
Questing Fictions

Latin America's

Family Romance

Djelal Kadir

Foreword by Terry Cochran

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Chapter 2

Borges's Ghost Writer

Meanwhile do I talk to myself as one who hath time. No one telleth me anything new, so I tell myself mine own story.

Nietzsche, "Old and New Tables"

Little by little the book will finish me.

Edmond Jabés, *L'espace blanc*

No one is anyone, one single immortal man is all men. Like Cornelius Agrippa, I am God, I am hero, I am philosopher, I am demon and I am world, which is a tedious way of saying that I do not exist.

Borges, "The Immortal"

The itinerary of my tracking after Borges turns upon the epigrammatic triptych I place at the head of this chapter. By "Borges" here I mean that measure of interstitial space between the triptych's panels, the space where the pivoting hinges at once join and separate its threesome tables. My object consists in trailing that moot and problematic author — that in-existent speaker of this Borges epigraph and its ghostly demarcations — deployed by Borges the writer; the authorial trace that haunts as ghost, as spectral differential, that dwells in Borges the romancer's obsession now as figure of ironic nostalgia, now as object of dispassionate commemoration.

The form of appropriation which, in the previous chapter, we have seen Borges exercise in "The Life of Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829-1874)" is typical of his penchant for a certain kind of repetition and extenuation. I have in mind that poetic topography which is simultaneously a scene of recognition, a recapitulation of poetic inheritance, and a filial succession: A family romance that perseveres at the concurrent planes of poetic tradition and of authorial self-inscription into the "untimely" continuity or extension of textual space — the incunabula of gnostic space, as Lezama Lima would have it. In this sense Borges's discourse labors simultaneously in a redoubled project of extending literary tradition and of extenuating (to the point of effacement) the authorial privilege of the writing subject in the tale. What we conventionally call story, history, or poem, the textual figuration, thus becomes "biography" in a plural, multivalent, and self-disseminating sense. "La biografía de Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829-1874)" (I think the original Spanish title is preferable for being more articulate in this regard)

does more than imply the mere dispersal of a national epic's hero into a further topography of textuality, into the "graphy" or *writing* of biography. It does the same for the authorial subject inscribed into the tale. Borges the author-biographer, as we have seen already, "biographizes" himself into that proliferating fiction. Ultimately, the authorial successor disappears into the graphic recesses of textual figuration, of topography or "negative, gnostic space," where he has already relegated the precursor author, José Hernandez, by appropriating his primacy and pre-empting his authorial privilege in a "biography" or poetic genealogy. The residual vestige, the surviving trace of this disappearing act, or authorial aphanisis, is writing itself — the story left "to tell myself mine own story," as our Nietzsche epigraph and its "Tables" would have it. Abandoned to itself, the "story" seeks to become self-same but ends in self-displacement. For in telling itself its own story, it becomes "another" to itself, in endless "self-repetition," and in becoming its own impossible self-identicalness, it mirrors the perpetual departure of authorial essences that wane into the phantomness of biography — ebbing essences whose traces perdure to haunt as telling ghost story. The "story" then extends itself into the "untimely" continuity, the perpetual timelessness of uchronic utterance ("Meanwhile do I talk to myself as one who hath time") in the utopic space of writing, a writing, that is, which does not originate in and can no longer be proper(ly) to a privileged locus or commonplace other than the topography of writing "itself." Authorial presence — José Hernandez and the biographer Borges — passes on to that baneful realm of the textual fabric; they become stitched into the texture of incunabula. No longer subjects of authority bearing the poem or story, they become objects of iconoclastic reading — or misreadings — borne by the textured space of incunabula as traces of what has been termed, by one of Borges's most astute students — Michel Foucault — "authorial function."¹ Borne unto the timelessness of uchronia and the placelessness of utopia, these authorial subjects become disseminated *à outrance* by the endless proliferation of the text into what one of Borges's unmistakable masters — Paul Valéry — called "immortality." This is not an immortality of transcendence, however; nor is it an infinitude/eternity of metaphysics, mathematical abstractions which the authorial and biographical Borges (if such a dichotomy could be maintained) dreads and is obsessed with. Rather, as characterized by Valéry, this is an immortality that "implies insignificance, indifference, perfect isolation — inexistence."²

I read in this authorial predicament the parable of Borges's unmistakable internalization (the problematic *sublation*, Hegel would say) of Lezama Lima's *landscape* into writing itself. In other words, the landscape that was incunabula — the toposhesia that transformed nature into topography of culture, myth into multivocal image, geospatial history into "gnostic space" — as we have seen in the previous chapter, now in Borges becomes a process turned on itself. The poetic process, that is, becomes its own poetic object. The quest of this family

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romance, as a result, crosses yet another horizon in the perpetual endlessness of crossings, of imaginary horizons, of negative space (utopia) and “untimely adversity” (*destiempo, contretemps* — *uchronia*). That corpus of writing which our author-centered conventions make us wont to identify with the code-word Borges serves as demonstration of this unending process. The most tenaciously active element within this demonstration is the counter-self-directed authorial function or implied authorship itself. To elucidate this procedure I will allude to a number of pieces from the Borges codex, but focus primarily on that prodigious illustration entitled “The Immortal.”³

Mortality/immortality, the verso and obverso of the same topical coin, emerge in Borges-writing as recurring obsession. In the commonplace topicality of this preoccupation, Borges, as always, pursues a problematization of the well-worn currency. Disbelieving in novelty⁴ and, like the hero of his “Circular Ruins,”⁵ dreading a predicament of derivative belatedness,⁶ Borges deploys an ambivalent strategy whose overt, identifying signature consists in a deliberate and equivocal self-limitation to the topoi or commonplaces of originary inheritance; to the problematic foundations of literary heritage. As we have seen, however, topical appropriation in Borges becomes more than limitation. Yes, Borges does become a “paper author,”⁷ weaving himself as authorial subject into the fabric of biography, of dynastic seriality — the legacy of a poetic tradition. And, yes, in this sense Borges fosters, through a taciturn quietism and studied attenuation of authorial self, a “phantomness,” a mortality. But, and the equivocal of ironic ambivalence now comes to the fore, in insinuating that authorial self into the fabric of writing, he leaves behind a hedge, an untimely trace against the specter of mortal limitation. If mortality can be abetted, if authorial presence can negotiate the adversative *contretemps* of a disappearing act, the haunted space precipitated by such an absence endures and proliferates in the untimely, graphic quest as spectral visitation. And, as we have seen in our discussion of Lezama Lima, while the *imagines*, the *phantasmata*, may not cast an Eliotic shadow, their pullulation as negative presence (as absence), their untimely (*uchronic*) haunting in the gnostic space of incunabula leave the ghostly mark of the phantom's immortality. Absence, vacuity, disappearance can only have meaning as mnemonic and differential trace of a receded, effaced, defaced, and sublated presence. Borges's internalization of Valéry's equivalents *immortalité/inexistence* is itself a mark of the Argentine's ironic insight into this aphanisis paradox. That is why, I suspect, Borges displays such fondness for John Donne's *Biathanatos*, where it is said that “Homer, who had written a thousand things that no one else could understand . . . was said to have hanged himself.”⁸ Donne's “fabulous or authentic” exemplum of Homer's violent thanatopraxis, however, has not impeded Borges from pursuing and sublimating Homer as immortal phantom in the proliferating ghosts of incunabula. I am referring to the timelessly extended bloodline, the filiation of departed and departing authorial subjects that haunt as

shadowless presence in the everextended deserts of "The Immortal." In the spirit of this ambivalent stance, of this equivocal posture of self-preservation in self-limitation struck by Borges, I am compelled to read the authorial, proprietary utterance in "The Immortal" as *apostrophe* — an apostrophic figuration in the dual sense of the Greek term: An exclamatory address that turns away from undifferentiated immortality and, simultaneously, an apostrophic, diacritical mark of the possessive that executes an elision, an omitted presence that haunts there in the elided spaces as genitive phantom. In other words, I read that apostrophe as enunciatory signature by which the Borges text turns the literary tradition, the archi-text, it appropriates into aleatory pretext, even while the apostrophe, the mark of elision, incrementally extends textuality, serves for further writing that augments and enlarges the inherited incunabula. I shall indicate the specific ploys of this program which justify my reading as outlined here.

Borges's presentation of this double-pronged strategy, literally a *discursus* (a duplicitous procedure, one has to say, since the characteristically ironic Borges is at work here), is mediated through the use of Sir Francis Bacon, author of the *Novum Organum* (1620) and of *The New Atlantis* (1627). Borges ironically re-presents this novelty-struck proto-scientist epigrammatically. He sets the tone of ironic duplicity, the redoubled strategy of his own authorial apostrophe, by epigraphizing a particular passage from Bacon that clearly undermines and contravenes the embattled "new scientist" in his own obsession with the "new." "Salomon saith, *There is no new thing upon the earth*. So that as Plato had an imagination, *that all knowledge was but remembrance*; so Salomon giveth his sentence, *that all novelty is but oblivion*," *Essays*, LVIII (Borges's italics). Ironically, Borges, who proclaims elsewhere "One thing does not exist: Oblivion,"⁹ rescues Bacon from the "oblivion" of his own *novelty* by inscribing him into the text as epigrammatic quotation; a mixed blessing, for while oblivion carries with it the redeeming virtue of the waters of Lethe, immortality stands for the perpetual precognition of self-loss, as this Borges story makes abundantly clear, as the "Biografía de Tadeo Isidoro Cruz" dramatically illustrates.

The authorial Borges's predicament is an oscillation, *ad hominem*, between epigraphs — Yeats and Francis Bacon. His is a voice of quotation in which authorial subject, authorial utterance (*apostrophe*), and textual discourse echo as desultory epiphenomena. The appropriated voices, in turn, hark back to authorial figures who are in themselves figurations of yearning, of nostalgia for augural initiations, for primal scenes long departed into the aphanisis of mnemonic phantomness. The presentation, the making present in remembrance, the seeking "the face I had/Before the world was made," suffers the mediations of what we recognize in that other American precursor of Borges, in Emerson, as "economy of compensation." For the attempt to present, to re-cognize a primal scene and a "transcendental signified" translates simultaneously as incremental accre-

tion *and* as superannuation. "The Immortal," then, is the ghost story of a ghost made more ghostly in the incremental evocations of literature's self-history, in literature's "telling itself its own" differential story, a self-same utterance — illusorily believing itself to be so, at any rate — gazing at its specter since "No one telleth me anything new." Appropriately enough, arrogating to himself the Salomonic *sententia* by way of Bacon, "all novelty is but oblivion," Borges apostrophizes it in spectral mirror-inversion thus giving us its compensatory converse, "One thing does not exist: Oblivion." Borges inverts, too, that common ground shared by Yeats's and Bacon's Neo-Platonism. The One in Borges is not what is made present; it is not the One which infuses with its transcendental privilege the sundered and desultory fragments, the many. Rather, the One in Borges becomes exponentially fragmented, superannuated in augmentative refractions, hyper-extended in spectral, untimely perpetuity. Thus, in "The Immortal" Homer's avatar is Joseph Cartaphilus, is Marcus Flaminius Rufus, is the Warrior at Stamford Bridge in 1066, is the calligrapher amanuensis of Sinbad's adventures, is Borges, is Nahum Cordovero, is Ernesto Sábato — "a tedious way of saying" that the primal author devolves into "No One," i.e., the Immortal.

"The Immortal" has received its most extensive treatment in Ronald Christ's allusive *The Narrow Act*.¹⁰ I detect in that conscientious effort a fundamental flaw, however. The shortcoming consists in reducing this ghost story to the figura of allusion. Within the Emersonian economy of compensation allusion becomes tantamount to superfluity, to pleonasm, to conspicuous abundance. For allusion, by definition, implies the multiplicity, the array of what are *res alienae*, an inflated economy of goods with discrete proprietorships. In short, allusion denotes allogenesis of "stories" or "histories," as opposed to what Borges's Emersonian economy places before us with the studied terseness of a self-problematizing story with an aphanitic author who eschews novelty and (ab)originality. The signatures appended to that story change and multiply, but only as allographs — the ghostly amanuensis displaced by his protean signature, an allonymy which screens out the aleatory signators by substituting itself in their vacated place. That allonymic trace configures simply the grapheme or "function" *author*, impersonal, undifferentiated, multiple, and immortal, i.e., inexistent as being, as *per* Valéry. Here a key distinction between "oblivion" and "inexistence" becomes imperative. The first, oblivion, is absolute indifference; the second, inexistence, is the difference which belies and spectrally haunts existence as critical or negative reflection. Immortality for Borges, as for Valéry, is entailed in the second. Immortality is what exacerbates existence into its differential supplement, into its converse or obverse ("L'immortalité . . . implique . . . l'inexistence," Valéry; "No one is anyone, one single immortal man is all men . . . a tedious way of saying that I do not exist," Borges). Like Marcus Flaminius Rufus, who *speaks* to us here and in our epigraph from

the recesses of inexistence, Odysseus is, (in)existentially, *No one* — *Outys*. Polyphemus, however, can attest to his inconsonance with the bliss of oblivion. Immortality, then, stands for the inexistence which is born of inordinate extenuation, of the infinitely superannuated, of endless deferment and untimely extensibility. Borges's romance is a quest for oblivion that founders along the way on immortality. "The Immortal," as we shall now see, is a plaintive apostrophe, a self-conscious complaint, an *aporia*, an ironic lament against this insurmountable and self-perpetuating difficulty. I suspect this is why Borges's story opens with Bacon's Salomonic "oblivion" and "ends" with Homer's deathwish. Within each of these moments, and between them, we can now read the impossibility of either.

"The Immortal," the textual story, is well framed. It is sutured snugly between "bookends." At the opening paragraph we find Alexander Pope's *Iliad* (1715-1720). At the other end, we have Nahum Cordovero's *A Coat of Many Colors* (Manchester, 1948). That the first is an actual phenomenon — Pope's translation of the Homeric classic — and the second apocryphal, is moot. The significant fact remains that both container-frames are biblioform. What this frame-up encloses is also graphic — a manuscript found in the *last* volume of Pope's *Iliad* which was acquired by the Princess of Lucinge in June 1929 from the "antique dealer" Joseph Cartaphilus. "The original" of the manuscript "is written in English and abounds in Latinisms." The version offered us within the boundaries of this biblio-graphic framework "is literal," pleonastically enough.

One thing is self-evident in the ruse of this strategy, of this frame-up: Narrative voice and authorial privilege are one. What we read within this frame is what the narrator has authored. Authorial function and narrative utterance coalesce, become congruent and consonant. He who speaks is he who writes. We read and listen at once, we hear in reading, visually. We need, then, ask: Who is the provocateur of this ocular experience? Who is the author, the responsible subject with whom we find ourselves secreted within this frame, within this bookish cave? The responses to these queries are multiply duplicitous. They are a polymath's contestation who tells us he is "No one," who assures us, "I do not exist." And yet we must endure his graphic filament in our ocular center. Like Polyphemus, the questioning reader reads the voice of *Outys*, of "No one, even as he suffers the perduring scrawl. The scene of our predicament, beginning as it does where the *Iliad* ends, becomes a recognition scene. Our trial is not purely visual but re-visionary for we recognize the abyssal ground on which we read as the continuation of textual genealogy, an extended postscript of the Iliadic experience, i.e., *The Odyssey*. But this, the sequel in our manuscript, is no simple continuity for here, in this version, the authorial subject and the heroic deed are now become one, adjacent and supplementary. Homer and Odysseus have joined into *Outys*. Not only have narrating speaker and authoring writer fused in our manuscript, as already noted, but this linkage in turn becomes

subsumed by the hero in a double bind. The *rhapsode*, the authorial voice and subject, has become stitched into the desultory fabric, the text, of the song. We might call this an economy of Emersonian compensation with a vengeance. Homer, the primal author, the transcendental subject, the mythical authority, the founding father, becomes woven as textual sign, as grapheme, as another untimely scribble or *garabato*, as mnemonic trace of textual space. He meets, etymologically, the fate spelled by his name: *Homeros* — to give as security, as hostage, as pledge; to accord, meet, join together, link in binding contract. (Borges, the perpetrator of this wily scheme, himself inexorably meets this same fate, as we shall see.) This authorial fate sunders the phenomenon “author” into his fragmented epiphenomena by which he is subsumed, *ad infinitum*, to become what Nahum Cordovero characterizes as “The Greek centos” and “the centos of late Latinity” (p. 118). The desultory paragraphing and endless resuturing of the authorial rhapsode is a fate overtly intimated in the second and concluding footnote of the story, where we read again ironically, of Giambattista Vico’s defense of “the idea that Homer is a symbolic character, after the manner of Pluto or Achilles.” From author to symbolic character, from rhapsode to a song’s note, from arch-maker of structures of signification to a signifier, from signifier to phantom signified, this is the spectral destiny dealt to the “primal author”: “It is not strange that time should have confused the words that once represented me with those that were symbols of the fate of he who accompanied me for so many centuries. I have been Homer; shortly, I shall be No One, like Ulysses; shortly, I shall be all men; I shall be dead.” These are the concluding words of the Joseph Cartaphilus manuscript: The yearning of this Homeric epiphenomenon, of this Homeric pleonasm, resounds as mocking paradox, as insurmountable difficulty. The seeking after a “homing” in disappearance, in anonymity, in the oblivion of mortality serves, as it has done for over two millennia, to further the haunting immortality in the every-extended accretions of writing, of the *biographia literaria* and its self-perpetuating genealogy. That Homer/Joseph Cartaphilus should be pursuing this quest in our century, that Doctor Nahum Cordovero should be amplifying Joseph Cartaphilus, and that Borges should be, through us as accessories, supplementing this genealogical bloodline attests to the endless deferment, to the abiding postponement and ultimate subterfuge of that dynastic homecoming.

In this story, in this ghost history of incunabula, we can read the itinerary of a quest romance whose waylaying *contretemps* is an immortality endlessly perpetuated in the unflagging pursuit of mortality. “The Immortal” is a complex trope on and of this itinerary. It is a meta-trope really that at once dramatizes and compounds this unending project and its timeless difficulty. In this regard, the figment of fiction, the “symbolic character” we call “author” attains to the condition of Homer’s epithet for his favorite hero, Odysseus, to whom Homer refers in the “Hymn to Hermes” as a *polytropos*. The wily prodigiousness of

that *polytropic* hero has become the proper signature that identifies the author. Accordingly, Joseph Cartaphilus, the author in Borges's story, the author of our manuscript, the compounded Homeric avatar, the abyssal authorial Borges, displays his coat of many colors. To that end, Borges leaves little room for doubt. The paradigm "author" — Homer and the Homeridae — has been transfigured into the aphanisis of language, into the multitrope of writing and incunabula. Joseph Cartaphilus is a *homeros* — more a figure of language, a "hostage" or "security" of writing, a "pledge" of papyrus incunabula (a literal Carta-philus) than he is a writing/authoring subject. That he is from Smyrna, that he is an antique dealer, that he peddles another's (Pope's) intonation of the *Iliad*, that he appears as "a wasted and earthen man, with gray eyes and gray beard, of singularly vague features," that his mortal odyssey founders on immortality aboard a ship called Zeus, that his mortal body is beached on an island called Ios, are all desultory (co)incidents which, as mnemonic traces, commemorate, spectrally sublimate, and further timelessly his distant, immortal (and therefore inexistent, Valéry would say) prototype, Homer. In that subsuming or sublimation, the ghostly prototype also endures the passage into turns of language, into threads of the colorful coat's fabric, into stitchings of the text.

If as "homeros-cartaphilus" Joseph Cartaphilus extends the immortality of the paradigmatic author, he also attenuates the "essentialized" figure of the author as subject. That attenuation or diminishment is entailed by the emergence of the perpetuated Homer as spectral projection, as coeval image of the hero, Odysseus, a synergism that eventuates in our author. For Joseph Cartaphilus is at once Homer and cursed wanderer, i.e., Odysseus. Joseph's outer garment of many colors translates into the wandering hero of many turns, the *polytropic* man. The Autolycean Odysseus, the grandson of the wily schemer Autolicus who transferred the burden of odium borne toward him unto his grandson by giving him a name that signified his own "odious" fate, perforce emerges as the problematic progenitor and precursor of the Homeros-Cartaphilus. Thus, the author of our manuscript appropriates, internalizes the multiplicity, the many-sidedness of this polytropic fate. For in the name Joseph perdure not only the multiple and chameleonic vestments and the odium borne toward the biblical Joseph by his brethren but, also, the polyvalent and incremental ciphers which prodigiously augment and extend the economy of goods and tradition ("Joseph" has its root etymon in the Hebrew verb *yasaph*, meaning "to augment," "to add," "to increase"). "Joseph" and "Cartaphilus" then, as composite trope, augurs the unending incrementation, the perpetual deferment of totalization, or closure, in oblivion. It augurs the furthering of "immortality," and, semantically, of the graphic trace, the mnemonic cipher, the incunabula of that immortality. Accordingly, we should be less than surprised by the proemial line of the Cartaphilus manuscript: "As far as I can recall, my labors began in a garden of Thebes Hekatompulos, when Diocletian was emperor." Joseph Cartaphilus being

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epi-graphic cipher, an augural palimpsest, an epi-grammatic figure etched into the tables of writing, it follows naturally that a “garden of Thebes” with a myriad of apertures — hekatompylos, “a hundred-gated” — be the “original” locus, the inaugural station of his, our hero-author’s, labors. Thebes, the Boeotian Thebes that supplementarily conflates with the Egyptian capital Thebes here, as the Greek epigrams teach us, is an originary site, a primal scene of writing; a point of transumption, where the Phoenician alphabet transmutes into the Greek, initiating thereby the variegated career of Greek writing and its palingeneses. In one of these avatars of Greek writing, in the *Phaedrus* of Plato, we read of a “great city in the upper region [of Egypt] which the Greeks call the Egyptian Thebes. It is here that the art of writing is first presented to Thamus the King by the divinity who is said to have invented the art, Theuth” (*Phaedrus* 274 c-e).¹¹ In this our Latinate avatar, our heroic-authorial figura that continues to “tell itself its own story” in the intoning of lines from the text of the *Iliad* — “the rich Trojans from Zelea who drink the black water of the Aisepus” — (from the end of Book II, the Catalogue of the Ships) goes by the suggestive name of Marcus Flaminius Rufus. We can read this code name as “the red trace,” the filial blood-line whose timeless swell is to be read in the confluence of its streams beyond time and space (in utopia and uchronia), in the gnostic space of incunabula, in the spectral superscriptions and supplemental displacements of one epic palimpsest by another. Marcus’s is a “new” Troy dance. Cartaphilus’s a “new” Troy tale, where the adjective “new,” as in Borges’s Francis Bacon, must be bracketed or viewed as transparent, for what we read is both “another” and the self-same Troy tale, mediated by the diaphanous opacity of palimpsests and superscriptions which have accrued to it to extend its timeless perpetuity into unending *aristeia* and self-differentiating peregrination. As Iliadic hero, Marcus Flaminius Rufus’s *aristeia*, a hero’s attainment of honorable distinction in battle, is a pathetic failure whose anti-climax echoes with mocking incongruity and bitter irony in his exaggerated name, so cloyingly redolent with martial coloring and ferocity. The irony in this self-mocking pleonasm does not escape the hero. In this Sunburned (literally, “Iliadic,” or “Aithiopian”), blood-colored battlefield on the Red Sea, Marcus contritely confesses, “I scarcely managed a glimpse of Mars’ countenance. This privation pained me and perhaps caused me precipitously to undertake the discovery, through fearful and diffuse deserts, of the secret City of the Immortals” (p. 106).

In the apprehension of his own shortfall of heroic action, fame, and hero’s immortality, Rufus seeks after a compensatory self-vindication. He transforms his self-deprecating difficulty, his *aporia* or self-questioning, into its synonym, into *zitis* or a “questing after.” In that transformation, in that figural transumption from *aporia* to *zitis*, Rufus passes from being an Iliadic hero to being a wandering Ulysses, compelled, cursed, one should say, to wander in pursuit of an evanescent *nostos*, a homecoming, a self-absolution that may cleanse the

curse, the "privation," as he calls it, which condemns him to wander through "fearful and diffuse deserts." As cursed wanderer, Rufus emerges as another form of pleonasm, as composite palingenesis of a filial genealogy which he perpetuates in himself — a lineage that extends from Odysseus through the Wandering Jew, the Flying Dutchman, and the Ancient Mariner. In this filial bloodline, we recognize that peculiar conflation of authorial subject — Joseph Cartaphilus — and symbolic personage — the character Marcus Flaminius Rufus. That *homeros*, or "linkage" literally, resonates in the suggestive lineaments of the gray and time-worn Joseph Cartaphilus, in his Salonika Spanish and Macao Portuguese, in his very name — an Old Testament cast-out, Joseph, and a New Testament fate, Cartaphilus, the porter in the service of Pontius Pilate whose abuse of Jesus condemns him to wander until the Second Coming. The thirteenth-century chronicler Roger Wendover (*Flores Historiarum*) identifies the Wandering Jew as a Cartaphilus¹² and Borges, in fact, has admitted to having drafted a story once on the Wandering Jew whom he called Cartaphilus.¹³ (Further on, I shall return to the figura of Joseph Cartaphilus in that suggestive linkage that Borges intimates between this Jew/Homer/Odysseus and Flavius Josephus the Jew, whose apologia against Apion, the Greek grammarian and conjurer of Homer, adumbrates for us the "originary" authority of the "true" Homer.)

In this hypallage, this conflation of Rufus and Cartaphilus, *qua* schema of rhetorical trope, we recognize Rufus as the perduring and perennial quester of poetic invention, of literature, whose sought after *nostos*, his "homing," the "secret City of the Immortals" is the baneful ground of literature itself. The scene of the hero's wanderings in this written tale is itself a writing scene, as I shall amplify shortly. His itinerary is a passage from geography to geognosis, from the sunburned deserts and blood-hued plains into *topography* — the "written" topoi, the graphic scene and its polytropic labyrinths. We educe the forms of this transumption from Rufus's repeated declaration that his "labors began in a garden of Thebes," Plato's Egyptian cradle of writing, Ptolemy's belated reproduction in Egypt, once more, of that "other," and already secondary, Boeotian primal scene of writing. We suspect it, too, in Rufus's Homeric speech and idiolect. In short, we witness this passage, this transumption into incunabula, in that vast literary landscape which bewildered certain readers as a jungle of allusions, a landscape through which Rufus makes his pilgrim's way to his re-encounter with a troglodytic psychopompos he names Argos, "Ulysses' dog," who turns out to be Homer himself yearning for mortality.

The *zitis*, the quest, of Marcus Flaminius Rufus has a negative origin. As I have pointed out, it is founded on a "privation," its inaugural point is a lack, an absence of the requisite ingredient for immortality: heroism. Like the Yeats epigraph ("I am looking for the face I had/Before the world was made") which articulates the fate of Tadeo Isidoro Cruz, Marcus's pursuit is a seeking after his own spectral reflection — his countenance suggested in eponymic and pronoun-

mial figures: "I scarcely managed a glimpse of Mars' countenance. This privation pained me." The hero's praenomen, *Marcus*, is traceable to Mars, the red planet (Rufus), and to Mawort, the Italic deity who became Rome's god of war. Marcus Flaminius Rufus is a "military tribune in one of Rome's legions." His tautological full name may be translated as "the red highpriest (*flaminius*) warrior god." Like Tadeo Isidoro Cruz, whose quest subsumes and is subsumed by a national epic, the *Martín Fierro*, "a poem which has come to mean 'all things to all men'," Marcus Flaminius Rufus is led by his pursuit to seek (and in the process carry on) a self-recognition scene, as already noted, in the abysmal space of writing, the topography of epic incunabula. His pursuit of the City of the Immortals translates into a questing after the *maximum bonum* of epic heroism and heroic action — immortality.

In this sense Rufus moves toward a locus of writing, a graphic topos, whose privilege is to privilege the heroic deed by redeeming the fallen hero from death, from oblivion. His sought-after object, in other words, becomes a privileged center, a writing scene, where death is transcended (timelessly) and immortality conferred. The Greek epic perpetuates in its narrative the immortality of the heroic dead. Life in the epic becomes consecrated and magnified by death. Death and immortality then are inextricably and paradoxically linked, as in Valéry's equation of immortality and inexistence. Epic narrative and writing are traditionally the privileged locus where the linkage takes place. The quest and vicissitudes of Marcus Flaminius Rufus become a vehicle through which Borges problematically explores and ironically explodes this topos, this traditional commonplace. Rufus's peregrination, his venture into the labyrinth of the City of the Immortals and his passage through its "center," emerge as a self-deconstructive reading and as demystification of a traditionally privileged scene of writing. His quest, then, becomes an irreverent allegory whose object is reading. What is unfolded on that itinerary divulges an insight into the problematic and self-problematizing nature of writing and the topical privilege, or centeredness, accorded to it by our literary tradition. We shall see how presently.

Homer, if he ever was, intones a narrative, the *Iliad*, into which he disappears to be displaced by Alexander Pope, who re-writes, in a modern language, the Troy tale into which he is subsumed as bookend for the manuscript of Joseph Cartaphilus, who, in turn, recedes into his writing so that Marcus Flaminius Rufus may etch himself into the script of his own adventures, into the "tables" of his own Troy dance. Rufus's writing, in turn, emerges as a differential re-writing, as mnemonic reading, where he reads himself as Iliadic hero, "lacerated," as he writes, "by a Cretan arrow," slouching toward dawn to be reborn, toward a landscape that "bristled up into pyramids and towers," to dream, intolerably, "of an exiguous and nitid labyrinth: in [whose] center was a water jar: my hands almost touched it, my eyes could see it, but so intricate and perplexed were the curves that I knew I would die before reaching it" (p. 107).

Beyond this death, a “sleep” in the presence of a “water jar” in the center of a labyrinth, a jar beyond reach but within view which tradition teaches us to identify as the jug of water fetched by Iris from the river Styx so that the gods may take their oath in its ablution, an oath which, if broken, the taker must be condemned to lie in a year-long coma and thereafter wander, ostracised for nine years more, beyond this “coma,” when Rufus finally “became untangled from this nightmare,” he finds himself “in an oblong niche no longer than a common grave, shallowly excavated into the sharp slope of a mountain.” In this rite of passage from life, through death, to a transumption in which “on the opposite bank” of an impure and noiseless stream “(beneath the last sun or beneath the first) shone the evident City of the Immortals,” Rufus drinks from the waters of the river of immortality. He discovers, however, that while granting immortality the waters grant not forgetfulness, not oblivion, but remembrance. And so, as he quenches his burning thirst, he finds himself *repeating* lines from the *Iliad's* catalogue of the ships — “I sank my bloody face into the dark water. I drank just as animals water themselves. Before losing myself again in sleep and delirium, I repeated, inexplicably, some words in Greek: ‘the rich Trojans from Zelea who drink the black water of the Aisepos’.”

Having drunk the waters of the river, crossed to the opposite bank, reached the City of the Immortals in commemorative utterance and painful peregrination, Rufus discovers, fortuitously, that the only access to the shining city, like the endless threshold of the labyrinth of writing in which he reads/writes himself, is abyssed, its central chamber multiplied, its centeredness abysmally repeated, the curse of nine years’ wandering and ostracism transformed repeatedly into nine doors, of which the ninth repeats, *mise en abyme*, the passage to a center with nine doors: “The force of the sun obliged me to seek refuge in a cave; in the rear was a pit, in the pit a stairway which sank down abysmally into the darkness below. I went down; through a chaos of sordid galleries I reached a vast circular chamber, scarcely visible. There were nine doors in this cellar; eight led to a labyrinth that treacherously returned to the same chamber, the ninth (through another labyrinth) led to a second circular chamber equal to the first. I do not know the total number of these chambers; my misfortune and anxiety multiplied them” (p. 109).

One indeterminate day, again fortuitously, Rufus, wandering through this labyrinth of centers endlessly self-decentering in multiplicity, founders on another center, “a circle of sky so blue that it seemed purple,” which suggests, with unmitigated irony, a path of transcendence. “Thus I was afforded this ascension from the blind region of dark interwoven labyrinths into the resplendent City” (p. 110). Having “ascended” to the yearned for City — the sought-after transcendental *ontos* of epic figuration — Rufus discovers the aberrant character, the mad structurality, and endless asymmetry of “structure.” Far from a privileged center or a transcendental etymon, far from an ideal onto-telos or the richly structured

intricacies of a labyrinth, the City proves a heterogeneous monstrosity. Its age is haunted by timeless antiquity, "I felt that it was older than mankind, than the earth." Its fabrication is reminiscent of raving and departed deities, "'This place is a fabrication of the gods,' I thought at the beginning. I explored the uninhabited interiors and corrected myself: 'The gods who built it have died.' I noted its peculiarities and said: 'The gods who built it were mad'" (p. 110). Rufus finds himself before primordial, cosmic chaos: "To the impression of enormous antiquity others were added: that of the interminable, that of the atrocious, that of the complexly senseless. I had crossed a labyrinth, but the nitid City of the Immortals filled me with fright and repugnance. A labyrinth is a structure compounded to confuse men; its architecture, rich in symmetries, is subordinate to that end. In the palace I imperfectly explored, the architecture lacked any such finality. It abounded in deadend corridors, high unattainable windows, portentous doors which led to a cell or pit, incredible inverted stairways whose steps and balustrades hung downwards. Other stairways, clinging airily to the side of a monumental wall, would die without leading anywhere, after making two or three turns in the lofty darkness of the cupolas" (pp. 110-11).

In this profusion of chaos, we can read Rufus's own dissolution; the dissolving into aberrant undecidability of his own genealogy, of his own ontological anteriority as epic hero, as immortal cipher, as symbol of literature. His own writing, thus, becomes proleptic, augural, of his own diffusion into undecidable indeterminacy, into the fortuitous and heterogeneous centos of "a coat of many colors." The object of his quest, once reached, divulges not a privileged center, not an order from which emanate the desultory fragments, the epiphenomena of a unitary and integral locus of origin, but an undecidable nightmare whose horrors afflict the quester with vertigo: "I do not know if all the examples I have enumerated are literal; I know that for many years they infested my nightmares; I am no longer able to know if such and such detail is a transcription of reality or of the forms which unhinged my nights . . . I do not want to describe it; a chaos of heterogeneous words" (p. 111).

Rufus's abandonment of this "nefarious City" translates into a process of self-demystification. His sought-after fountainhead proved not void (that would have been the supreme good of oblivion) but incomprehensible, beyond mastery. He encountered not a transcendental *primum mobile* but a senseless heterogeneity. Rufus does not, properly speaking, "escape" this aberration. Rather, he devises a ruse, a passage, yet another transumption into self-recognition where that insight means a perspicacity into the illusionary self. In that recognition, he problematizes his own "naive" quest by turning on the abysmal nightmare of literary historicity and translating the endless profusion into a game of which he partakes not only as pawn but as player, not only as deluded "naive" but as self-conscious, demystified participant. He extends that profusion, he augments the abyss by yet one more frame. He frames up the frame-up, as it were, by

self-directed irony, by turning on *aporia*: He opts for voluntary forgetfulness — a self-engendered oblivion which forswears to become oblivious to what it *knows* to have been relegated to oblivion, that is, *what it remembers to forget*: “I do not remember the stages of my return, amid the dusty and damp hypogea. I know I was not abandoned by the fear that, when I left the last labyrinth, I would again be surrounded by the nefarious City of the Immortals. I can remember nothing else. This oblivion, now insuperable, was perhaps voluntary; perhaps the circumstances of my escape were so unpleasant that, on some day no less forgotten as well, I swore to forget them” (p. 111).

The conjectural tone of Rufus's apostrophe (“perhaps . . . perhaps”), in view of what he still fears and what follows, serves to exacerbate self-irony. Having ventured into writing, into timeless and untimely textuality, he fears that on leaving its last labyrinth he may still be surrounded by it. Having transformed that fear into ominous precognition, into more than an apprehension, he *opts* to forget the chaos of a “primal” scene, of originary textuality and its history, so that he may go on writing, so that he may carry on the strategies of incunabula. His exploration and discovery prove untranslatable into statement, into cogent “meaning” or metaphysical “truth.” His pursuit, as it happens, can only generate further writing, unending textuality, incontinent scenes of writing. At this juncture, what he recursively remembers to have proleptically written and what he self-consciously knows himself to be in the process of doing — writing — conflate. The momentary parabasis reads thus: “Those who have read the account of my labors with attention will recall . . .” (p. 111). What are we really to recall: that, as he writes, “a man from the tribe followed me as a dog might up to the irregular shadow of the walls”? Maybe so. But I suspect we are also being prompted to recall what we, along with Rufus, are remembering to forget: writing, the deluded history of writing, and the dreaded precognition that once “outside” of that writing scene, the City of the Immortals, we would again find ourselves surrounded. And so, having come out of the last cellar, at the mouth of the cave Rufus encounters the troglodyte of canine docility, “stretched out on the sand, where he was tracing clumsily and erasing a string of signs that, like the letters of our dreams, seem on the verge of being understood and then dissolve” (p. 111). That dissolution on the threshold, on the liminal border of decidability and mastery which Rufus experienced in the “nefarious City” plays itself out again on another frame of the abyss.

Thus, on that rudimentary threshold of the cave's mouth, we again encounter a writing scene which conflates the history of writing and the problematic process of a writing subject, of a beleaguered consciousness in the act of writing — an abysmal repetition of Rufus's parabasis. Only here the embattled co-incident is more frenzied, more immediately counter-self-directed, more acutely aporetic, since in this scene anteriority or the history of writing and the writing process or act itself coalesce without any mediation. In the coalescence — the unwriting

of anteriority in re-writing — there appears to be a privileged “present” where primal origin and its undoing, its demystification, become simultaneous: “At first, I thought it was some kind of primitive writing; then I saw it was absurd to imagine that men who have not attained to the spoken word could attain to writing. Besides, none of the forms was equal to another, which excluded or lessened the possibility that they were symbolic. The man would trace them, look at them and correct them. Suddenly, as if he were annoyed by this game, he erased them with his palm and forearm” (pp. 111-112).

At this juncture, *our* writing subject, Rufus, whose writing we are in the process of reading, finds himself “surrounded” once again (better yet, *still*) by the “nefarious City of the Immortals,” as he well suspected and proleptically wrote earlier. He confronts on this threshold yet another spectral reflection of that abyssal, *eccentric* ground where writing, he would have hoped, originates but where, in fact, that origin is already a “figuration,” the suggestion of a coming into being, which dissolves into monstrous heterogeneity, a desultoriness whose profusion proscribes, already and endlessly, the eventuation or actualization of any such privileged moment or occurrence. Thus, the possibility that this troglodyte’s marks constituted writing, Rufus notes, is “excluded or lessened” since “none of the forms was equal to one another.” In other words, the requisite element for “symbolic” figuration — the element of *identity* — is internally absent. What the troglodyte’s graphic activity does suggest (and we may take this as emblematic suggestion or specular reflection for “The Immortal”) is multiple or infinitely repeating substitutions, as opposed to symbolic or representational writing. That is, what Rufus describes in his own scribing is not “writing” which can be reducible to representation, to symbol, but it is a process of tracing, effacing, and re-tracing, an open-ended play of displacements, free of referentiality or onto-teleological purpose — “The man would trace them, look at them and correct them. Suddenly, as if he were annoyed by this game, he erased them with his palm and forearm.” The disembodied activity of the troglodyte, whose “humility and wretchedness . . . brought to my memory the image of Argos, the moribund old dog in the *Odyssey*, and so I gave him the name Argos and tried to teach it to him,” incites Rufus to speculate “that perhaps there were no objects for him, only a vertiginous and continuous play of extremely brief impressions. I thought of a world without memory, without time; I considered the possibility of a language without nouns, a language of impersonal verbs or indeclinable epithets” (p. 112).

Thus, even as he *remembers* an arch-text, an epitome of originary “writing,” the *Odyssey*, Rufus obliquely, ironically, beside himself in a literal sense, meditates on a pure, non-referential, anominalist discourse; on a textuality free from subjectivity, teleology, or transcendental historicity. His meditation becomes a spectral figure, a mirror image of the textual discourse he protagonizes and he himself a spectral shadow of the authorial ghost whose part he is deployed to

display or play out. In short, he becomes a mirror held up to himself. In the recognition of what he countenances he confronts yet another illusionary self and sees it as such, claiming, "everything was elucidated for me that day." The nature of that elucidation constitutes a demystification, a *desengaño*, which is rooted in further disconfirmation of his naive view, his historically preconditioned notion of representational writing. Rufus, we should recall, displays a traditional notion of writing when he observes, "it was absurd to imagine that men who have not attained to the spoken word could attain to writing" (p. 111). The elucidation which constitutes Rufus's corrective discovery comes with the realization that the abject troglodyte scribbling in the sand at the mouth of the cave, the humanoid whose wretchedness prompted Rufus to name him Argos, turns out to be Homer, the "primal author" himself: "Argos stammered these words: 'Argos, Ulysses' dog.' And then, also without looking at me: 'This dog lying in the manure.'

"We accept reality easily, perhaps because we intuit that nothing is real. I asked him what he knew of the *Odyssey*. The exercise of Greek was painful for him; I had to repeat the question.

"'Very little,' he said. 'Less than the poorest rhapsodist. It must be a thousand and one hundred years since I invented it'" (p. 113).

At this, one of an innumerable such pivotal points in the story, textuality turns on itself, repeats itself in an abyssed self-ostentation with the promise of endlessness and inexhaustibility. Rufus's performance itself compounds, self-consciously, the unending "heterogeneity" that assails him repeatedly. I refer to Rufus's utterance in reaction to his discovery of the troglodyte's identity — "We accept reality easily, perhaps because we intuit that nothing is real" — in which he articulates his own self-recognition as "irreality," his own "reality" as cipher, as graphic trace, as ghostly character in the text he is "authoring" for us. That expressed precognition reverberates in his question to Argos and in Argos-Homer's response: "I asked him what he knew of the *Odyssey* . . . 'Very little,' he said. 'Less than the poorest rhapsodist.'" If mastery of anteriority, of originary history, proves futile because that origin is a heterogeneous chimera, authorial self-mastery and mastery over one's "authored" text — authorial proprietorship in Vico's sense to be examined shortly — proves equally chimerical. The discovery of this futility entails the demystification of an evangelical (Flaminius — "high priest") quester who had naively sought after epic immortality where he believed it originates, in the heroic epic. Seeking after literature as embodiment of privileged, transcendental, and originary concenteredness, he discovers, instead, textuality; that is, he discovers a decentered, self-problematizing, heterodox play of a writing scene; what he characterizes as "a kind of parody or inversion. . . . This establishment was the last symbol to which the Immortals condescended; it marks a stage at which, judging that all undertakings are in vain, they determined to live in pure thought, in pure speculation" (p. 113).

At this juncture also, the apostrophic quality of Rufus's discourse takes another turn. From the brazen tone of a quester seeking mastery over what he thought to have been a privileged origin and history, he passes to didactic speculation, to melancholy meditation, yet a contemplation which has a surfeit, a pleonastic self-consciousness that flows surreptitiously as self-irony: "These things were told me by Homer, as one would speak to a child" (pp. 113-14). In the same vein, Rufus sees Homer as one who was "like a god who might create the cosmos and then create a chaos," that is, as one who might have originated literature and then, or at once, precipitated textuality, the heterogeneous scene in which he (Homer) himself becomes another desultory fragment — a fate corroborated by Homer's own compliance with the prophesies of Tiresias whom Odysseus had consulted in the underworld: "He also related to me his old age and the last voyage he undertook, moved, as was Ulysses, by the purpose of reaching the men who do not know what the sea is nor eat meat with seasoned salt nor suspect what an oar is" (p. 114). This conflation of Homer with Odysseus adumbrates our earlier discussion of immortality as well as the moot presence of the authorial subject outside of the text, his impossible authority as privileged consciousness authoring from above or from a locus exterior to the scene of writing.

Rufus's meditations also harken to the Emersonian economy of compensation and to Valéry's insight on immortality I pointed to earlier. That is, authorship resides within discourse or a textual system; immortality is a condition of generality at its highest powers, a dissolution into insignificance, indifference, inexistence — an unending dissemination into inexhaustible multiplicity, a profusion into effacement which is never totalizable. This is how Rufus articulates immortality in this sea of indeterminacy: "The wheel of certain Hindustani religions seems more reasonable to me; *on this wheel, which has neither beginning nor end*, each life is the effect of the preceding and engenders the following, *but none determines the totality* . . . Indoctrined by a practice of centuries, the republic of immortal men had attained the perfection of tolerance and almost that of indifference. They knew that in an infinite period of time, all things happen to all men. . . . Seen in this manner, all our acts are just, but they are also indifferent" (p. 114). Hyper-extended to its logical exacerbation, the undecidability or indeterminacy of such a system reaches its supplementary obverse of necessity and inevitability, but an "inevitability" in which the authoring subject as privileged authority suffers no less diminishment and superannuation: "Homer composed the *Odyssey*; if we postulate an infinite period of time, with infinite circumstances and changes, the impossible thing is not to compose the *Odyssey*, at least once. No one is anyone, one single immortal man is all men. Like Cornelius Agrippa, I am god, I am hero, I am philosopher, I am demon and I am world, which is a tedious way of saying that I do not exist.

“The concept of the world as a system of precise compensation influenced the Immortals vastly” (pp. 114-15).

Rufus's peroration here on such a blatantly Emersonian note resonates too powerfully not to receive comment and, in our commenting, for us not to be remanded to his earlier apostrophe on the chimerical, primordial writing scene — the *history* and its slippery ground on which his quest founders and his naïveté dissipates: “‘This City,’ (I thought) ‘is so horrible that its mere existence and perdurance, though in the midst of a secret desert, contaminates the past and the future and in some way even jeopardizes the stars. As long as it lasts, no one in the world can be strong or happy’” (p. 111). The unmistakable Emersonian echoes in both of these passages have never received comment, an oversight I hope can be remedied presently.

Borges has repeatedly invited and provoked comment on his work in the light, or shadow, of Emerson. His frequent citation of the New Englander speaks for itself and a good number of Borges's readers have followed the author's prompting. These include Ronald Christ to whose discussion of “The Immortal” I have referred earlier. Inevitably, however, a monadic and transcendental Emersonian figura is invoked in these discussions — “genius is all,” the Over Soul with literature as its record, the single author who penned all literature, all called up at one time or another by Borges. Invariably this type of referral takes Borges at his word and his word at face value, avowing a parasitic reliance on a naively privileged author rather than offering a reading that derives its strength from self-reliance. These eulogistic allusions pay homage to “the lengthened shadow of one man,” in Emerson's own words. Yet, Emerson himself decries such servility when he observes that in this sort of sacralization of literary history “Our reading is mendicant and sychophantic. In history our imagination makes fools of us, plays us false.”¹⁴ Indeed, the assiduous quest of Marcus Flaminius Rufus and his insight into the nefarious and aberrant character of the “institution” and its history, his demystified discernment, echoes Emerson's own brazen inveighing against the privileging of anteriority's penumbra and his inveterate attempts at displacing history's shadows rather than extending them. I cite from the introductory lines of his essay on “Nature” (1836 version): “Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. . . . Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? . . . [W]hy should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines today also.”¹⁵

Herein lies the iliadic “shining” and its unending Troy dance. Herein lies, too, the incitation to a “coat of many colors.” Most blatantly we find resonances of this Emersonian “self-reliance” in Marcus Flaminius Rufus's ironic discern-

ment and self-recognition, as well as in his didactic apostrophe on immortality as "indifference." Rufus notes of that baneful and chimerical locus of anteriority that "its mere existence and perdurance, though in the midst of a secret desert, contaminates the past and the future and in some way even jeopardizes the stars. *As long as it lasts, no one in the world can be strong or happy*" (p. 111, emphasis added). In "Self-Reliance" we read, and the reverberations are self-evident, "man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or, heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. *He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time*" (p. 76, emphases added).

In the American context of both Emerson and Borges to "live with nature" has a purely etymological connotation, meaning to live with constant "birth," which points to that timeless, or uchronic self-regeneration that characterizes America's family romance and its unending quest: A tireless errand internalized by our fictions' textuality and manifested in Borges's text, as we are in the process of seeing. Thus, living "in the present, above time" does not mean the venerate privileging of presence, authorial or temporal. It implies the strength to move in transitoriness, to remember to forget, like "Homer" and the Homeriadae in "The Immortal," to displace and self-displace. Such strength translates into the capacity to quest exhaustlessly and inexhaustibly, to transgress even in repeating transgression, to "play" freely in the undecidable heterodoxy of "landscape" and textuality, to exercise the power of what Emerson called "shooting of the gulf": "Power ceases in the instant of repose; it resides in the moment of transition from a past to a new state, the shooting of the gulf, in the darting to an aim" ("Self-Reliance," p. 77). What I earlier characterized as Borges's quest for oblivion foundering on immortality is an ironic "foundering" of this untimely, or counter-timely (*contretemps*) order — a perpetual leap into the infinite, a seeking after a zero point, an ab-original anteriority, but only encountering the unending displacements which constitute the vertiginous pursuit itself. "Death (or its illusion)," Rufus tells us, "makes men precious and pathetic. They are moving because of their phantom condition; every act they execute may be their last; there is not a face that is not on the verge of dissolving like a face in a dream. Everything among the mortals has the value of the irretrievable and the perilous. Among the Immortals, on the other hand, every act (and every thought) is the echo of others that preceded it in the past, with no visible beginning, or the faithful presage of others that in the future will repeat it to a vertiginous degree. There is nothing that is not as if lost in a maze of indefatigable mirrors" (p. 115-16). Borges, like Emerson, is a textual illustration of this power of abandon in the maze of mirrors and the perils of their "randomness." As a consequence, he turns from brooding, cataleptically, on the "precious and pathetic condition" which the "timely" arrogates to man.

An indispensable distinction needs be made at this juncture, before we go on

to witness Rufus's own dissolution into the vertiginous "maze of indefatigable mirrors." Emerson postulates a program, a propaedeutics, in his essays which he attempts to exemplify in his own poetry. Borges, on the other hand, deploys that program self-consciously and problematically, often ironically, as textual strategy. This is why I "cite" Rufus, a figural ploy of that strategy — the authorial character, the scriptor-scripture — here and not Boges; or I cite Borges only through the obliquity of a Cartaphilus, a misdirection of "vertiginous mirrors." Any attempt to read, in view of this distinction, "The Immortal" as completion, "totalization," or concretion of the Emersonian program (or even as "culmination of Borges' art" itself, as Ronald Christ would have it)¹⁶ would be nothing short of naive and deluded mystification, a "mendicant and sychophantic" reading. Emerson is many things but, least of all, an ironist. Borges, the abysmal Borges of mazes and indefatigable mirrors, is foremost an ironic and wily romancer, a significant datum which, in his zeal for a literary poetics and politics of dynastic and oedipal succession, Harold Bloom overlooks in his perspicacious but otherwise *weak* "misreading" of Borges.¹⁷

Emerson's self-reliance is a god-hood of the "I," a brazen disdain of the "secondary man," an impatient quest and assertion of the primal selfhood. Borges, the wily, polytropic Borges of "The Immortal," sublimates the Emersonian ferocity with reticent persiflage, subverting its rage, subsuming its determination and determinacy into ironic ploy, into self-consuming stratagem, into textual ruse. We witness that subterfuge in the dispersal of selfhood, in the proliferation of the "I" into scattered refractions, where anteriorities conflate as pleonastic, distended selfhood whose very prodigiousness divests it of individuality, of primacy of being-in-itself. Borges, we might say, exacerbates Emerson's anxious "compensation" for the dread of dynastic succession, for the mere possibility of belated secondariness. In the ironic subterfuge of Emerson's dynastic anxieties and their shrill programmatics, Borges, as I will show more explicitly in short order, strikes a dual blow at the mystification of privileged centeredness. First, he subverts the notion of an illusionary, primal self — a privileged subject, authorial or otherwise. Second, he undermines the notion of an equally illusionary primal origin — a locus of pre-scriptive ontos, a Pascalian, ubiquitous center at a transcendental point of "zero" which authorized subsequent desultory discourse and textuality. As we have seen, Rufus's quest in this regard reaches *not* an aboriginal center or transcendental etymon, but founders on the indeterminacies and mad diffusions of heterogeneity. Analogously, or homologously we could say in terms of structure, this problematic non-origin and non-originary historicity has its correlative in a hyperextended, superannuated Emersonian anti-dynasticism: Cartaphilus/Rufus is *not* a belated figure, a latter-day Odysseus or Homer. Rather, the pleonastic synergism Cartaphilus/Rufus (and we have seen and shall see again how they conflate) *is* Homer and Odysseus, and much more. Appropriation, in other words, as already discussed with respect to "Tadeo Isidoro Cruz,"

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ceases to be serial, successive, dynastic, and emerges as displacing adjacency, differentially supplemental, at once "self-same" as and also different from the appropriated; a situation in which priority or anteriority becomes moot and, therefore, dynastic succession, or earliness and secondariness, becomes concomitantly etiolated, faded out, diminished.

The conflation of Rufus and Cartaphilus, on the one hand, and the process of counter-seriality or the exacerbation of dynasticism into adjacency and supplemental simultaneity, on the other, occur concurrently in "The Immortal" and they must be examined together. That turning point in the story pivots on the separation between Rufus and Homer at the end of the story's fourth part and our passage into the fifth. Ironically enough, Rufus's separation from Homer is followed immediately by his fusion into Cartaphilus, who, in the conclusion of this fifth part of the story, will have written, "I have been Homer; shortly, I shall be No One, like Ulysses." Just as ironically, the grammatical means for bringing about that turn at this pivotal point is the subject pronoun "I." A clearly ironic turn since the outcome of the process consists in the unmitigated attenuation, the eradication through over-exposure, of the subject and of privileged subjectivity. The closing lines of part four prepare us for the decrement of the timely, for the ebbing of any possibility for unique eventuality, the effacement of subjectivity, the fading out of any nostalgically guarded or evoked presence. Simultaneously, those lines open up the textual field to play, to "non-seriousness," to "serious non-sense": "There is nothing that is not as if lost in a maze of indefatigable mirrors. Nothing can happen only once, nothing is preciously precarious. The elegiac, the serious, the ceremonial, do not hold for the Immortals. Homer and I separated at the gates of Tangier; I think we did not even say goodbye." The essential question "who is this I?" or the performative query "who is speaking here?" becomes altogether specious and, in view of what follows, downright irrelevant. Since we are stalking that shadowless figure, for exegetic purposes we can identify the first person subject pronoun with Rufus — the Rufus we have been following in his peregrination which culminates in his dialogue with the troglodyte who turns out to be Homer. Now, on taking his leave of Homer, without goodbyes (wholly unnecessary since here there is no "first" or "last" or "once" for such encounters and departures), the "I" transits to part five which opens with "I travelled over many kingdoms, new empires." With rare exception, each sentence in the next two paragraphs (about a page) has the first person singular pronoun as its subject. The following page also abounds in the subjective, though less so. I have pointed to the irony of this procedure. What may be just as significant, however, is what the text itself problematically sunders, or dis-articulates, and that is the *unreality* issuing from a certain ungrammaticality, an anacoluthon, or *the confusion of subject*, to the unquestionable detriment and loss of a speaking or authoring subject — a ghostly "I" who at one point cloyingly, ironically, with phantasmal perspicacity mutters,

sub rosa, an unflagging determination to go on writing, "no matter if I am judged fantastic."

In a sweep which sees the individual "I," the jealously narcissistic Emersonian selfhood, scattered, disseminated timelessly through a history whose historicity is neither unique nor precious, neither new nor self-same, but sundry, simultaneous, and refracted in the "maze of indefatigable mirrors," this "I" courses indefatigably from Stamford Bridge in 1066, to "the seventh century of the Hegira, in a suburb of Bulaq," transcribing "with measured calligraphy" the adventures of "Sinbad and the history of the City of Bronze [read: Ilium, or Troy]," professing the science of astrology in Bikaner and Bohemia. "In Aberdeen, in 1714, I subscribed to the six volumes of Pope's *Iliad*; I know that I frequented its pages with delight. About 1729 I discussed the origin of that poem with a professor of rhetoric named, I think, Giambattista; his arguments seemed to me irrefutable. On the fourth of October, 1921, the *Patna*, which was taking me to Bombay, had cast anchor in a port on the Eritrean coast. I went ashore; I recalled other very ancient mornings, also facing the Red Sea, when I was a tribune of Rome and fever and magic and idleness consumed the soldiers" (p. 116). In this multitudinous dispersal of the subject over the disparate space, the desultory "landscape" of incunabula, of historical and marvelous textuality as homologated space — from the historical field of the Norman Conquest, through the abysally compounded frames of the *Arabian Nights* to the Vichian *New Sciences* and the steamer *Patna* of Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* — we witnessed at once the profuse dissipation of hero into textual cipher (in the sense of the term's Arabic root etymon *sifir*, meaning "zero," and the Odysseyian *Outys* ("No One")) and the conjunctive agrammaticality, the rhetorical *anacoluthon*, which (con)fuses, conflates, Rufus the Roman tribune and Joseph Cartaphilus, the peddler of Pope's *Iliad* in our opening frame, who subscribed to the six-volume translation of Pope in Aberdeen in 1714 and who had occasion to discuss its origin with a professor of rhetoric — Giambattista (Vico). In this maze of convergence and dispersal, the spectral tirelessness of non-mimetic, echoing mirrors, of disseminated and disseminating textuality, we witness, too, an implosion, a caving in of the opening frame, the prefatory threshold of the text. The text, that is, recapitulates its container-frame, its bookend — Pope's *Iliad* that contained *our* manuscript — into itself. The degree of ironic chastisement endured by Emersonian subjectivity in the strategy outlined thus far should be readily apparent. Ironically, however, what may not be so obvious is a peculiar dilation or magnification of selfhood, of a "primal" I, in being subjected to the desultoriness and intense dispersal which vitiates it. I place "primal" as modifier in quotes since in these vicissitudes serial or dynastic primacy and secondariness become moot and are displaced by an "I" which repeatedly re-capitulates, an "I" that now and again "heads" or "moves to the head" to subsume and internalize as

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pre-dicant and predicate the spectral or ghostly subjectivities and their "anteriority," their authorial power and proprietorship, their *auctoritas*. In this "odd" deployment of the economy of compensation, more becomes less and less becomes more. Borges's Emersonian striving suffers subterfuge and chastisement but finds its "self" ironically vindicated in being vitiated by dispersal.

In "Guayaquil" (August, 1970), a story that comes nearly two decades after "The Immortal," the authorial Borges offers an exordium with a singularly suggestive confession that helps elucidate this ironic stratagem. In a poem entitled "Emerson," which dates from Borges's visit to New England in 1962 he offers another, equally suggestive adumbration. I shall take these in turn. We read in the opening gambit, the second paragraph, of "Guayaquil," "My opening paragraph, I suspect, was prompted by the unconscious need to infuse a note of pathos into a slightly painful and rather trivial episode. I shall with all probity recount what happened and this may enable me to understand it. Furthermore, to confess to a thing is to leave off being an actor in it and to become an onlooker—to become somebody who has seen it and tells it and is no longer the doer."¹⁸ As prefatory ploy, Borges's cloying ruse of self-effacement has a feint and a surfeit to it. The recounted episode of the story is clearly not a "trivial episode," and it is obviously more than "slightly painful," and the "note of pathos" infused into the proemial paragraph is by no means countermanded or proscribed from the rest of the story by virtue of being relegated to the purported marginality of prefatory strategy. What does fade out is authorial presence and immediacy, now mediated by authorial trace become spectacle to itself. That spectacle or mirror-object watched constitutes the surfeit of the feint, the authorial self become a guest in the text, hosted by the self-effacing, faded-out author-prefator now haunting as remainder in his own story; the precipitator-doer turned onlooker, now watching his own surfeit, the remainder-doer in spectacular performance. In this sense, the proemial confession of the exordium belies its own marginality. It betrays the self-effacement of the "diminished" authorial self. For to "leave off being an actor" by means of confession in order "to become an onlooker" is tantamount to looking on the self as *acting*. In that redoubling, far from ceasing to be an actor, the subjective self (the authorial subject) becomes the performer acting the role of actor, being a "someone else" that founders on the self, on one's own ghost, on one's own mirror specter. The "confessor," the authoring subject that seeks to cast itself out as ratiocinating exteriority, implodes from the peripheries and enters (falls) into literature, into abyssal textuality. That is the fate of "Borges" in "Guayaquil"; that too is the fate of Rufus and of Joseph Cartaphilus in "The Immortal." That is, as well, the supremely ironic fate reserved for Emerson himself by Borges in the poem "Emerson," where we read of the brazen high priest of the self and of self-reliance:

He thinks: I have read the essential books
 and written others which oblivion
 will not efface. I have been allowed
 that which is given mortal man to know.
 The whole continent knows my name.
 I have not lived. *I want to be someone else.*¹⁹

The ironic exacerbation wrought upon the Emersonian "self" consists here in an etymological and literal overdetermination of self-reliance as a re-alignment or re-assembling of self, a redoubled bind (*re-ligare, reliance*), as in a confession, where the subject becomes an onlooking spectator of the self as "someone else." The strategy displayed through authorial self-dramatization in "Guayaquil" and dramatized at Emerson's expense in this poem is the same operative principle deployed in "The Immortal." In this sense "The Immortal" could be read as Hermetic parable of a textual economy and politics (Hermetic in the sense of Hermes's role as god of property and thievery); that is, the economy of appropriation and divestment of texts which authorize authorial selfhood—in the Vichian sense of a synonymy between property and *au(c)toritas*, where author means property, and authorial status is defined by ownership (*autos; proprius; suus ipsius*).²⁰ The text of "The Immortal," the Joseph Cartaphilus manuscript we read, is predicated on such economy: Pope's *Iliad* is acquired from Joseph Cartaphilus the "dealer," the manuscript-text is found in the last volume and becomes "literal offering" of an authorial persona, Borges, who, in making the offer, divests himself of the appropriation. This is the opening frame, the proemial gambit of the story. That prefatory propriety becomes subsumed, or reclaimed, by the text it frames when the text itself adumbrates the feint of that ploy; when it discloses the frame-up. And at this juncture our text, the Cartaphilus manuscript, authorizes its own readability as Hermetic economy, as compensatory linkage or contractual dealing which is "binding."

At this critical point we glean, as well, the spectral adjacency between the over-wrought Emersonian *re-liance* and the Homeric/Cartaphilusan *auctoritas*. I refer to the already cited passage in the text where we read that our synergetic "subject" Rufus/Joseph Cartaphilus writes: "In Aberdeen, in 1714, I subscribed to the six volumes of Pope's *Iliad*. . . . About 1729 I discussed the origin of that poem with a professor of rhetoric named, I think, Giambattista; his arguments seemed to me irrefutable" (p. 116). In another of the text's putative peripheries, in the supposed exteriority of a footnote, our "dealer," the authorial Borges (parading as broker, in dealership of Cartaphilus' the dealer's property, his manuscript), would have us understand unmistakably, by way of another obliquity of attribution, that the mentioned "Giambattista" is none other than Giambattista Vico. Borges attributes the "suggestion" to one of his contemporary compatriots and his frequent antagonist: "Ernesto Sábato suggests that the 'Giambattista'

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who discussed the formation of the *Iliad* with the antique dealer Cartaphilus is Giambattista Vico; this Italian defended the idea that Homer is a symbolic character, after the manner of Pluto or Achilles." The effect of such a stratagem that attempts to delineate liminal lines, thresholds between textuality and the peripheries of textuality, is to co-opt any and all privileged "beyondness" of authorial subjectivity as the text's shaping agent from above or from the outside. We can attribute that "unexpected" outcome to the fact that the text recapitulates into itself, sucks in, and thereby pre-empts any extra-textuality, eradicating in the process any ideological differentiation between a biographical (in the "real life" sense) author with his contemporary-world writing scene (Ernesto Sábato being an index here) and the authorial persona, the "broker," in this case the "wheeler dealer" who delivers the goods, offering them to us "literally." As with Homer and Emerson, Borges suffers a re-alignment, an entry *into* literature which is "binding." The "linkage" here could be outlined in the following compensatory and mirrored spectrum: What Vico (basing himself on, in collusion with, Flavius Josephus the Jew) does with Homer, is what Borges does with Emerson, is, in turn, the fate of Borges, and, no less so, becomes the fate of Giambattista Vico. In this regard, "The Immortal" could be read, and I opt here for reading it as such, as Vichian enterprise that turns on Vico his own method, dramatically fulminating and extending, in the process, that ambiguous and equivocal project in *The New Science* which announces itself as the "Discovery of the True Homer" (Book III).

Short of converting Vico's method in *The New Science* into overdetermining principle for "The Immortal," one must remark the distinctly Vichian procedure entailed in the text's strategy for inter-dicting frames, peripheral liminality, exteriority, and onlooking or ratiocinating subjectivity (authorial or remarking, i.e., Borges, Sábato, this or any other reader) and, by that inter-dicting, suturing these would-be peripheries into itself.²¹ That ploy, which problematizes Vico himself by turning his "method" on the Giambattista whose arguments on the origin of the *Iliad* "seemed to me irrefutable," appropriates the methodological axiom that serves as controlling postulate in *The New Science*: "Doctrines [Theories] must take their beginning from that of the matters of which they treat" (paragraph 314); and "It [The New Science] must begin where its subject matter began" (paragraph 338). The *principle* (*principium*) of procedure, in other words, must be of the essence of that which it treats. Thus, the deployed stratagems must be *of* the text; textualizing strategies with a text as their object must be *proper* to, must *pertain* to, their putative mark, to their considered matter, i.e., to the text itself. Such a principle of filiation, then, permits no exclusivity, liminality, or periphery. All that is about the text (all that "surrounds" it) becomes a filiate part of its constellation, of its textuality. The "author," the "authorial subject," the "proprietor" (*auctos/proprius*), the economic dealer of this *appurtenance* is neither excepted nor excludable from

the binding snare of this entanglement. Thus, in the bindery of texts and textuality the weavers and their weaving appertain to the fabric of their labor. In this simultaneous adjacency and filiation, *self-reliance* entails and is entailed by a *self-re-linkage*, a re-binding of self, an economic re-alignment to and within the web of fabrication, the texture of the text — a (re)entry into literature and literature's textuality. While Homer may not have *written* the *Iliad*, as rhapsode he wove its desultory fragments where, in turn, through etymology, homonymy, and compensatory economy, he himself, as *homeros*, has been stitched into its maze of links, into its macula. The Vichian postulates, in this regard, extend with firm constancy as method of *The New Science*; they also dramatize and display the *principii*, the "beginnings" which Vico's project subsumed, appropriated, internalized into itself as method:

Homer left none of his poems in writing, according to the firm assertion of Flavius Josephus the Jew against Apion the Greek grammarian. The rhapsodes went about the cities of Greece singing the books of Homer at the fairs and festivals, some singing one of them, others another. By the etymology of their name from the two words which compose it, rhapsodes were stitchers-together of songs, and these songs they must certainly have collected from none other than their own peoples. Similarly [the common noun] *homeros* is said to come from *homou*, together, and *eirein*, to link; thus signifying guarantor, as being one who binds creditor and debtor together. This derivation is as farfetched and forced [when applied to a guarantor] as it is natural and proper when applied to our Homer as a binder or compiler of fables (paragraphs 850-52, brackets in the translation.)

Within the Vichian schema method and matter become so integral, so inextricably interwoven that one can no longer speak of their duality. We have in Vico more than adjacency, more than supplementarity, with the logical consequence of an impossibility of "beginning at the beginning" or taking our *principii* from the *principium* of our subject matter since we ourselves cannot (could not) be an external element of that matter, just as Homer is not. In the Vichian procedure the *method* (literally the "way" — from the Greek *hodós*), the *pursuit of scienza*, of knowledge, is the knowledge itself; the path of wisdom is itself wisdom and all wisdom for Vico is "poetic wisdom." It is what one achieves in the *poesis*, in the "making," or fabrication, on the "way," in the pursuit itself: "Indeed, we make bold to affirm that he who mediates this Science narrates to himself this ideal eternal history so far as he himself makes it for himself. . . . For the first indubitable principle posited above is that this world of nations has certainly been made by men, and its guise must therefore be found within the modification of our own human mind. And history cannot be more certain than when he who creates the things also narrates them" (paragraph 349). Emerson has his own incarnation of this Vichian principle and its consonance with Vico's *verum ipsum factum* is unmistakable. In "Nature" we read, aphoristically,

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“Every man’s condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put. He acts it as life, before he apprehends it as truth.”²² Under, within, these circumstances, a *procedure* necessarily devolves upon its poetic etymology, upon its paleonymy. It literally becomes a *ceding* (*cedere*) “before” or in favor of, a yielding to a going before. Concomitantly, Emersonian “self-reliance” as pursuit of primacy, of “beginning” or *principium*, connotes a self-re-adjustment by which the self surrenders in order to re-capitulate, move to the fore — a compensatory economy of reciprocity whereby the self seeks to recoup the loss sustained in ceding, in yielding up of self so that its re-aligned remainder could attain to the sought after primacy or anteriority.

There is, we could say, an inescapable measure of capitulation in any re-capitulation. The duality or dialecticality of a self in a reciprocal, compensatory transaction with itself is a false duality or dialectic, Vico and Emerson seem to be telling us. For certainty in history, as far as Vico is concerned, resides in the mutuality, more accurately, the congruity of deeds, of things created, and of their narration. As for Emerson, our life is a rebus whose shape we live and what we live figures as that shape which we apprehend as our “truth.” While a redoubled subject or a dialectical self seems to be a figure with one term too many for Vico and Emerson, the “truth” of our fictions, the narration of our fabrications, of our history, require this superfluity at least as ploy, as feint so that the subject, authorial or otherwise, may act as onlooker, as outsider to his own actions, as exteriority to the fabric his actions weave as web, as text or incunabula which figures as the “actor’s” historical truth. If, as Vico tells us, man cannot comprehend anything outside of what he himself has made, and, as Emerson would have it, if man’s actions are themselves the questions to which the human condition is a solution, which man “apprehends as truth,” that discernment both for Vico and for Emerson is itself an act and resides within the web of man’s deeds, fabrications, procedures. The posture of self-distancing from the performance of this “drama” is more properly an “imposture.” In other words, authorial activity, just as acts of confessing, of onlooking which would have the self divide into spectator and spectacle, carries with it a necessary falsity — necessary in the sense that the feint is inherent, but also necessary in the sense that such play-acting is an indispensable element which infuses these human activities with an *aporia*, a difficulty.

Emerson contends with such difficulty by turning it into impetus, into energizing source which he terms our necessary “poverty.” Vico, describing the necessity of such a predicament, tells us that there can be no outside guarantors and, thus, an etymology which would link such a privileged, overriding status to *homeros* is, as he notes, “farfetched.” For Vico there are only “creditors/debtors” who are at once both creditor and debtor, who “bind” and ‘compile’ and who are also bound and compiled into the fabric of the compilation. Borges conflates Vico and Emerson, contending with this difficulty by treating its predicament

as irony. Accordingly, he exacerbates the feint, the ploy, the "falsity" inherent in a strategy of self-re-gathering, of re-collection, of a subjectivity bound into, entangled by, the textual economy we call (so cavalierly at times) literature and literary history. In the light of this "exacerbation," of this highlighting of *aporia*, we read Joseph Cartaphilus, the Borgesian avatar of Vico's Flavius Josephus the Jew, as he engages in the gymnastic performance of this playacting in order to recall and recollect the self as authorial subject severed from the synergesis Cartaphilus/Rufus; so that he may cogitate from a (feigned) exteriority, self-aware and cognizant of the feint and conscious, too, that his feint yields a surfeit, is a yield(ing) of an irony which produces a remainder, an alterity as spectacle, an "other" as, or in, self-reflection, i.e., his own authorial specter:

After a year's time, I have inspected these pages. I am certain they reflect the truth, but in the first chapters, and even in certain paragraphs of the others, I seem to perceive something false. This is perhaps produced by the abuse of circumstantial details, a procedure I learned from the poets and which contaminates everything with falsity, since those details can abound in the realities but not in their recollection. . . . I believe, however, that I have discovered a more intimate reason. I shall write it; no matter if I am judged fantastic.

The story I have narrated seems unreal because in it are mixed the events of two different men (pp. 116-17).

Cartaphilus' ruse aims at disarming and, in disarming the reader, diffusing the *aporia*, the predicament of ironic difficulty. His ploy consists in rendering his insight as having the appearance of, as *seeming* to be "unreal." He betrays his own awareness of the fact that he is engaged in an *extra-vagant* act here. He displays a precognition of not only being "judged" *as* but *being fantastic* by dint of "walking out on himself" — of extra-vagance. He engages in a procedure by which he yields as subject in favor of "another" who is not "another" but is a yielded or produced self out of an act of self-deflection. We may call this act a differential simulacrum, the simulation of specular reflection, a ghostly visitation, by means of which he feigns to be an on-looker looking on himself, as in an act of confession, and yielding in deference to Homer. The feint betrays itself, however, when in the next paragraph he tells us "I have been Homer." For the moment, he descries not only his own "fantastic" nature born of extravagance — or the attempt to extricate himself or drift from inside the web of the textus to the periphery — but he beholds as well that the story, under these circumstances, "seems unreal because in it are mixed the events of two different men." Only, and here is the surfeit, the ironic superfluity, if you will, the second of the "two different men" is not rendered from the terms of the synergism Rufus/Cartaphilus. Rather, it is deflected to read Rufus/Homer with Cartaphilus as the aspiring yield, the "third man" as remainder, as surfeit, as ratiocinating-narrating subject in authorial and authoritative exteriority: "Flaminus Rufus,

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who before has applied to the city the epithet of Hekatompylos, says that the river is the Egypt; none of these locutions are proper to him but rather to Homer. . . . Spoken by the Roman Flaminus Rufus, they are not. They are spoken by Homer; it is strange that the latter should copy in the thirteenth century the adventures of Sinbad, another Ulysses, and should discover after many centuries, in a northern kingdom and a barbarous tongue [Pope's English], the forms of the *Iliad*" (p. 117).

We recall, of course, that the grey and wasted antique dealer peddling Pope's *Iliad* is Cartaphilus, the dealer who subscribed to the six-volume translation in Aberdeen in 1714, and who "discussed the origin of that poem with a professor of rhetoric named . . . Giambattista." But so does Cartaphilus, in spite of the "falsities" which contaminate "recollection" of "details [which] can abound in the realities." And in trying to mediate which words are proper to whom, in attempting, that is, to delineate an economy of proprietorship, of authority, of *authorship*, his "confusion" betrays that no such privileged status obtains within this economy (whether it be the status of guarantor, *homeros*, or the status of ownership, *proprius*). "When the end draws near," he *confesses*, "there no longer remain any remembered images; only words remain" (p. 118). Reflecting on (and compounding) his own extravagant status as "fantastic" and on the confusion his earlier procedure perpetrated, he writes, "It is not strange that time should have confused the words that once represented me with those that were symbols of the fate of he who accompanied me for so many centuries. I have been Homer; shortly I shall be No One, like Ulysses; shortly, I shall be all men; I shall be dead" (p. 118). The quietus, the ultimacy of that wishful peroration, however, becomes interdicted. Having woven his own aphanisis, his own re-ceding (or yielding up of self) into the text, having become text by "exiting" into textuality, now that very text pro-scribes its own closure. That pro-scription, with ironic consistency, takes on the form of "Post-script," clearly a chiasmus, our rhetor Gimabattista would interdict. Thus, far from an expiration in ultimacy, in clausura, the text runs its course only to run "out" of that course, to work itself out into literature, into landscape of incunabula; a course not unlike Cartaphilus' re-ceding into words, into textuality disseminated and self-disseminating, scattered into desultoriness — the heterogeneous centoism, the monstrous heterogeneity of abysmal decenteredness where Rufus's quest foundered vertiginously.

I shall be taking up the nature of "Post-script" in its relations to script shortly. For now, I should like to focus on this trailing opusculum in relation to itself, as its own pleonasm or inflated economy which superannuates into its own ironic "poverty" of disseminated desultoriness. The procedure in this "Post-script" should be familiar to us by now. It consists in the Vichian *method* postulated as axiom for the *New Science*, in the Emersonian questioning self as hieroglyphic solution for the question posed — a self-gain in capitulation, or moving toward

subsuming all in order to eradicate all anteriority. The "Post-script" is concerned with the question of a "most curious" commentary elicited by the publication of the Joseph Cartaphilus manuscript, if we can still call it that. This curiosity is a cento, a patchwork quilt of "some one hundred pages" that speaks of "the Greek centos, of the centos of Latinity," among other fractions. It is biblically entitled *A Coat of Many Colors* and emanates from "the most tenacious pen" of a Doctor Nahum Cordovero,²³ yet one "more" palingenesis of Flavius Josephus the Jew and of Joseph Cartaphilus. What this "most curious" commentary expatiates is nothing more and nothing less than its own cento of Joseph's coat of many colors. Its biblical title remains consonant and, thereby, one with its biblioform, its "biblical" interiority. The fabric, the text(ure) of its Cordoban vellum, stitches its own incunabulistic "consolation" ("Nahum" has precisely this literal meaning in the Hebrew). In its one hundred pages resonates a reminiscence of Homer's myriad "Thebes Hekatompylos," the hundred-gated Theban writing scene. Far from a post-script, an addendum of clausura, an after-mathemata, this supposed appendix *recapitulates* the preceding textual corpus *but not* as synthesis. Rather, it subsumes its graphic antecedent so that it may move to the head of the process. For it is clearly apparent that in this purported after-word we have not an ending but a beginning. The textual poetics of an "epic" quest, the family romance of textuality of incunabula, sally forth for the innumerable first time. The textual *nostos*, the homing or home-coming anticipated in a "post-script" ends up as *zitis*, as renewed quest.

Like Marcus Flaminius Rufus, whose peregrination founders on a problematic locus where synthesis is impossible, where heterogeneous desultoriness interdicts cogency and the centeredness of transcendental origin or privileged *principium*, Nahum Cordovero's "commentary" must confront the insurmountable diffuseness of a mad structurality. Thus, his own enterprise can only manage a ragtag patchwork. Like the Homeroid troglodyte whose scribbles in the sand at the mouth of the cave lack internal identity, Cordovero's project can muster no "commonality" or internal consistency in these "Greek centos," these "centos of Latinity" that might enable him to martial this scattered fragmentariness into coherent transformation. In the face of this predicament and its impossibility, Cordovero contends with his *aporia* by subsuming its difficulty into his enterprise thereby making his own project of one piece with its subject matter. True to the Vichian axiom that theories must take their *principii*, their principles or beginnings, from the *principium* of the matters which they treat, Cordovero can do nothing but compound inaugural actions since his subject-matter — the "Cartaphilus manuscript" — consists in repeated and self-compounding beginnings. Like the authorial ghost emanating from the synergism Homer/Cartaphilus/Rufus, Nahum Cordovero devises his own self-conscious ruse, his self-ironic strategy which he deploys against the difficulty of his predicament. Faced with the desultoriness of multivalence, of polysemia disseminated into uncontrolled structural-

ity, like the spectral heroes and authorial subjects *on* whose manuscript he pens his own palimpsest-like commentary, Cordovero devises a spectral space for his own ghostliness from where he can look on his predicament as spectacle. We are told that in the face of this heterogeneity "he infers from these intrusions or thefts that the whole document is apocryphal" (p. 118). In view of his perspicacity into that Vichian filiation between his commentary and the document he comments on, Cordovero infers that his own performance is of the essence of its treated object. His inference thus betrays the insight that his own commentary, *A Coat of Many Colors*, must be *apocryphal* as well, if its re-marked object is indeed apocryphal, with the concomitant realization that he himself is an apocryphal figure, a polytropic fiction. Here we embark, more explicitly, on the relation between the "Post-script" and the "script."

We can read Nahum Cordovero's performance as commentator as a Borges parable on commentary and on self-extending textuality. Put into the form of "Post-script," Cordovero's commentary displays its palimpsest relation to its object betraying and subverting, thereby, the liminal median between "script" (object of commentary) and "Post-script" (the commentary). That subterfuge of divisory liminality, as we have seen already in the case of the manuscript itself, eradicates once more the dichotomy of an inside and an outside space of the text. Deployed in the guise of "commentary," the "Post-script" undermines the finality or concluding end it was devised to carry out. In that guise, in that ruse, the "Post-script" becomes an inter-diction, a dilatory *dictation between* continuity and discontinuity of the text, of the quest inscribed therein, of textuality's family romance in other words. Ironically, then, the "Post-script" assures unmitigated pursuit, continuity, textual peregrination by endlessly "pro-scribing" an ending of the script. In this sense "Post-script" becomes an extension and integral part of the script. In Vichian/Emersonian terms we could say that the *theoros* — the on-looker — falls into the *hodós*, the path, the way of *method* (into the "midst" of pursuit — *mid-hodós*, literally).

Thus even to the last structural unit, the last mark on the page of "The Immortal" becomes an extended conversation, a pivotal path, a pursuit that *turns* on itself for its own perpetuation. In that conflation the onlooking commentator, the conversant authorial subject, like his utterance or scribing activity, also becomes sublimated, subsumed into the endless self-perpetuation of the script as well, as we have seen in the case of Homer, Cartaphilus, Rufus, Cordovero, and, of course, Borges. "When the end draws near . . . only words remain," writes Cartaphilus. "It is not strange that time should have confused the words which represented me with those that were symbols . . ." he continues. Thus he himself passes into the realm of textuality's graphic figuration. In that coalescence, the *nostos*, the homing, of our questing subject — authorial and heroic — becomes the script itself, never "already written," but endlessly in the making, its pilgrimage become its own shrine in unending peregrination.