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An Endless Cycle: A Borgesian Look
at the Reciprocal Nature of Artistic Creation and Inspiration

Jorge Luis Borges' positioning within literary history is indisputably important; besides being at the vanguard of magical realism and science fiction (not to mention his cultural impact in heralding *el boom latinoamericano*), he advanced themes from notable writers and in turn influenced some of the most prominent philosophical and creative minds of the contemporary era. Using interpretations from two of Borges' works regarding inspiration and expression, a framework for analysis will be created and applied respectively to both Borges' personal inspirations and those who were distinctly influenced by Borges. The theoretical framework created posits that the creation of art is a perpetual cyclical process, in which the art continuously inspires, but also deepens, the complexity of what came before.

The framework that will be presented in the first part of this paper will be divided into conceptual layers, each being founded upon the rhetoric of a distinct Borges work; this framework is thus not meant to perfectly mirror Borges' ideology regarding the subject, but rather serve as a subjective way of interpreting the relationship between inspiration and artistic creation through a Borgesian lens. The application of this framework will further unearth the rhizomatic interconnectivity between these concepts and authors in a manner that transverses

time.¹ Due to the influential scope of these authors, many of these themes and philosophies are relevant to literature as a whole, spreading far beyond the *oeuvres* of the writers featured.

Layer 1

"Las ruinas circulares" (1940), the thematic basis for the first layer of the aforementioned framework, features a mysterious man arriving at the burned, crumbled ruins of an ancient temple. Upon his arrival, he immediately goes to sleep; his goal, it is revealed, is to dream a man into existence ("quería soñar un hombre: quería soñarlo con integridad minuciosa e imponerlo a la realidad" (Borges, 451)). The first set of dialectic dreams sees the man lecturing to an array of students in an amphitheater, which resembles a pristine version of the temple ruins. Out of these dreams he hopes to find a pupil worthy of existence; he eventually selects a bright boy that resembles himself. After a patch of insomnia and a month's worth of physical and mental preparation, the dreams shift to the creation of a human: each successive dream slowly adds more organs, limbs and body parts to this being. Striking a deal with the deity of the temple, notably named *Fuego*, the dreamed is brought to life, appearing as a carnal, living boy; albeit with the caveat of being actually a *fantasma*, not truly human, though this secret is known only to the deity and the man. After being educated by the man, who views the dreamed as his own son, the dreamed is sent away to another temple by the deity with all memories erased. After some time, the man hears word that his son discovered his immunity to fire, a byproduct of being a *fantasma*. Anxiety fills him as he fears that the son will find out he was conceived in a dream

¹Rhizome in philosophy stems from the thought of postmodernists Gilles Deleuz and Felix Guattari, who described it as "a process of existence and growth that does not come from a single central point of origin." (Mambrol) They argue that in postmodern thought, the structure of ideas is like a fungus or botanical rhizomes, composed of interconnected fibers that spread with no form or center. Ideas grow off each other, but there is no point of origin or locus.

and was never really a true human, but his worries are quickly interrupted when a forest fire breaks out and envelopes the temple ruins. Embracing death, the man wallows in the flames, only to find out that he is unaffected; revealing to his dread that he too was dreamed by another.

This multifaceted story is one of Borges' most notable works, published in the early 1940s initially as a stand-alone piece and later as an addition to his first collection of short stories *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*. As is common in most Borgesian stories, the thematic scope spans a wide range of subjects, often overlapping with other stories (the relationship between the conceptual and reality from "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" comes to mind). A particularly important theme that forms the groundwork of the first layer of my framework is the allegorical nature of the story to the artistic process. The dreamed son, in this setting a representation of artistic work, is dreamt by the man—the author, artist, creator—through a painstakingly long and arduous process, riddled with challenges and setbacks. In the end, the discovery that the man was just a derivation of another dreamer, in the same way his son was to him, hints at a cyclical repetitiveness in artistic creation. This "infinity" reveals a never-ending pattern of creation. Within the development of new ideas (and by extension artistic works) there exists always a predecessor whose influence transitively carries into the next cycle, and so forth.

In order to substantiate this claim the assumption that the man's dreamer was also dreamed by another must be assumed, something that ensures this infinite continuation is not merely a limited occurrence between the three parties (the man, his dreamed son and the dreamer of the man). José Luis Fernández backs this theory in the essay "Borges and the Third Man: Toward an Interpretation of 'Unánime noche' in 'The Circular Ruins'" :

The mysterious man is himself a creation; one who owes his phantasmal existence to the one dreaming him. Hence, just as the mysterious man's failure to impose his son on

reality exposed his own ontological privation, the mysterious man's dreamer also seems to lack the power to dream a real man into existence. Subsequently, the "someone else" dreaming the mysterious man can be viewed as equally deficient of reality, and so on through a doubly infinite series of dreamers and dreamees. (27)²

Fernández rejects the possibility of an individualized instance of the dreamer-dreemee relationship in favor of a continuous cycle. Another connecting factor he links between the three parties is the failure of imposition, as both the man and his son are *fantasmas*, a reflection of an inability to truly be imposed into reality. Just as circular motion has no set beginning or end point, "Las ruinas circulares" exist on a vertiginous and infinite plane.

Thus, the first layer I have referred to is the very notion of a continuous repetitive process. Within the process of creation, new ideas are constantly being birthed from preexisting ones in a manner that distinctly defines a relationship between the predecessor and the successor. This layer is the foundational basis on which the remaining iterations will be constructed, deepening the complexity of the analytical framework.

Layer 2

The framework's second layer is formed by the theoretical foundation laid in the essay "Kafka y sus precursores", part of *Otras Inquisiciones, 1937-1952*. A piece less glossy than

² Fernández arrives at this conclusion using an Aristotelian argument of "the Third Man" regress. The conceptual construction first stems from Plato's *Parmenides*, in which Plato's theory of Forms is rebuked. The Third Man argument states that with the existence of a shared Form between two instances, the existence of a third (for example, the Form itself) must be true; however, due to the theory of Forms' assurance that the Form itself is an individual instance that partakes in its own Formness, there must be another presiding Form that includes it. This creates an infinite regress in which every Form is a part of another Form, and vice-versa ("Plato's Parmenides"). In the same manner works the set of dreamers, sharing the unanimous characteristic of "dreamanity", in "Las ruinas circulares". Borges also addresses the Third Man regress and engages in a rebuttal by commenting the philosopher's discourse, as well as Zeno's Second law, in the essay "Avatares de la tortuga", a concept later detailed in the "Kafka y sus precursores" section.

Borges' traditionally popular magical realism stories, the essay poses a detailed theory on the bilateral effect that artistic inspiration wields in the creation of literature. At the most basic level, Borges posits that he finds the authorial voice of Franz Kafka in multiple predecessors—listing Zeno's Paradox, a fable by Han Yu, Kierkegaard, Browning's *Fears and Scruples*, León Bloy and Lord Dunsany as examples—even though the texts individually are separated by space and time, antecedent to Kafka's *oeuvre*.³ Each of the texts contain distinctly Kafkaesque traits and thus resemble one another, despite having nothing in common:

Si no me equivoco, las heterogéneas piezas que he enumerado se parecen a Kafka; si no me equivoco, no todas se parecen entre sí...en cada uno de esos textos está la idiosincrasia de Kafka, en grado mayor o menor, pero si Kafka no hubiera escrito, no la percibiríamos; vale decir, no existiría. (“Kafka”, 711)

In the essay, Borges calls for the “purification” of the term predecessor and its negative connotation; that is to say, rather than treating a predecessor as the complete or the “original”, one should recognize it as a part of the successor and vice versa. This tenet forms the second layer of the framework—through the creation of a successive piece, the reader comes to understand the predecessor in a new light, deepening the theoretical scope of the concepts that in turn inspired the new work. The second layer expands on the infinitely cyclical nature of the first layer by adding this bilateral element. Not only does literature repeatedly inspire, constantly birthing new thought, each individual new instance also complicates the one it derived from.

³ Borges himself was inspired by the Bohemian writer, having adopted a Kafkaesque style especially in his early writing. Even later stories are riddled with thematic allusions and symbolisms that represent Kafka— one of the most blatant being the “Qaphqa” latrine in “La lotería en Babilonia”. This extends the conceptual implications of “Kafka y sus precursores” directly to Borges' own work and the presence of a Borgesian influence not only in Kafka's writings but also by extension the rest of the pieces cited in which Kafka's presence is felt.

As expressed throughout “Re-reading ‘Kafka and His Precursors’” by Rex Butler, each of the examples Borges nominates holds a distinctly Kafkaesque trait, and yet no traces of resemblance exist on an authorial or intertextual level between said cases. This conceptually isolates the Kafkaesque from the holistic Kafka in a manner that creates a commonality among seemingly disparate writers (96-98). However, Butler posits, the added commentary Borges makes is that reducing Kafka to any individual quality in which an author is likened to further reduces Kafka to a single characteristic out of a vast variety. Therefore, “[W]hat is missing in any comparison and what each successive comparison tries to fill in is the “Kafka” that allows the comparison between these precursors and Kafka. Each new comparison draws out another quality of Kafka, and yet the “Kafka” that allows this comparison is always missing.” (99) The many cases of *Shakespear and...*, *Borges and...*, or *Joyce and...* works identify such authors by their unique characteristics, but then ironically reduce them in forcing comparisons to others, making them seem unoriginal and less innovative. Paradoxically, though, Kafka cannot exist outside of these comparisons as well, as the importance of recognizing allusions, literary sources and textual interconnectivity is a defining characteristic of literature as a whole. There thus exists two sorts of Kafka: the one that exists only within comparisons, and the one that uniquely exists devoid of possible comparison (99).

“Re-reading ‘Kafka and His Precursors’” continues to delve into the relationship between the idealized Kafka, the relationship between the Kafkaesque characteristics and the example texts, and the complexity that arises in interpreting the intertextual connections between not only the two parties but also these two Kafkas. Butler names Borges’ commentary on the Third Man regress from “Avatares de la tortuga” (part of the same collection, *Otras Inquisiciones*) and applies it to the Kafka and the listed precursors, in that each description of similarity between

Kafka and a precursor requires a Kafka to compare to the Kafka that exists between them (102). The Third Man regress can even be applied to only Kafka, dividing his own work into different degrees of being “Kafka-like”—Borges specifically mentions *Bechtrachtung*-era Kafka being less of a Kafka precursor than Browning or Lord Dunsany—creating a similar paradoxical regress that splits the meta-conceptual writer from the real. Yet it is Borges himself who recognizes the connections between these Kafkas and the precursors, and it is he who capitalizes on it.⁴ It is through this conceptual labyrinth that perhaps Borges’ closing theme is revealed: the most impactful writers (like Kafka, who serves as the exemplary figure, or Borges himself, who recognizes and writes about it) are the ones who manage these complex external relationships, standing the test of time by creating work that plays on them.

The implications of this essay are important both in the fields of literary and rhetorical inquiry and for the framework being established. Due to Borges’ positive representation of the predecessor, “Kafka y sus precursores” often is compared to Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence*, a comparable work that in contrast depicts a more pessimistic view of similar themes. Bloom believes that the process of creation is inherently corrupted due to the ever-present influence of precursors; furthermore, authors feel this anxiety when trying to break from the paths of their influence. “Kafka y sus precursores” rejects both of these notions by eliminating the looming nature of the predecessor, relieving Bloom’s anxiety and adding a layer of complexity to all parties involved.⁵ While an in—depth comparison of these contrasting

⁴ Butler notes that though it is not impossible, it is very unlikely that Kafka had read all the sources mentioned by Borges, with Kafka holding this list of seemingly random authors together as a sort of conceptual glue (97).

⁵ I have a possible interpretation regarding “Las ruinas circulares” ending, that takes into consideration the themes of creation and inspiration. I posit the pessimistic revelation that no creation is without prior influence, perpetuating Bloom’s theory. The man, having no prior memory of being dreamed by another, attempts to create new life; since he was dreamed unknowingly, the influence of the “first” dreamer is unrecognized, and only after the creation of the “son” does the man realize the existence and influence of the “first” dreamer. This sensation fills him with dread and fear, possibly tying into Bloom’s anxiety of influence theory and the inescapable grip of the precursor (in this case the “first” dreamer). However, in my view, ““Kafka y sus precursores”” overwrites this interpretation due to its role

suppositions is outside the thematic scope of this paper, the relevance of "Kafka y sus precursores" within its theoretical circle remains worth mentioning. In regard to the previously mentioned framework the story adds an additional element of reciprocity within the nature of inspiration and creation, deepening our ability to make intertextual connections and shedding a new light on historic works.

Borges and Dante

The application of the framework starts with an instance in the infinitely repeating cycle of creation. In allegorically applying the setting from "Las ruinas circulares", Borges' works take on the main role of the mysterious man. Similarly, in this case, Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia* (completed in 1321) plays the role of the dreamer's dreamer, or the predecessor of the dreaming man. Dante's influence on writing as a whole is nearly limitless—as insurmountable as the amount of literature that attempts to convey this very notion—ranging from the implementation of common vernacular in poetry, to the archetypical form of fiction, to the depiction of Heaven, Hell and Purgatory that continues to remain central to contemporary popular culture. The breadth of this influence reaches Borges' works as well in the forms of direct delineation and more subtle conceptual allusions. This combination, coupled with the interweaving of Borges' cosmovision and thematic prose, allows for the two-way dialogue of interpretation outlined by the second layer of the framework. In asserting the veracity of this conclusion, the Borgesian works "El Aleph" (1945) and "Inferno I, 32" (1955) will be analyzed.

"Inferno I, 32" in a characteristically witty yet also ponderous tone, chronicles God's placement of the leopard in confinement so that Dante may see and eventually cement its legacy

as a dedicated commentary on the subject and its chronological subsequence. The concretization of its theme is inarguable, while the other interpretation is more hypothetical.

in the opening act of *Inferno*.⁶ The leopard, caged, sacrifices its primordial yearnings and meaning in life for this very purpose, as is revealed to it by God through divine intervention; however, though it initially is illuminated and understands this truth, it later awakens and finds itself confused and only vaguely aware of what occurred, resigning itself to the complexities of the mechanisms of life. In a parallel manner, Dante, years later when dying in Ravenna, similarly encounters God in a dream. He there learns the meaning and purpose of his life; though when he awakens, he feels as though he lost an infinitely important thing, as he does not remember the dream in full. He thus resigns himself to the complexities of the mechanisms of life, just as the leopard did.

Perhaps the most notable link to the *Divina Commedia* in this piece is not the inclusion of the leopard, or of Dante himself, but of the reaction that the characters experience in the presence of God and in the wake of that climactic encounter. In the short story, in a parallel manner, both the leopard and Dante experience the totality of God's power, understanding the true essence of their incomparably feeble existence, and yet both are unable to emerge from their dream retaining this divine knowledge. In both cases the characters are left with an indescribable sense of the infinite and total helplessness. This same process of feelings is detailed by the pilgrim Dante in *Paradiso*, demonstrating exuberance and understanding in the face of God:

Io credo, per l'acume ch'io sofferesi
del vivo raggio, ch'i' sarei smarrito,
se li occhi miei da lui fossero aversi.

E' mi ricorda ch'io fui più ardito

⁶ The title of the piece references Canto I, Line 32 from *Inferno*, in which Dante encounters the leopard at the base of the mountain.

per questo a sostener, tanto ch'i' giunsi
l'aspetto mio col valore infinito. (33.76-81)⁷

But also, a sense of helplessness and limitation, as the human mind fails to grasp God and the
Empyrean and is left with nothing but a faint trace of what occurred:

Da quinci innanzi il mio veder fu maggio
che 'l parlar mostra, ch'a tal vista cede,
e cede la memoria a tanto oltraggio.

Qual è colüi che sognando vede,
che dopo 'l sogno la passione impressa
rimane, e l'altro a la mente non riede,

cotal son io, ché quasi tutta cessa
mia visione, e ancor mi distilla
nel core il dolce che nacque da essa. (33.55-63)⁸

⁷ I believe that, because of the keenness of the
Living ray which I endured, I should have
Been lost if my eyes had been turned from it.

I remember that on this account I was the
bolder to sustain it, until I united my gaze
with the Infinite Goodness. (Translation by Charles S. Singleton)

⁸Thenceforward my vision was greater than
Speech can show, which fails at such a sight,
And at such excess memory fails.

As is he who dreaming sees, and after the dream
The passion remains imprinted and the rest returns
Not to the mind;

Such am I, for my vision
Almost wholly fades away, yet does the sweetness

Borges thus mirrors the experience of divine contact in "Inferno I, 32", uprooting Dante's own conceptualization of Heaven, God and human perception and applying it to the poet, though in this case it is to the authorial Dante rather than the fictitious one. An interpretation could be that Borges is further developing the Dantean theme as a means of describing fate, purpose and divine intervention in everyday life.⁹ The predetermined destiny of both the leopard and Dante, each their respective ways, fulfills the will of God, and both man and beast in the end fail to register both their encounter and true purpose with Him. I posit that "Inferno I, 32"'s Dante is a reflection of Borges himself, or perhaps authors in general. In the aforementioned dream, "Dante, maravillado, supo al fin quién era y qué era y bendijo sus amarguras" (Borges, 807). Dante is notably in Ravenna alone – "tan injustificado y tan solo como cualquier otro hombre" (807). It seems that the revelation of the dream provides Dante an instance of solace, justifying his existence despite his somewhat contrastingly pitiful final moments. Perhaps Borges attributes the dedication and willpower of an author to a divine purpose, something beyond the capabilities of human understanding; something that, when known even for a second, can shine light on the soberingly tragic existence of humanity.

"El Aleph" similarly has Dantean undertones in its plot and theme. The story follows the narrator Borges and his dealings with Carlos Augusto Daneri, a (fictitious) poet and cousin to Borges' deceased love Beatriz. Borges pays a visit every year to Beatriz's house on her birthday, which is still occupied by the her cousin. In these interactions he slowly grows more familiar with the poet and, after nearly a decade has passed, Daneri reads him his expansive epic *La*

That was born of it still drop within my heart. (Translation by Charles S. Singleton)

⁹ Borges' poem "Ajedrez" addresses a similar theme, describing the beauty and battle of chess. In the final lines, he asserts that even the players are on the checkerboard of the continuous game of life, with God moving the pieces. Yet in the final verse, Borges ponders what God lies beyond God.

tierra, which aims to encompass in an encyclopedic manner all that is on the planet. Narrator Borges dismisses the epic as trite and of poor quality in a long assessment of the work. Later, Daneri contacts Borges to warn him that Beatriz's house is to be destroyed, and along with it the Aleph- a singular point in which everything in the universe can be witnessed.¹⁰ Borges abrasively doubts Daneri and even suspects him of ill-intention when taken to the Aleph, located in the cellar of the house, but he eventually experiences the totality of its power. When asked by Daneri how the experience went, Borges, who is still shocked by the overwhelming totality he felt, vehemently denies its existence and runs off. The story concludes with a postscript that details the destruction of the Aleph and Daneri's success as a nationally recognized, prize winning poet.

Even on the surface, the connections to Dante and the *Commedia* are evident. Beatriz's mirroring of Beatrice is clear to any reader remotely exposed to the *Commedia*, and Daneri's name is a clear amalgamation of **Dante Alighieri**. The descent into the cellar of the house, with Daneri guiding Borges, can very much be likened to the path of Dante and Virgil through Hell in *Inferno*, where at the bottom, underneath Satan's torso, lies the center of the universe. Another striking, and perhaps most commonly asserted, similarity is the metaphysical depiction of the Aleph and of the Dantean God in *Paradiso*.¹¹ Just as the Aleph represents a single point in which all other universal points are contained, God can be seen as an infinitely powerful and all-encompassing point of light. Both protagonists recognize the impossibility of describing the experience through words, and both feel a sense of evanescence and loss in its wake (the very same concept detailed in the analysis of "Inferno I, 32"), so much so for narrator Borges with the

¹⁰ The Aleph was the source of inspiration for Daneri's poem; he used its expansive powers try to cover everything on the planet in *La tierra*.

¹¹ This theory is most notably established in respective works by Roberto Paoli, Ruggero Stefanini and Alberto Carlos. (Thiem 100)

Aleph that he even questions the reality of his experience and the faultiness of his memory. Jon Thiem, in “Borges, Dante and the Poetics of Total Vision”, says, “more important still, each work presents a spatial paradox that also involves a perceptual anomaly: not just a point that is all points, but a point in which all other points remain discernible to the human eye.” (101) In both cases the main character experiences this totality of vision that goes beyond the capabilities of human perception, in which everything at once can be observable and understood.

This interpretation is the first part of Thiem’s comprehensive analysis of the Borges-Dante relationship within “El Aleph”. He notes that, despite the excessive, encyclopedic inclusion of literary sources that have even the remotest parallel to the Aleph expressed by the character Borges (not to mention the epigraphs of Hobbes and Hamlet), Dante is not mentioned once. Thiem focuses on the reference to Alanus de Insulis’ paradoxical rendering of God as a sphere, in which the center is everywhere but the circumference is nowhere. This metaphor precisely encapsulates Dante’s cosmological vision of the Empyrean, and yet there is no mention of the *Commedia* or its author.¹² The constant, even blatant, parallels between the works, thus, render this apophatic (as Thiem describes it) omission purposeful; as it seems that Borges makes a point of avoiding this “source” or “inspiration”.¹³ Thiem attributes this to a didactic scheme of the authorial Borges, one that plays on the nature of the *Commedia* and his own opinions regarding Dante and total vision (105-107).

¹² Another mentioned analogy is narrator Borges’ cabalistic interpretation of the Aleph, which was named (as far as we know) by Daneri. The Hebrew character aleph stands for God.

¹³ In a 1970 commentary on “El Aleph”, when asked about the lack of Dante mentions, Borges stood by his decision, vehemently denying any intentional parallels. The near-encyclopedic listing of the other literary works and their parallels could justify this comment, but Thiem asserts that the Argentine author’s comment is another red herring that detracts from a purposeful omission.

In Borges' opinion, the *Commedia* is a singular instance in which total vision exists.¹⁴ Just as the Aleph or the Dantean God exhibit this spatial paradox, the work encapsulates all, both terrestrial and celestial: "For Borges then, the *Commedia* is an anomaly, a human fabrication that miraculously achieves the quality of all-inclusiveness. In this respect Dante's masterpiece suspiciously resembles Borges's Aleph." (Thiem 108)¹⁵ Thus, the *Commedia* is a completely holistic work, an anomaly that contrasts with Borges' general belief that such a thing cannot exist—a notion pervasive in many other of his works.¹⁶ The law of unintentional omission, in many cases in his stories, is at fault in impeding this impossible task, in the same manner that *Commedia* is left out of the narratorial Borges' delineation of literary parallels. Just as this law constantly undermines the inclusionary process and enumeration, in a paradoxical manner this *significant* omission is a key to total vision in *El Aleph* (108). The unintentional omission is acknowledged through this seemingly "accidental" mistake and total enumeration is voluntarily sacrificed (since by Borges' opinions it is already impossible to achieve).

Daneri's failure to replicate an impressive encyclopedic epic (and the root of his name), however, presents the case that the literary form through which Dante provided his total vision is no longer sensical; some of the very criticism that narrator Borges bestows upon Daneri are the same qualities that receive praise in the *Commedia*, both in the past and in contemporary times.

For clarification, author Borges makes Daneri's work a case of the traditional, exemplary epic:

¹⁴ Enumeration is defined in the essay as a cataloging method for achieving total vision in literature: "Total enumeration by means of a comprehensive catalog or encyclopedia is, of course, a long-standing method for representing a total vision. In fact, it is Daneri's method in his encyclopedic epic *The Earth*, the poetics of which Borges takes such pains to discredit." (Thiem 107) However, the impossibility of enumerating everything within a work means achieving total vision through this method is also impossible. *La tierra* attempts to do so through the Aleph, and authorial Borges appears to be attempting to do so through the listings of literary works with parallels.

¹⁵ *Estudio Preliminar* (1949) is used to support this statement, in which Borges likens Dante's work to a microcosmic picture that includes all in the universe (Thiem 108).

¹⁶ Examples from other Borgesian works include, but are not limited to, Funes' memory ("Funes el memorioso"), the abandonment of an all-inclusive map ("Del rigor en la ciencia"), the poet who tries to summarize the universe forgets the moon ("La luna"), the elusive all-telling book in the universal library ("La biblioteca de Babel").

using overly long prose, dense poetic style, exaggerated diction. Certain scholars regard in fact characterize epics specifically by their length and inclusiveness (109). By having narrator Borges criticize these aspects, in a parody of the perhaps the most paradigmatic epic in history, author Borges is commenting on the outdated epic form and its infeasibility in modern times.¹⁷ The *Commedia* throughout history has received praise for some of these very qualities, but such a feat of success cannot be reproduced in Borges' eyes in the contemporary world. Thus, in many ways, Thiem posits, Borges is the successor to Dante—his oxymoronic, succinct, meta story is the antithesis of Daneri's epic—in that he creates, through the significant omission, a modern rendition of total vision through a re-writing of the *Paradiso*. It is done not trying to recreate it through total enumeration per se (as Borges has made its infeasibility very clear), rather “in creating ecstatic moments that arise out of the failure of language, memory, and vision, moments that succeed in evoking a total vision, almost to the extent that they forgo its exhaustive representation.” (112) This accomplishment seemingly does cement Borges truly as Dante's successor, achieving total vision as the *Commedia* did in a modern and individualized way.

A final interpretation made by Thiem, perhaps the most important in relation to the recurring themes addressed through this paper, is the application of Alephian principles to the literary world and authorship in general. From a Bloomian perspective, one preoccupied with the unshakeable anxiety connected with the inevitable existence of the precursor, Dante is a metaphorically insurmountable wall to scale. In this case, the purposeful omission may reference Borges' inability to do so; however, through the contextualization provided by “Kafka y sus precursores” this lack of mention may be the exact opposite. In depersonalizing the means of

¹⁷ A separate interpretation of narrator Borges' criticism of *La tierra* could be tied to the theme of impossibility of the human language in replicating the Aleph, God and the Empyrean. This theme is recurring in all three of the Borges-Dante works analyzed, and *La tierra* could serve as another way of human perception falling short.

authorship, all writers are part of a universal Aleph, in which “there is no plurality of authors: all authors are one and all books are finally one book. Since an author’s individuality and even time itself are illusory, the anxious competition for literary priority, originality, and influence are futile and come to nothing.” (Thiem 117) The authorial Borges thus is peering through an Aleph just as the narratorial Borges does, but the impossibility of achieving the total enumeration causes "El Aleph" to fall short. In this universal Aleph of literature, the narratorial Borges is Dante just as much as Dante is Daneri, and the authorial Borges is both. Thus, the inclusion of these metaphysical connections—spanning across time, space, reality and fiction—is planned by the authorial Borges in a manner that mirrors his interpretation of the literary Aleph, this constantly growing universal author that instills ideas throughout all writing in history. Paradoxically, he in doing so is not only mirroring his interpretation of the literary Aleph but is also fulfilling it, as in creating these parallels he is drawing unconsciously (or consciously, through inadvertently) from the omni-present universal author.

"Inferno I, 32" and Thiem’s analysis detail the inspiration latent in Borges’ philosophies and convictions. Interpreting these textual interconnections within the context the second layer of my framework reveals how the work in turn broadens the audience’s understanding of the *Commedia*. Borges’ fascination with several Dantean themes, particularly the evocation of certain emotions in the presence of God and Heaven, is evident in both stories. "Inferno I, 32" further develops the theme and applies it to a reality-mirroring setting. Using the historical Dante as one of the main characters applies the prevalent themes to reality, invoking a sense of verisimilitude. The shared experience of totality and the suffering caused by the limitation of human perception that follows thereafter by the Borgesian Dante and the pilgrim melds these two figures together and allows the audience to further apply the conceptualizations of the *Commedia*

to reality, eliminating the dichotomic divide existing between the two characters. This effect is accomplished in a manner that is not dissimilar to Dante's usage of Florentine politicians, religious personnel and notable historical figures throughout the realms of his cosmos.¹⁸

Beyond the mentioned parallels between "El Aleph" and Dante's trilogy, I believe Thiem's "Borges, Dante and the Poetics of Total Vision" offers an enticing interpretation that highlights the relationship of reciprocity within inspiration. As has been mentioned, Borges' veneration of *Paradiso* and the other parts of the *Commedia* as an exemplary instance of total vision becomes apparent through the omission of the pieces as an inspiration and the denial of the existence of any parallels. Even more important, though, is the Borgesian interpretation of the literary Aleph. This metaphysical concept cements the *Commedia*'s influence in all other works while also affirming the disregard of Bloomian thought regarding inspiration. In this sense, the combination of Borgesian works encapsulates the influential weight of the *Commedia*, exalting it as the single holistic masterpiece of literature. And yet, as "Kafka y sus precursores" posits, in reading Dante's works Borgesian concepts clearly appear, and vice-versa.

Eco and Borges

The paper will now address the ways in which Italian semiotician and philosopher Umberto Eco was inspired by Borges, specifically through *Il nome della rosa* and "Borges and My Anxiety of Influence", and their significance in the context of my constructed framework. Using the first layer above, and the same allegory as previously, if Borges' work is the mysterious man, and Dante's is the "original" dreamer, Eco's is the conceived, a product of

¹⁸ Furthermore, the fate of the leopard and Dante warrant a reflection on predestination in everyday life and, through the connection to the *Commedia*, its role in the afterlife. Borges, in broadening the theme and applying it to the characters in "Inferno I, 32", allows readers to approach this Dantean philosophy in a different context, one individualized by the Argentine.

Borgesian thought and imagination. This completes the triad of "Las ruinas circulares", though, as mentioned, I postulate that this is not a closed set—rather, an infinite cycle—and the existence of someone furthering Eco's philosophies is certain, continuing this inevitable process. In *Il nome della rosa*, Eco creates multiple thematic parallels (not unlike Borges does in "El Aleph") to create a commentary, while "Borges and my Anxiety of Influence" addresses Eco's perception of influence (both intended and unintended) and reflects upon how authorship affects his own works.

Eco's debut novel *Il nome della rosa* (1980) has become one of the best-selling books in history. The Italian author, forgoing his traditional role as a semiotician and theoretician, takes up the mantle of artistic creator, a shift that often is done in reverse. This multilayered work thus has its foundations rooted in theory, ripe with symbolisms, allusions and a complexity that inspires creative thought. The connections to Borges are plentiful, ranging from plot-based parallels (the striking overlap with "La muerte y la brújula") to character names (the librarian antagonist Jorge de Burgos).¹⁹ Indeed, *Il nome della rosa* has a distinctly Borgesian introduction and preface, an intermingling of magical imagination and reality, and the recurrence of Borgesian motifs and obsessions. In terms of "La muerte y la brújula", "Eco takes an actual Borges plot and introduces some variations to it in order to present an epistemological picture that differs from Borges's'" (Corry and Giovanolli 430). Both Borges and Eco exhibit interest in the philosophical ramifications of conjectures (hence the detective theme), and Eco creates a meta-conjecture through a process he coins "epistemological metaphors", where a literary work illuminates unrecognized aspects of a philosophical theory (430). Recognizing Borges' work as

¹⁹ Other themes in the story include labyrinths, libraries, mirrors and more, very commonly recurring throughout Borges' *oeuvre* as well. Leo Corry and Renato Giovanolli trace these allusions throughout the Eco novel, particularly analyzing its events in comparison to "La muerte y la brújula". The analysis is comprehensive and complex beyond the scope of this paper.

an epistemological metaphor that contrasts his cosmovision with that of a traditional detective story, Eco does the same, using the same format.²⁰

Thus, with this comprehensive relationship Eco creates a meta-allusion that traces perhaps Borges' most prominent thematic device. According to Corry and Giovanolli "Borges's use of allusion does not merely reflect his aesthetic inclinations but, rather, is deeply rooted in his metaphysical convictions and in his idea of literature, both of which are tightly interwoven." (441) In turn, "by alluding to the peculiar traits of Borgesian allusion, Eco seems to be pointing to hitherto unnoticed aspects of this literary device." (444) In other words, Eco's allusion, displayed through the mirroring of "La muerte y la brujula" and references to the Argentine's most obsessive themes, reveals different aspects of Borges' style and philosophy.

Some years following the publication of his debut novel, Eco's essay "Borges and My Anxiety of Influence", part of the collection *On Literature* (2002), details his vision of influence and authorship. The title is a clear reference to Bloom, though Eco's focus is more on the conception of influence rather than the Bloomian psychological effects. Eco sets forth a triangle that defines this relationship, comprising three parties: Point A, the predecessor, Point B, the successor, and Point X, which lies at the top of the triangle. Point X, he describes, is culture, or the chain of previous influences.²¹ Beyond the three points also lies the presence of the *Zeitgeist*, the reciprocal influences pertaining to a certain time (119-120).²² These points form his

²⁰Both parties achieve this by subverting certain archetypal detective story norms to elaborate on the nature of conjectures. Eco in addition continues to maintain Borgesian references and devices in his work as well. These allusions form the intertextual relationship between the works, and it is this relationship that also highlights the differences between them.

²¹ The interaction between the three points can go multiple ways. For example, B can find a work of A not realizing its prevalence in X, B can look at X without realizing the presence of A, or B can find a work of A and through it learn of X.

²² An example of this used by Eco is a fictional story he wrote at the age of 10, which contained traces of Borgesian humor and creativity and utopianism of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He had not read any such work at that age, but the fiction that he did read transmitted in an underlying manner many concepts he now came to recognize.

philosophy in the creation of a new work. In terms of Borges, Eco does not shy away from describing his admiration, and he admits that both Borgesian library and "La muerte y la brújula" weighed heavily on his mind in and around the conception of *Il nome della rosa* (124-125). However, at particular times within the authorial process, he might have described his inspiration to be from somewhere else, as the creative process is complex and by no means one-dimensional.²³

Other Borgesian models present in his process are the *Pierre Menard* and *Averoes* models, conceptually derived from the respective works. Though these influences are both real and apparent, Eco notices it is hard to trace many of the paths that ideas take within the creative process. In a reference to the labyrinthian theme, and whether it derived from Borges or from other sources, Eco remarks "here then is a case where it is not clear, not even to me, whether I (B) found X by going through writer A, or whether I (B) first discovered some aspects of X and then noticed how X influenced A." (128) He follows this by pondering whether *Il nome della rosa*, with its labyrinthian aspect, could have been even written without the existence of Borges, as it is possible that the Argentine author is for Eco the connective tissue between the multitude of labyrinthian theme sources. "Borges and My Anxiety of Influence" then transitions to the difficulties that lie in identifying inspirations and limiting the relationship one or even two-dimensionally. Authors such as Borges have covered nearly everything thematically, displaying a comprehensiveness that may lead readers to lose sight of the true intertextual relationships. For example, Eco's naming of his novel is not a reference to the Borgesian rose, nor to the Shakespearean rose, as many postulate. Rather, it was an arbitrary selection made by his friends; a title selected out of a list of ten proposed by the Italian author (129-130).

²³Other non-Borges models derived from literary works are nominated as examples of different sources of inspiration for the work, such as Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*.

To close, Eco, after mentioning distinctly non-Borgesian aspects that comprise his writing style, characterizes some of Borges's style and defining characteristics. The Argentine's narratives span the breadth of fantasy and reality, evoking the philosophical, metaphysical and rhetorical through parables. This quality is the preeminent pillar upon which his influential ability stands, and the manner in which he delivers it is even more fundamental:

It is very difficult to escape the anxiety of influence, just as it was very difficult for Borges to be a precursor of Kafka. Saying that there is no idea in Borges that did not exist before is like saying there is not a single note in Beethoven that had not already been produced before. What remains fundamental in Borges is his ability to use the most varied debris of the encyclopedia to make the music of ideas. I certainly tried to imitate this example (even though the idea of a music of ideas came to me from Joyce). (Eco 134-135)

Based on the principles established for the second layer of my framework, Eco's work should either add to the complexity of the conceptual characteristics of Borges' works or develop a unique way of thinking which can be traced within them. As Corry and Giovanolli posit, Eco's novel serves as a holistic parallel to "La muerte y la brújula". By using the same archetypal format, and through the recurrence of Borgesian motifs and themes, we are drawn to elicit comparisons between these two sides of the same coin. By creating the "epistemological metaphor", Eco attempts to define a Borgesian subgenre, in which philosophy and science is described through literary means. This coinage provides a new approach in which both Eco and Borges' *oeuvre* can be interpreted in depth. Additionally, Eco's usage of the meta-allusion in *Il nome della rosa* highlights Borges' very own unique aesthetic strength, something that is a

symbol of his perception of the interconnectedness of literature.²⁴ Thus, Eco's position as a theoretician is further exemplified, even by means of his novel. These conceptual developments expand the reader's understanding of Borges, both in his prose and philosophical approach to literature, and within the Argentine's own writing traces of Eco can be recognized by the reader, a key trait in the reciprocal nature of "Kafka y sus precursores".

"Borges and My Anxiety of Influence" offers Eco's perspective on inspiration and authorship, addressing the implications of both "Kafka y sus precursores" and *The Anxiety of Influence* while simultaneously explaining facets of his experience in his own creative process. The triangle of influences, along with the inclusion of the Zeitgeist, offers an interesting, multi-faceted relationship that differs slightly from Borges'. The point X, being the influence of culture or the chain of built up influences, provides a "third party" explanation that encompasses the unintentional influences that aren't directly derived from source material. Eco's belief that one of Borges' greatest strengths is his ability to amalgamate and concretize these abstractions from the temporally spanning encyclopedia of ideas is evident, both in his analysis and in the admission of imitation. In terms of the second layer of my framework, this work also builds upon previous Borges thought, both in terms of inspiration and of his respective characteristics. While the triangle can serve as a consideration of, alternative to or further development of the relationship central to "Kafka y sus precursores", Eco's conclusion noticeably highlights a unique Borgesian strength that, in re-reading Borges, can be analytically recognized through Eco and his theoretics.

²⁴ Much like the Alephian principles discussed previously.

Conclusion

Dante and Eco were respectively selected as examples of a predecessor and successor to Borges, thereby fulfilling the first layer of the framework, which posits the continuous cycle of inspiration. Two pieces were selected regarding each author that exemplified these relationships and their thematic ramifications were discussed in accordance with the second layer, which describes a bi-lateral connection in which the successor's work alters the reader's perception of the original (in a manner not possible without the successor's existence). As this complex puzzle begins to fit together, the intertextual connections between all the various sources become apparent. Eco's analysis of the Borgesian allusion and the Argentine's ability to pull concepts from a metaphorical encyclopedia of knowledge echoes Borges' own interpretation of the literary Aleph, a holistic source over which a universal author presides. Of course, this interpretation in itself finds parallels in the Dantean God, revealing over three cycles of inspiration the suffusion of ideas and the individualistic changes that come with each new iteration of authorship.

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