

BORGES, DANTE AND BARBUSSE
A CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS A COMPARATIVE READING



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It was Emir Rodríguez Monegal who, to my knowledge, first indicated the impact of Henri Barbusse's *L'Enfer* on Borges (118-19). Borges seems to have read the novel in 1919, when he was still an adolescent. Referring to its content, the Uruguayan critic points out what above all must have impressed the young and inexperienced Borges of those years: "The reading of *Hell* must have had a great influence on Georgie's view of the adult world. With the exception of the book on Balkan sex life, *Hell* was probably the first book he came across that dealt explicitly with sex" (119). However, given the critic's thorough knowledge of Borges's work, it is startling that he failed to notice the thematic coincidences between the two authors and, in particular, the striking parallel between the short story "El Aleph" and Barbusse's novel.

In spite of this, there are scarcely any references to Barbusse in Borges's work. This is all the more surprising considering that the theme of the novel must have been very close to his emotional and intellectual concerns. Indeed the year 1919 stands at the centre of a highly intense period in Borges's life. Emotionally, it is crucial because it follows the year in which he is thought to have experienced

a humiliating encounter with a prostitute in Geneva (Rodríguez Monegal 113, 349; Canto 114-17; Woscoboinik 144). On the other hand, it signals the end of his study years in Switzerland and his journey to Spain, where he was to promote the literary tenets of the ultraist movement. This was his first public commitment as a man of letters. Now Barbusse was a dominant socialist thinker of the time, and Borges's rejection of his early ideological tenets may in part account for his silence with regard to the work which so much agitated him. I believe, however, that it was because of the highly emotional import of his reading (which may have to do with a repression of the sexual issue) that he, perhaps involuntarily, preferred to delete it from his memory. As Borges's biographic sketch of the French author reveals, his appreciation of this work was both literary and philosophical, and it shows in germ some of the motifs which he will develop later on in his fiction. However, the crucial and, in many ways, disturbing element of the novel (its explicit sexual content) is omitted. This is what he says about *L'Enfer*:

Barbusse ensayó la escritura de una obra clásica, de una obra intemporal. Quiso fijar los actos esenciales del hombre, libres de las diversas coloraciones del espacio y del tiempo. Quiso exponer el Libro general que late bajo todos los libros. Ni el argumento — los diálogos en prosa poética y las escenas lúbricas o mortales que la rendija de un tabique de hotel concede al narrador —, ni el estilo, más o menos derivado de Hugo, permitieron la buena ejecución de aquel propósito platónico: del todo inaccesible, por lo demás. Desde 1919 no releo ese libro; recuerdo aún la grave pasión de su prosa. También, alguna justa declaración de la soledad central de los hombres. ("Henri Barbusse" *OC* 4: 267; See also "Nota sobre Walt Whitman", *OC* 1: 249-53)

Borges highlights the epic scope in Barbusse's novel, its ambition to capture a universal view of man in a hypostatic, timeless dimension. This element, I think, is fundamental for the appreciation of Borges's mature work, for although as a writer he opted for other kinds of expression, as a reader he privileged the epic form, and this left clear traces in his writing (consider, for instance, the role that authors such as Homer, Virgil, and Milton, as well as the Saga cycles

of Scandinavian literature, play both in his poetry and in his prose).¹ What is striking, however, is the way in which the above excerpt anticipates his critique of a total writing as exemplified later in Carlos Argentino Daneri's all-embracing poem "La Tierra". But this is not all. A closer inspection of *L'Enfer* reveals far more than what is possible to perceive in Borges's biographical note.

Barbusse's novel takes place within the dark room of an old, second rate hotel in Paris. In this rather claustrophobic setting (where vision is taken to its extreme act of transgression) the novel carries the reader to the centre of a stage where the drama of the human condition is enacted in its sheer nakedness. It is a complex reading, one that shows both the misery and sublimity of the human existence in its attempt to break the primordial isolation of the self through love. This movement is never accomplished either because of the uncontrollable nature of the human passions or because of man's radical negation of the transcendental. As one of its characters says: "We are divinely alone, and the heavens have fallen upon us" (261).²

One of the most striking features of *L'Enfer* is Barbusse's description of sensual love. This is characterized by him as a brutal force leading the lovers to the moment of union after which they are left in a state of emptiness and confusion. Consider the following passages:

C'est vrai qu'ils sont là et qu'ils n'ont rien qui les unit. Il y a du vide entre eux. On a beau parler, agir, se révolter, se lever furieusement, se débattre et menacer, l'isolement vous dompte. Je vois qu'ils n'ont rien qui les unit, rien. (...) Il n'y a pas au monde deux êtres qui parlent le même langage. (...) Quand on écoute, on n'entend guère; quand on entend, on ne comprend guère. (...) ils tombent chacun, ils ne savent où, la bouche et les bras entr'ouverts. Jouir ensemble, quelle désunion! (148-51)

Elle avoue ce que taisait le virginal silence; elle montre son brutal amour. (...) On dirait deux damnés occupés à horriblement souffrir, dans un silence haletant d'où va s'élever un cri. (...) J'ai vu l'être mul-

¹ The opposition between the lyrical and the epic in Borges's creative drive is noted by Fernández Moreno 15.

² I quote from the 15th edition [1916]. For an English translation see *Hell*.

tiple et monstrueux qu'ils font. On dirait qu'ils cherchent à humilier, à sacrifier tout ce qui était beau en eux. (...) Puis, ce sont des bruits inarticulés qu'elle laisse tomber en une sorte d'éclat de rire. (...) Et après, comme les autres, comme toujours, comme eux-mêmes le feront souvent dans l'étrange avenir, ils se relèvent lourdement et disent: "Qu'avons-nous fait!" Ils ne savent pas ce qu'ils ont fait. (361-65)

And yet, despite all this, the consumation of carnal love can still be a purifying force amidst the dark and thick delusions of human life:

L'amour! Cette fois, il n'y a pas eu pour pousser l'un sur l'autre ces deux êtres, de stimulant équivoque. (...) S'ils ont violé des souvenirs et des vertus, c'est par la force même de leur amour, *et leur ardeur a tout purifié comme un bûcher. Ils furent innocents dans le crime et dans la laideur. Ils n'ont pas, ceux-là, de regret, de remords; ils continuent à triompher. Ils ne savent pas ce qu'ils ont fait; ils croient qu'ils se sont unis.* (365-66; my italics)

This view of eroticism is in accord with Borges's representation of sexual love in "Llamarada", a youthful poem composed in the same year he read *L'Enfer* (compiled by the author in the first edition of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, the poem belongs to Borges's ultraist period in Spain where it was published under the title "La llama"). The language and imagery used here by Borges are of an amazing intensity, one that is absent from the sentimentality of his early love lyrics. Consider, in particular, the final stanza of the poem with its striking *ultraísta* metaphor of the crucifixion for the sexual union of the lovers:

Espoleados - deseando deslumbrarnos y perdernos en las culminaciones carnales - en la crucifixión de cuerpos tremantes. (...) Y la llama se hunde en el gran crepúsculo enfermo - que en girones desgarran los grises vientos. ("Llamarada" *Fervor*, no page number)

As I show elsewhere, there are several elements here that can be related to the Paolo and Francesca episode in Dante's *Inferno* (Núñez-Faraco 29-30). In particular, I identify the presence of the word "tremantes", which is *hapax legomenon* in Borges's work, as a direct reference to *Inferno* V, 136: "la bocca mi basciò tutto tremante". On the other hand, in *L'Enfer* Barbusse uses the same term to describe the lovers' physical and emotional state in sexual union,

and in one occasion he actually reinforces the idea with a simile which is not entirely remote from Borges's image, especially if we consider the biblical link between the tree of paradise and the cross. Thus Borges's metaphor ("en la crucifixión de cuerpos tremantes") can also be closely related to Barbusse's simile ("trembling like two entwined trees", 61). In the latter, furthermore, there is an echo of the metaphor of the crucifixion, although not in the sense Borges gives it in his poem. Indeed, whilst his image refers to the physical union of the lovers, in Barbusse it describes the *voyeur's* intensely masochistic participation in the act he witnesses. Although the metaphor of the crucifixion reappears in the novel, Barbusse does not link the terms in the way Borges does (note, however, the simile of the lovers like two tall whirling flames in the second quotation):

(...) Mon immobilité prolongée me broyait les muscles des reins et des épaules, mais je m'aplatissais contre le mur, collant mes yeux au trou; je me *crucifiais* pour jouir du cruel et solennel spectacle. Je l'embrassais, cette vision, de toute ma figure, je l'étreignais de tout mon corps. Et le mur semblait me rendre les battements de mon cœur.

(...) Les deux êtres enserrés l'un par l'autre *tremblaient* comme deux arbres mêlés. (96-97; my italics, ellipsis in the original)

Ils s'embrassèrent *violemment*. Ils tourbillonnaient ; on eût dit *deux flammes* hautes.

Sa figure brûlant la sienne, il lui cria:

—Je t'aime. Je te veux... Ah! Pendant mes nuits d'insomnie et de désir, étendu, *les bras grands ouverts devant ton image*, comme ma solitude était *crucifiée!* (360; my italics)

On the other hand, there is a striking echo between the erotic imagery in some of the poems written by Borges at this time (take, for instance, "Himno del mar" and "Paréntesis pasional") and a passage in *El Caudillo*, the novel published by his father in 1921. Note in the following excerpt the images of the flame, the mask and the cross, as well as the comparison with the sea and the impetus of sexual desire:

Si buscas la belleza, yo soy la perfección del espejismo que persigues. —Una sola curva de mi cuerpo, vaso sagrado, arca de los destinos de la raza, refuta el saber de *tu vetusta filosofía* y es la *estética* misma de las academias, *soy creación de lo infinito y de lo eterno.* (...)

Bálsamo soy, y soy ternura, mis brazos abiertos para ti mi prometido *son cruz de redención sálvate en ellos...* Las fuerzas vitales de su juventud contenidas por un temperamento soñador é idealista, respondieron al llamado. Como *las olas barren las arenas* su ser sintióse barrido por alta y pasional marea. (...) El corazón *ardió en llama* tan intensa que á su lado lo demás palidecía. El amor mismo que él creyó tan profundo y duradero era una sombra incolora, un fugitivo tembloroso ante el sacudimiento del deseo.—Ya no estaba como antes atado por preferencias ó prejuicios á este ó aquel afecto, á esta ó aquella mujer.—Lo que antes fuera individual y limitara su elección, se apartaba, era secundario, perdía realidad ante la enorme realidad del sexo. (...) Hallóse transformado, estaba libre, perfectamente libre de toda orientación determinada, de toda vana disputa, era solo el hombre *involado y arrollado por la pasión única de la hombría*. —Lina, Marisabel y todas cuantas deseaba ó poseyera, nada le importaban, había cesado de amarlas ó quizás las amaba á todas.—Su cuerpo solo existía tenso en la busca de *la mujer que se esconde detrás de todas las mujeres cuando la careta multiforme desaparece*. (188-189, my italics)³

This parallel suggests an ambiguous attempt on Borges's part to assert his masculinity (by imitating his father's rhetoric) while, at the same time, he uses this imagery to oppose the father figure and pronounce his own views on sex.

In Barbusse's novel, mirrors act as counterparts to the duplicity of human beings revealing their true moral and existential condition ("Je me devine dans la glace plus que je ne me vois. Je vois ma faiblesse et ma captivité", 15). More specifically, with regard to the female figure, the mirror becomes the woman's secret accomplice in the intimacy of her chamber. This notion is undoubtedly implied in Borges's use of the mirror in "Prose poems for I. J.", written in 1934 ("Two English Poems", in later editions). Note the thematic and lexical coincidence between the following lines in Borges's first English poem:

³ I have kept the original accentuation. The image of the mask reappears in a much later poem, "El amenazado", which Borges rejected for its lack of ambiguity and overt intimacy: "Hay un poema, creo que se llama 'El amenazado', que taché de mis libros porque era demasiado íntimo. (...) La poesía necesita algo fabuloso, algo ambiguo, y le faltaba a ese poema. Era una especie de interjección que no podía permitirme en público" (Cited by Woscoboink 192, cf. Rodríguez Monegal, 185-86. See note 4 below).

The big wave brought you.
 Words, any words, your laughter; and you so lazily and incessantly
 beautiful. We talked and you have forgotten the words.
 The shattering dawn finds me in a deserted street of my city.
 Your profile turned away, the sounds that go to make your name,
 the lilt of your laughter: these are illustrious toys⁴ you have left me.
 (...)

 Your dark rich life...
 I must get at you, somehow: I put away those illustrious toys you
 have left me, I want your hidden look, your real smile – that lonely,
 mocking smile your cool mirror knows.

and Barbusse's passage:

Elle se sourit à la glace, de deux façons différentes, et même elle prend
 une pose désappointée, un instant. Elle invente mille petits mouve-
 ments inutiles et utiles... Elle découvre *des gestes de coquetterie* qui,
 comme les gestes de pudeur, revêtent une sorte de beauté austère
 d'être accomplis dans la *solitude*. (...) Je ne la reconnais plus, tandis
qu'elle surgit de l'ombre avec ce masque de soleil; ma je n'ai jamais vu un
 mystère de si près... Je reste là, tout enveloppé de sa lumière, tout
 palpitant d'elle, tout bouleversé par sa présence nue, comme si
 j'avais ignoré jusque là ce que c'est qu'une femme.

Ainsi que tout à l'heure, elle sourit avant que ses yeux se soient déta-
 chés de moi, et je sens la *valeur extraordinaire de ce sourire* et la *richesse*
 de cette figure...

Elle s'en va... Je l'admire, je la respecte, je l'adore; j'ai pour elle une
 sorte d'amour que rien de réel n'abîmera, et qui n'a aucune raison ni

⁴ The expression 'illustrious toys' pertains to a now forgotten author, Joseph Beau-
 mont, *Psyche*, Canto II, "Lust Conquered", par. 189; line 4: "Of all this vain World's
 most illustrious Toys" (I am grateful to Professor Jason Wilson for calling this to my
 attention). This is the typical case in which an expression which seems natural in its
 original context acquires an eccentric character when it is adapted to a new one. The
 implications of the allusion in view of the primary text are quite extraordinary, for
 Borges is virtually admitting, in an utterly private tone, his zeal for chastity (see, in
 particular, pars. 187, 194, 205 of the same canto). Cf. Rodríguez Monegal, 186: "Sex is
 not explicitly presented in most of [Borges's] work because it is presented in a different
 manner: 'weaving through dreams a sexual strife'. (...) This attitude reveals the method
 of his writing. Just as sex is woven in the texture of his dreams, so it is woven in the
 texture of the quotations he uses to mask his private voice". See also Gordon Brother-
 ston's remark, in Borges' *Ficciones* 24-26.

d'espérer, ni de finir. Non, en vérité, je ne savais pas ce que c'était qu'une femme. (50-51; *my italics*)

In both excerpts, then, the woman smiles at herself in the mirror with a posture that suggests her cunning as much as her isolation:

...that lonely, mocking smile your cool mirror knows.

Elle découvre des gestes de coquetterie qui, comme les gestes de pudeur, revêtent une sorte de beauté austère d'être accomplis dans la solitude.

Both passages enhance the woman's beauty with expressions that help to create a mystifying aura around her:

... your laughter; and you so lazily and incessantly beautiful. (...)
Your dark rich life.

... je sens la valeur extraordinaire de ce sourire et la richesse de cette figure...

Elle s'en va... Je l'admire, je la respecte, je l'adore.

In both instances, furthermore, the interplay between light and darkness is fundamental. In Barbusse, the moment of revelation is accompanied by the radiance of the woman's face as if she had literally emerged from the darkness of hell:

Je ne la reconnais plus, tandis qu'elle surgit de l'ombre avec ce masque de soleil; ma je n'ai jamais vu un mystère de si près... Je reste là, tout enveloppé de sa lumière, tout palpitant d'elle, tout bouleversé par sa présence nue, comme si j'avais ignoré jusque là ce que c'est qu'une femme.

In Borges's poem, on the other hand, the moment of revelation is not fulfilled. Rather it is suspended in a hopeless awareness that the narrator's gaze will never meet the woman's eyes in the reflection of her mirror. Hence, as he finds himself alone in the increasing brightness of the morning, her memory remains engulfed in the darkness of unknowing. It is true, nevertheless, that in both cases her existence remains entirely separate from the narrator's. In Barbusse's novel, furthermore, the only certainty about her destiny is death:

C'est ainsi que je l'aperçus dans mon dernier coup d'œil — sans bien comprendre, car on ne comprend jamais tout un départ. Je ne la re-

verrais plus. Tant de grâces allaient se flétrir et se dissiper; tant de beauté, de douce faiblesse, tant de bonheur, étaient perdus. Elle s'enfuyait lentement, vers l'incertaine vie, puis vers la mort certaine. (52-53)

Latter on, in a more pungent remark, he declares: "L'humanité, c'est le désir du nouveau sur la peur de la mort" (326).

In this respect, the theme of mortality in Barbusse's novel presents a tragic counterpart to the satirical portrayal of human vanity which will appear later on in Borges's short stories "El Aleph" and "El Zahir". Here Borges exploits once more the motif of the smile as a token of duplicity, but the bitter irony that pervades the poems of 1934 is turned into mockery and disdain. This shift in attitude is significant because it implies a certain emotional detachment of the author from his writing in a way that he was not able to do in his early work. Rather than confronting his emotions in a direct way, Borges is now aware (and in full control) of the relieving possibilities that caricature and fictionality can offer him. Years later he expressed this dichotomy in the paradoxical closing line of "Borges y yo" ("No sé cuál de los dos escribe esta página", *OC* 2: 186), but the idea is already present in an early essay on Whitman (see "Nota sobre Walt Whitman", *OC* 1: 249-53).

Returning to Barbusse, perhaps the most important link between *L'Enfer* and "El Aleph" is the motif of total vision and its implications on the literary act (a theme which, incidentally, refers us back to the essay on Whitman). I cannot tell whether Borges was aware of this connection when he wrote the short story. It is more likely that Barbusse's novel exerted an unconscious influence on his writing, and that it was due to the combined forces of his memory and imagination that it came out in the story. And yet how are we to explain the puzzling words with which Daneri completes the fourth verse of his poem: "Pero el *voyage* que narro, es... *autour de ma chambre*" (619; italics in the original)? Perhaps this is Borges's humoristic way of acknowledging his indebtedness to Barbusse's novel, whose poetic prose does indeed take place, from beginning to end, within the walls of a hotel room (it is true that the expression is reminiscent of the *voyages imaginaires* so much in vogue in eighteenth-century literature, but I do not see how these connect with the explicit vo-

yeuristic allusion in the story, which must derive from Barbusse). Thus, although there are several other references weaved in the narrative of "El Aleph", the link with *L'Enfer* can contribute to our understanding of its emotional dimension, as much as it gives a definite existential import to some of his early love lyrics.

The passage which attracts my attention in the French novel is the description of a small opening near the ceiling of the protagonist's room. This apparently trivial incident opens up an entirely new cognitive dimension to him. Overwhelmed by the possibility of transgressing the forbidden ("la pensée du sacrilège"), he succumbs to the power that the satanic vision offers him:

En haut, près du plafond, au-dessus de la porte condamnée, il y a une lumière scintillante. (...)

La cloison est trouée là, et par ce trou, la lumière de la chambre voisine vient dans la nuit de la mienne.

Je monte sur mon lit. Je m'y dresse, les mains au mur, j'atteins le trou avec ma figure. (...) Une ouverture se présente à mes yeux, large comme la main, mais invisible d'en bas, à cause des moulures.

Je regarde... je vois... La chambre voisine s'offre à moi, toute nue. (...)

Je domine et je possède cette chambre... Mon regard y entre. J'y suis présent. Tous ceux qui y seront, y seront, sans le savoir, avec moi. (...)

Je ne m'arrête pas à la pensée du sacrilège; le spectacle de l'humanité enfermée entre les murs de ses chambres me semble tout d'un coup trop désirable pour que je puisse le refuser. Je l'attends, et, déjà, j'en ai besoin. (17-19)

Later on, he refers to the voyeuristic experience as a grandiose, joyful vision ("la vision si grande et si heureuse", 55), a spectacle that bestows upon him such a complete view of humanity that it threatens to annihilate his own life impulses:

Je n'ai pas besoin d'une femme. Si je suis troublé au contact des amours, c'est à cause d'une grande pensée et non pas d'un instinct.

(...) Que m'importe la rapide et grossière extase, la comédie sexuelle! J'ai vue sur l'humanité, sur les hommes et les femmes, et je sais ce qu'ils font. (107)

Il n'y a pas de feu mystérieux. J'ai volé la vérité. J'ai vu des choses sacrées, des choses tragiques, des choses pures, et j'ai eu raison; j'ai vu des choses honteuses, et j'ai eu raison. Et par là j'ai été dans le

royaume de vérité, si on peut employer à l'égard de la vérité, sans la souiller, l'expression dont se sert le mensonge et le blasphème religieux. (410-11)

The parallel with Borges's short story hardly needs to be highlighted. The Aleph, it will be recalled, consists of a luminous point in which every object and living creature of the universe can be seen all at once (there is here, as well as in Barbusse's passage, a biblical echo from Luke, IV, 5: "And the devil, taking him up into a high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time"). In order to behold the Aleph, the viewer must go down to the darkness of the basement. There he must lie on the floor and rest his head on a pillow (a pun on the dreamy quality of the scene, but also an echo of Barbusse's novel and its sexual setting). He must then look up and spot the Aleph, which is located in the upper steps of the stairs. All this resembles very much the discovery of the hole shining like a twinkling light in Barbusse's novel. Furthermore, the *voyeuristic* implications of the vision are clearly stated in the story: "Tarumba habrás quedado de tanto curiosar donde no te llaman", exclaims impudently Daneri. Note also the erotic connotation in expressions such as "altivo cuerpo", "cartas obscenas", "lo que deliciosamente había sido Beatriz" and, especially, "el engranaje del amor" (626), clearly a variation of the metaphor of the crucifixion used by Borges in his poem of 1919.⁵

I have already mentioned Barbusse's blunt depiction of sexuality and its impact on the young Borges. Now the vision of the Aleph reveals the truth about the woman with whom the protagonist had been hopelessly in love, and what he understands then is that she could never have been worth of his affection because of her illicit relationship with another man. In other words, the woman's previous experience of sex made it impossible for him to conceive a fulfilling relationship with her. This issue must undoubtedly be related

⁵ This is not to deny Borges's imitation of Dantean passages, such as *Par.* XVII, 16-18; *Par.* XXII, 128-35, 153; *Par.* XXVIII, 16-18, and *Par.* XXX, 61-63. See Paoli 44 and *passim*; Stefanini 54-55 and *passim*. Also, in his study on Borges, John M. Cohen (81) refers to Jacob Boehme's mystical illumination as the source for the vision in "El Aleph". The motif, however, was not new in Borges; see Borello 36-41. See also *Inquisiciones* 124-26.

to the myth of the unblemished woman, which has always been very strong in the Hispanic world. As Estela Canto, the dedicatee of "El Aleph", puts it: "Él sabía que yo no era una de las niñas asomadas a balcones rosados y celestes que pintaba su hermana Norah" (98; compare 116). Perhaps this conflict is at the base not only of his relationship with Estela Canto but also of that first sexual encounter arranged by his father in Geneva. At any rate, it constitutes the emotional core of the story, and the suggestion that there are autobiographical overtones in it renders its composition far more personal than what is generally conceded by critics.⁶

A final remark. With the composition of "Prose poems for I. J.", the theme of love in Borges acquires an ambiguous connotation. This is clear in his treatment of the female figure which dominates the first of the two poems. Here the object of love is surrounded not so much by an aura of mystery as by an impenetrable enigma of duplicity and concealment. This circumstance is reflected in the astral image with which the night is described (sharing the woman's essential quality of darkness and unknowing) as well as in the mirror motif at the end of the poem:

Nights have a habit of mysterious gifts and refusals, of things half given away, half withheld, of joys with a *dark hemisphere*. (...)
Your dark rich life...

I must get at you, somehow: I put away those illustrious toys you have left me, I want your *hidden* look, your real smile – that lonely, mocking smile your cool mirror knows. [My italics]

At the same time, the central emotional theme of the poem ("Your profile turned away, the sounds that go to make your name, the lilt of your laughter"), suggests a link with canto XXXI of Dante's *Paradiso* in which Borges sees the most moving literary description of the separation of the lover from his chaste beloved ("los versos más patéticos que la literatura ha alcanzado", *OC* 3: 372):

⁶ But see Ortega, "'El Aleph' revisitado" 182. Note, however, that my argument here is primarily concerned with the psychological rather than the metaliterary. For a theoretical consideration, see Thiem 97-121; Bratosevich 549-60. See also Ortega, "La primera letra" 3-22; id., "'El Aleph' y el lenguaje epifánico" 93-103.

e quella, sì lontana
 come pare, sorrise e riguardommi;
 poi si tornò a l'eterna fontana. (Lines 91-93)

As in other instances, what Borges achieves in the compositions that I have considered here is a juxtaposition of readings, one which, I think, is not the product of calculation but a natural response of his creative mind to all sorts of literary and psychological associations. It is this multiple resonance that renders Borges's writing so rich in interpretative possibilities.

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