Turner’s mental spacing model, is something intrinsically valuable to the mapping of this story, illustrating an almost mathematical array of the relation between the three figures. These are figured by overlapping cells where each cell (composed of nine sub-cells) denotes one of the “figures.” The space and time arrows are meant to designate the process of development; for indexical reference, we the readers are privy to the middle cell (MB/B/N) where the scene of the text is taking place for us. As we will demonstrate, the past is dominated by the romantic narrator, the present by the “death” of the narrator as the Borges ego succeeds in domination and there is a realization of this tension by the meta-Borges (also signaling his emergence). The future time is my speculation, an extension of what most likely would occur based on prior developments in this progression. Note that in each successive cell of nine sub-cells, something of the previous moment of Borges is retained in

⁵ An additional reading is omitted here that would also be of interest. What if the narrator is the reader, and that as we read, we narrate the text we are reading? This would render this text as a veiled second-person point of view.

the finished product (strengthening a case to submit this text to a Hegelian reading).



Note here the symmetry in proportion between N and MB. Moreover, we could consider this table of cells as indicative of the spatio-temporal blend of all three figures in a unity. Our justification in doing so is both reasonably and textually supported. In terms of the former, we know that the romantic figure of Borges the narrator preceded Borges the recognized writer in both space and time. As for the latter, the narrator posits a future time when he dies and Borges the writer survives. It would not be too much of a conjecture to postulate a future time when Borges the writer also perishes due to obscurity or the meta-Borges realizing this repugnant ego and making steps toward its annihilation. The blank areas at the limits of space and time indicate the death of these functions in meta-Borges, the absence of their existence in the composite when only meta-Borges remains in this curious dialectic of the self. We the readers are transported to a very unique place in space and time: the singular convergence of the three Borgesian figures before this dialectic consumes the narrator, and eventually Borges the ego.

Meta-Borges writes from the perspective of the narrator about Borges the writer. Borges represents the authorial ego, as indicated throughout the text by his list of accomplishments (professorial position, published works in a biographical dictionary, popularity suggested by volume of mail). The symmetry in our mapping result between meta-Borges and the narrator can be interpreted by their mutual sense of honesty: the narrator as the innocent and clean,

meta-Borges as the one who will subsequently be cleansed and innocent again once the Borges persona is dead (however, the stains of the past will never be fully removed). This symmetry can also be seen as a before and after picture—a before the ego and a survival after the ego is vanquished. They are both seriously afflicted by the ego crimes of Borges the writer, a figure who believes that the writing's purpose is to be selfish in design and not in the interests of a grand cultural history. The narrator appears to suggest that the work, coming from the people, belongs to the people, not to Borges. For the dying narrator, the issue of flight directly concerns fleeing from the monstrous ego creature of Borges the writer. We base this on the notion that the narrator is the earlier, romantic version of meta-Borges when he was only a modest writer with a deeper connection to his native Buenos Aires. The narrator sees himself more in the simplicity of the people, guitar strumming, and folkish myths than in the conflated texts of Borges. The narrator's eventual perishing would signal the death of this romantic and simple side of meta-Borges, for the narrator fades away slowly over time as he "little by little" gives everything to Borges.

The narrator is uncertain whether he has an I to speak of, and whether this notion of an I is inherently pernicious seeing how Borges' strong sense of I has led to so many distortions and a disconnection from the people. The ego drives the work, not honesty. Not to say that all the pages are invalid, as the narrator charitably offers, but that they become increasingly tainted by an encroaching egotist view that desires popularity, honours, and acclaim. How do we deal with the death of the narrator? What will become of this attribute of meta-Borges? When the narrator perishes in Borges, leaving only an "instant" of himself behind as a kind of surviving residue, what remains will simply be the narrating function (empty and devoid of true authentic substance). The mapping changes to reflect this, where the narrating function alone is retained in Borges:

B	B	B
B	B/N	B/N
B	B/N	B/N

However, Borges the writer will meet the same fate as he is vanquished by meta-Borges' self-cleansing:

MB	MB	MB
MB	MB/B	MB/B
MB	MB/B	MB/B

As we mentioned above, meta-Borges will still bear the stains of the past, and this notion is retained in the mapping. Meta-Borges will never be innocent again, but he will have finally subdued his ego component. The dialectic between the narrator and Borges the ego is resolved by a synthesis that gives birth to the meta-Borges, who in turn retains the prior movements of the two Borges in his own constitution.

The benefit of this mapping-blend that may extend beyond the integration model resides in the fact that we are able to control for multiple and simultaneous entities contained in one actual being. However, this method may not have universal linguistic applicability, for it is a method tailor made for this very anomalous text. In fact, special texts may require innovative and equally special mappings. Before we go on to explicate the results of this blend in regards to other textual indicators and how these fit into our blend, it behooves us to mention a temporal benefit of this particular mapping for this particular instance. In the third column (space) and the third row (time), we have an immediate present in which the text is located. That is, the reader is presented with the appearance/birth of the meta-Borges and the death of the narrator. The emergence of the meta-Borges occurs exactly when there is self-reflection of the Borgesian duality between narrator and Borges the writer. It is, in some very rough sense, the product of a Hegelian dialectic, a synthesis of *Borges the writer* and *Borges the narrator* to form the new entity, the meta-Borges. Moreover, the space and time in which we read about these figures, the intersection of column three and row three, contains all of them. Meta-Borges, Borges, and the narrator are all the subjects of the discourse, and we are able to trace their development from the past and into the future.

A FEW OUTSTANDING ISSUES.

FOLLY OF THE EGO

The narrator indicates the folly of the Borgesian ego. The metaphor of stopping mechanically is the first concrete example of the narrator's servitude, for the narrator is being compared to a machine. Machines, other than being very abrupt and analytical, have no self-agency; they must be put into motion by a guiding force. That he is made to meander about in Buenos Aires in search of details to pad Borges' literature expands the MAN IS MACHINE metaphor, conveying that the narrator is not taking any joy in his observations (as he so desires), but that he is merely a cold harvester of text-worthy items in the service of Borges' demands. And so the narrator examines the details of a gate and an arch in a machinic fashion.

The second linguistic trigger in this forensic exercise of determining the folly of Borges' ego occurs when he is compared to a vain actor. An actor plays parts and roles. If Borges' is only playing at being a writer, then the narrator's presupposition is that a genuine writer actually cares about the subject matter. To merely accumulate details to create a semblance of genuine text is not in itself a genuine operation.

The narrator uses the word "contrive" in the context of Borges' literature (and we can perhaps see this as a veiled or ironic jab at Borges by giving the lofty title of literature to his work). Contrivance, being pejorative, reinforces the idea that Borges is merely acting.

In a pithy remark, the narrator expresses his view that literature belongs to language and tradition, and not to Borges. The sense in which Borges believes that the work *belongs* to him as the ego of the writing subject communicates a kind of futile possession that is incommensurate with the true nature of literature. The second sense of belonging conveys the second aspect of folly where the narrator states that everything belongs to either Borges or oblivion. The word oblivion triggers an understanding in the reader of futility and meaninglessness. The disjunction of Borges and oblivion is more to the effect of a conjunction, equating the ego to oblivion, as merely a diaphanous and blustering nothingness. Already, in the acting metaphor, we find that the ego is essentially false and empty, and so

this distinction between Borges and oblivion is not a matter of binary opposition. The reliance upon the ego, as suggested by this conjunction, leads to nothingness in the end, contrary to the expectations of the egotist writer who seeks valorization and immortality. The suburban mythologies and the games of infinity and time that the narrator enjoyed now belong (in the nihilistic sense) to Borges, and it is just this arrogance that portrays a deeper folly of the ego in thinking that these myths and games could ever be possessed.

AUTHORSHIP

Who is writing the story? This question may in the final analysis appear moot, for the "moral" of this parable is that there is no "I" in the written word; the author does not *own* the work, for the intellectual property is transferred to the ages. To assert the "I, author" is futile, as the narrator on occasion alludes. But are we getting the whole account? The narrator's confession is mediated through Borges the writer's writing, and so could prove to be a distortion—and we already know that the narrator is not free to express himself, that he is in thrall to Borges who owns all of the narrator's thoughts.

Meta-Borges is thoroughly dissatisfied with what he has become. In parable form he has related his self-dissatisfaction that is in the spirit of irony: we would expect that the accomplished and recognized writer has succeeded in his tasks and can now experience the joy of his acclaim. But for meta-Borges, this prospect is the source of a great melancholy, and hence this parable. This compares to another parable of his alluding to Shakespeare, recycling the theatre metaphor of "Borges and I": "That very day he arranged to sell his theatre. Within a week he had returned to his native village, where he recovered the trees and rivers of his childhood and did not relate them to the others his muse had celebrated, illustrious with mythological allusions and Latin terms" (Borges "Everything and Nothing" 249). Despite the parable's reference to Shakespeare, it functions as a metaparable concerning how Borges felt about his own life as a writer and his deep yearning to escape the theatre of the persona and return to his roots in the romantic past. In a sense, this is a replay of the Miltonic return where, in a powerful literary moment in *Paradise Lost*, Satan reaches the fringes of Heaven and finds there

his former seat from which he is eternally blockaded from ever repossessing. Borges could not return to his romantic roots, and this anguish led him to write these powerful parables.

And so to return to the question of authorship, we know that the last glimmer of Borges' romantic self strains to be heard, but is being drowned out by the demands of his persona that he had unwittingly built. Meta-Borges, in the auspice of the dying narrator, conveys this deep anguish as a confession and as an apology between two epochs in his own life. As a metanarrative, meta-Borges reflects and reminisces upon which he could never experience again. This story foreshadows the possibility of his complete abandonment of writing, and so functions quite powerfully on a level that would touch most writers. In a more general reading audience, the pathos of the poetics here operate on the notion of the impossible return to the past, to times when we were much happier.

RELEVANCE OF THE MODEL

The bifurcation of the self across an abstract temporal terrain presents a difficulty to the kind of mapping and blending we are accustomed to with the integration model. However oblique this offshoot of the integration model may be, it has proven itself to be a fecund operation in which to understand this rather enigmatic Borgesian text. In fact, it is always worthwhile for linguists to be very cautious when approaching Borges' work that still, to this day, has not exhausted its cleverness and the problems it poses for semantic interpreters. To the unconvinced linguist, this Borgesian example may only be an exceptional case, and that such cases do not occur with enough regularity to warrant any revision to the integration model. But we as speakers commonly perform this operation of splitting up our lives into temporal units that sometimes overlap. Absolute distinctions are very hard to make when we consider identity, especially when it pertains to very complex states of being occurring in a single individual. For example, when is a drug addict no longer an addict? The addict could speak of a time of addiction, of convalescence, and of overcoming, but these lines are blurred by the very terms that are used: is one an addict or a former addict during convalescence? Matters of this rather deceptively facile example give us

cause to ponder about the limits of absolute and binary distinctions between terms employed by linguists, and may not be solved in any definitive or decisive way; in case of fact, we have seen here how a one and a half page story could not be adequately and succinctly examined without losing a degree of complexity and rigour we might have otherwise lost with a cursory mapping.

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