

CHAPTER TWO

Variations on a Letter *Avant-la-Lettre*

Seul le chapitre des bifurcations reste ouvert à l'espérance. N'oublions pas que tout ce qu'on aurait pu être ici-bas, on l'est quelque part ailleurs.

(Only the chapter of bifurcations remains open to hope. Let us not forget that all that we could have been down here, we are somewhere else.)

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I

If the aesthetic, theoretical, and hermeneutic present is debated in the face of the indeterminacy of works that slip between the expansive spaces of a disputable disciplinary topography; if epistemological definitions question its limits and its doctrinal and methodological foundations; if questions of taxonomy challenge the rigidity of inventories that fail to encompass the inventions they seek to classify; nor oppositions justify series because they interlace them, accelerating their differences; if other uncertainties are not exclusive of the scientific present; perhaps it is not necessary to remind ourselves that, since more than a half a century ago, numerous thinkers, philosophers, and writers have been reading Borges. They hesitated at first, interpreting as metaphors the aporias of his rhetoric of indecision, as allegories the paradoxical variations of a poetics of preterition that grasps the imagination of possibilities and their opposites, convinced, like some of the characters of his fiction, that historical times interlace their differences, multiplying uncertainties, planting suspicions, filtered through an unpredictable network that intercepts them as much as it lets them pass through.

Just as *after Borges*² it is no longer disputed that each author creates his or her own precursors,³ it is even less disputed that Borges creates other authors who follow him, read him, who write and therefore exist. So many poets and narrators, so many theoreticians and critics are occupied with the imagination of Borges, that the imagination of Borges has occupied the world. Understandably, a long time after Emir Rodríguez Monegal⁴ wrote down the illustrious terms of that "greatest common denominator" that is his *name*, a North American critic proposed to nominate Borges as the emblem of this era.⁵ There is no question about it: In such a case, I would carve in that emblematic image the inscription *ante litteram*.

It is not unusual to approach the variations of his literature's reasoned aesthetics, the diverse modulations of his intellectual poetry, which anticipated and concentrated the thought, knowledge, and imagination of the century, attending to the reticencies contained in a *transgressive writing* that has been alluded to more than once, but whose excesses would recuperate the original meaning of "to transgress": to pass to the other side, traverse margins, cross borders, go *beyond*—also in capitals, transitions that cede way to the *transcendence* that is, properly speaking, an ascension to universal terms, by which it overcomes categories, oppositions, the eventuality of differences. A contradictory transgression overcomes limits or suspends them through a bringing into relief (*relevamiento*) that, like the well-known *Aufhebung*—that Hegelian form of "to bring into relief" (*relevar*)—is overcoming and suppression, both actions at once. It is important to bring into relief that first meaning of *to transgress* because, among other reasons, that is how to understand, in a contradictory way, that his writings "read with a previous fervor and a mysterious loyalty"; those conditions of reading that define, according to Borges,⁶ the classical writers. An in-fraction restitutes the fracture, reunites the fragments, animates the vigor and validity of his writings. It is precisely in that essay, "On the Classics," where he concludes by formulating an assertion that I would introduce here as an exhortation, with the purpose of controverting a permanence that neither endorses nor invalidates transgression:

The emotions that literature evokes are perhaps eternal, but the means must constantly change, even if only in the slightest way, in order not to lose their virtue. They expend themselves as they are recognized by the reader. Thus the danger of affirming that there exist classical works and that they will be so for ever.⁷

II

Beyond the functions of reader and critic, of author and critic, or of author and reader, Borges's writing melds attributions that are presumed to be external to the textual universe, interlacing them in a threshold that extends and disappears. Neither inside nor outside, neither before nor after. A diegesis in crisis alters the spaces and times of a textuality that does not distinguish between them. Beyond oppositions between language and metalanguage, between both, it is possible to imagine variations of a semiosis that, (a)posited in the abyss, confuses references, impeding the discerning of another way out through an exit facing inward, facing backward, at the same time or timelessly. Beyond disciplinary conventions, his writing slips between literary and philosophical borders, superimposing theory and poetry, history and fiction, representation and reference, lucidity that is not only wakefulness. Without imposing, without being excessive, a spectral entity—a specter in fact—oscillates between narrator and characters, victims and heroes, hangmen and traitors, between times that do not differ, return, or coincide in the simultaneity of an instant, an *Augenblick* that, deprived of time, is not distinguished from eternity: fleeing that threshold a man is discerned on the way to a universe where space does not count, nor time, who persists in creating a passage where extension and ephemerality are confused in a reality *au-delà*, *à outrance*, an ultrareality,⁸ an ideal reality, perfect, eternal, exaggerated, extreme.

Beyond limits, the writing of Borges e-liminates them; beyond oppositions, it requires an interpretation, succinct, in the key of O; different or the same, either the letter or the cipher, or both, it obliterates the disjunction making of alterity another identity. His imagination does not resolve the antagonism of superimpositions, suppositions, conjectures; it invents or discovers the literary space that makes place for an origin, the beginning (*principio*) of a thought that adjusts to the principles (*principios*) of a logic—if not proper, adverse, illogical—a logic that reveals the mechanisms of a reasoning secured according to rules that, albeit imposed, seem natural, or it seems natural that they be so.

What is missing are limits to this transliminal aesthetic, where definition coincides with the indefinite, the finished with the infinite, acceding to a perfection that, unexpected, does not end. In "Of Rigor in Science,"⁹ the brief text (which could serve as epigraph to these reflections) endorses the cartographic practices of geographers who expose the perfection of their maps to the inclemencies of time and weather

(*tiempos*), chronological or temporal, meteorological or the more intemperate storms of rain and wind that intensify beyond the times (*tiempos*) that neither grammar nor history can periodize. Another text, almost symmetrical, "The Parable of the Palace,"¹⁰ reveals that that perverse *perfection* is not an exclusivity of rigorous sciences, and ends by risking poetry as well; the word of the poet that destroys the poem, the palace: "It was enough (they tell us) that the poet pronounce the poem for the palace to disappear, abolished and struck down by the last syllable."¹¹ The word (*palabra*) is the parable,¹² a "comparison," a story, an *allegory* that, literally, is "another thing," but that other thing is also a word: in this story, the word (*palabra*) is *le palais*, the palace or the palate where the word (*palabra*) takes place, where it forms, and when it disappears, its disappearance drags everything with it: poet, poem, palace, parable/parabola, describing a movement, a geometric figure similar to the curve described by a projectile, or a parable/parabola similar to this plural figure. The perfection of poetry or the perfection of the cartographers' techniques insinuates the "intrusion of a fantastic world into the real world,"¹³ where neither the incidences of fiction nor the networks of a parabolic or satellitic installation cause surprise. Between these networks is shaped a terminal reality, terminated, revoked by a voice that suppresses it while duplicating it, that re-vokes it (the semantics of the prefix are tricky) on the screens, in the words that are duplicated in a contradictory way, as in "the things [that] are duplicated in Tlön have a propensity to be erased and lose their details."¹⁴

Without outrage, without putting it in those terms, a canon such as that of Borges contests the canon. But more than joining with other contestations, its questionings are verified by arguments of a different nature from those arming the skirmishes of certain all-too-current, all-too-circumstantial academic debates. In the same essay on the classics he said:

Thus my ignorance of Malay or Hungarian letters is complete, but I am sure that if time lent me the occasion to study them, I would find in them all the nourishment the soul requires. In addition to linguistic barriers, political or geographical barriers intervene.¹⁵

As well as including "*les phares*," visible, foreseeable, he illuminates authors scarcely known, discovers unknown authors, gives birth to others who, like J. Hládík in the Prague jail or like P. Menard in Nîmes, convert their success (*éxito*) into existence in a universal literature that now counts, among its glories, the statute of an author who does not exist celebrated for a work that also does not exist, signs of an apophantic poetics

that, like negative theology, configures the critical and theoretical imaginary of this epoch. Borges brought together into one figure all the literary functions: just as he himself is, Menard is a reader; a critic; an author; a translator, according to some; in all cases a character. Menard exists *for* (*por*) Borges, and the Spanish preposition figures as cause, as substitution, and as multiplication, such is the fantastic polysemy of the preposition *por*: Borges for Menard, one author for another who does not exist; as if he multiplied by (*por*) zero, the number (*cifra*) that reunites all numbers, he exceeds him and exhausts him, he animates and annuls him at once.

The vanishing of the author in such functions long predates the overnight "mort de l'auteur" (death of the author)—the sentence is from Barthes who, like another death foretold, pronounces it on the basis of the accepted theories of writing.¹⁶ A little later, on the basis of a related notion of *écriture*—although he extends it in certain ways—Michel Foucault pronounces a similar sentence by referring to "the disappearance of the author."¹⁷ It was a great disappearance—it was not the first—but like the decree of an earlier, greater death, it precipitated the announcement of a chain of disappearances: the disappearance of poetry, a disappearance consecutive to other flagrant disgraces; the presumed and oft-proclaimed disappearance of history; or, in the best of cases, the claim of writing, which confers on it a status of fiction that neither the historians nor the writers would oppose. The disappearance of systematic difference, more rigid than rigorous, the disappearance of the *difference* in a writing that belittled even the voice,¹⁸ which cannot even be heard amidst the bells tolling in mourning over the disappearance of absolute knowledge,¹⁹ brought into relief by a *pensiero debole*,²⁰ disappearance of the referent as one more illusion. One had spoken of an *hors texte* like an *hors la loi*; it is not surprising that an aesthetics of disappearance that razes geographic and generic borders would have in the work of Borges its fabulous antecedent. In his texts, a cell in Prague borders on an entryway in Tacuarembó; a hovel in Cairo, Illinois; a slum of Buenos Aires; or a suburb of Dublin, it is all the same whether "in Oklahoma or Texas or in the region that the literati call the *pampa*."²¹ If the latest edition of the *Encyclopedia Universalis* defines the current concept of globalization on the basis of a quote from P. Valéry: "Le temps du monde fini commence"²² (The time of the completed world begins), any one of the numerous references imagined by Borges from his earliest to his most recent writings would have been more pertinent:

But let us not speak of facts. Facts are no longer of any concern to anyone. They are mere starting points for invention and reasoning. In the schools they teach us doubt and the art of forget-

ting. Foremost the forgetting of what is personal and local. We live in time, which is successive, but we try to live *sub specie aeternitatis*. From the past we retain a few names, which language tends to forget. We pass over the useless details. There is neither chronology nor history. There are no statistics either.²³

In that utopia of the story, although "English, French, and mere Spanish" had already disappeared from the planet, language is not the conjectural *Ursprache* of Tlön, because "the earth had returned to Latin." The anonymous character encountered by the narrator warns him that: "There are those who fear that it will once again degenerate into French, Languedocian, or Papiamento, but the risk is not imminent."²⁴

For diverse reasons—critical and hermeneutic, philological or mystical—no one is surprised that the vastness of Borges's oeuvre could be identified, emblematically, with the *aleph*. More than the letter, more than the title, the story, the book, his whole oeuvre constitutes a sort of *aleph*, the first letter touching on an immense universe, the disproportionate *aleph* that is found, in places, in all places, before the beginning, before the creation, on whose account the beginning does not appear because something had already started before: a letter *avant la lettre*? *Ante litteram*. In Hebrew *aleph* represents, more than the letter, the inspiration prior to the production of sound, it points to the movement of the soul, a wish previous to its articulation; the Kabbalists always considered "the *aleph* the spiritual root of all letters, capable of containing in its essence the entire alphabet and, hence, all human language. 'Entendre l' Aleph, c'est proprement ne rien entendre'" [to hear/understand the Aleph is not to hear/understand anything],²⁵ and I turn to the French translation in order to take advantage of the verbal polysemy of a verb that, in that language, alludes to a form of grasping at once sensory and intellectual.²⁶

Nevertheless, and to confirm the beginning/principle (*principio*) of that initial silence, it should not be surprising that the inquiries into the genesis of his text indicate that a space, the *mibrab*,²⁷ had preceded the literal, graphic, and Kabbalistic inscription of that letter. Because of that literal and figurative vision, a character of Borges, he who does not see—just as one says of Socrates, he who does not write, or of Plato, he who does not speak—sees all the earth and the whole earth sees him. The whole orb in the orbits, *urbi et orbi*. Which is the center and which the periphery in that excessive topography that suppresses the dimensions and distances that are its material? In a miniaturized domestication of the universe, the shaded enclosure, at home, in a point of the basement like the corner of the miserable hut of Funes, an enigmatic but square black

hole, perhaps another *black hole*²⁸ where the stars of a "collapsing universe" are pulled apart, on the edge of the void, there where the world contracts, exposes itself to the horror of a blind window, of a screen like a blank page, which risks it, reveals it, hides it. A hole like an empty orbit, it becomes the bastion (*reducto*) of vision, the reduction of the visible, a résumé of the world or a receptacle where the world is concentrated into a fenced-in camp, a metaphor of the preelectronic prison, of a *prison-house*,²⁹ the prisonhouse of language where reality is held hostage by its vision. I wonder if someday someone will dare to say: "Once upon a time, there was reality . . ." as in a fairy tale, the narrator will create suspense and, condescendingly, will refer to reality like to the sleeping beauty, in a box with a crystal cover, beneath a transparent screen. Face to face, the *aleph* of Garay street, "where the entire universe was reflected"³⁰ threatened by demolition on the verge of disappearing; similar to the *aleph* on the forehead of the Golem, on which Judá Leon inscribed and, repentant, erased the first letter of the "simulacrum"³¹ that he had made: "Made of consonants and vowels [. . .] in exact letters and syllables," the suppression of the first letter, like the suppression of a page in an encyclopedia, turns the truth (*emet*) into death (*met*), a country, a region, a continent, suppressed by a perfect version, exact (*cabal*), complete (*acabada*)—Kabbalah plays with the homophony of these letters, between them—or because it is missing a page: the *aleph*, the letter the Golem (Hebrew for an embryo, a larva, a being short of being; a mask in German³²), the letter missing at the beginning (*bereshit*—Genesis—begins with *beth*), the title that announces that the world had begun before, before the beginning and its version. If the world was created by the letter, by the same cause, literally, it can disappear.

In 1980 Paul Virilio began to speak of an aesthetics of disappearance.³³ More than forty years earlier, the year in which Walter Benjamin committed suicide, Borges, in the story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," and Bioy Casares, in *The Invention of Morel*³⁴—"a perfect novel"³⁵ that crosses paths with that story—anticipated in a literary way that aesthetics of disappearance. A multiplied disappearance that the concentration universe would cast into the abyss, the endless precipice, that fall. "Impossible to write and think like before," says Giorgio Agamben;³⁶ or as Jean-François Lyotard says in the *Differend*,³⁷ the dilemma that has been faced by thought since the furthest reaches of time and remains detained in the *disgrace*, the dividing (*einteilen*) of a world that does not communicate (*mitteilen*), variants that do not belie the negation of Theodor Adorno,³⁸ to whom it perhaps did not seem necessary to negate history as well, because according to Hegel it had already come to an end in October of 1806.³⁹

III

From his first books, Borges had shown his preoccupation with the relation between space and signification. But in place of the maximal minimal *aleph*, in *The Size of My Hope*⁴⁰—that book that replicates in its title *The Size of Space*, the small volume that Leopoldo Lugones had written some years earlier on mathematical questions⁴¹—Borges had desired to accede, by way of the appropriation of the common tongue, to the singularity of each place (in space), of each time (in waiting, in hope), to a different idiomatic property, a language of his own, particular, which, as was already said, is the original meaning of *idiom*.⁴²

At one time I had intended to analyze linguistically the impossible language (*idioma*) of Ireneo Funes; I wanted to formulate a semantics on the basis of words that, precisely because they were particular, like proper names, do not signify. Today it would be interesting to sketch out a different analysis of Borges's language, of a multilingual "Borgese" to which the transversality of his revelations is conducive. In the same way one says "the language of Cervantes" but in reverse, I would disfigure the metonymy such that in place of making reference to the language of all Spanish speakers, I could restrict it to a particular language, his, since it is that *original particularity* that we are talking about. The language of Borges both is and is not the language of Cervantes and, according to this contradictory ambivalence, Borges would be trying to approach a primordial language, at times via etymologies, at times dispensing with them:

There are few disciplines as interesting as etymology; this is due to the unpredictable transformations of the primitive meaning of words across time. Given such transformations, which can border on the paradoxical, the origin of word will help little or not at all in the clarification of a concept.⁴³

One would have to pause to consider the poetic reason of a signification that brings him close to the theories of Walter Benjamin, to the mysticism of his speculations, which lays the foundations of, among others, one of his greatest essays: "The Task of the Translator,"⁴⁴ "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" (utterance and demonstration of a task at once possible and impossible, since *Aufgabe* in German means both work and giving up). It is a question of one of the semantic dilemmas that preoccupied Borges and that distinguish his words with a universal poetic density. The comprehension of antebabelian language, edenic/adamic⁴⁵ because of his foreseeable blindness, the ironic association of this fate with access to a paradoxical Paradise, a species of library; the appropriation of his ances-

tors' iron language, which his blindness throws down into a crossroads of tongues: "the iron language"⁴⁶ similar to the "hard iron, the intimate knife at my throat"⁴⁷ ("Conjectural Poem"⁴⁸), *un lenguaje blindado* ("blinded" and "armoured").⁴⁹ The translanguistic crossroads is prolonged in a series of names, proper or not, which reciprocally "untranslate" themselves: the red Adam, Red Scharlach, Escoto Erígena, or the Irish Irishman, and so many others.

If all thought is conjectural⁵⁰—the thought and the declaration are Borges's—one of the conjectures I could formulate, apropos of thought and knowledge, would be as much a double conjecture as a double thought: in a certain sense, Borges knew how to reveal "the grace of thought" or "the grace of knowledge," the grace so needed by this twentieth century that fell into *disgrace*, because of the catastrophe that more than fifty years ago provoked the differend from which there is no exit. Perhaps it is pertinent to evoke, from the place of my double ignorance of Hebrew and Kabbalah, a procedure that the Kabbalists apply to the interpretations of texts. I refer to "tikkun,"⁵¹ that restitution that demands prayer, in the middle of the night, imploring the restoration of the ruined temples, the urns broken like crystals in the night. More than a prayer, "tikkun" is the procedure that the lay lecture, *lega*,⁵² cannot elude. All reading supposes an operation of fragmentation and the contrary operation, a reunion of fragments, the search for unity, the means to a restitution of *a* meaning that implies not a unique meaning but rather the union of meaning, one where the series commences and encompasses it, in unity, less secular, less fortuitous than other unities more celebrated in the last years.

From these perspectives, it was necessary that the restitution pass through German, through its idiom and, as Adorno said, when he pointed to the absurd lexical obstinacies of German that designates *philosophy* as *thought*, thus making a profit out of a deficiency.⁵³ To aspire, among so much disgrace, to return *grace*, to a restitution that language just like recent history still obliges and of which language is conducive. "La grace, par hypothèse, n'a pas de prix, peut-elle même s'obtenir?" (Grace, by hypothesis, has no price, can it even be obtained?).⁵⁴ Without avoiding the academic, epistemological exigencies of thought and knowing (*saber*), one would have to undertake to recuperate in thought *the grace/humor of thought* since, in their origin, it was impossible to distinguish them: *danken und denken* (to thank and to think) are terms that originate in the same voice: in old high German, *danc*. In the same way, one would have to recuperate in knowing *the grace of knowing*, since something similar occurs there, *Wissen* being not so different from *Witz*, the joke. In the end, in both cases, to claim to restore *the grace of knowledge* (*conocimiento*),

or better yet, *cognizance* (or recognition), which was one of the forms of *gratia*, configuring a gesture or gratitude that passes through knowledge and duplicates it, fragmenting it along a semantic cleavage that tends not to be remembered.

They are more than coincidences, convergences of meaning in the biography of a word or the incidences of simultaneity in a single voice. *In a word*, I allude again, one more time, to the recuperation of an original meaning that accumulates, without attenuating the variations of other meanings, discovering a semantic synthesis that the fragmentation of use had disarticulated. Borges writes in Spanish, which is his language, although his *quête* or *quest*,⁵⁵ his search and questioning of universality orients his verbal imagination toward other languages and myths: he uses words in Spanish, but they can be understood in English, at times in other languages—in Hebrew, for example—a fate of translinguistic, poetic growth, because of which the same words sound, re-sound at the same time in different languages. It is one of the paths I could find in a Garden beyond or before, through which it is possible to transgress borders, and which erases them or bifurcates them: *une biffure*, as Lévinas said of thought: “La pensée est originalement *biffure*” [Thought is originally *bifurcation*],⁵⁶ the trace that crosses—erases—and symbolizes, at the same time, parts of a fractured piece that, when they coincide, incite a return to the illusion of the beginning.

2. VARIATIONS ON A LETTER AVANT-LA-LETTRE

1. Blanqui, *L'éternité par les astres. Hypothèse astronomique*, ed. L. B. de Behar (Genève: Fleuron-Slatkine, 1996), 149.
2. English in the original.
3. Borges, *Obras Completas* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1974), 712.
4. Rodríguez Monegal, "Borges y la nouvelle critique," *Revista Iberoamericana* (July–Sept., 1972): 367–390; *Borges par lui-même* (Paris: Seuil, 1981).
5. Gregory Ulmer, "The Punctum in Grammatology," in Jonathan Culler, ed., *On Puns. The Foundation of Letters* (New York: Blackwell, 1988), 164–189.
6. *Obras*, 173.
7. *Ibid.*, 773.
8. See Lisa Block de Behar, "El milagro de la rosa o el ultrarrealismo de Borges," in *Al margen de Borges* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 1987), 193–210, and "Le seuil d'autres mondes: l'ultraréalisme de Borges et Bioy Casares en regard de Walter Benjamin et Louis Auguste Blanqui," in *Nouveau monde autres mondes* (Paris: Pleine Marge 5, 1995), 75–92.
9. *Obras*, 847.
10. *Ibid.*, 801–802.
11. *Ibid.*, 802.
12. The following depends on the double meaning of the Spanish word *parábola*: parable and parabola [W.E].
13. *Ibid.*, 441.
14. *Ibid.*, 440.
15. *Ibid.*, 773.
16. Roland Barthes, "Le bruissement de la langue," in *Essais critiques IV* (Paris: Seuil, 1984, original from 1968), 93–96.
17. Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Critical Theory Since 1965*, eds., Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1986, original essay, 1969), 140.
18. Jacques Derrida, "La différance," in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), 3–29.
19. Derrida, *Glas. Que reste-t-il du savoir absolu?* (Paris: Denoël/Gonthier, 1981).
20. Gianni Vattimo and Aldo Rovatti, *Il pensiero debole* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1983).
21. Borges, *El libro de arena. Obras Completas, III* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1989), 52.

22. *Encyclopedia Universalis*. CD-Rom (France: Encyclopedia Universalis France S.A., 1995).
23. *Ibid.*, 124.
24. *Ibid.*, 124.
25. Gershom Scholem, *La kabbale et sa symbolique* (Paris: Payot, 1975), 40.
26. "Entendre" in French means both *to hear* and *to understand* [W.E.].
27. Borges, *Oeuvres Complètes*, édition établie, présentée et annotée par Jean-Pierre Bernès (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 1602–1603.
28. English in the original.
29. English in the original.
30. Borges, *Obras Completas*, 627.
31. *Obras*, 885.
32. "Larve Lat. larva, Gespenst, quälender Geist eines Verstorbenen, Maske der Schauspieler, Larve." Bertelsmann, *Wabrig Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 1997.
33. Paul Virilio, *Esthétique de la disparition* (Paris: Balland, 1980).
34. Adolfo Bioy Casares, *La invención de Morel* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial/Emecé Editores, 1972).
35. *Ibid.*, 12.
36. Agamben, *Means without Ends*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
37. Lyotard, *Le différend* (Paris: Minuit, 1983).
38. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1983).
39. Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 90.
40. Borges, *El tamaño de mi esperanza* (Buenos Aires: Proa, 1926).
41. Lugones, *El tamaño del espacio: Ensayo de psicología matemática* (Buenos Aires: Ateneo, 1921).
42. From the Greek *idioma*, own or particular language.
43. *Obras*, 772.
44. Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator/Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers," trans. James Hynd and E. M. Valk, *Delos: A Journal on & of Translation* 2 (1968): 76–99.
45. *Obras*, 772.
46. English in the original.
47. English in the original.
48. *Ibid.*, 867–868.
49. English in the original.

50. As Borges says in an issue of *La Maga* (issue in homage to Borges, Buenos Aires, February 1996).

51. That union that according to the concepts of Isaac Luria, taken up again by later currents, "portrays the Messiah as cleaving to the divine power in order to restore the divine system to its harmonious status." Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah. New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 57.

52. The word means "lay," while maintaining an etymological association with "reading" or "lecture" through the latin verb *legere*.

53. Adorno, 76.

54. Lyotard, *Un trait d'union* (Grenoble: Le Griffon d'argile, 1993), 5.

55. English in the original.

56. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Hors sujet* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1987), 217.