

Erratic Encyclopedias: *Ulysses* and the Analytical Language of John Wilkins

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Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges showed a life-long, though problematic, interest in the aesthetic accomplishments of James Joyce. The passionate celebration of the Irish writer in “ultraist” Borges’s early review of *Ulysses* and his own translation of its last page in *Proa* give way to a more complicated combination of mordant critiques and sincere recognition. For instance, in a 1937 “Synthetic Biography” of Joyce, published in the Argentinian weekly magazine *El Hogar*, Borges declares about *Ulysses* that the “delicada música de su prosa es incomparable [the delicate music of its prose is incomparable].”¹ Four years later, in a short opinion piece published in *Sur*, Borges refers to Joyce’s book as an “indecipherably chaotic” novel requiring the monstrous memory of someone like his fictional character Ireneo Funes. In the same breath, though, he goes on to praise Joyce’s “multitudinous diversity of styles.”² Borges summarizes his conspicuously ambiguous response as he states that “[p]lenitude and indigence live side by side in Joyce” (R 136). Joyce’s last book, *Finnegans Wake*, does not escape Borges’s harsh criticism either. After elevating Joyce as “uno de los primeros escritores de nuestro tiempo [one of the best writers of our time]” in a 1939 review of *Finnegans Wake*, Borges demotes the book as “una concatenación de retruécanos cometidos en un inglés onírico y que es difícil no calificar de frustrados e incompetentes [a chain of puns rendered in an oneiric kind of English, both difficult not to categorize as frustrated and incompetent].”³

However, what in a preliminary approach appears to be a refusal and rectification of an immature admiration turns out to be a haunting presence in Borges’s fictional and essayistic production. Joyce’s and Borges’s shared and self-assumed marginal stance in relation to encyclopedic paradigms of knowledge will provide the grounds to see their literary endeavors in the same light. As a result of this common perspective, Borges’s veiled attacks in his fiction on Joyce and his modernist experimentalism as a totalizing practice can be reassessed,

since Joyce's work can be actually argued to be paradoxically mirrored in the Argentine's own literary praxis. Arguably, this paradoxical stance is related to Joyce's own dual status as canonical authority and stylistic iconoclast. After a theoretical proposal for the understanding of the intricate literary relations between Borges and Joyce, I shall offer readings of Borges's "El idioma analítico de John Wilkins," "El Aleph," "La muerte y la brújula" and "La lotería en Babilonia." I will seek to show that these texts' underlying claims cohere with, rather than clash against, Joyce's approach to the epistemological possibilities of human understanding in *Ulysses*.

César Augusto Salgado has related Borges's conflicting views of Joyce to his evolution from his early ultraist experiments in poetry to the philosophical outlook of his mature years.⁴ As Salgado argues, "this change of heart motivates the mature Borges's rejection of Joyce's experiments in the novel after the young Borges had promoted Joyce's work."⁵ Andrés Pérez Simón seems to mimic this critical position as he argues Borges "rejected *Ulysses* after a change of heart, partially motivated by the influence of *Finnegans Wake*, which the Argentine writer considered a total disappointment."⁶ Such straightforward evolution does not seem to fit well with a writer who is notorious for his ambiguity, masterfully displayed in his fiction. This ambiguity should not only guide us through the philosophical labyrinths of his short stories, but should also warn us against taking his critical views at face value. While Borges blatantly attacked the experimentalism of the *Wake*, he also viewed it as a model for "the same circularity he was looking for," as Pérez Simón himself argues.⁷ Indeed, *Finnegans Wake* lies behind Ts'ui Pên's novel in "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" or the "Libro de Arena." The latter is described as an inconceivably infinite, four-dimensional book where the "número de páginas es exactamente infinito. Ninguna es la primera; ninguna es la última" ["number of pages is no more or less than infinite. None is the first page, none is the last"].⁸ The resemblances between this book and *Finnegans Wake* are evident, but Borges himself made them explicit as he argued that Joyce's book was not "less inconceivable than C. H. Hinton's fourth dimension or the Nicene Creed" (R 135). Both books can be taken as models of an idealist universe where no single perspective or reading can comprise the whole, a perspective shared by both Borges and Joyce. Therefore, even though Borges lambasted Joyce's daring experiments in his critical writings, he covertly used them as models for his fictional and philosophical ideas.

In addition, Salgado's linear conception of Borges's work would find a likely objection in Borges's own claim that the seeds of his literary

developments are contained in his first book, ultraist *Fervor en Buenos Aires* (1923): “[p]ara mí, *Fervor de Buenos Aires* prefigura todo lo que haría después [to me, *Fervor en Buenos Aires* prefigures everything I was going to do thereafter]” (OC 1:13). Along the same lines, he favored a cyclical appraisal of his production as he admitted that the ultraist he was in the 1920s lived in him long after that phase was over. Discussing the Icelandic *kenningar* in *Historia de la eternidad* (1936), he pointed out that “[e]l ultraístra muerto cuyo fantasma sigue siempre habitándome goza con estos juegos [the dead ultraist whose ghost keeps haunting me delights in these games]” (OC 1:380).

An illustrative example of Borges’s perplexing ambiguity is provided by “Deutsches Requiem,” one of the stories in *El Aleph* (1949). The protagonist of this narrative is a Nazi officer, Otto Dietrich zur Linde, who is about to be executed for his war crimes. The story opens with zur Linde’s genealogy, which, significantly, omits a Hebraist. The Jew vs. Nazi dichotomy is further undermined when zur Linde becomes identified with his nemesis, David Jerusalem. Jerusalem did not only become “una detestada zona” (OC 1:579) [“a detested zone”⁹] of zur Linde’s soul, but also, with his own death, prefigured the very circumstances of his executor’s. Similarly, zur Linde uses the central arguments of the biblical Book of Job—paraphrasing the epigraph to the story—to define the destiny of Nazi Germany: “[m]uchas cosas hay que destruir para edificar el nuevo orden; ahora sabemos que Alemania era una de esas cosas” (OC 1:580) [“(m)any things will have to be destroyed in order to construct the New Order; now we know that Germany also was one of those” (L 146)]. The paradox here, as Jaime Alazraki has noted, is that the new order zur Linde is trying to bring into the world is coterminous with the old order that he is striving to destroy, the epigraph from Job operating as a miniscule mirror that inverts zur Linde’s pro-Nazi narration.¹⁰

A similarly paradoxical and destabilizing relation can be posited between Joyce and Borges. Like zur Linde, Borges tried to devalue the received “gospel” of Joyce’s innovations, while recasting the underlying principles of the Irish storyteller’s work in his short fiction. The Joyce/Borges connection seems to prove correct the Borgesian statement in “La esfera de Pascal” that “[q]uizá la historia universal es la historia de la diversa entonación de algunas metáforas” (OC 2:16) [“(i)t might be that universal history is the history of the different intonations given a handful of metaphors” (L 192)]. It could be argued that Joyce and Borges shaped the same underlying conception of reality under different aesthetics, thus giving different intonations to the same metaphor.

In an article that emphasizes the importance of Joyce's influence in contemporary Latin American literature, Emir Rodríguez Monegal supports this view of the literary ties between Joyce and Borges as he claims that "[s]lowly, and through many successful works (Borges achieved in his stories a scale reduction. . .) and through some literally monstrous attempts (Leopoldo Marechal's *Adam Buenosaires*), *Ulysses* became the invisible but central model of the new Latin American narrative."¹¹ According to this critical assessment, it can be argued that, like the epigraph from Job in "Deutsches Requiem," Borges's short stories, notably those in *Ficciones* and *El Aleph*, function like convex mirrors that microscopically reproduce the central onto-epistemological concerns informing *Ulysses*. Borges's fiction can be envisioned, then, as an ambivalent combination of "filial admiration and patricidal mockery, brotherhood and rivalry,"¹² most likely stemming from a characteristic "anxiety of influence."¹³ As Borges affirmed, "a nadie le gusta (como dijo Johnson) deberle nada a sus contemporáneos [nobody likes (as Johnson said) to owe anything to one's contemporaries]" (*OC* 1:417), a statement interestingly followed by a reference to Joyce's *Ulysses* and its Homeric parallels. However, Borges shared with Joyce an overriding suspicion of clear-cut notions of reality and the universe, both preferring to constantly problematize well-established certainties crystallized more often than not into encyclopedic fact. As Robert Martin Adams has put it, "as does Joyce, Borges often gives us nuts to crack that are more shell than kernel."¹⁴

In *Atlas* (1984), Borges dedicates a section to Ireland, which closes with the following words: "[c]aminé por las calles que recorrieron, y siguen recorriendo, todos los habitantes de *Ulysses*" (*OC* 3:408) ["I also walked the streets where all the inhabitants of *Ulysses* walked, and continue to walk"¹⁵]. With these words, Borges seems to join the characters in his wanderings around the Irish capital, becoming part of the immortal novel. Ireland is also the subject matter of some of his stories, such as "La forma de la espada" and "Tema del traidor y del héroe." In these two stories, Levine argues, "there is a brotherhood of colonial marginality between Argentina and Ireland *vis à vis* successful imperialism."¹⁶ Borges actually spells out the Irish-Argentinian connection in "El escritor argentino y la tradición":

Tratándose de los irlandeses no tenemos porqué suponer que la profusión de nombres irlandeses en la literatura y la filosofía británicas se deba a una preeminencia racial, porque muchos de estos irlandeses ilustres (Shaw, Berkeley, Swift) fueron

descendientes de ingleses, fueron personas que no tenían sangre celta; sin embargo les bastó sentirse irlandeses, distintos, para innovar en la cultura inglesa. Creo que los argentinos, los sudamericanos en general, estamos en una situación análoga. (OC 1: 273)

[In the case of the Irish, we have no reason to suppose that the profusion of Irish names in British literature and philosophy is due to any racial pre-eminence, for many of those illustrious Irishmen (Shaw, Berkeley, Swift) were the descendants of Englishmen, were people who had no Celtic blood; however, it was sufficient for them to feel Irish, to feel different, in order to be innovators in English culture. I believe that we Argentines, we South Americans in general, are in an analogous situation. (L 184)]

These considerations are further elaborated by Borges in “Nuestro pobre individualismo,” where he puts forward some arguments that Joyce, by virtue of his stance as colonized “other,” would have been likely to endorse. According to Borges, “el mundo, para el europeo, es un cosmos, en el que cada cual íntimamente corresponde a la función que ejerce; para el argentino es un caos” (OC 2:37) “[f]or the European the world is a cosmos where each person corresponds intimately to the function he performs; for the Argentine it is a chaos”].

This patricidal marginality that feeds off the center while innovating and reshaping it can be said to characterize not only Joyce’s and Borges’s works in relation to their respective “normative” cultures, but also Borges’s dependence on/rejection of Joyce’s literary creation. Even though marginal Joyce is refashioned as patriarchal authority by Borges, the resemblances between their aesthetic-philosophical projects are noteworthy. Books like *Ulysses*, *Ficciones* or *El Aleph* radically depart from the impositions of enlightened notions of knowledge as stable fact. This artistic rebelliousness opens up a liminal zone where both authors operate as they stand between old, decaying values and new, though largely unformed, ones. Like their national identities, their artistic projects beg for self-authentication. As such, Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Borges’s fictions can be considered rites of passage in their contesting of official discourse. As Victor Turner points out, Arnold Van Gennep, in *Rites of Passage* (1908), distinguishes “three phases in a rite of passage: *separation, transition and incorporation*.”¹⁷ For the transition stage, Van Gennep chose the term “limen”, the Latin for “threshold.” In anthropological terms, the liminal stage operates as an anti-structure

where the individual in a given society experiences a blurring of social distinctions and strays from the prevalent order of the rest of the community. Placed in the agonistic locus between center and margins, liminality is the non-space liable to generate new worlds. In Turner's words, "[m]eaning' in culture tends to be *generated* at the interfaces between established cultural subsystems. . . . Liminality is a temporal interface whose properties partially invert those of the already consolidated order which constitutes any specific cultural 'cosmos.'"18 However, it should be noted that the liminal does not irrevocably lead to a discursive center, but can operate as a permanently transitional space where referents stand in a catachrestic relation to cultural signifiers. Commenting on Turner's inferences, Spariosu aptly affirms that "the liminal as the cunicular may not necessarily always lead back to a center; on the contrary, it may, under certain conditions, lead away from it in a steady and irreversible fashion."19

Therefore, refusing to reduce reality to any of its component parts or to re-establish an order, both Joyce and Borges reject ready-made explanatory systems or encyclopedias. In Levine's words, "Borges would ultimately translate Joyce's efforts to write the simultaneity of perceived reality into his own terms."20 Joyce's and Borges's rewriting of Western culture contests the rational systematization of the universe that became the aim of the project of the enlightenment. Both writers, rather than privileging any epistemological principle ruling representation, embrace previously silenced or disregarded discursive spaces to explore the plurisignificant implications of giving different intonations to the same time-worn metaphors. Perpetually inhabiting the agonistic zone of the limen, Joyce and Borges propose an aesthetics of free play that continuously refuses to reach paradigmatic systems of knowledge. As Jacques Derrida has claimed in his seminal essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," the notion of free play of signification does away with any sort of center as a result of the effacement of a metaphysical cornerstone: "[t]he absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely."21

With these theoretical considerations in mind, we should not be surprised that Borges could never wholeheartedly comply with the impositions of a literary patriarch, a source or center of influence. Despite his veiled admiration for the Irish novelist, Borges refused to slavishly acknowledge his debt to his model, just as both writers strayed from the mainstream culture into which they had been born. However, this aspect is what paradoxically brings their respective artistic enterprises together

and endows them with infinite freedom to constantly recreate reality aesthetically. Their liminal stance enabled them to construct labyrinthine universes where chaos equals order, and chance and infinite regress substitute for cause-and-effect logic and a centered structure. This irreverent spirit not only casts an uncanny glance upon the edifices of knowledge solidified in the encyclopedia and the dictionary, but also makes it impossible to assert a clear-cut lineage of literary ascendancy between Borges and Joyce. Just as both writers need and despise the order they distort so as to create, Borges seems to take the Irish writer as a limit that he simultaneously and paradoxically approaches in the act of breaking away from it.

In “Avatares de la tortuga,” Borges argued that it is “aventurado pensar que una coordinación de palabras (otra cosa no son las filosofías) pueda parecerse mucho al universo” (*OC* 1:258) [“venturesome to think that a coordination of words (philosophies are nothing more than that) can resemble the universe very much” (*L* 207)]. This idea is furthered in another sketch from *Otras inquisiciones*, “El lenguaje analítico de John Wilkins,” where Borges presents the linguistic endeavors of John Wilkins, who like Ireneo Funes tried to devise a language where “cada palabra se define a sí misma” (*OC* 2:84) [“each word defines itself”²²]. The arbitrariness of such an enterprise is revealed as we find out that it is based on artificial “categorías o géneros, subdivisibles luego en diferencias, subdivisibles a su vez en especies” (*OC* 2:85) [“categories or classes, which were then subdivisible into differences, subdivisible, in turn into species” (*OI* 102)], according to which Wilkins divides the universe. Since the universe lacks ultimate meaning, Borges reasons, all human systems of understanding it are equally valid or invalid. Therefore, John Wilkins’s language “no es el menos admirable de esos esquemas” (*OC* 2:86) [“is not the least admirable of those schemes” (*OI* 104)].

In this short piece, Borges also registers a zoological categorization from a Chinese encyclopedia, entitled “*Emporio celestial de conocimientos benévolos*” (*OC* 2:86) [“*Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*” (*OI* 103)], which, like Wilkins’s language, offers an alternative to “normative” segmentations of reality:

En sus remotas páginas está escrito que los animales se dividen en (a) pertenecientes al Emperador, (b) embalsamados, (c) amaestrados, (d) lechones, (e) sirenas, (f) fabulosos, (g) perros sueltos, (h) incluidos en esta clasificación, (i) que se agitan como locos, (j) innumerables, (k) dibujados con un pincel finísimo de pelo de camello, (l) etcétera, (m) que acaban de

romper el jarrón, (n) que de lejos parecen moscas. (*OC* 2:86)

On those remote pages it is written that animals are divided into (a) those that belong to the Emperor, (b) embalmed ones, (c) those that are trained, (d) suckling pigs, (e) mermaids, (f) fabulous ones, (g) stray dogs, (h) those that are included in this classification, (i) those that tremble as if they are mad, (j) innumerable ones, (k) those drawn with a very fine camel's hair brush, (l) others, (m) those that have just broken a vase, (n) those that resemble flies from a distance. (*OI* 103)

This classification, which deconstructs itself as it contains a section (h) that stands for the whole, has gained some critical relevance lately as it has inspired one of the most influential philosophical treatises of the twentieth century, Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1966). Foucault introduced his book with the following words: "[t]his book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought . . . breaking up all ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things."²³ *The Order of Things*, like Borges's fictions, sets out to critique the edifices of enlightened reason, negating the existence of a unified foundation for philosophical systems or a single-dimensional organic coherence within the world itself. This epistemological relativism ascribes "equal value to rational and irrational modes of classification insofar as they are manifestations of fictional, conjectural, imaginative or speculative thought."²⁴ The encyclopedia is, once again, disseminated by its reflection in a mirror, as happens in the opening lines of "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius."

The totalizing spirit of encyclopedic enterprises as seen in literary works is also parodied in "El Aleph," where Carlos Argentino Danieri, in his poem *La Tierra* [*The Earth*], tries to "versificar toda la redondez del planeta" (*OC* 1:620) ["set to verse the entire face of the planet"²⁵]. Danieri's work is subject to harsh parody, and Borges refers to it as a "pedantesco fárrago" (*OC* 1:621) ["pedantic hodgepodge" (*A* 21)] and a poem that "parecía dilatar hasta lo infinito las posibilidades de la cacofonía y del caos" (*OC* 1:622) ["seems to draw out into infinity the possibilities of cacophony and chaos" (*A* 22)]. We detect the sub-textual presence of Joycean works such as *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake* behind Danieri's *La Tierra* since, as Joyce did with *Ulysses* and *Work in Progress*, Danieri wants to publish his poem serially. His constant corrections also bring to mind Joyce's obsession with finding the right word and his constant reworking of manuscripts: "Me releyó, después,

cuatro o cinco páginas del poema. Las había corregido según un depravado principio de ostentación verbal” (*OC* 1:621) [“He then reread me four of five different fragments of the poem. He had revised them following his pet principle of verbal ostentation” (*A* 20)]. The stylistic and intertextual richness of *La Tierra*, “covering thirty centuries packed with literature” (*A* 18), also bears crucial resemblances to the narrative texture of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, especially “Oxen of the Sun,” and the *Wake*.

The “Aleph” that Borges discovers in the cellar of Danieri’s house is the source of *The Earth*. The “Aleph” is “uno de los puntos del espacio que contiene todos los puntos” (*OC* 2:623) [“one of the points in space that contains all other points” (*A* 23)], and its rendering in the lineal account that Danieri provides is only a simplification of its infinite simultaneity. Language and reality are irreconcilably different in nature. A similar relationship can be posited between philosophical systems and encyclopedic projects like Danieri’s and the world. None of them can possibly capture the multidimensional chaotic nature of the universe. The only option to report the “Aleph” is, Borges writes, an enumeration, which as “any listing of an endless series is doomed to be infinitesimal” (*A* 26). The stark simplicity of the chaotic enumeration comprising the vision of the “Aleph” stands in opposition to the symmetrical alexandrines of Danieri’s poem and its contrived rhetoric. As Ana María Barrenechea explains, the repetition of the verb “see” with each element of the enumeration is a stylistic device that highlights the attempt to register the marvelous spectacle in an honest and unmediated way.²⁶ With this, Borges seems to ridicule Joyce’s totalizing attempt in trying to capture in a novel a day down to its minutest details.

However, despite the rhetorical complexity of *Ulysses*, Joyce’s book is closer to Borges’s chaotic enumeration than to Danieri’s poems. As Borges does in “El Aleph,” Joyce consistently mocks as incomplete encyclopedic attempts to capture the essence of the cosmos. This element of incomplete information is at the very foundation of the ludic narratives of both authors and triggers an endless series of playful creations of orders that are doomed to be erratic.²⁷ “Eumaeus” is a good illustration of the erratic encyclopedic narration that characterizes *Ulysses* on multiple levels. The stylistic technique in this chapter, according to the Linati-Gilbert scheme, is “narrative (old)”, and it actually resembles realist novels in the fashion of Defoe or Dickens. However, a closer look at the syntax of the chapter often reveals anacolutha that seem to undermine the powers of language to mirror the world. Its lengthy descriptions, aimed at exhausting all the aspects of the referent, actually reveal their own inadequacies. The linguistic organization of discourse that mirrors an

ordered reality crumbles in an episode where “[s]ounds are impostures . . . like names” (*U* 16.362-3).²⁸ Therefore, as Eric D. Smith has claimed,

If sounds (spoken language) and names (nomenclature, definition) are “impostors,” humankind is in a state of epistemological crisis. Meaning, predicated upon the ability to categorize things separate and definable one from another, is rendered unattainable, and language is reduced to a hoax, a complex game the rules of which are indecipherable. Joyce, it seems, is anticipating the post-structuralist severance of signifier and signified.²⁹

The inadequacies of language and style also permeate the identities of the characters in the chapter. At the beginning, Stephen and Bloom come across a vagrant who is ironically referred to as “Lord John Corley” (*U* 16.242-3). Later we learn that this specious title is the result of his great-grandmother’s working as a servant in the house of a noble family. Also, Bloom contradictorily argues that “Christ was a Jew too, and all his family, like me, though in reality I’m not” (*U* 16.1084-5). Related to this is the uncertainty concerning what day it is, as the following exchange attests:

—At what o’clock did you dine? he [Bloom] questioned of the slim form and tired though unwrinkled face.
 —Some time yesterday, Stephen said.
 —Yesterday! exclaimed Bloom till he remembered it was already tomorrow Friday. Ah, you mean it’s after twelve!
 —The day before yesterday, Stephen said, improving on himself. (*U* 16.1572-7)³⁰

On this occasion, it is scientific Bloom, instead of artistic Stephen, who is guided by his senses, showing how “it is hard to lay down any hard and fast rules as to right and wrong” (*U* 16.1095-6).

In the absence of a grand narrative that unfailingly dictates what to think of the universe, *Ulysses*, like the classification of animals in Borges’s Chinese encyclopedia, or the analytical language of John Wilkins, is a provisional blueprint of the Dublin day it sets out to demarcate. As “Wandering Rocks” with its juxtaposed vignettes implies, Bloom’s, Stephen’s and Molly’s accounts of the day are just three among many others. According to this reading of “Wandering Rocks,” Bloom is just a mere pawn in the infinite game of life, and his perspective is reduced to a mere peephole into the reality of 16 July 1904. Like each of

Molly's lovers, he is "neither first nor last nor only nor alone in a series originating in and repeated to infinity" (*U* 17.2130-1) in perceiving the reality of the day. Indeed, each of the vignettes in "Wandering Rocks" could potentially become a new rendering of the day, and, hence, a new *Ulysses*. Like the zoological classification in the Chinese encyclopedia, *Ulysses* undermines its own claims to offer a totalizing view of the reality it explores. Joyce's rejection of dogmatic orderings of reality infuses his narrative with a chaotic freedom that enables it to explore new discursive possibilities. Joyce, like Bloom and Stephen—indeed like all of us in our daily experience—is bound "to live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life!"³¹ This productive combination of determinism and randomness offers "the possibility of multiple significance in every moment, multiple histories arising and read retrospectively from every bifurcation point in the text."³²

As Stephen argues, for a genius like Shakespeare, "errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery" (*U* 9.229). The same applies to Joyce and Borges, where errors point in the direction of the road not taken, the irrational other of enlightened reason. In "La muerte y la brújula," Erik Lönnrot's failure and subsequent death can be taken as a symptom of the simplifications that rational interpretations impose on the world. The detective's idealist quest, based on cabalistic evidence, rejects the triviality of existence, which he tries to force into meaningful molds. After the first murder, he tells his colleague Treviranus: "Usted replicará que la realidad no tiene la menor obligación de ser interesante. Yo le replicaré que la realidad puede prescindir esa obligación, pero no la hipótesis" (*OC* 1:500) ["You'll reply that reality hasn't the least obligation to be interesting. And I'll answer you that reality may avoid that obligation but that hypotheses may not" (*L* 77)]. Lönnrot is not interested in contingency and chance, so he tries to construct a structured hypothesis that revolves around "una explicación puramente rabínica" (*OC* 1:500) ["a purely rabbinical explanation" (*L* 77)]. With this, the detective is privileging some aspects of experience over others with a view to constructing an inherently coherent system. The murderer and Lönnrot's nemesis, Scharlach, is playing with the investigator's assumptions, and provides for the clues, based on the number four (the four letters of the name of God, the cardinal points where each murder is committed, the rhomboids of the harlequins' outfits). What condemns the detective, a "puro razonador, un Auguste Dupin" (*OC* 1:499) ["pure reasoner, an Auguste Dupin" (*L* 76)], is precisely his perceptiveness in figuring out the logic behind the net that Scharlach was knitting to trap him. Interestingly, the criminal admits that "[e]l primer término de la

serie me fue dado por el azar” (*OC* 1:506) [“[t]he first term of the sequence [the words taped on Yarmolinsky’s typewriter] was given to [him] by chance” (*L* 85)]. Therefore, “La muerte y la brújula”—where Joyce’s presence becomes manifest in the name of one of Scharlach’s allies, Black Finnegan—becomes an anti-detective story in its paradoxical deflation of the final moment of revelation. The criminal wins, thanks to the inadequacy of Lönrot’s rational orderings and his encyclopedic turn of mind.

Like Lönrot, Bloom is a “conscious reactor against the void incertitude” (*U* 17.2210-1). However, Bloom is consistent only in professing his “disbelief in many orthodox religious, national, social and ethical doctrines” (*U* 17.24-5). In this sense, Bloom mirrors the stance of Joyce’s book as a whole, which continuously escapes genealogical antecedents liable to legitimize its discourse. Thereby, there can be no sense of development or “progress” which suggests the resolution of some “flaw” (or “gnomon”) in the world. As in “La muerte y la brújula,” the logic of cause and effect is equally under scrutiny. In this regard, Derek Attridge has noticed the importance of coincidence to Joyce.³³ In “Lestrygonians,” Bloom, as he rambles around Dublin, thinks of two people—John Howard Parnell and George Russell—just before running across them, leading him to conclude that “[c]oming events cast their shadows before” (*U* 8.526). Similarly, in “Circe,” after hearing a tale about someone defecating in a plasterer’s bucket of porter, he mutters “[c]oincidence too” (*U* 15.593), implying that he is the person they are talking about, precisely at a point in the narrative where he was about to confess to such a “crime” to Mrs. Breen. Finally, in “Eumeaus,” Bloom muses about “the coincidence of meeting, discussion, dance, row, old salt, of the here today and gone tomorrow type, night loafers, the whole galaxy of events, all went to make a miniature cameo of the world we live in” (*U* 16.1222-5). Along the same lines, in “Nausicaa” Bloom, once he realizes his watch has stopped at half past four—the time he reckons sexual intercourse between Molly and Boylan is likely to have been consummated—wonders if there is “any magnetic influence between the person because that was about the time he” (*U* 13.984-5). Rice has related Bloom’s thoughts about “the intimations of design in the coincidence” to chaos theory and its “forward-backward prospective-retrospective view of stochastic determinism, seeing design in past and future phenomena.”³⁴ Midway between chance and necessity, coincidence occupies the abrasive, though highly productive, zone between the logically arranged narrative of Western logos and chaos.

As a result of the productive uncertainty inherent in Bloomian coincidence, Attridge has noted that “meaning is never grounded or guaranteed; but, as the product of the complexity of our cultural systems, it is always available, utilizable.”³⁵ This groundlessness of meaning might explain Bloom’s constant reinterpretation of reality, which tries to segment experience in alternative ways. As he thinks about natural medical remedies in “Lotus Eaters,” Bloom argues that you can find “remedy were you least expect it” (*U* 5.483-4). This conviction seems to inform his unconventional rendering of morning, noon, evening and night as “[p]oetical idea: pink, then golden, then grey, then black” (*U* 4.535-6). This chromatic denomination of the parts of the day is, as Bloom quickly realizes, “[s]till true to life also” (*U* 4.536). The “language of flowers” (*U* 5.261)³⁶ he concocts after reading Martha’s letter in “Lotus Eaters” can be read in the same light, and as a project running parallel to Wilkins’s analytical language and the Chinese encyclopedia. Bloom’s openness to alternative exegetical codes comes to validate the assumption that any trivial detail in the text of *Ulysses*, as in Borges’s fictions, is crucial.

This relativism lies at the very core of Borges’s “La lotería en Babilonia.” Like Schalach’s trail of clues in “La muerte y la brújula,” all official discourses in “La lotería” spring from chance. For Borges, as for Bloom, chance and coincidence seem to be the only ruling principles in their chaotic views of the universe. “La lotería en Babilonia” presents a version of a universe that disguises disorder as order, a process which, Borges leads us to think, is endemic to any attempt to capture existence in systematized paradigms, all of them thus emerging as “lotteries.” Even the very writing of the story is tainted with uncertainty; since it could be “a result of the lottery itself, the truth of the statement is infinitely suspended.”³⁷ This ‘chaosmos’ of uncertainty emphasizes the essential gap between the human mind and the “presupposed intangibility of the thing in itself” (*U* 17.2212-3). Actually, the workings of the “Company” in Borges’s fiction bring to mind the idealist encyclopedia of Tlön in that they both point to a reality understood as an “infinito juego de azares” (*OC* 1:460) [“infinite game of chance” (*L* 35)].

Unlike the rational systematization of the universe which became the aim of the project of the enlightenment, *Ulysses* and “La lotería en Babilonia” dissolve any idea of discursive origin—thus undermining the presuppositions of an integral *ratio* consequent with the Cartesian *cogito*—and emerge as narratives that deconstruct their own discursive reliability, only ruled by chance. The ensuing leveling of the “trivial” and the “relevant” leads to a conception of reality where no element takes

precedence over another in the understanding of the whole. Any process of selection would constitute, then, a flagrant misrepresentation.

This ludic apprehension of experience results in a constant adjustment of focus of perception, since the rules of the game are ever-changing. Bloom, like the narrator in “La lotería en Babilonia,” is very much immersed in a world where “[n]inguna decisión es final, todas se ramifican en otras” (*OC* 1:459) [“[n]o decision is final, all branch into others” (*L* 34)]. Actually, both Bloom and the narrator believe that “aceptar los errores no es contradecir el azar” (*OC* 1:458) [“to accept errors is not to contradict chance: it is to corroborate it” (*L* 33)]. Chance and errors in *Ulysses* become identified with subversive movement and supplemental replacement, never leading to an ultimate epiphanic moment of revelation.³⁸

Bloom’s languages and his obsession with “righting” things,³⁹ along with his emphasis on “coincidences” as mediators between chaos and order, might offer a metaphor for the process of signification in the novel as a whole. Fritz Senn has discussed this process of constant perspectival readjustment under the label “dynamics of corrective unrest.” As Senn puts it, righting as writing is “a convenient, compact, synecdochal illustration of a process that characterizes *Ulysses*”; Senn adds that the “book itself tends toward ameliorative diversity. *Ulysses*, as an event in words, seems to try to right itself through more words, as though it wanted to undo the damages of all previous presentations.”⁴⁰ Bloom, like the narrator in “Lottery” and *Ulysses* itself, would be doomed to keep “righting” their statements about reality “on the humpy tray” (*U* 4.007) of a universe where “God becomes man becomes fish becomes barnacle becomes featherbed mountain” (*U* 3.478-9).

Phillip Herring has perceptively discussed this disseminative operation of the writing process in terms of what he calls Joyce’s “uncertainty principle,” a term he borrows from quantum physics. According to this principle, the Irish writer, like Borges, would direct our attention to absence. As Herring notes, “when we ask the broadest, most meaningful questions about nearly any interesting character in Joyce, we immediately encounter Joyce’s uncertainty principle, which went beyond the idea of missing pieces to generate unsolvable problems.”⁴¹ From this critical standpoint, we should not try to “understand” Joyce’s message about the world in *Ulysses* as much as to celebrate the productivity and vitality of the consequent ongoing struggle. Such productivity emerges from the relentless tampering with the word as a way to render the world in a discursive space emancipated from a monolithic epistemology.

Joyce and Borges, in their rejection of stable epistemological ground, of the security blanket of the encyclopedia, find themselves doomed to err, to fall endlessly, and to dispose their materials to different aesthetic ends, none of which is definite, but always provisional. They keep speculating darkly, “upon the void. Upon incertitude, upon unlikelihood” (*U* 9.842), seeing things through the looking-glass of human perception and showing the inadequacy of our pretenses to certainty. The same claims apply to the literary connections between Joyce and Borges. Unable to recognize a paternal figure in Joyce, though constantly drawn to the aesthetic appeal of the Joycean enterprise, Borges, like Bloom, is doomed to continuously reshape and rework his agonistic relationship with Joyce. And even though they used opposing aesthetic molds, and Borges overtly and covertly criticized Joyce’s methods and techniques, the world-view behind these molds is similar and shows how seeming opposites fuse, since “[t]he playwright who wrote the folio of this world . . . is doubtless all in all in all of us” (*U* 9.1046-50). Maybe we should take Borges and Joyce as facets of the same literary venture that, like the rival theologians in Borges’s story, eventually “formed one single person” (*L* 126).

Notes

¹ Jorge Luis Borges, *Textos cautivos: ensayos y reseñas en “El Hogar” (1936-1939)*, eds. E. Sacerio-Garí and E. Rodríguez-Monegal (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1986) 84.

² Jorge Luis Borges, *Borges: A Reader. A Selection of the Writings of Jorge Luis Borges*, eds. E. Rodríguez Monegal and A. Reid (New York: Dutton, 1981) 135. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *R*.

³ Borges, *Textos cautivos* 328.

⁴ Besides Salgado’s essay (“*Barroco* Joyce: Jorge Luis Borges’s and José Lezama Lima’s Antagonistic Readings,” in *Transcultural Joyce*, ed. K. Lawrence [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998] 63-96), there are several studies that focus on the literary ties between Borges and Joyce. Luis Murillo, in *The Cyclical Night: Irony in James Joyce and Jorge Luis Borges* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968), studies the presence of irony in both authors, though in separate chapters and rarely establishing connections between them. Andrés Sánchez Robayna, in “Borges y Joyce” (*Ínsula* 437.1 [1983] 1-12) offers an appraisal of Borges’s reception of Joyce’s work in his critical writing and comments on the Argentine’s general reaction to such an influence in his literary output. Along the same lines, Antonio Ballesteros in “Controversias, exilios, palabras y ceguerras: Joyce en Borges” (*James Joyce: Límites de lo diáfano*, eds.

C. Medina et al. [Jaén: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Jaén, 1998] 61-71) and Suzanne Jill Levine in “Notes on Borges’ Notes on Joyce: Infinite Affinities” (*Comparative Literature* 49.4 [1997] 344-59) focus on Borges’s explicit references to Joyce and Joyce’s work as well as on the biographical parallels between the authors. Beatriz Vegh has published an article (“A Meeting in the Western Canon: Borges’s Conversation with Joyce,” *European Joyce Studies* 14.1 [2002] 85-97) that studies Borges’s 1925 article on and translation of *Ulysses* and their shared status as “semicolonial” writers. Sergio Gabriel Waisman also assesses this Borgesian translation in “Borges Reads Joyce: The Role of Translation in the Creation of Texts” (*Variaciones Borges* 9 [2000] 59-73). Thomas Rice offers insightful connections between both authors in “Subtle Reflections on/upon Joyce in/by Borges” (*Journal of Modern Literature* 24.1 [2000] 47-62). More recently, Andrés Pérez Simón has published one more article documenting the references to Joyce in Borges’s critical writings in “Borges’ Writings on Joyce: From a Mythical Translation to a Polemical Defence of Censorship” (*Papers on Joyce* 7/8 [2001-2002] 121-37).

⁵ Salgado 65-66.

⁶ Pérez Simón 121.

⁷ Pérez Simón 130.

⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, *Obras completas*, 4 vols. (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1989-1996) 3:69. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *OC* followed by volume number plus page number.

⁹ *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, eds. D. A. Yates and J. E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1962) 145. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *L*.

¹⁰ Jaime Alazraki, *Versiones, inversiones, revisiones: el espejo como modelo estructural del relato en los cuentos de Borges* (Madrid: Gredos, 1977) 94-5.

¹¹ Emir Rodríguez Monegal, “The New Latin American Novelists,” *Partisan Review* 44.1 (1977) 41.

¹² Levine 355.

¹³ See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973).

¹⁴ Robert Martin Adams, *Afterjoyce: Studies in Fiction after “Ulysses”* (New York: Oxford UP, 1977) 193.

¹⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, *Atlas* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984) 16.

¹⁶ Levine 347.

¹⁷ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ, 1982) 25.

¹⁸ Turner 41.

¹⁹ Mihai I. Spariosu, *God of Many Names: Play, Poetry, and Power in Hellenic Thought from Homer to Aristotle* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) 38.

²⁰ Levine 345.

²¹ Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass and R. Macksey (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978) 280.

²² Jorge Luis Borges, *Other Inquisitions*, trans. R. Simas (Austin: U of Texas P, 1964) 102. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *OI*.

²³ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Random House, 1973) xv.

²⁴ Robert Wicks, "Literary Truth as Dreamlike Expression in Foucault's and Borges's 'Chinese Encyclopedia,'" *Philosophy and Literature* 27 (2003) 83.

²⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph and Other Stories (1933-1969)*, trans. N. T. di Giovanni (New York: Dutton, 1970) 19. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *A*.

²⁶ Ana María Barrenechea, *La expresión de la irrealidad en la obra de Jorge Luis Borges y otros ensayos* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Cifrado, 2000) 93.

²⁷ See Enrique A. Giordano, "El juego de la creación en Borges," *Hispanic Review* 52.3 (1984) 346-7.

²⁸ The arbitrariness inherent in the deictic force of a name is discussed by Borges in "Historia de los ecos de un nombre [A History of the Echoes of a Name]," included in *Otras inquisiciones* (though not found in the English translation).

²⁹ Eric D. Smith, "A Slow and Dark Birth: Aesthetic Maturation and Entelechic Narrative in James Joyce's *Ulysses*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 47.4 (2001) 764.

³⁰ This tampering with conventional logical reasoning in the form of lively repartees brings to mind the nonsensical exchanges in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* or *Through the Looking-Glass*. Interestingly, a reference to "Humpty Dumpty" (*U* 16.1570) immediately precedes this exchange.

³¹ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. J. A. Álvarez (Salamanca: Colegio de España, 1995) 274.

³² Thomas Rice, *Joyce, Chaos, and Complexity* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1997) 99-100.

³³ Derek Attridge, *Joyce Effects: On Language, Theory and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 123-5.

³⁴ Rice 89, 90.

³⁵ Attridge 124.

³⁶ In Chapter 6 of his *Figural Language in the Novel: The Flowers of Speech from Cervantes to Joyce* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984), Ramón Saldívar offers an intelligent analysis of Bloom's floral metaphors, connecting them to the main thematic threads of the book (sexuality, paternity and the problem of language). The particular case of Bloom's language of flowers is, Saldívar argues, part of a net of metaphor-creating tendencies (i.e. languages, ways of segmenting reality) "whose intersections produce the appearance of solidity and continuity" (234).

³⁷ Alberto Moreiras, "De-Narrativizing the Populist State Apparatus: Borges' 'La loteria en Babilonia,'" in *Jorge Luis Borges: Thought and Knowledge in the XXth Century*, eds. A. de Toro and F. de Toro, (Frankfurt and Madrid: Die Deutsche Bibliothek, 1999) 109.

³⁸ This ontological vacuity has been discussed in cultural terms by Hugh Kenner (*Joyce's Voices* [Berkeley: U of California P, 1978]). In discussing "Cyclops," Kenner comes to the conclusion that "*when statements can have no substance they can only have style*" (55). The term Kenner uses to refer to this cultural emptiness is "Pyrrhism," whereby "no one at bottom knows what he is talking about because there is nothing to know except the talk" (53).

³⁹ Just a few examples should illustrate the point: "[k]idneys were on his mind as he moved about the kitchen softly, *righting* her breakfast things" (*U* 4.006-7; my emphasis); "Another slice of bread and butter: three, four: right. She didn't like her plate full. Right" (*U* 4.011-12); "*Voglio e non vorrei*. Wonder if she pronounces that right: *voglio*" (*U* 4.327-8); observing a Catholic mass, Bloom thinks, "[p]ious fraud but quite right. . . . Queer the whole atmosphere of the. Quite right. Perfectly right that is" (*U* 5.393); "Your hat is a little crushed, Mr Bloom said, pointing. . . . It's all right now, Martin Cunningham said" (*U* 6.1018-24); "Must get those old glasses of mine set right" (*U* 8.554).

⁴⁰ Fritz Senn, *Joyce's Dislocutions: Essays on Reading as Translation*, ed. J. P. Riquelme (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984) 65.

⁴¹ Phillip Herring, *Joyce's Uncertainty Principle* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987) xii.