

THE IMMINENCE OF REVELATION
AESTHETICS & POETIC EXPRESSION IN EARLY WITTGENSTEIN & BORGES



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And how try to ask weather THAT can be expressed which cannot be EXPRESSED? Is there no domain outside the facts? (L. Wittgenstein, Notebooks 52e)

I still believe that poetry is the aesthetic act; that poetry is not the poem, for the poem may be nothing more than a series of symbols...Poetry is a magical, mysterious, unexplainable- although not incomprehensible - event. J. L. Borges. Alifano, 37

The goal of this essay is to illuminate the concepts of 'aesthetics' and 'poetic expression' in the early thought of Wittgenstein and in Jorge Luis Borges' works; the preliminary assumption of the investigation is that poetic expression, being a conjunction of language and art, flaunts the aesthetic phenomenon. The goal will be carried out via a comparison between Wittgenstein's early philosophy of language and Borges' works, so that the philosophical system of the former will establish an outlook over the literary texts of the latter. More concretely, the research will explore in the first place the notion of 'aesthetics' and its role in Wittgenstein and Borges, and thereafter it will focus on aesthetic expression in literature, i.e., on poetic utterance. Finally, the findings of the re-

search will be demonstrated with Borges' fragment *The Yellow Rose*, taken from his book *El Hacedor* ('*Dreamtigers*', 1960).

Etymologically, the Greek notion 'Aesthetics' denotes both 'observation' and 'sensual perception' (Peters 8). Only in the work of Plato the notion '*aistheton*' denotes solely 'sensual perception' as opposed to the notion '*noeton*' which denotes 'intellectual perception' (Peters 15). Yet it was Kant who established an entire separate scope of the aesthetic experience, separating it from pure reasoning and ethical judgment (Kemal 1-22). As Tilghman puts it, Kant conceived aesthetics "as the object of an entirely disinterested satisfaction, as pleasing universally without a concept, as having the form of purposiveness without a purpose and as the object of a necessary satisfaction" (Tilghman 24). Here emerges the stance of 'art for its own sake'.

Wittgenstein, in his early thought, upholds a radical view of the nature of aesthetics: it is no longer an autonomous phenomenon aiming at disinterested pleasure, but rather an ineffable phenomenon which, as well as ethics, dwells in the almost-sacred scope of value. Aesthetics, then, resides outside the world of facts and therefore it is a transcendental phenomenon *par excellence* - i.e. the mystical -, in accordance with ethics. Since aesthetics is transcendental, it substantially digresses every possible language according to the often-quoted proposition of the *Tractatus*: "*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world*" (*Tractatus* 5.6). Hence Wittgenstein declares in 6.421 that aesthetics, as well as ethics, is ineffable, so that "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (*Tractatus* 7). Silence seems to be the only act that should be associated with the experience of the mystical (Mualem *Silence*).

Yet in his *Notebooks* Wittgenstein declares that "Art is a kind of expression. / Good art is complete expression" (*Notebooks* 83e).

If we will understand 'art' as an aesthetic phenomenon, which is hard to deny, then this declaration sharply contradicts the *Tractatus*' decisive demand for silence. For in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein declares that aesthetics is one and the same with ineffable ethics (6.421) so that aesthetics is strictly ineffable, while on the other hand he declares in the *Notebooks* that art, the manifestation of aesthetics, is a type of expression, or, in rare cases, a complete expression. So how

can we settle the contradiction? Is there a possibility that art as a *kind* of expression might represent some loophole through which the inexpressible might, somehow, be (completely) expressed? Is there a golden path between speech and silence? Here resounds the question that Wittgenstein asked himself in his notebooks: “Is *language* the *only* language?” (*Notebooks* 52e)

1. THE CONCEPT OF AESTHETICS IN WITTGENSTEIN’S EARLY THOUGHT

The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which is considered as one of the fundamental texts of twentieth-century philosophy, is the only philosophical work that Wittgenstein published during his lifetime. It is also a refined expression of his early thought. It is interesting to notice that Wittgenstein defines the goal of the book as an *aesthetic* one: according to the preface of the *Tractatus* it aims at granting pleasure rather than knowledge: “- So it is not a textbook. - Its purpose would be achieved if it gave pleasure to one person who read and understood it” (*Tractatus* 3). On the other hand Wittgenstein mentions only once the term ‘aesthetics’ throughout the *Tractatus* in a marginal and enigmatic proposition: “It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental. (Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same)” (*Tractatus* 6.421).

Wittgenstein does not use here the term ‘transcendental’ in a Kantian manner, i.e. as a term that denotes pure a-priori knowledge (Stenius 214-218). He rather uses it in order to indicate something that resides *beyond* the world of facts and digresses human utterance (Anscombe 166). Anyway, an analysis of proposition 6.421 will yield the following aspects of the term ‘aesthetics’ in the *Tractatus*:

1. It is impossible to establish a ‘theory of Wittgenstein’s early aesthetics’ solely upon the *Tractatus* since there is only one lateral reference to aesthetics.
2. Aesthetics and ethics are not necessarily equivalent notions; we cannot unequivocally infer that ‘the good’ is equal to ‘the beautiful’ in Wittgenstein’s early thought. Thus, aesthetics and ethics are different notions, yet they maintain some sort of integral relation.

3. Aesthetics is a transcendental phenomenon. It dwells beyond the world of facts and digresses meaningful utterance.

At this point let us turn to investigate the internal relation between ethics and aesthetics. This issue is rather vague in the *Tractatus*, a fact that entails a continuous dispute among its commentators (Chason 34-49). Most of them tend to reject logical equivalence between aesthetics and ethics, and the remained question is what, then, is the common radix of the separate notions (Tilghman 46; Barrett 20; Zemach 55-57). Now in 6.4 Wittgenstein declares that "All propositions are of equal value"; then he makes clear that propositions are equal in that they have no value at all, since they are contingent – i.e. logical pictures of accidental facts – whereas value is substantial. Hence:

The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: *in* it no value exists – and if it did exist, it would have no value. (*Tractatus* 6.41)

Since meaningful language is only a bipolar manifestation of possible facts within the world, and since value resides outside the domain of the world, it is clear that "So too it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Propositions can express nothing that is higher" (*Tractatus*, 6.42). Ethics, if would be taken as the manifestation of values, is beyond what can be said; ethics is ineffable since it is essentially transcendental. And aesthetics, according to the final parenthesis of 6.421, resembles ethics: "(Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same)". This parenthesis accords with Wittgenstein's remark in the *Notebooks* which adds the notion of logic to the equation: "Ethics does not treat of the world. Ethics must be a condition of the world, like logic. Ethics and aesthetics are one" (*Notebooks* 77e); and let us remember that in the *Tractatus* logic is clearly transcendental: "Logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror-image of the world. Logic is transcendental" (*Tractatus* 6.13). So ethics and logic are transcendental and they are equal to aesthetics both in the *Tractatus* and in the *Notebooks*. It seems then that the common radix of ethics aesthetics and logic is that they all are transcendental, i.e. beyond the scope of facts.

At this point, the link between aesthetics and the limits of language should be clarified. We have seen that aesthetics belongs to the scope of value, which is ineffable. Now, in 6.522 Wittgenstein remarks: "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical" (*Tractatus* 6.522).

In the light of the former analysis it is quite clear that ethics and aesthetics belong to those 'things': the 'things' that reside in the scope of value and cannot be said, yet they *show* themselves. Another indirect link between the mystical and aesthetics might be sparsely driven from Wittgenstein's *Notebooks*. In 20.10.16 he writes: "Aesthetically, the miracle is that the world exists. That what exists does exist" (*Notebooks*, 86e). It is not clear in what sense Wittgenstein uses the word 'Aesthetically'; McGuinness, for instance, translates the German phrase 'Das Künstlerische wunder' as 'for an artist [or for art] the miracle is...' (McGuinness 315). But if the proposition does indicate some sort of a link between aesthetics and the ontological miracle, which is plausible, then there is also a link between aesthetics and the mystical – specially in the light of *Tractatus* 6.44: "It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists".

So aesthetics is linked with the mystical and hence it belongs to the 'things' which can only be shown. But what is the philosophical meaning of the act of showing, and how could it be related to the act of expression? Let us focus now on the distinction between showing and saying, well known as the *Showing Doctrine* of the *Tractatus*. It is well known that Wittgenstein considered the showing doctrine as the crux of the *Tractatus*; in a letter to Russell he thus writes:

The main point is the theory of what can be expressed by propositions – i.e. by language – (and, which comes to the same, what can be *thought*) and what cannot be expressed by propositions, but only shown; which, I believe, is the cardinal problem of philosophy. (*Letters* 71)

The doctrine of showing (Mualem *Showing*) claims that language comprises two distinct dimensions: what is being declared by a proposition, i.e. a possible fact in the world which is being logically

pictured by a proposition; and what shows itself in language, i.e. its logical form which entails the whole logical space. And Wittgenstein declares in 4.121:

Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them. What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent. What expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot express by means of language. Propositions *show* the logical form of reality. They display it.

We have seen that aesthetics and ethics, being transcendental, belong to the 'things' that reside in the scope of what can be shown; it seems unequivocal that all transcendental entities can be shown and not said according to the *Tractatus*. Thus, in the light of Wittgenstein's showing doctrine in general, and the above-mentioned proposition 4.121 in particular, -aesthetics can only show and not say, or rather, it can let things of value manifest themselves (Tilghman 65). *Aesthetics shows what cannot be said*. This insight might illuminate Wittgenstein's letter to his friend Paul Engelmann (April 1917):

The poem by Uhland is really magnificent. And this is how it is: if only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then *nothing* gets lost. But the unutterable will be - unutterably - *contained* in what has been uttered! (Engelmann 7)

It is important to stress that these words relate to Wittgenstein's respond to a poem written by Uhland. Provided that literary criticism is linked to aesthetics, Wittgenstein's criticism of Uhland's poem is clearly tied up with the domain of aesthetics. So here is some sort of link between artistic expression and the showing doctrine, so that aesthetics, or art, can show rather than say. This conclusion coincides with Engelmann's own interpretation to the abovementioned letter of his friend:

The 'positive' achievement of Wittgenstein, which has so far met with complete incomprehension, is his pointing to *what is manifest in a proposition*. And what is manifest in it, a proposition cannot also state explicitly. The poet's sentences, for instance, achieve their effect not through what they say but through what is manifest in them, and the same holds for music, which also says nothing. (Engelmann 83)

Engelmann relates the act of showing to poetry. Thereafter he goes on and remarks: "Poetry can produce a profound artistic effect *beyond* (but never without) the immediate effect of its language" (84).

The profound artistic effect that goes *beyond* the effect of language seems to mean that poetry can show far more than it can possibly say, or, more sharply formulated, poetry says nothing and yet it manages to manifest things that can only be shown. What is being shown, that is, the thing that the refined poem of Uhland manifests, is according to Engelmann "the picture of a life" (Engelmann 85). And it is worthwhile to go on and quote his explanation to the way Wittgenstein used to recite "with a shudder of awe" Mörike's story *Mozart's Journey to Prague*:

...In the rare cases where the venture succeeds, as it does here, we are in the presence of sublime peaks of poetic language, and thus of verbal expression altogether. Here was one of the great passages in literature touching on Wittgenstein's most central language problem: that of the border of the unutterable and yet somehow expressible. (Engelmann 86)

Engelmann's argument, which seems a plausible interpretation of Wittgenstein, is that tremendous poetry is a special kind of expression that somehow transcends the limits of meaningful expression and somehow manages to manifest transcendental entities.

Let us turn now and see *how* does poetical utterance, i.e. aesthetics, actually present the ineffable scope of value, i.e. ethics. In a lecture on ethics, given in 1929, Wittgenstein undertakes the task to say something about the unsayable nature of ethics, a nonsensical task according to the criteria of the *Tractatus*. He also declares in the outset of his lecture that the subject includes "the most essential part of what is generally called aesthetics" (*Lecture 4*). So it seems that Wittgenstein's paradoxical mission is to say and not to say, at the same time, the nature of ethics and aesthetics. He tries to carry out this task by a metaphor:

I can only describe my feeling by the metaphor, that, if a man could write a book on ethics, this book would, with an explosion, destroy all the other books in the world... ethics, if it is anything, is supernatural and our words would only express facts. (*Lecture 7*)

The usage of metaphor here is not haphazard; *only* an aesthetic utterance can show a picture that alludes to the transcendental nature of ethics. It is in this sense that the unutterable is being 'unutterably contained' in what has been uttered'. It seems then that poetical utterance can be conceived as an attempt to run against the limits of language by means of metaphors, - an attempt that according to Wittgenstein also 'signalizes ethics' (Waismann 93). It doesn't mean, of course, that aesthetical activity *per se* is an ethical act. And yet, it does point at the fact that both aesthetical utterance and ethical utterance are similar in their paradoxical digression from the limits of what can be said.

In the light of this analysis, it turns out that aesthetic expression necessarily entails a tension between saying and the unsaid that eventually is only being shown. In other words, every aesthetic expression yields an inevitable *failure* - a failure to say what cannot be said. Yet the very act of aesthetic expression can be justified in that it manages to point at the right direction, so to speak. This dialectical movement also characterizes ethics, as Wittgenstein says to the members of the Vienna circle on December 30, 1929: "In ethics we are always making the attempt to say something that cannot be said ...but the inclination, the running up against something, indicates something" (Weismann 69). Ethical and aesthetical utterances are nonsensical and yet they have some value, they *indicate* 'something', which seems to denote here something transcendental. Hence it comes out that Wittgenstein does not negate the very attempt to say something ethical. This liberal tendency is echoed in his remark in *Culture and Value*: "Don't, for heaven's sake, be afraid of talking nonsense! But you must pay attention to your nonsense" (*Culture* 56e). The question rises once again at this point: how can we settle this conclusion with the *Tractatus*' harsh demand for silence? One possibility is that there is some development in Wittgenstein's thought so that he moved from demanding total silence to some sort of allowing indirect expression; yet his above-quoted letter on Uhland's poem was written on April 1917, the period the *Tractatus* was written. Another option is that he is inconsistent in his early thought, upholding two contradictory views simultaneously, which might indicate an ambivalence towards the question of aesthetical and

ethical utterances; yet, it is hard to see how he didn't notice a contradiction in 'the main point' of his early system. The third option seems more plausible. Wittgenstein might have thought that aesthetic utterance is not an act of *saying* since it does not denote or define the mystical, but rather it is an act of *showing* since it is not any sort of logical picture but rather it lets the mystical show itself via a pictorial metaphor. 'To speak aesthetically' actually means pointing at something and saying 'look here!'. Such an act keeps the vow of silence, as much as direct scientific denotation goes. Aesthetical, or ethical, utterance in this manner is a dialectical fusion of speech and silence.

Now, is there an accord between the goal of aesthetics and the *expression* of this goal via poetical language, that is, between the 'what' and the 'how'? According to Wittgenstein the answer is positive, as shown in the following fragment on Shakespeare's work:

Shakespeare displays the dance of human passion, one might say. Hence he has to be objective; otherwise he would not so much display the human passion - as talk about it. But he displays it to us in a dance, not naturalistically. (*Culture* 36e-37e)

The goal of Shakespeare's work is to unfold the dance of passion. And he manages to accomplish his goal by a dance of metaphors; thus the goal of poetry matches its verbal expression: aesthetics is being reflected in aesthetic utterance. Here, too, language can show what it cannot say, i.e. the dynamic force of human passion. This conclusion is echoed in Wittgenstein's remark on the essence of poetic mood, which is "...a mood of receptivity to nature in which one's thought seems as vivid as nature itself" (65e).

At this point of the investigation we can observe, then, an important insight: there are actually two modes of utterance in the *Tractatus*:

1. *The utterance of saying* - which is scientific language that manifests possible facts in the world. This is the meaningful utterance.
2. *The utterance of showing* - which dialectically points at the mystical 'things' that show themselves via, for instance, poetic metaphors. This utterance is actually nonsense, since it is a

running up against the borders of language; and yet it does indicate something.

In the light of this insight, the final propositions of the *Tractatus*, starting at 6.4, can be conceived as the second mode of utterance. So in 6.54 Wittgenstein declares:

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

This declaration manifests the dialectical nature of the utterance of showing, which is nonsensical and at the same time manages to elucidate its own essence. Moreover, the usage of the metaphor of the ladder here should be, as we have seen, deliberate. It is the only way to let the unspeakable show itself. Accordingly, in the above-mentioned proposition (6.54) the metaphor of a ladder points at the transcendental orientation of these propositions which point at the scope of the mystical; so this proposition is a showing of showing - a meta-showing, so to speak. In accordance with this argument, G. H. Gill claims in his book *Wittgenstein and Metaphor* that for Wittgenstein “at the most fundamental level philosophy is a metaphorical enterprise” (Gill 128).

It seems that Russell, in his introduction to the *Tractatus*, felt uncomfortable with his young fellow’s dialectical language of propositions 6.4 - 7. He prudently criticizes the stance that ethics is the mystical which belongs to the inexpressible region and above all he flaunts the fact that Wittgenstein is capable, eventually, of conveying his ethical opinions:

What causes hesitation is the fact that, after all, Mr. Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said, thus suggesting to the skeptical reader that possibly there may be some loophole through a hierarchy of languages, or by some other exit. (*Tractatus* xxiii)

Russell seemingly overlooked the fact that there are actually two *alternative*, not hierarchical, utterances in Wittgenstein's system - i.e. saying and showing - so that showing is a dialectical mode of saying and unsaying via, e.g., metaphors. In other words, the main argument of the present essay is that aesthetic expression is the ultimate mode of showing. This argument seems to accord with Wittgenstein's remark in *Culture and Value*:

The miracles of nature.

One might say: art *shows* us the miracles of nature. It is based on the *concept* of the miracles of nature. (The blossom, just opening out. What is *marvelous* about it?) We say: "Just look at it opening out!" (56e)

Concluding Wittgenstein's early perception of aesthetics and its relation to aesthetical expression, we can point at the following characteristics:

- Aesthetics is essentially linked with ethics.
- Aesthetics is a transcendental phenomenon.
- Aesthetics alludes to what can only be shown.
- Aesthetical expression is a tendency to run (up) against the limits of expression: the expression beyond expression.
- Aesthetics utterance, e.g. poetic expression, is a dialectical fusion of saying and unsaying.
- Transcendental 'things' show themselves via aesthetic expression.

2. BORGES' AESTHETIC EXPRESSION

In the second part of the essay we will turn the searchlight of our investigation to the works of Jorge Luis Borges. It is well known that the Argentinean master has consistently refused to be considered as 'a thinker', that is, to be taken too seriously, despite the highly philosophical trait of his work. Borges have also upheld anti-theoretical stance, and he didn't hesitate to express his severe mistrust of aesthetic doctrines, for instance in the prologue of his book *The Unending Rose* (1975):

Al término de tantos – y demasiados – años de ejercicio de la literatura, no profeso una estética. ¿A qué agregar a los límites naturales que nos impone el hábito los de una teoría cualquiera? Las teorías, como las convicciones de orden político o religioso, no son otra cosa que estímulos. Varían para cada escritor. (*Selected Poems* 342-344)

His tendency ‘to explore the literary possibilities of metaphysics and of religion’ and to examine ideas under the criteria of their aesthetic value, i.e., as a “mere creation of the imagination” (Alazraki 143), is considered as a decisive mark of dogmatic skepticism. He himself admits, in an often-quoted epilogue, the skeptical trait of his book *Otras Inquisiciones* (1952): “Una, a estimar las ideas religiosas o filosóficas por su valor estético y aun por lo que encierran de singular y de maravilloso. Esto es, quizá, indicio de un escepticismo esencial” (OC 2: 153).

It is interesting to notice how does Borges actually articulate the last sentence. He says, “It is, *perhaps*, an indication of radical skepticism”. His conclusion is, then, reserved, not decisive. It might indicate that Borges distrusts skeptical doctrines in the same manner of distrusting aesthetic doctrines. The main point seems to be that he distrusts any doctrine *qua* doctrine.

It is clear that in the latter quotation Borges reduces philosophy and theology to aesthetic phenomenon. But yet how does Borges interpret the notion of ‘aesthetics’? This is a key question that could shed light on the meaning of such a reduction. For if he perceives aesthetics as an act of disinterested pleasure, as Kant did, then it could be plausibly argued that Borges is inclined to radical skepticism or nihilism. Yet it was demonstrated in Wittgenstein’s system that aesthetics could be perceived as a transcendental phenomenon. Of course this viewpoint will shed an entirely different light on the act of reducing metaphysics to aesthetics; it would be a transcendental, rather than skeptical, move. Fortunately, Borges does straightforwardly unfold the way he perceives the aesthetic act. In the often-quoted conclusive paragraph of his essay *The Wall and the Books* he thus writes:

La música, los estados de felicidad, la mitología, las caras trabajadas por el tiempo, ciertos crepúsculos y ciertos lugares, quieren decirnos

algo, o algo dijeron que no hubiéramos debido perder, o están por decir algo; esta inminencia de una revelación, que no se produce, es, quizá, el hecho estético. (OC 2: 13)

We can see here two points of similarity between Borges and Wittgenstein. Firstly, aesthetics is being defined as a somewhat mystical phenomenon that digresses any epistemological reduction. Moreover, both the borgesian use of the word 'revelación', a word which is loaded with mystical and theological connotations, and his use of the phrase 'inminencia ... que no se produce', - resemble the digression of Wittgenstein's scope of the mystic. So the key phrase here is the last sentence: "this imminence of a revelation, which is not produced, is, perhaps, the aesthetic event". Borges depicts aesthetics as a threshold of a yet-to-be-fulfilled mystical revelation that resides beyond sensual experience. Furthermore, the aesthetic act in Borges is integrally related to the borders of language, which is another salient trait of Wittgenstein's early aesthetics. It turns out that in Borges too there is a dialectic movement between saying and un-saying: according to the latter quotation the aesthetic act has said or is about to say something that is unsaid; it is always a threshold of an unproduced utterance. *In other words, in accordance with Wittgenstein's early outlook the aesthetic act in Borges' view is a transcendental phenomenon which is integrally linked with the act of running against the limits of expression.* And yet it seems that Borges is much more ambivalent towards the possibility of reaching at the transcendental. In his view, transcendence seems to have a 'Kafkaesque' trait and thus the mystical might never be fully 'shown', only alluded; it is a threshold, rather than a complete manifestation, of revelation. Borges and Wittgenstein, then, might be located on the opposite brinks of the threshold of transcendence.

It is important to find out whether the theme of the aesthetic act is mentioned in another borgesian text, and if so, if it overlaps the findings of our investigation. It turns out that in the short story *The End*, published in *Artificios* (1944), Borges almost duplicates the words of *The Wall and the Books*: "Hay una hora de la tarde en que la llanura está por decir algo; nunca lo dice o tal vez lo dice infinitamente y no lo entendemos, o lo entendemos pero es intraducible como una música..." (OC 1: 521).

Although the notion 'aesthetic event' is not explicitly mentioned, the resemblance to the former quotation is clear, so that we can relate this section to aesthetics. Here, too, the main point is the threshold of speech, the thing that cannot be said, or cannot be understood, or cannot be depicted after being heard – like music. There is here a strong fragrance of mystical revelation which is about to be realized and, if already been realized, cannot be communicated since it is of an infinite nature. It might be said that here too something is either being alluded or is about to show itself to us. It is interesting to notice that both Borges and Engelmann, in his interpretation to Wittgenstein, refer this inexpressible experience to music. Maybe it indicates a mutual source of influence: Arthur Schopenhauer, who considered music as the ultimate manifestation of the Will, and whose philosophy was highly esteemed both by Borges and by Wittgenstein; but this issue should be carefully investigated elsewhere.

We should not overlook the fact that Borges stresses once again the unfulfilled trait of aesthetic experience: in his view something is *about* to show itself and yet is not explicitly shown. It is an implicit utterance of showing, a threshold of showing the transcendental. The question should be asked at this point, why does Borges constantly stress the negative aspect of aesthetic revelation, the unrealized aspect of poetic utterance, whereas Wittgenstein does allow the inexpressible to show itself? It is clear that Borges doesn't fall short of Wittgenstein in his awareness of the problem of the limits of language (Rest 153). And as far as mystical experience goes, it is probable that Wittgenstein had undergone such an experience in 1910 (Nieli 96), and Borges likewise surprisingly affirms:

In my life I only had two mystical experiences and I can't tell them because what happened is not to be put into words, since words, after all, stand for a shared experience...I wrote poems about it, but they are normal poems and do not tell the experience. I cannot tell it to you, since I cannot retell it to myself, but I had that experience and I had it twice over... (Barnstone 11)

Borges stresses the difficulty of telling the mystical experience. But he is certain in having it; and he also admits his attempt to put

the experience into poetic words despite his awareness that it is a helpless act. It might be that his poems cannot *tell* the mystical but they do *point at* something... Anyway, it cannot be argued that Wittgenstein is 'a kind of a mystic' (as Russell puts it) whereas Borges is a cold-blooded rationalist.

So the question is sharpened: why do Borges and Wittgenstein differ in their approach towards aesthetical showing so that the latter upholds explicit act of showing while the former speaks of an unfulfilled revelation, of the inability to put the mystical into words? It seems that the answer is anchored in the fact that Wittgenstein upholds a mode of thought that can grasp the mystical, i.e. what shows itself (6.522); he calls this thought "*sub specie aeterni*" (6.45). On the other hand, Borges presupposes that humans do not know the essence of the universe, as he manifestly remarks in the essay *The Analytical Language of John Wilkins*, Published in *Otras Inquisiciones* (1952): "Notoriamente no hay clasificación del universo que no sea arbitraria y conjetural. La razón es muy simple: no sabemos qué cosa es el universo" (OC 2: 86)

In the light of this metaphysical ignorance, deep skepticism arises. We should, says Borges, suspect that there is no 'universe' as presupposed in this unitary and ambitious word. Yet since we don't know, we cannot even deny the existence of the universe. Thus Borges goes on and tries to explore the human condition under the possibility that the universe does exist as a *cosmos* (the Greek word for 'order') which is unfathomable:

Si lo hay, falta conjeturar su propósito; falta conjeturar las palabras, las definiciones, las etimologías, las sinonimias, del secreto diccionario de Dios. La imposibilidad de penetrar el esquema divino del universo no puede, sin embargo, disuadirnos de planear esquemas humanos, aunque nos conste que éstos son provisorios. (OC 2: 86)

We ought, says Borges, to keep on searching for the divine scheme by projecting our human schemes. It is interesting to see that he tends to relate this search to language: the simile is of pursuing the meaning of the hidden idiom of 'God's secret dictionary' - so it could be that Borges hints that this search can be carried out by means of exercises in language, i.e. by literature. Moreover, we

should notice that Borges uses here a metaphor, 'God's secret dictionary', in order to dialectically point at the supposed transcendental scheme that we cannot define. So it can be inferred that Borges' aesthetic expression, the metaphor, which alludes to the transcendental, is his way of coping with the things that are *yet to be* shown, whereas in Wittgenstein "there are *indeed* things" that "make themselves manifest" (*Tractatus* 6.522). Now according to the last stanza of Borges' poem *The Other Tiger*, the motivation to persist such an arduous effort, despite the awareness of a necessary failure, is rooted in a mysterious force:

Un tercer tigre buscaremos. Éste
 Será como los otros una forma
 De mi sueño, un sistema de palabras
 Humanas y no el tigre vertebrado
 Que, más allá de las mitologías,
 Pisa la tierra. Bien lo sé, pero algo
 Me impone esta aventura indefinida,
 Insensata y antigua, y persevero
 En buscar por el tiempo de la tarde
 El otro tigre, el que no está en el verso. (OC 2: 203)

There is another important point of difference between Borges and Wittgenstein. According to the latter 'aesthetics and ethics are one and the same', whereas according to the former aesthetics and poetry are *indifferent* to ethics. In a poem written in 1982 Borges even denies that the 'web of cosmic process' has any ethical meaning: "has the web a meaning? The meaning cannot be ethical, since ethics / is an illusion of men, not of the unfathomable gods" (Alifano 157). And as for the act of conjoining ethics and aesthetics, Borges harshly criticizes Nathaniel Hawthorne for his ethical tendency that spoils his poetic work:

En Hawthorne, siempre la visión germinal era verdadera; lo falso, lo eventualmente falso, son las moralidades que agregaba en el último párrafo o los personajes que ideaba, que armaba, para representarla. (OC 2: 59)

Aesthetics, and poetry as the ultimate aesthetic expression, is indifferent to - yet not necessarily a negation of - ethics. Hence in Bor-

ges' stance both aesthetics and poetry are entirely separate from ethics, as opposed to Wittgenstein's view.

At this point of our investigation it is worthwhile to notice that Borges, like Wittgenstein, does not attempt to formulate an analytic definition of the aesthetic act neither in his essays nor in his short stories. He rather uses poetic expressions, such as metaphors, so that he depicts aesthetics solely by means of aesthetic expression. From a wittgenstenian point of view it can be said that Borges uses aesthetical utterance in order to show what cannot be said. This act can be seen in a conversation between Borges and Roberto Alifano that was carried out in 1984, wherein Alifano asks Borges to define poetry and the old poet replies:

I believe that poetry is something so intimate, so essential, that it cannot be defined without oversimplifying it. It would be like attempting to define the color yellow, love, the fall of leaves in the autumn. I don't know how essential things can be defined. It seems to me that the only possible definition would be Plato's, precisely because it is not a definition, but a poetic act. When he refers to poetry he says: "That light substance, winged and sacred"¹. That, I believe, can define poetry to a certain extent, since it doesn't confine it to a rigid mold, but rather offers to our imagination the image of an angel or of a bird. (Alifano 37)

The move here is dialectical. Plato's definition is actually not a definition, yet it is the only way to *show* the 'light substance' of poetry. Only the poetic utterance can go beyond the limits of language and 'define' essential things such as poetry; only poetry can show its own evasive essence. Thereafter the two interlocutors relate poetry to aesthetics:

ALIFANO: So that in concurring with Plato's definition, you would accept the idea that poetry is, above all, an aesthetic act?

BORGES: Yes. I still believe that poetry is *the* aesthetic act; that poetry is not the poem, for the poem may be nothing more than a series of

¹ Borges' quotation is taken from Plato's *Ion*, 534b. Actually, Plato speaks there of the image of the poet, not of poetry.

symbols...Poetry is a magical, mysterious, unexplainable – although not incomprehensible – event. (*Alifano* 37)

Poetry as *the* aesthetic act seems to mean that poetry is *the* ultimate expression of that transcendental threshold-of-revelation². Poetry, then, can be perceived as the utterance of showing both in Borges and in Wittgenstein: an implicit act (“an imminence of revelation”) according to the former, and an explicit act (“things that indeed show themselves”) according to the latter.

I am well aware of the fact that relating Borges, ‘the ultimate skeptic’ (Yates 29) to such an implicit transcendental outlook is a controversial commentary. Yet, other scholars had reached at a similar conclusion, such as Ditier Jaén who also relates aesthetics to metaphysics so that “For Borges, the essence of the aesthetic and the mystical experience is perhaps the same” (Jaén 166). Moreover, Borges himself didn’t always deny transcendence altogether. When directly asked in interview whether he believed in “anything or look for anything that eludes causality, in anything that is transcendental”, he replied by relating transcendence with aesthetic creation: “Of course I do. I believe in the mystery of the world...we are begetting God. We are creating God every time that we attain beauty” (Barnstone 102).

As for the question of the relation between Borges and Wittgenstein, he was asked in another interview for his reaction to Wittgenstein’s distinction between what can be said and what must remain unsaid³. He replied: “I think of art as being an allusion. I think that you can only allude to things, you can never express them... I can only allude to things. I may mention the moon but I cannot define the moon” (Barnstone 169).

² Elsewhere Borges says to Alifano that language *per se* is an aesthetic phenomenon: “Language itself is also an aesthetic creation. I believe this is indisputable” (*Alifano* 39)

³ I may add here a personal remark. I met Mrs. María Kodama in a conference dedicated to Borges Science and Philosophy at Leipzig University in October 2001. I asked her whether Borges held books of Wittgenstein in his personal library. She replied that he did, and that Wittgenstein’s books are filled with Borges handwritten remarks. So it can be plausibly assumed that Borges was acquainted with Wittgenstein’s thought.

Borges relates his reply to the nature of poetic expression. For him the question of the limits of language seems to be linked to the question of the limits of poetic, or artistic, utterance. Here again allusion, the art of showing, seems to be a dialectical utterance that stands between saying and unsaying.

Concluding the course of our investigation, I will try to demonstrate my central argument via Borges' fragment *The Yellow Rose*, taken from his book *El Hacedor* (1960). I am fully conscious of the fact that this fragment is usually taken as one of Borges' most skeptical texts, as a text which demonstrates his deep skepticism towards the representational faculty of language. And it is true that, in all, the text deals with a harsh disillusionment of an old poet, Giambattista Marino, 'whose brow laurelled with years and glory', who realizes on his deathbed that "

Los altos y soberbios volúmenes que formaban en un ángulo de la sala una penumbra de oro no eran (como su vanidad soñó) un espejo del mundo, sino una cosa más agregada al mundo (OC 2: 173)

Let us observe the text from the viewpoint of aesthetic expression. A prudent reading unfolds the fact that Marino's sobriety is an outcome of a revelation, a 'motionless and silent act', wherein he manages to foresee the essence of a yellow rose which was set by a woman in a goblet: "Entonces ocurrió la revelación. Marino *vio* la rosa, como Adán pudo verla en el paraíso". The vision is clearly a sort of a mystical revelation: Marino foresees the platonic *idea* of the rose. And it seems that the comparison of Marino to Adam in paradise is not haphazard; In Jewish traditional legends on *Genesis*, called *Midrash Bereshit*, it is told that it was Adam, not the angels, who gave every animal its proper name (Levner 18). So the image of Adam at this point of the text relates the act of foreseeing the ultimate essence of things to the act of *naming* them, endowing them their precise hidden name. In Borges' view this act is a characteristic of the poet, as he remarks in a verse of his poem *The Moon*, published in *El Hacedor* (1960):

Pensaba que el poeta es aquel hombre
Que, como el rojo Adán del paraíso,
Impone a cada cosa su preciso
Y verdadero y no sabido nombre (OC 2: 197)

The link between language and mystical revelation is emphasized by the fact that in Borges' text the revelation occurs *while* Marino whispers the lines taken from his own poem *L'Adone*: "Púrpura del jardín, pompa del prado, / Gema de primavera, ojo de abril..."

So it is only on the background of poetic, or aesthetic, expression that the revelation occurs. The words of Marino's poem show something; their content demonstrates, using Wittgenstein's terms, 'the miracles of nature' or 'the dance of passion'. Now in the light of our former analysis, this poetic expression is an aesthetical act, 'an immanence of a revelation which is not fulfilled'. So the aesthetic act is the threshold of revelation whose outcome might be revelation itself, which is realized only on the poet's deathbed; in other words, the aesthetic act is the preliminary condition of Marino's mystical revelation. It is the ladder which must be thrown away after we have climbed up it, using Wittgenstein articulation. Hence the philosophical meaning of the text is not altogether negative: poetry fails to be a mirror of the world yet it is an utterance that points at the transcendence, and thus directs the reader's attention to the scope of ineffable things. And accordingly, Borges tells us, Marino: "Sintió que ella estaba en su eternidad y no en sus palabras y que podemos mencionar o aludir pero no expresar..."

Marino's words do not contain the essence of the rose that lies within its own eternity. But there is another insight: *the aesthetical act is not an expression but rather an allusion*. It is not an act of telling but an act of pointing at something transcendental. It is an implicit utterance of showing.

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