

## **BORGES: THE REALITY OF MAKING SENSE**

**A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Rhetoric  
Bates College (Maine, USA)  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree Bachelor of Arts - April 1, 1985**

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Special Thanks to Robert J. Branham,  
to whom this essay is dedicated

“Understanding is the goal, process and result whenever one mind succeeds in entering another mind or, what is the same thing, whenever one mind succeeds in incorporating any part of another mind”.  
Wayne Booth

### **INTRODUCTION**

The interest in pursuing further studies concerning Jorge Luis Borges was born out of my attraction to the problematic relationship between reality and fiction. While believing that writing is ultimately an expression of the self, it was necessary for me to understand Borges's fictional world to come to grips with his short story “The Other” (1980).

Borges's fictional world is essentially based on his conception of art as an illusion. Identity, individuality, and time are also illusory. Identity exists inasmuch as every man is also another man and even all men. Time is past, present and future existing simultaneously. The universe is considered as a total oneness in which individuality is a mere illusion. Since, as Borges states, “the ego is the past, the present, and also (...) the future”,<sup>1</sup> reality as the reflection of an ego becomes dubious and uncertain.

However, man has the need to understand the world in which he lives. By reading Borges, and by studying “The Other” in specific, I have come to realize that man understands his world according to his own reality. Borges's main purpose in confounding the boundaries between reality and dream in his fiction is to enable man to create his own reality according to the laws which he can know. As such, different realities may exist to different men.

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<sup>1</sup> Willis Barnstone (ed.). *Borges at Eighty*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 101.

Borges's pursuit of an understanding of the world in which we live is a reflection of his concern with the problematic relationship between the world known by the mind, and reality as it exists apart from any knowing subject. However, as man makes structures of words, of symbols, of metaphors, of adjectives, of images, he creates a world of art which might be as praiseworthy and as real. Borges's reality is born out of his fiction which has been found to be reflexive.

Reflexive/meta fiction takes as its subject – or object – the relationship between “real” and “fictional” worlds. In the fictional world of “The Other”, Jorge Luis Borges is two characters as well as its author. As he identifies himself with fictional characters, Borges insists that readers recognize the contingency of his world as we watch him make his own tentative world. By becoming critically detached from the action in the fiction, readers find it necessary to take on an active role in the reading process. As such, we recognize ways in which all of us are making our own worlds.

Although the process entangled within the reflexive/metafictional work directs us toward an understanding of the maker of a story, it also provokes in the readers an understanding of themselves. It is not only writing, but also reading, that is ultimately an expression of the self. While experiencing Borges as a creature of fancy, readers experience the unfamiliar as the text itself. They are unable to identify with the main characters “Jorge Luis Borges” since Borges is a man existing in the real world. Consequently, readers are forced to surface their own consciousness into an awareness of their own reality. The reading process becomes the readers' own reality.

However, as readers attempt to make sense of their reality, they are making fiction. As each one of us structures reality in a stylized and personal way, our construction of the world will be somewhat fictional. Different realities lead to constructions of different worlds. The boundaries between fiction and reality are lost in an attempt to make the world real.

As in Borges's fiction, “to see things as they really are is to see that *they are not* (...). What is *given* is not the thing, but a transformation (...) of the thing in the language”.<sup>2</sup> To make the world in which we live real, is to lose the boundaries between fiction and reality, between the dream and the real.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Boyd. “The Mimetic Fallacy”, in *The Reflexive Novel: Fiction as Critique*. Associated University Press, Inc., 1983, p. 172.

## Chapter One

### THE RHETORICAL AND FICTIONAL EXCHANGE

The successful act/process of the reading of a fictional text relies on “the active engagement of two human beings, one inviting to an elaborately formal dance of the mind, the other accepting the invitation and entitled to take pride in his own performance”.

Wayne Booth

The main purpose of this chapter is to establish the basis of rhetorical and fictional exchange. In doing so, it is of interest to establish the four main varieties that have prevailed in the history of Western literary tradition.

#### I

In the introduction to *The Rhetorical Analyses of Literary Works*, E.P.J. Corbett isolates the three elements which figure in any rhetorical situation – the speaker, the speech, and the audience or, otherwise, the *I*, the *it*, and the *you*. When the work is set up in relationship to three external elements – the Universe, the Author, and the Audience – a critic who confines her or his attention to the work itself, its formal structure and integrity, is defined as an Objective Critic. The New Critics and the Chicago School of neo-Aristotelians were engaged in such criticism. The literary work is, as an autonomous whole irrespective of the author who produced it and the audience which read or heard it, regarded as an object to be experienced and enjoyed.

The Mimetic Critic is interested in the verisimilitude of the representation, or *mimesis*, embodied in the literary work. That is, the work is studied in relation to the world or reality it attempts to represent.

The mode of criticism which is concerned with the work in relationship to its author, focusing on the psychology of the creative act, is called Expressive Criticism. As Corbett states, “the Expressive Critic ‘reads back’ from the work to its efficient cause”.<sup>3</sup>

Rhetorical Criticism, or Pragmatic Criticism as M.H. Abrams defines in his book *The Mirror and the Lamp*, considers the relationship between the work and the Audience its main

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<sup>3</sup> E.P.J. Corbett (ed.), *The Rhetorical Analyses of Literary Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. xvi.

concern. A rhetorical analysis of a literary work tends to focus on the text itself. It does not remain *inside* the literary work but works *outward* from the text to consider author and audience. Its importance lies in the interrelationships among author, work, and audience. As Corbett clearly remarks, “rhetorical criticism uses the text for its ‘readings’ about the author and the audience”.<sup>4</sup> Critics learn about the author from what they gather from the text itself – that is, by looking at such things as her or his ideas and attitudes, stance, tone, style, and her or his attempts to communicate with an audience. Such text-based speculations are also quite revealing about author and audience interaction.

By concentrating on the rhetorical strategies operating within the literary work, the critic acquires an understanding of its “modus operandis”. S/he is best protected against impressionism and subjectivism as s/he confines her or his analysis to specific elements in the text capable of producing a certain effect on a certain audience. Corbett quotes Bernard Weinberg to say that, “what happens in the audience happens because of what the poem is, not because of what the audience is”.<sup>5</sup> Essentially, the work is regarded as an instrument for communication. Rhetorical Criticism is more interested in the literary work for what it *does* than for what it *is*.

Finally, a critic is rhetorical as s/he attempts to show that the choices made by an author from available lexical and syntactical resources of a language are related to subject matter, or genre, or occasion, or purpose, or author, or audience, or a combination of these. As the rhetorical author, the rhetorical work of literature concerns itself with effecting a change of thought or attitude, and / or moving people to take some course of action.

However, if we are interested in the effects of the literary text on the reader, we should focus our attention on its workings and mechanisms next.

## II

If literary texts only carried the meanings brought to light by the process of interpretation, the reader’s participation in text construction would be limited to his acceptance or rejection of that text. For this reason, when reflecting upon a literary work, we should take into account not only the actual text itself, but also the actions involved in responding to that text.

Wolfgang Iser, in his essay “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach”, delimits two poles which he calls the artistic and the esthetic. The artistic refers to the text which the author created; the esthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader. Consequently, the literary work is not completely identical with the text, or with the realization

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<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xviii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

of the text, but lies beyond the two. It is the virtual convergence of text and reader which brings the text into existence. The dynamic nature of a literary work springs from this virtuality, and is at the same time the precondition for the effects which the work calls forth.

“The reader uses the various perspectives offered him by the text in order to relate the patterns and the 'schematized views' to one another; he sets the work in motion and this very process results ultimately in the awakening of responses within himself. Thus, reading causes the literary work to unfold its inherently dynamic character”.<sup>6</sup>

Iser's concept of the reading process relies on the fact that, were the reader given the whole story, and nothing left for her or him to do, her or his imagination would not enter the literary, here equated to the fictional field, resulting in boredom. Further, it is as the reader's imagination animates the “outlines” of a work that the written part of the text is to be influenced – causing the dynamic reading act/process to begin.

Agreeing with the notion that the meanings of literary texts are generated in the act of reading, the interpreter who wishes to open up the possibilities of such texts should renounce her or his role of conveying meaning. The reason lies in that, as the texts lose their determinacy, the more strongly is the reader shifted into the full operation of their possible intentions.<sup>7</sup> In J.L. Austin's terms, literary texts are “performative utterances” – that which creates its object instead of simply exposing its object (“constative utterance”).

However, inasmuch as “performative utterances” can create its object, a literary text, as opposed to a legal text, cannot set out anything factual of its nature – therefore it cannot bring about the existence of an object. In other words, a literary text, here to mean a fictional text, is form without reality. Its reality is established by the reader's participation and response to the text.

The main characteristic of a literary text, then, is

“its peculiar halfway position between the world of real objects and the reader's own world of experience. The act of reading is therefore a process of seeking to pin down the oscillating structure of the text to

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<sup>6</sup> Wolfgang Iser, “The Reading Process: A phenomenological Approach”, in *The Implied Reader: Patterns in Communication in Prose and Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 275.

<sup>7</sup> Wolfgang Iser, “Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction”, in *Aspects of Narrative: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. J. Hillis Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 6.

some specific (or multiple) meaning(s)”<sup>8</sup>

-- which the reader as well as the author may hold.

The gaps in the text – that is, the fundamental asymmetry between the text and reader which leaves open the connection between textual perspectives – give the reader a chance to build her or his own bridges by relating the different aspects of the object which have thus far been revealed to her or him. Inasmuch as readers are different people, different bridges have the possibility of being built, and the literary text never be given a final definition. The indeterminacy of the text leaves room for a change of vision. The reader’s responses, equated to her or his participation in the reading process, lead to a construction of the text.

### III

However, the author may act in a way as to guide the reader’s responses. One of the ways in which this can take place is through the author’s comments – as in an evaluation of the events. In the same essay mentioned above, Iser concludes that at the point which the author is guiding the reader’s responses, s/he is the one to remove the existing gaps. It is “with his comments (that) he tries to create a uniform conception of his narrative”.<sup>9</sup> The author tells the reader how her or his tale is to be understood. The reader, in turn, can only oppose the author’s commentaries if s/he thinks s/he can extract different impressions from the work.

Thus, commentaries can also imply other possibilities of interpretation than those that arise directly from the events described. Most important is the fact that, as Iser states, “commentaries on different situations (or on any situation for that matter) often reveal different standpoints of the author himself”.<sup>10</sup> This in turn offers an assessment which contains different possibilities open to the reader’s choice.

However, an important question arises. Since the author’s comments might often seem to contradict what the reader has just assumed from the events described, are we or are we not to trust those same comments? As a consequence, the reader realizes that s/he is dealing not only with the characters in the novel but also with an author who acts as a mediator between story and reader. The author is now demanding the attention of the reader with the same intensity as the story itself.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*,p.10

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*,p.18

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*,p.17

In *Critical Understanding*, as well as in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth gives different subcategories to dramatized authors. The undramatized author is the writer: the “real” person who wakes up in the morning, has breakfast and goes about her or his own business. The dramatized author or speaker is the “I” who narrates much fiction, or the “author” who intrudes into some modern drama. S/he may be presented as very different or as very close to the writer’s own life. However, neither writer nor dramatized author bears any predeterminate relationship with the implied author – the creating person implied by the totality of a given work. An implied author is one who can be equated with the author behind the scene; that is, the author’s second-self as s/he creates her or his work. Distinctions between real and implied authors are often difficult to be established when there are references to the real author in the work. The fictitious author or hero is the one created and played with by author and public, independently of the author’s actual works. The current word for this is “image”. “Character”, in the old sense of “reputation”, is what Wayne Booth has in mind.

Unreliable and reliable narrators are an additional subcategory. The narrator, the dramatized spokesman for the implied author, is reliable when s/he speaks or acts in accordance with the norms of the work. Unreliability can be identified as the narrator mistakenly believes her or himself to have qualities the author denies. Unreliable narrators possess characteristics which change in the course of the work. For Iser, it is the unreliable narrator which naturally constitutes the more interesting type for the communication process. The narrator’s “unreliability” possesses a strategic intention which relates to the steering of the reader in the text.

Different categories of narration in a single work constitute multiple viewpoints. The writer may use space-time dislocations, collage, or alternative endings with the intent to remind the reader of the artificiality of the fictional work. Thus, the center of multiple viewpoints which shifts continuously is an open invitation to alternative interpretations on the part of the reader. Nevertheless, as Iser very clearly points out, at the same time the reader is involved in the evaluative process, the process can guide the reader’s evaluation.

An additional way of guiding the reader’s responses can be established as we examine the way in which sequent sentences act upon one another. Inasmuch as the sentences correspond to “component parts” which make statements, claims, observations, or convey information, they establish various perspectives in the text. The sentences are not the total sum of the text itself for they only take on their full meaning as they interact as correlatives.

In “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach”, Iser establishes that as the sentence correlatives interact in their capacity as statements, observations, purveyors of information, they enable the reader to “climb aboard” the text. As they interact, they are in

themselves indications of something that is to come. They open up a particular horizon which is modified, if not changed, by succeeding sentences. In other words, “the sentence (...) aims at something beyond what it actually says. They set in motion a process out of which emerges the actual content of the text itself”.<sup>11</sup>

On another level, while the texts which reveal a cutting–montage–or segmenting technique permit relatively great freedom with respect to the concatenation of their textual patterns, the texts which are structured according to a principle of contrast or opposition have their textual pattern strongly prescribed. It is only when the discoveries of the motivations behind the constant shift of viewpoints are made that the reader can be led to the comprehension of what is intended. As a host of different perspectives is offered to the reader, the reading process almost becomes the problem of how to make these perspectives consistent. Thus,

“the text is constructed in such a way that it provokes the reader constantly to supplement what he is reading. The act of completion, however, is not concerned merely with secondary aspects of the work, but with the central intention of the text itself”.<sup>12</sup>

The author’s motive then, is “to bring about an intensified participation which will compel the reader to be that much more aware of the intention of the text”.<sup>13</sup>

The indeterminacy of the text causes the reader to search for meaning. Paradoxically, if and as s/he tries to break down the areas of indeterminacy by disregarding the motivations behind the constant shift of viewpoints, the picture that the reader shall draw will then be illusory. Consequently, as the limitations inherent in any meaning are exposed, the discriminating reader has a chance to come to grips with her/his own ideas in attempting to fulfill the intentions of the text. At the same time, as s/he acknowledges the inexhaustibility of the text by making decisions, it is this very inexhaustibility which forces the reader to make such decisions. Thus, the reading process is a reflection of a textual structure in which the reader’s part is already incorporated.

#### IV

In retrospect, Wolfgang Iser equates the most vital element of a textual structure to the reading process. Meaning is conditioned by the text but only in a form which allows the reader her or himself to bring it out.

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<sup>11</sup> Iser, “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach”, p.53.

<sup>12</sup> Iser, “Indeterminacy and the Reader’s Response in Prose Fiction”, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*,p.33



Iser also establishes that it is within the reader's imagination that the reality of a text lies. This he relates to the fact that "within a system, the lack of one element is important in itself".<sup>14</sup> The fact that an intention is unstated does not mean it does not exist.

However, inasmuch as the reality of a text is to be found in the reader's imagination, it has been removed from the text itself. But in fact, if we consider the conclusive meaning of a story to be the reader's experience, the reality of the text lies in the actual act of reading. The workings of the reader's imagination act as responses to the process of reading. From this viewpoint, the reader is not removed from the text itself, for her or his reality is the text's reality – the reading process is equated to the act of reading.

If in agreement with the above concepts, one shall not be in complete agreement with Iser's notion of literature.

"Literature stimulates life, not in order to portray it, but in order to allow the reader to share in it. He can step out of his own world and get into another, where he can experience extremes of pleasure and pain without being involved in any consequences whatsoever. It is this lack of consequence that enables him to experience things that would be otherwise inaccessible owing to the pressing demands of everyday reality. And precisely because the literary text makes no objectively real demand on its readers, it opens up a freedom that everyone can interpret in his own way. Thus, with every text we learn not only about what we are reading but also about ourselves, and this process is all the more effective if what we are supposed to experience is not explicitly stated but has to be inferred".<sup>15</sup>

In fact, before and if the reader is able to transcend the restriction of time and written word to enter other worlds, or infer what we are supposed to experience, s/he is "forced" to face the written word itself, and come to terms with it. As Iser states it himself, the reader is not "simply called upon to 'internalize' the positions given in the text, but (...) induced to make them act upon and transform each other".<sup>16</sup> It is the text's indeterminacy which "forces" the reader to face the written word, and by doing so bringing her or his own consciousness to the surface into an awareness of reality. Whether or not the reader is in fact taken into "other worlds", it is the preceding step which concerns us here. The experience of the reading process, as an awakening of the reader's consciousness, becomes her or his own reality. The actual reading act is not in itself an illusion.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*,p.43

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*,p.44

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*,p.119

In fact, Iser relates the transitory nature of illusion revealed in the reading process to entering the fictional world so as to experience the realities of the text as they happen. The reader is the one to build the illusions, and as s/he oscillates between the involvement in and the observation of those, s/he “opens (her or) himself up to the unfamiliar world without being imprisoned in it”.<sup>17</sup>

Iser also supports the idea that the way in which the reading experience comes about, through the process of continual modification, is closely akin to the way in which we gather experience in life. Thus, the “reality” of the reading experience can illuminate basic patterns of real experience. The manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect her or his own disposition. Further, the impact this reality makes on the reader will depend largely on the extent to which the reader actively provides the unwritten part of the text, supplying the missing links. “It is only by activating the reader’s imagination that the author can hope to involve (her or) him and so realize the intentions of his text”.<sup>18</sup>

The consequent notion of literature relies on the belief that it is because of literature’s very indeterminacy that a choice–making process is promoted and established. That is, the process involves the reader in such a way as to cause a change of thought or attitude, and/ or moving people to take some course of action.

This thesis supports the idea that the reader experiences the “fictional realities” of the text as a choice–making process. Because the literary text does not intend something “out there”, it makes demands on its readers. As the reading process calls forth an awakening of the reader’s consciousness and with it her or his present reality, the choices between different sentence correlatives stand for demands of the reader. Thus, a literary text is considered here that which can affect the reader’s attitude concerning her or his present experiences. It is by being “forced” to come to terms with the written word by making specific choices that the literary text conducts us into an examination of itself as well as of ourselves.

It is not when “we have outstripped our preconceptions and left the shelter of the familiar that we are in a position to gather new experiences”<sup>19</sup> but the opposite. It is when we are dressed in our preconceptions, and the familiar is faced with the unfamiliar that the experience of the unknown calls forth a re–examination of ourselves.

In place of reflecting the structure of experience inasmuch as “we must suspend the ideas and attitudes that shape our own personality before we can experience the unfamiliar world of the literary text”,<sup>20</sup> the reading process reflects the structure of experience as our

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<sup>17</sup> Iser, “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological”.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*,p.64

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*,p.65

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*,p.65

familiar ideas and attitudes are forced to experience the unfamiliar as *the text itself*. We are unable to suspend our ideas and attitudes so as to accept the literary text passively. It is as those same ideas and attitudes are re-examined that the reading process is experienced.

Instead of considering *identification* – that is, the establishment of affinities between oneself and someone outside oneself – a familiar ground on which we are able to experience the unfamiliar, we shall consider exactly the opposite. That which leads us to experience the unfamiliar *is* the at least momentary “lack of affinities” which draws us towards the unknown. As text and reader confront each other, the reader’s individuality is brought to the foreground. What s/he is, is confronted with what s/he is not – and it is this conflict which leads the reader to re-examine, re-formulate and, in the re-discovering of her or himself, put into practice that which s/he thought nonexistent.

## Chapter Two

### “THE DOUBLE” IN BORGES: DREAM OR REALITY?

#### I AM

“I am he who knows himself no less vain  
 than the vain looker – on who in the mirror  
 of glass and silence follows the reflection  
 or body (it’s the same thing) of his brother.  
 I am, my silent friends, the one who knows  
 there is no other pardon or revenge  
 than sheer oblivion. A god has granted  
 this odd solution to all human hates.  
 Despite my many wondrous wanderings,  
 I am the one who never has unraveled  
 the labyrinth of time, singular, plural,  
 grueling, strange, one’s own and everyone’s.  
 I am no one. I did not wield a sword  
 in battle. I am echo, emptiness, nothing”.

Jorge Luis Borges

“We are only ourselves and yet there exists the strongest  
 impulse to destroy our solitude by including more in it”.

Willis Barnstone

The main purpose of this chapter is to establish a correlation between the concept of “the double” and Jorge Luis Borges’s fictional world.

#### I

To draw significant connections between Borges’s fictional world and the concept of “the double”, it is necessary to take Borges’s concept of identity into account. The notion that every man is also another man an even all men permeates most of his works. In fact, he considers his stories autobiographical. “I have told them...using strange symbols so that

people might not find out they were all more or less autobiographical”.<sup>21</sup> Borges has not created any characters, but has written and rewritten about the same old “Borges”, only slightly disguised.

An example of this can be found in the short story “Borges and Myself”.

“It’s to the other man, to Borges, that things happen. I walk along the streets of Buenos Aires, stopping now and then – perhaps out of habit – to look at the arch of an old entranceway or a grillwork gate; of Borges I get news through the mail and glimpse his name among a committee of professors or in a dictionary of biography. I have a taste for hourglasses, maps, eighteenth-century typography, the roots of words, the smell of coffee, and Stevenson’s prose; the other man shares these likes, but in a showy way that turns them into stagy mannerisms. It would be an exaggeration to say that we are on bad terms; I live, I let myself live, so that Borges can weave his tales and poems, and those tales and poems are my justification. It is not hard for me to admit that he has managed to write a few worthwhile pages, but these pages cannot save me, perhaps because what is good no longer belongs to anyone – not even the other man – but rather to speech or tradition. In any case, I am fated to become lost once and for all, and only some moment of myself will survive in the other man. Little by little, I have been surrendering everything to him, even though I have evidence of his stubborn habit of falsification and exaggerating. Spinoza held that all things try to keep on being themselves, a stone wants to be a stone and the tiger, a tiger. I shall remain in Borges, not in myself (if it is so that I am someone), but I recognize myself less in his books than in those of others or than in the laborious tuning of a guitar. Years ago, I tried ridding myself of him and I went from myths of the outlying slums of the city to games with time and infinity, but those games are now part of Borges and I will have to turn to other things. And so, my life is a running away, and I lose everything and everything is left to oblivion or to the other man.

Which of us is writing this page I don’t know”.<sup>22</sup>

In this piece Borges is wrestling with the theme of “the double”. The private man

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<sup>21</sup> George Plimpton (ed.), *Writers at Work* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), p. 139.

<sup>22</sup> J.L. Borges, “Borges and Myself”, in *The Aleph and Other Stories: 1933-1969* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970), p. 151.

Borges has lost ground to “Borges” the literary character, which the man himself has created. “I let myself live, so that Borges can weave his tales and poems, and those tales and poems are my justification” (lines 11-13). As Emir R. Monegal points out in *Jorge Luis Borges: a Literary Biography*, the character “Borges” has usurped all of Borges’s functions and privileges. “Everything that Borges now does, or likes, becomes the other’s possession”.<sup>23</sup> While the “I” stands for the private self, “Borges” stands for publicity, interviews, politics, opinions. Publishing belongs to “Borges”, while feeling, dreaming, and writing belong to “I”. A third Borges, the fictional “Borges”, is the one to sum the public self and reflect upon his experiences: “I have been surrendering everything to him, even though I have evidence of his stubborn habit of falsification and exaggerating” (lines 21-22).

By becoming “Borges”, Borges obliterates himself. Thus he states “I am fated to become lost once and for all, and only some moment of myself will survive in the other man” (lines 18-20). In such a way Borges ceases to exist, and is finally nothing.

As a consequence of the above, individuality – a vast and complete oneness which is the universe – is but an illusion. As J. Alazraki points out, “if the world exists only as my idea of it, myself, a part of this world is just an idea in the mind that perceives me or projects me as its perception”.<sup>24</sup> Thus Borges is an echo, emptiness, nothing – as every man is also another man and even all men.

## II

In attempting to establish Borges’s fictional world, one has to be aware that such a world is based on the idea of art as an illusion. Borges states: “maybe everything I have written is a mere metaphor, a mere variation on that central theme of being puzzled by things”<sup>25</sup>. That is, since one can never express things but allude to them, wondering at life may stand for the art of poetry.

However, it is important to note that at the same time things are unobtainable by art, we are making structures of words, of symbols, of metaphors, of adjectives, of images. As such, Borges believes this world of art “may be as praiseworthy and as real”.<sup>26</sup>

A further notion that permeates Borges’s works relies on the conception of time as an illusion. Past, present, and future exist simultaneously in eternity. The past is making us all the time – we need it in order to create the future. The present moment is also an abstrac-

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<sup>23</sup> Emir Rodriguez, *Jorge Luis Borges: A Literary Biography* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978), p. 399.

<sup>24</sup> Jaime Alazraki, *Jorge Luis Borges. Columbia Essays on Modern Writers*, No. 57 (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 38.

<sup>25</sup> Barnstone, *Borges at Eighty*, p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59.

tion, as the past or the future. Consequently, one slips all the time from one to the other because in the present moment one always has some kind of past, and some kind of future also. In the short story "The Aleph",<sup>27</sup> time, as in the total sum of the spatial universe, is to be found in a tiny shining sphere barely over an inch, existing in eternity.

Nevertheless, Borges expands his conception of time as he relates it to his conception of identity. He supports the idea that the problem of identity is like the problem of time inasmuch as the problem of time involves the problem of ego. "For, after all, what is the ego? The ego is the past, the present, and also. . . the future".<sup>28</sup> In fact, Borges has the feeling of remembering himself as he wakes up in the morning. He feels he is more or less nonexistent, but at the same time has to be somebody, and exactly that somebody.<sup>29</sup>

Borges has also said that during extremes of happiness or sadness, he is apt to feel that what he is undergoing is happening, independent of him, to somebody else. The fact that when he writes he stresses certain peculiarities of his and omits others, has led him to consider Borges as a creature of fancy. As he states it himself, "why on earth should I worry what happens to Borges? After all, Borges is nothing, a mere fiction".<sup>30</sup> Thus, the ego is merely an onlooker who has identified himself with the man he is continually looking at.

### III

Borges's preoccupation with identity and sometimes its discord, duality, shall be the focus of the following section.

Psychoanalysts define the experience of seeing one's own "self", or one's double as "autoscopy". Literally, autoscopy means "seeing" oneself in the visual space, as if it were one's image reflected in a mirror. In his article "The Self and the Double", M.D.N. Jukianowicz defines autoscopy as "a complex psychosensorial hallucinatory perception of one's own body image projected into the visual space".<sup>31</sup> The autoscopic double usually copies all movements and facial expressions of its "original".

Apart from sensorial, emotional and cognitive modes of perceptions, the subject not

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<sup>27</sup> J.L. Borges, "The Aleph", in *The Aleph and Other Stories: 1933-1969* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970), pp. 15-30.

<sup>28</sup> Barnstone, *Borges at Eighty*, p. 101.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>31</sup> N. Lukianowicz, "Autoscopic Phenomena: The Self and The Double", *General Psychology*, V. 80 (1958), p. 199.

only “sees” a true image of her or himself (visual perception), but also may “hear” her or his spectre “with his mind”, though not with her or his ears. S/he also perceives the position in space and all apparent movements of “the double” as her or his own movements (kinesthetic perception). Finally, s/he is usually intellectually and emotionally aware of her or his double as an integral part of her or himself (psychoemotional perception). Both the subject and the double seem to possess three dimensions.

Jukianowicz also points out that some of the vivid hallucinatory experiences occur in the drowsy state when the subject is just falling asleep. He calls these images hypnagogic images and states that they “behave” independently of the subject’s voluntary control and are characterized by a vividness of picture.

Much of Borges’s preoccupation with identity, in this case its duality as existent in “the double”, is reflected in his conceptualization of language and reality. Language is a “tradition, a way of grasping reality, not an arbitrary assemblance of symbols”.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, “one should work into a story the idea of not being sure of all things, because that’s the way reality is”.<sup>33</sup> Thus, reality is dubious and uncertain; the universe is considered as a total oneness in which individuality is a mere illusion.

Language, however, is considered as being capable of turning around and observing itself. As D. Bolinger states in his article “Fire in a Wooden Stove: On Being Aware in Language”, “it exists in time and space – here can observe there and today can observe yesterday”.<sup>34</sup> Burton Hatlen defines this characteristic of language as metafiction – a fiction which forces the reader to become conscious of the nature and significance of the fictioning process itself.<sup>35</sup>

Such self – reflexivity makes problematic the reality of the text, author, and reader in such a way as to open up the possibility of a new kind of relationship between reader and writer. Thus, Hatlen considers fundamental in the concept of metafiction the awareness of the artistic structure, which is achieved as readers are reminded that the work of fiction is not a natural phenomenon.

To J.A. Pearse, metafictionists reveal their process of invention through the fictional

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<sup>32</sup> J.L. Borges, *The Gold of the Tigers* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977), p. 8

<sup>33</sup> D.L. Shaw, *Borges: Ficciones*, ed. J.E. Varey and A.D. Deyermond (Grant & Cutler Ltd., 1976), p.

<sup>34</sup> Dwight Bolinger, “Fire in a Wooden Stove: On Being Aware in Language”. in *The State of The Language*, ed. Leonard Michaels and Christopher Ricks (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), p. 381.

<sup>35</sup> Burton Hatlen. “Borges and Metafiction”, in simply a *Man of Letters* (Orono, Maine: University of Maine at Orono Press, 1982), p. 133.



form itself, and compel readers to be both creators of and audience for the fiction.<sup>36</sup> The interpreter and the implied reader function as agents for enacting the potential meanings presented by the prestructured text. Thus implied reader and interpreter share the ambiguous status of being performer – when making manifest the connections between material and technique – and audience simultaneously. Consequently, Pearse perceives interpreter / implied reader as one agent in the interpretation of metafiction. The narrative technique and material presented are connected only through experiencing their entanglement.

As the metafictionist fragments the narrative focus to highlight the process which calls fiction into being, the interpreter / implied reader is asked to focus upon maintaining the ambiguity existent in multiple narrative perspectives. In attempting to expose the subject from many angles, the writer creates a fictive world which presents clues on itself for establishing a credible narrative direction among the possible experiences in a story. The structure of the story arises from how events are related by their content in order to produce the narrative direction. Therefore, the performance of ambiguity enhances the struggle for narrative position. The dynamics highlight the fact that this ambiguity is best considered through experiencing it.

Michael Boyd supports the idea that reflexivity can be used to describe a specific element in a work, or to describe the controlling compositional idea behind the entire work.<sup>37</sup> He also maintains that as the realist writer pretends that fiction is life, the antirealist *knows* that life is a fiction. “Words become instruments for pursuing a reality that eludes both observation and introspective insight”.<sup>38</sup> The reflexive mode is, thus, a mode of antirealism.

A more radical kind of anti – realism is a literature that turns back on itself; which instead of simply relocating reality into some ideal world, or in actual, everyday events, challenges the bane assumption underlying *any* equation between literature and life. Thus, reflexive fiction takes as its subject, or as Boyd points out, as its object, the relationship between “real” and “fictional” worlds. Boyd also equates reflexive fiction to metafiction: a criticism on fictional form – the short story or novel which uses its own imaginative energy to sustain itself.

The reflexive fiction is thus seen as "not only changing our attitudes toward the world

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<sup>36</sup> James A. Pearse, “Beyond the Narrational Frame: Interpretation and Metafiction”, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 66, 1980, p. 73.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Boyd, “The Reflexive Novel”, in *The Reflexive Novel: Fiction as Critique* (Associated University Press, Inc., 1983), p. 20.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

but also changing the ways in which those attitudes are formed”.<sup>39</sup> As such, characters will seem “unreal”, and writers may use space time dislocations, collage, or alternative endings with the intent to remind the reader of the artificiality of the fictional work. As a consequence, the reader is encouraged to become critically detached from the action, finding it necessary to take on an active role in the process of reading.

The resulting process entangled within the reflexive / metafictional work is directed toward an understanding of the maker of a story. Authors become problems to be solved, and characters bits of evidence to their sensibility. “If anything, rather than being ‘dehumanized’, the reflexive novel (or fiction), runs the risk of being too personal”.<sup>40</sup> Writing becomes ultimately an expression of the self. Therefore, the reflexive / metafiction writing provides a sustained examination of the writer and his work.

Inasmuch as modern literature defines itself primarily in terms of its self – consciousness and through the activity of self – examination, the reflexive / metafictional fiction attempts to bring us back to the fundamentals of the reading process. As Burton Hatlen points out, while Borges insists that readers recognize the contingency of his world as we watch him make his own tentative world, we recognize ways in which all of us are making our own worlds. The metafictionist in Borges exists in his concern with the problematic relationship between essence and existence, between the world as known by (or recreated in) the mind, and reality as it exists (if it exists) apart from any knowing subject.

#### IV

“Which of us is writing this page I don’t know” (line 33). It is at the end of “Borges and Myself” that the reader realizes one might not always be successful in reducing or solving the problematic relationship between the world as known by the mind, and reality as it exists apart from any knowing subject. It is by confounding the limits between the individual and the generic, reality and absolute abstractions, that Borges widens the scope of his stories to include all men.

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*,p.34.

### Chapter Three

#### MAKING SENSE IS MAKING FICTION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF “THE OTHER”

“Think of the world as a riddle. And the beautiful thing about it is that it can’t be solved”.

J.L. Borges

“The word is ineffable, but it’s unspeakable. . . all words need something to be shared”.

J.L. Borges

Chapter one established the grounds for an understanding of the rhetorical and fictional transaction. Its main focus was the reader’s active participation in responding to a literary, fictional text. Chapter two dealt with Jorge Luis Borges’s real and fictional worlds. It laid the basis for an understanding of the concept of “the double”. The notion of the double directed us toward the problematic relationship between the world as known by the mind, and reality as it exists apart from any knowing subject.

This third chapter will be based on a critical analysis of the short story “The Other”.<sup>41</sup> This is the story of Borges’s encounter with a younger Borges, “The Other”, himself at age 20.

The role designed for the reader, in an attempt to understand or make sense of the world in which s/he lives will be this chapter’s primary focus. This, however, is connected with the role the fictional author – the one created and played with by author and public, independently of the author’s actual works – determines for her or himself.

Since in “The Other”, as in “Borges and Myself”, “only some moment of myself (the older Borges) will survive in the other man (the younger Borges)” (line 26), the fictional author is forced to differentiate younger and older Borges. The older Borges, who had never been a father, “felt for that poor boy – more intimate to me even than a son of my flesh – a surge of love” (p. 15). As the fictional author brings forth the younger and the older Borges’s idiosyncracies, he is differentiating both characters.

However, the reader had been previously drawn into the world of fiction as the fictional author stated that, although “I made no attempt to record it (the event) at the

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<sup>41</sup> J.L. Borges, “The Other”, in *The Book of Sand* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977), pp 11-20.

time” (lines 2-3), “now. . . I feel that if I commit it to paper others will read it as a story” (lines 4-6). As s/he is faced with the Borges’s idiosyncracies, the reader is taken out into reality. Such is the case when the younger Borges realizes that both men resemble each other, “but you’re much older and your hair is gray”. (p. 12)

In *The Reflexive Novel*, Michael Boyd points out that the concept of reflexivity is *about* bending back – it makes its *actions* its theme. The reader is faced with the problematic relationship between reality and fiction as s/he comes constantly into contact with the younger and older Borges’s idiosyncracies. As s/he attempts to discriminate between the two, the text becomes the reader’s own reality – the attempt to set boundaries between dream and reality, between the fictional and real worlds.

F.J. Varela, in his article “A Calculus for Self Reference”<sup>42</sup> maintains that a self – conscious system contains its own description as a source of further information. However, the hardship rooted in self – referential situations is based on the fact that the distinction between the (self-) referent and that which is operated upon collapses. The fact that Jorge Luis Borges is a character in “The Other” as well as its real author is a source of information about the real author himself. He is attempting to gain credibility as he mingles reality with fiction.

The first paragraph of “The Other” establishes the setting for the story. The fictional author is recording an event which took place in Cambridge in February 1969. A horrifying event to him, the implied author commits it to paper in the hope that if others will read the event as a story it might become a story for him as well. However, it “does not mean that an account of it will move anyone else”. Such statement is an invitation to the reader to enter and partake in the fictional author’s world. As he leaves undefined the account the event might have on his reader, the reader is bound to give him full credit.

As R.M. Adams states in “Authenticity – Codes and Sincerity – Formulas”, “the fact that I need to be vouched for instantly disqualifies me as one who can vouch”.<sup>43</sup> Thus Borges, the fictional author, cannot vouch. The possible veracity of the event experienced lies in the calculated ambiguity established by the ambiguous ending of “The Other”.

Adams also states that the abdication of authorial responsibility for what he lists as arrangements of episodes, motives, appeals for sympathy, by which readers’ responses are manipulated, is a strategy that seems to eliminate the manipulative element in language. As

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<sup>42</sup> Francisco J. Varela G., “A Calculus for Self-Reference”, *Int. J. General Systems*, Vol. 2, 1978, pp. 5-24.

<sup>43</sup> R.M. Adams, “Authenticity – Codes and Sincerity – Formulas”, in *The State of the Language*, ed. Leonard Michaels and Christopher Ricks (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), p. 580.

Adams puts it, “he (the author) invites your suspicion as the ultimate proof of his good faith”.<sup>44</sup> Not vouching for is the fictional author’s way of drawing the implied reader into the text. Thus, the text’s ambiguity and indeterminacy “forces” the reader to face written word and bring her or his consciousness to the surface into an awareness of what reality might be.

As the fictitious becomes full of reality, the real takes on an aura of unreality. To record a “real” event in an attempt that it might become fiction (lines 6 and 7 of “The Other”) is to confound the boundaries of dream and reality. Thus, the fictional author is purposefully forcing the reader to create his own reality.

Jorge Luis Borges, the real author of “The Other”, holds the view that man does not understand reality. As a consequence the “belief in the meaningfulness of existence becomes difficult to maintain”,<sup>45</sup> and life for Borges may be an illusion. As J. Alazraki comments in *Jorge Luis Borges*, if art is a dream, or a magic, the success of the magician is the instant in which the real seems fictitious, and the fictitious real”.<sup>46</sup> In fact, Borges uses the “real” as a springboard to launch his readers into a fictional world. As he uncovers a possible aspect of truth, he questions the validity of the created world in order to give it greater reality – the reality of construction.

In the second paragraph, the implied author establishes the time of the day, describes the scenery as he sits on a bench facing the Charles River. The fictional author begins to build upon the implied author’s idiosyncracies in order to differentiate him from the younger Borges – he is a professor, and has slept well the night before.

In paragraph three, the concept of “the double” is introduced. “I had the impression (according to psychologists, it corresponds to a state of fatigue) of having lived that moment once before” (lines 20-22). Someone sat down at the end of the bench and began to whistle a familiar tune which took the implied author back to “a certain Buenos Aires patio” (line 32).

A dialogue is established between these two men, and as it turns out, the other man sitting at the end of the bench is Borges at a younger age. The implied author, the Old Borges, is faced with “The Other” – the Younger Borges at age 20. They start talking.

To the Old Borges, the conversation is taking place in Cambridge in 1969. To the Young Borges, however, it is Geneva, 1914. He lives at number seventeen Malagon, across from the Orthodox Church. “In that case”, I said (the Old Borges) straight out, “your name is Jorge Luis Borges. I, too, am Jorge Luis Borges” (lines 47-48). “No, he said (the Young Borges) in a voice that was sure but a bit removed” (lines 50-51). “The strange thing is that we resemble each other, but you’re much older and your hair is gray” (lines 53-55). The Old

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 581.

<sup>45</sup> Shaw, *Borges: Ficciones*, p. 75.

<sup>46</sup> Alazraki, *Jorge Luis Borges*, p. 37.

Borges, then, convinced that they are both the same person sets to persuade the Young Borges by telling him things that a stranger would not know. The Old Borges tells the Young Borges of a silver mate cup and washbasin, of his books, and of his evenings “on a certain second floor of Place (Dufour)” (line 73). The Young Borges, however, is not convinced. “These proofs prove nothing. If I am dreaming you, it’s natural that you know what I know” (lines 77-79). The fact that the Young Borges remains unconvinced and in doubt that Young and Old Borges are the same man, provokes the reader to come out of the fictional world once again, and into contact with reality. Thus, reality is equated to the problematic relationship between the real and fictional world.

The boundaries of dream and reality are confounded as the implied author directs our attention to existent and real objects: books such as *Germania*, *Don Quixote*, and the mentioning of “meetings” which took place on the second floor of the Place Dufour – a reality in the life of the real author, Jorge Luis Borges. As a consequence, the reader is constantly confronted by the fact that he is reading fiction in the form of a short story. In itself, this is the fictional author’s attempt to make meaning out of his own reality – an event which took place “in Cambridge back in February, 1969” (line 1).

In fact, the real author Borges does not conceal his concern with dreams. He is not sure whether the world is a natural process or whether it is a kind of a dream which we may or may not share with others. He states: “I tend to think of things as being illusory. The idea of the world as a dream is not alien to me. On the contrary... what I like is to dream away, to let myself go dreaming”.<sup>47</sup> To Borges, a writer is a man who is continually dreaming – “a dream is a creation. . . you know that all that comes from yourself”.<sup>48</sup> As the moral of a fable may be unknown to the writer and different to us all, Borges tries to go on dreaming and using metaphors rather than arguments.

As the Young Borges objects to the proofs brought up by the Old Borges in an attempt to prove that they were both the same man, the Old Borges sees his point. However, “if this morning and this meeting are dreams, each of us has to believe that he is the dreamer. Perhaps we have stopped dreaming, perhaps not” (lines 81-84). The implied author, however, intends to “accept the dream just as we accept the world and being born and seeing and breathing” (lines 85-87) in order to make plausible the ambiguity of the text. If a dream is equated to being born, a reality in itself, the boundaries between dream and reality might be nonexistent with the same age as the real author’s, Jorge Luis Borges, the implied author states that his “dream has lasted seventy years now” (lines 91-92). To have the implied author on such similar grounds as the real author is a call for credibility and authenticity due to the fact that reality is being perpetually confounded with fiction. It is in a

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<sup>47</sup> Barnstone, *Borges at Eighty*, p. 164.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

provisional complicity, a moment or more of assent, in his attempt to overcome real or apparent obstacles, that the implied author intends to guarantee his authenticity.

As the implied author accepts the idea of being born and seeing and breathing as he accepts the idea of dreaming, the dream is equated to reality. A dream that lasts seventy years is a life that lasts seventy years. A life that lasts seventy years is a reality comparable to the fact that on awakening man finds himself with himself.

The solution found by the Old Borges for the fact that the two men can be one man is that “what is happening to us now (Young and Old Borges) – except that we are two” (lines 93-95). That is, “there isn’t a person alive who, on waking, does not find himself with himself” (lines 93-94). As a proof to support this view, the Old Borges offers to tell the Young Borges about the future which awaits him, which is Old Borges’s past.

In the following paragraphs Old Borges talks about his mother, the death of his father and grandmother, while Young Borges talks about his father before his death. As Old Borges asks how he himself is doing, he answers “I don’t know the number of books you’ll write, but I know they’ll be too many like your father and so many others of our family, you will teach” (lines 117-122). As the Young Borges did not ask about the success or failure of his books, the Old Borges went on to talk about past wars and the present political situation of the world.

It is noteworthy the fact that there exists a peculiar equivalence of self – reference and time. As F.J. Varela points out, “self –reference cannot be conceived outside time, and time comes in whenever self – reference is allowed”.<sup>49</sup> The notion of a circular time as consequence of self – reference reflects Borges, the real author’s conception of the universe as infinite and chaotic. The infinite becomes the only dimension suitable to a world conceived as an insoluble labyrinth. James Alazraki warns: “the spatial and temporal infinity of the universe accentuates its chaotic nature and reinforces its impenetrable condition”.<sup>50</sup> The subject who is usually intellectually and emotionally aware of his double as an integral part of himself supports the notion that one man is at all times all men. This implies the negation of individual identity, or more exactly, the reduction of all individuals to a general identity which contains all and is at the same time contained in each. Borges’s way of perceiving and organizing the universe transcends the immediate physical reality, psychological perception and realistic reporting. Since the ending of “The Other” is a calculated ambiguity – the reader shall never know whether the event was reality or a dream. As the context of the story is in the past, the present is a bending back in time, and an opportunity for the reader to construct with Borges the universe according to her or his own reality and order. As a follow up to the fact that the Old Borges tells the Young Borges

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<sup>49</sup> Varela, “A Calculus for Self-Reference”, p. 20.

<sup>50</sup> Alazraki, *Jorge Luis Borges*, p. 21.

about his future, the fictional author starts to signal further differences between the two. Not only is the implied author much older and has gray hair, but “I (the old Borges), who have never been a father, felt for that poor boy – more intimate to me even than a son of my flesh – a surge of love” (lines 144-146). The Old Borges’s weakness towards the Younger Borges can be equated to the old man’s knowledge of the younger, as when the younger responded to one of his questions – “this attempt at rhetoric seemed to me proof that he had regained his composure” (lines 158-159). The fact that another image of the protagonist is provided in his double reflects the notion referred to above that one man is all men, and one place, all places. In the preface to *The Book of Sand* Borges states:

*In ‘The Other’, I had to ensure that the speakers were sufficiently different to be two persons and alike enough to be one. Is it worth stating that the idea for the story came to me in Cambridge on the banks of the Charles River, whose cold course reminded me of the far – off course of the Rhone?*<sup>51</sup>

Such approach as taken in “The Other” ensures the permanence of the problematic relationship between dream and reality. The reality of two persons alike enough to be one is equated to the dream of one man being sufficiently different to be two persons, or all men.

A long conversation is maintained between Young and Old Borges after the latter’s recognition of a surge of love for the Young man. They talked about literature, and the Old Borges feared he said “no more than the things I usually say to journalists” (lines 198-199). Further idiosyncrasies were established between the two characters. The Young Borges, in an attempt to undermine the Old Borges’s conviction that they are one man recalls a specific incident. “If you have been me, how do you explain the fact that you have forgotten your meeting with an elderly gentleman who in 1918 told you that he, too, was Borges?” (lines 207-211). The Old Borges replies that maybe he chose to forget the event. As the Young Borges asks the Old Borges “What’s your memory like?” (line 216), the latter realizes that “to a boy not yet twenty a man of seventy was almost in the grave” (lines 217-218). The Old Borges studies Old English while the young man does not; he is a professor, while the young man is to become one; the Old Borges’s memory approaches forgetfulness and his hair is gray. The Young Borges is not yet twenty, while the Old Borges is seventy. Both have different “literary” interests, and at seventy the Young Borges will have lost his eyesight almost completely, as the Old Borges has.

The above paradoxes challenge the reader’s easy acceptance of the Old Borges’s story. As such, the implied reader is being constantly drawn in and taken out of the fictional world. As a result the role designed for the reader is her or his attempt to understand, or

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<sup>51</sup> Borges, “The Other”, in *The Book of Sand*, pp. 11-20.



make sense of, the world in which s/he lives.

However, the Young and Old Borges's "situation was unique and, frankly, we were unprepared for it" (lines 196-197). Their "conversation had already lasted too long to be that of a dream" (lines 222-223). In an attempt to prove to the Young man that he was not dreaming the Old Borges, the latter reads him a line of Victor Hugo. The Young Borges acknowledges he had never heard it before. Later the Old Borges realizes that

*we were too similar and too unlike... Each of us was a caricature copy of the other. . .The situation was too abnormal to last much longer. Either to offer advice or to argue was pointless, since unavoidably it was his fate to become the person I am. (lines 249-256)*

Even if they were a younger and an older version of the same man, they would both be caricaturized versions of themselves and in that fashion exaggerated and unprecise versions.

However, the Young and Old Borges's differences begin to disappear as the implied author realizes, in response to a statement made by the Young Borges, that, "we have not changed in the least... Ever the bookish reference" (lines 278-279). Their attempt to "see each other the next day, on this same bench, which existed in two times and in two places" (lines 286-287) failed. They parted without touching each other – so as to leave open the question of each other's existence. At this point the implied author believes he has discovered the key to the understanding of the event.

*The meeting was real, but the other man was dreaming when he conversed with me, and this explains how he was able to forget me; I conversed with him while awake, and the memory of it still disturbs me.*

*The other man dreamed me, but he did not dream me exactly. He dreamed, I now realize, the date on the dollar bill (1964). (lines 304-311)*

This notion of partial dreaming works so as to support the ambiguous ending of "The Other". In the same way the reader is drawn out of the fictional world as s/he is faced with the Young and Old Borges's idiosyncrasies, or each one's weaknesses, the same takes place as s/he is faced with the idea of partial dreaming. The reader is being constantly faced with the problematic relationship between dream and reality, between the real and fictional worlds.

The reader of "The Other" is left uncertain of the outcome of the event narrated by the implied author. Such is the real author's idea of life and work of art: due to their fragmentary condition, the finished text is impossible in itself. As Burton Halen points out, "it is precisely the *failure* of our attempts to encompass the world within our heads – or within

our fictions – that makes our existence endurable”.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Hatlen, “Borges and Metafiction”, in *Simply a Man of Letters*, p. 140.

## CONCLUSION

According to J.L. Borges, we do not understand the significance of life, or of ourselves, or of the world in which we live. All the combinations of experience are possible and nothing can be ruled out. Though the Old Borges attempts to offer the reader a “logical” explanation in the conclusion of “The Other”, there exists no fixed criteria, and anything logical or illogical can happen. Any explanation, credible or incredible, may be true. In sum, all things may be an illusion.

Inasmuch as most things in “The Other” conform to the principle of verisimilitude, Borges makes reality tangible. His main purpose is to confound the boundaries between reality and dream, reality and fiction. This enables man to create, as Borges does, his own reality according to the laws which he can know.

The fact that the main characters of “The Other” are the Young and Old Borges, two versions of one single man, who can be easily identified with the story’s real author, Jorge Luis Borges, causes the text itself to be viewed as a object of concern. Conflict between reality and fiction can be identified as a calculated ambiguity designed to be and remain a mystery. Self – reference, as in the use of the figure of “the double”, functions as a tool in maintaining the desired ambiguity. No definite answer exists to the out come of the event related by the implied author.

Borges’s choice of a self – reflexive character sacrifices the reader’s ability to identify with it. The idiosyncrasies called upon by the implied author are effective in establishing the reader as different from himself. In doing so, Borges provokes the reader into an active process of reading. The role created by the fictional author for his implied reader, is one based on the interaction between reader and writer. Reading generates meaning inasmuch as the implied reader works towards actualizing the metafiction created by its author. As J.A. Pearse points out, “the implied reader exists where the reader and the literary text collide, the latter two entities call the first into being”. As text and reader confront each other, the reader’s individuality, in an awakening of her or his consciousness, is brought to the foreground. What s/he, is confronted with what s/he is not – and it is this conflict which becomes her or his own reality.

From this perspective, the reader shares the ambiguous status of being the performer – the one to create meaning in the metafictional text – and audience simultaneously. The unveiling of the narrative perspective arises from how the events are related by their content in order to produce the narrative perspective itself. It directs us within the reflexive and metafictional work, towards an under standing of the maker of the story.

Fiction and reality exist simultaneously in a self reflexive text. Such text presents a realistic event as fiction in the re – telling of a story. The uncertainty and ambiguity with

which the reader is left, as in the outcome of "The Other", compels us to see reality as a perpetual movement – a movement which transcends daily occurrences to discover new dimensions in it. As in "The Other", the ambiguous boundaries between reality and fiction exist with the intention to confuse the reader up to the point of preventing her or him from defining the identity of things, and making her or him feel that anything can be all things. To be Borges is to search for him in our deepest idiosyncrasies, in the center which is each one of us: to be my self being the other. In an awareness of her or his own consciousness, the reader's thoughts are the Unitarian space in which all contradictions may exist simultaneously. Thus, to understand or make sense of the world in which we live is to structure reality in a personal and stylized way. As each one of us constructs the world in private and therefore somewhat fictional manner, to make sense is to make fiction. There is no real experience inasmuch as our construction of the world is somewhat fictional. As the boundaries between reality and fiction are nonexistent, to understand another's reflexivity is to understand one's own. To attempt to come to grips with our own reflexivity is an attempt to come to grips with our own reality – reality which in itself, and by itself, incites man towards perpetual forward motions.

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