

## Imaginative Geography: Dialectical Orientalism in Borges

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### Abstract

The following essay investigates Borges' cultural-ideological stance as an Argentinean writer opposed to national literature and ideological rhetoric. This position will be elucidated via a comparison with Edward Said's *Orientalism* which, following Foucault, argues that literature is subservient to the ideological paradigms of the period. The discussion demonstrates how Borges presents a dialectical orientalism in his work: a philosophical-universal position deviating from the delimited framework of national ideology, hereby establishing an uni-ideological philosophical and transcultural view of the interrelationship between "East" and "West." In line with Said, the essay examines the literary representation of Islam in Western literature, focusing on the image of Mahomet in Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

"These are the lenses through which the Orient is experienced, and they shape the language, perception, and form of the encounter between East and West" (Said, 1994, 58). Herein, Edward Said trenchantly argues that Western Orientalism is demonic in its power. In his seminal *Orientalism* (1978), he details the scope, internal consistency, and strata of this vast web of representations the West spreads over the Orient in an attempt to control and master it, believing it to constitute a "creeping danger." It resembles the labyrinth Daedalus constructed in order to capture the Minotaur. The image of the labyrinth is inaccurate, however, Said in effect believing that the web is so fine and well-made that even Westerners can no longer extract themselves from it.

I believe that Said would regard Jorge Luis Borges as an Orientalist *par excellence*. Not only does he appear to portray the East as mysterious and exotic—"something vast, immobile, magnificent, incomprehensible"—in typical Orientalist fashion but he also seems to accept the essentialist distinction between "East" and "West" (Borges, 1984, 42). From a Saidian perspective, his writings thus embody Orientalist mental structures that serve, in William Blake's phrase, "mind-forg'd manacles." In this article, I shall argue that this assessment is quite erroneous, Borges in fact presenting an aesthetic-philosophical alternative to Saidian political-ideological Orientalism—a transcultural, critical, and above all philosophical stance (in the Socratic sense of the word). In the light of Stanley Fish's (1972) distinction between rhetorical and dialectal literature, I shall call Borges's perception of the relations between East and West "dialectical Orientalism."

Let us examine first Said's doctrine of Orientalism, paying particular regard to his assertions regarding the cultural role of literary writing. Acknowledging his debt to Michel Foucault's (2002, 168-216) postulation that *epistemes*—an *a priori* infrastructure of ideas—shape all the layers of the cultural

activity in which they are embedded, Said posits (1994, 24) that individual texts and the collective literary enterprise synergistically nourish and augment one another, all cultural activity in the West serving the ideology of Western hegemony. Literature and art therefore function on this view as surrogates of political ideology. The Orientalist ideologico-political web thus controls all cultural activities, political and “pure” knowledge being one and the same, such that artistic creativity is always ideological, serving the Orientalist web.

In essence, Eurocentric Christian Orientalism defines itself in relation to the Orient, gaining “in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (3). This “strength” consists of a vast mechanism of economic-cultural dominance that shapes a sense of superior self-identity. In its attempt to firmly ground its strength and identity, Orientalism outlines an “imaginative geography” that determines and delineates scope of “East” and “West.” Taking Giambattista Vico’s observation that “men make their own history” literally, Said argues that Orientalism extends it to geography: “as both geographical and cultural entities—to say nothing of historical entities—such locales, regions, geographical sectors as ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’ are man-made” (1994, 5). This system of imaginative representations serves thus as an ideological myth of cultural and geographic differences. It is thus pointless to discuss whether Orientalism is true or whether it accurately corresponds to the Orient; the best one can do is to examine its internal consistency and features.

Said’s declared stance is therefore anti-essentialist by nature, the very distinction between “East” and “West” being, in his eyes, the product rather than the source of Orientalist representation: “In geographical and cultural—to say nothing of historical—terms, the ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’ are man-made” (1994, 5).<sup>1</sup> The concepts of “East” and “West” are thus empty rhetorical values. The web of representations that has forged them being so sophisticated and powerful, however, they are generally assumed to be incontestably true, Orientalists positing a “real” geographic distinction between “East” and “West.” Splitting space into “Occident” and “Orient,” this exterior representation turns, by sleight of hand, into what Said calls “radical realism”:

Philosophically, then, the kind of language, thought, and vision that I have been calling Orientalism very generally is a form of radical realism; anyone employing Orientalism, which is the habit for dealing with questions, objects, qualities, and regions deemed Oriental, will designate, name, point to, fix what he is talking or thinking about with a word or phrase, which is then considered to have acquired, or more simply to be, reality (1994, 72).

Orientalists who visit the country they have made their scholarly specialty thus use their observations therein in support of the validity of the *a priori* truths they hold and are neither interested in nor capable

of abandoning. We might formulate this claim in more parsimonious Popperian terms. All theories being amenable to verification by observation, observations are none other than retrospective acts performed in the light of one's "horizon of expectations." They thus always confirm the a priori truth of a given theory: "Once your eyes were thus opened you saw confirming instances everywhere: the world was full of *verifications* of the theory" (2014, 34-35 [original italics]). Total theories always possess great explanatory force, appearing capable of explaining with ostensibly "scientific" certainty everything within their sphere. In this framework, Saidian Orientalism constitutes a prime example of a pseudo-scientific theory that confirms its truth at every observation point and moment anew. Said also contends, however, that Orientalism is also intimately bound up with conspiratorial processes that seek to gain full economic-political control of the East.

In a more general formulation, we may say that Saidian Orientalism is a conspiratorial pseudo-scientific theory that functions as an ideological myth—one that first delineates the boundaries of the imaginative space of "East" and "West" and then presents the "East" as the inverse and flawed Other. This myth is absolute in both scope and depth, possessing such great force that its representations are mistaken as reality itself and so far-reaching that it penetrates all the strata of cultural activity—including the humanistic sciences and art.

In accentuating the totality of the Orientalist web, Said abolishes the classic Aristotelian distinction between science-philosophy (which seeks after truth), praxis (which seeks utility), and creativity (which creates objects). Hereby, he collapses the divide between "pure" and "political" knowledge, arguing that humanistic studies cannot be regarded as marginal to politics. Although it is easy to argue that knowledge about Shakespeare or Wordsworth is not political knowledge while knowledge about China or Russia is, in fact, as Foucault has already demonstrated, "the scholar cannot be detached from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society" (1994, 10). Even his own study of Orientalism reflects this fact, being a product of his status as an Arab-Palestine resident in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

No knowledge is apolitical. "Western" political society and cultural hegemony penetrate all parts of civic society, particularly academia, infusing it with ideology. Every study conducted in the humanities, every humanistic act, including the philosophic—which Aristotle regarded as seeking truth qua truth—is always and essentially performed from a cultural perspective informed by the ideology of Orientalism. Orientalism is thus a "*distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts . . . a whole series of 'interests' which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains it" (1994, 12 [original italics]). According to Kant (1790, Book 1.16), art and aesthetics are unique in producing *pulchritudo vaga*—free beauty—

dissociated from any purpose, ideology, or utility. This idea shaped the nineteenth-century aestheticism movement, heralding the ideal of *l'art pour l'art*. Said, however, maintains that literary writing and artistic creativity do not take place within the four walls of the individual subject; they always function in the shadow of the ideological myth of Orientalism.<sup>3</sup> Orientalism must therefore be studied as “a dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by the three great Empires—British, French, American—in whose intellectual and imaginative territory the writing was produced” (1994, 14-15).

Said exemplifies these “dynamic exchanges” in his brief discussion of Flaubert’s representation of the Egyptian courtesan Kuchuk Hanem—a deliberate choice, I would suggest, of a writer identified above all others with the ideal of “pure” literary writing. While this gives a powerful model of the perfect Oriental woman, it also reflects the exterior gaze always practiced by the Orientalist, thus confirming the conspiratorial model of power relations between “East” and “West”: “She never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. *He* spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was “typically Oriental” (1994, 6 [original italics]), In highlighting the writer’s entanglement in his or her ideological environment and its politicization of aesthetics, Said rejects the fundamental concepts of modern aesthetics—the genius, inspiration, originality, anxiety of influence, art for art’s sake, etc. In parallel, in ostensible resemblance to post-colonial thought, he also asserts that the historic-political perspective—that posits the delicate relationship between ideological systems and literary writing—must now form the focus of literary studies. He applies this principle in full force in his analysis of the figure of Muhammad in Dante’s *Inferno*, focusing on Dante’s Orientalist representation of Islam.

Despite initially defining Orientalism as a web of representations imposed on the “East,” Said promptly observes that his study is primarily devoted to an examination of the conspiratorial representation of the “Near East”—i.e., the world of Arab Islam. Islam stands at the centre of his attack on “Western” Orientalism because ever since its illustrious conquests in the Middle Ages it has embodied the “Ottoman threat” to the existence of Christian Europe—a “lasting trauma” (1994, 59). Caricatured as the powerful Other, terrible in its barbarity, a rigid and distorted Christian image developed of Islam in the Middle Ages that defined it as “just a misguided version of Christianity” (1994, 61). Here we find the theological and historical roots of modern politico-economic, anti-Islamic Orientalism propounded by the British, French, and Americans.

The war waged by Christian Europe against Islam during the Middle Ages was epitomized in what he calls the “theatrical representation” of Islam: The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is

confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe. (1994, 63)

On this stage the spotlight falls on the image of Muhammad, erroneously identified with Islam: “[S]ince Christ is the basis of Christian faith, it was assumed—quite incorrectly—that Mohammed was to Islam as Christ was to Christianity. Hence the polemic name ‘Mohammedanism’ given to Islam, and the automatic epithet ‘imposter’ applied to Mohammed” (1994, 60). Just as Islam was regarded as a flawed imitation of Christianity, so Muhammad was perceived as having established a heretical religion. Islam was thus perceived as an inferior copy of Christianity. This theological-cultural inferiority reached its peak in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.

According to Said, Dante “seamlessly combined the realistic portrayal of mundane reality with a universal and eternal system of Christian values” (1994, 68). Meticulously and with great dramatic effect, Dante crafts an exemplary text in which every figure constitutes a representative type of a quality, of the symbolic fate decreed upon it, and the “larger whole” to which it belongs. While Muslim sages, such as Ibn Rushd (Averroës) and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) are located in the *nobile castello*—the abode of the shades of the great of antiquity—Muhammad is incarcerated in “the ninth of the ten Bolgias of Malebolge, a circle of gloomy ditches surrounding Satan’s stronghold in Hell” (1994, 68).<sup>4</sup> He is thus set among the most recalcitrant of sinner, “the sowers of scandal and discord,” the only ones ranked lower being traitors such as Judas Iscariot. His punishment arouses particular disgust:

A cask by losing centre-piece or cant  
Was never shattered so, as I saw one  
Rent from the chin to where one breaketh wind.  
  
Between his legs were hanging down his entrails;  
His heart was visible, and the dismal sack  
That maketh excrement of what is eaten. (*Inferno*, Canto 28)

This depiction recalls Christ’s passion on the cross, both figures experiencing extreme physical torture. Their punishment differs in one significant respect, however: blood-chillingly horrific as it may be, the cross nevertheless preserves Christ’s body as an organic whole. Muhammad, on the other hand, is mutilated beyond human form, his entrails pouring out from his insides. Hereby, he is demonized in a type of caricature of Christ’s crucifixion, once again being taking on the role of “imposter.” The “discriminations and refinements of Dante’s poetic grasp of Islam” thus form, in Said’s view, an example of the “schematic, almost cosmological inevitability with which Islam and its designated

representatives are creatures of Western geographical, historical, and above all moral apprehension” (1994, 69).

Said is particularly critical of the opaque nature of Dante’s cosmological division—i.e., the closed circles of the imaginative territory of hell. This scheme symbolizes, of course, the impermeability of the representations, the absoluteness of the role they play on the stage of the theatrical Orientalist representation of Islam:

the Orientalist attitude . . . shares with magic and with mythology the self-containing, self-reinforcing character of a closed system, in which objects are what they are *because* they are what they are, for once, for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter. The European encounter with the Orient, and specifically with Islam, strengthened this system of representing the Orient . . . [and] turned Islam into the very epitome of an outside against which the whole of European civilization from the Middle Ages on was founded. (1994, 70)

Within the Orientalist web of representations, literature thus lies at the service of the ideological myth of the “West.” Wittingly or unwittingly, in shaping the representative figures of Islam, with Muhammad at their head, Dante sought to “characterize the Orient as alien and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, manager, and actors are *for* Europe, and only for Europe” (1994, 71 [original italics]). Muhammad is thus “always the imposter (familiar because he pretends to be like the Jesus we know) and always the Oriental (alien, because although he is in some ways ‘like’ Jesus, he is after all not like him)” (1994, 72). The view that derives from this analysis is clear, aesthetics operating in the political scope and literature weaving the ideological myth of Orientalism.

Let us now turn to Borges’s Orientalist writing. In 1978, the blind and much-acclaimed writer delivered a series of lectures in the Teatro Coliseo in Buenos Aires. One of these was devoted to the classic oriental book *The Arabian Nights*. Borges began by addressing the question of the “East”—whose “discovery” constituted a “major event in the history of the West. It would be more precise to speak of a continuing consciousness of the East, comparable to the presence of Persia in Greek history.”<sup>5</sup> In this framework, he analyzes the significance of the words “East” and “West”: “We will examine later the words *Orient* and *Occident*, *East* and *West*, which we cannot define, but which are true. They remind me of what St. Augustine said about time: “What is time? If you don’t ask me I know; but if you ask me I don’t know.” What are East and the West? If you ask me, I don’t know.”

The analogy Borges draws here with time is intriguing, time being, for him, the “central problem” of metaphysics and human existence. The view that derives from this position is clear. The “East” is mysterious, unknown—a constant, disturbing presence. Borges then elucidates this indefinability: “There is something we feel as the Orient, something I have not felt in Israel but have

felt in Granada and in Córdoba. I have felt the presence of the East, and I don't know if I can define it; perhaps it's not worth it to define something we feel so instinctively." The East's indefinability is thus a mark of its ontological profundity. From a Saidian perspective, the distinction Borges makes between "East" and "West" as essentially discrete bodies and his accentuation of the exotic mysteriousness of the "East" demonstrate that Borges is a typical Orientalist writer who works within the framework of the ideological web of Orientalist images.

While Said is justified in adducing Borges's essentialist orientation, his essentialism is in fact far from simple. The quote cited above indicates that Borges's "East" is not limited to a geographical sense, being tangible in Europe—Spain—but not Israel. Borges's insistence on its indefinability is also runs counter to the Orientalist pursuit of the enclosed whole. In the continuation of the lecture, Borges further blurs the distinction between "East" and "West," arguing that the latter is not completely separate from the former because it is constructed upon the two central pillars of Greek culture—the symbol of the "West" par excellence—and Asian Israel. He also stresses that just as the "West" has exerted an influence upon the "East" so the "East" has upon the "West." Thus, for example, he maintains that the "Romantic movement begins at that moment when someone, in Normandy or in Paris, reads *The Thousand and One Nights*. He leaves the world legislated by Boileau and enters the world of Romantic freedom."

Borges's perspective here is thus not unilateral and patronizing—the "Western" gaze on the "East" from outside and above—but reciprocal, dynamic and mutual, recalling the synergy of the *yin* and the *yang* in Chinese philosophy. While Borges does make an essentialist distinction between "East" and "West," this division does not obey the rules of Said's paradigm. It rather offers surprising principles with respect to the definition and mutual relationship between the Orient and Occident. In what way is Borges therefore an Orientalist and how does his Orientalism relate to Said's "classic" formulation? In order to answer these questions, we must first address the more general issue of Borges's outlook on the cultural stance of the writer.

As noted above, Said insists that a writer cannot step outside his or her cultural and historical context, just as the intellectual cannot but operate within the framework of the "cultural grip" of the society into which he or she was born. With Borges, of course, things are never simple when it comes to identity and its determination—especially his own identity as an "Argentinean" writer. (We only need recall the tension between his status as a national writer in Argentina—his face being imprinted on the peso—and his wish to be buried in Geneva.) He addresses this issue at length in his essay "The Argentine Writer and Tradition" (1955)—which originated as a lecture delivered in response to the claims made by nationalist intellectuals that, despite the Argentinean signs that mark his writing, his work is not "sufficiently Argentinean" (1964, 174-85).<sup>6</sup>

Right at the outset, Borges notes that, in his opinion, the question of a writer's relationship to his cultural tradition is a false, pseudo-problem. The idea that literature obligates one to define oneself by means of distinctively-national characteristics is new and arbitrary—just like the idea that writers must look for writing themes linked to their homeland. Shakespeare would have been astounded if he had been told that, as an Englishman, he could not write about Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark. Rather surprisingly, Borges seeks validation of his view in Gibbon's comment that the preeminent Arab book—the Quran—makes no reference to camels:

Gibbon observes that in the Arab book *par excellence*, in the Koran, there are no camels; I believe if there were any doubt as to the authenticity of the Koran, this lack of camels would suffice to prove that it is Arab. It was written by Mohammed, and Mohammed, as an Arab, had no reason to know that camels were particularly Arab; they were, for him, a part of reality, and he had no reason to single them out, while the first thing a forger, a tourist, or an Arab nationalist would do is bring on the camels, whole caravans of camels on every page; but Mohammed, as an Arab, was unconcerned; he knew he could be Arab without camels. I think we Argentines can emulate Mohammed, can believe in the possibility of being Argentine without abounding in local color. (1964, 174-85)

Borges also relates to the more specific question of national identity in Argentina. It being customarily thought that Argentina has severed itself to some degree from its European past, all Argentineans are therefore cut off from the past, floating without any historical roots as though in the pristine days of creation. This view is as unfounded as its tragic aura is mesmerizing. According to Borges, it is precisely this Argentinean perception of its European past that creates a strong feeling of time. He elucidates this argument via an analogy with Veblen's remarks about the prominent place of the Jews in Western culture:

He [Veblen] asks if this preeminence allows us to conjecture about the innate superiority of the Jews, and answers in the negative; he says that they are outstanding in Western culture because they act within that culture and, at the same time, do not feel tied to it by any special devotion; "for that reason," he says, "a Jew will always find it easier than a non-Jew to make innovations in Western culture." (1964, 174-85)

In other words, it is the ambivalent closeness to/distance from culture that nourishes Jewish creativity. Argentines—and South American in general—holding the same attitude towards the "West," they are able to think without prejudice or partiality. In effect, this Argentinean perception of Western tradition reflects, in the representation-within-representation structure so beloved of Borges, the Argentinean writer's attitude towards the tradition within which he or she works. This also helps us understand the

stance adopted by every writer. He or she stands in an ambivalent, close-distant relationship to his or her contemporaries—the proximity lying in the fact that his or her successful works are ultimately attributed to the tradition and language in which he or she works (just as we read Shakespeare’s letters as the zenith of English literature), the distance in the fact that as he or she writes, the author does not write with a personal or national identity but must act in accordance with what Borges calls the “voluntary dream which is artistic creation” (1964, 174-85).

While the writer is not engaged in a craft that is in the service of his homeland, he or she is not a “cosmopolitan”—an abstract, past-less, or rootless creation. He or she is absolutely free to treat whatever subject or literary product from whatever culture he or she chooses (actual or imaginary), without any obligation to use local “colors.” If it possesses true aesthetic worth, however, such a work will always be ascribed to the culture whence it derives. This view standing midway between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, I shall call it a “transcultural” stance.

This ambivalent position is a back-and-forth movement that, ascribing little importance to an author’s national identity, makes all cultures accessible and legitimate on the one hand and acknowledges that esteemed works will always return to their birthplace. To use a geometric metaphor, we may say that the Borgesian transcultural writer stands at the centre of a circle whose circumference is delineated by a variety of other cultures, the back-and-forth movement between them nourishing his or her creativity.

Here, Borges’s deviance from Said is clear. The latter accentuates the standard, relentless “cultural grip” in which the writer establishes a close connection with his or her life circumstances and national and ethnic identity—which, in his opinion, guides and shapes all his or her activity within the ideological infrastructure. Borges, in contrast, believes that the prerequisites for intellectual creativity and literary fecundity are freedom, cultural diversity, and a dynamically ambivalent stance towards nationality and tradition.

In the same lecture, Borges also addresses the creative process involved in producing a literary text. What is the “voluntary dream which is artistic creation” to which he refers? According to Schopenhauer—the philosopher who most influenced Borges—such dissociation is the preeminent hallmark of the artistic genius (1958, Vol. 1, III, §34). As Borges explains,

I believe ... that all these *a priori* discussions concerning the intent of literary execution are based on the error of supposing that intentions and plans matter a great deal. Let us take the case of Kipling: Kipling dedicated his life to writing in terms of certain political ideals, he tried to make his work an instrument of propaganda and yet, at the end of his life, he was obliged to confess that the true essence of a writer’s work is usually unknown to him. He recalled the case of Swift, who, when he wrote *Gulliver’s Travels*,

tried to bring an indictment against all humanity but actually left a book for children. Plato said that poets are the scribes of a god who moves them against their own will, against their intentions, just as a magnet moves a series of iron rings.

The “voluntary dream which is artistic creation” is thus grounded in the belief that the artistic creation diverges from the author’s intention. Having addressed this issue at length elsewhere, let me merely note here the salient points.<sup>7</sup> In arguing that the act of writing does not derive from the author’s consciousness or intention—from the predetermined intentionalism of his or her will and thought—Borges follows the essential elements of Plato’s transcendental inspiration, according to which the poet receives his or her inspiration from sources *outside* him or herself, these breaking through the psychological unity of his or her personality. The source of the inspiration behind writing is thus always exterior, penetrating inwards invasively. Plato transforms literary creativity from an act of self-skill (*techné*) into an ecstatic event of exterior divine inspiration (*enthousiasmos*: that in which God exists). In the *Ion*, he thus likens the author to a bee gathering nectar or an iron ring that receives and passes on magnetic force.

Borges does not address the question of the source of inspiration—the Greek muse, the Freudian unconscious (what he calls “our own dreary mythology”), or the Hebrew notion of the Holy Spirit; the meaning is the same in either case: the creative act as an event that diverges from the writer’s consciousness and intention. In some places, he even asserts that he himself was inspired in a similar fashion, receiving a sudden flash of knowledge of the “beginning and the end” of a text he then applied himself to finishing consciously, wittingly, and painstakingly. Thus, for example, he observes in the introduction to *Doctor Brodie’s Report*: “The craft is mysterious; our opinions are ephemeral, and I prefer Plato’s theory of the Muse to that of Poe, who argued, or pretended to argue, that the writing of a poem is an operation of the intelligence. (I never cease to be amazed that the Classics professed a Romantic theory while a Romantic poet espoused a Classical one)” (n.p.).<sup>8</sup> Borges relates here to Poe’s lengthy treatise “The Philosophy of Composition,” in which he describes, in mathematical precision, how he wrote his well-known poem “The Raven.” Elsewhere, he notes that this treatise is but a hoax, no one composing a poem in such a mathematical fashion.<sup>9</sup> In his lecture on Nathaniel Hawthorne, he goes so far as to assert that even if the author or poet holds opinions and worldviews that they insert into their writings—as Hawthorne was wont to infuse his stories with conservative moral-intellectual values inculcated by Victorian education—his creation will still diverge from its creator’s intention: “In the course of a life devoted less to living than to reading, I have verified many times that literary intentions and theories are nothing more than stimuli and that the final work usually ignores or even contradicts them” (1989, 59 [my translation]).

This is thus the essential mystery of the art of writing, created in the divergence and even “defying” of the author’s intention and personality. Here we find the second circle of dispute between Said and Borges—over the autonomous status of literature within the cultural-ideological system. As noted above, following Foucault Said argues that literature and art are always located within the iron grasp of the ideological myth, aesthetics being violently subject to politics. Borges—likely under the influence of Schopenhauer and Plato—contends that literature cannot be made subject to the writer’s worldview or his or her ideological opinions because the essence of literary inspiration lies precisely in its divergence from the author’s intention—the “voluntary dream which is artistic creation.”

At the same time, might a Saidian not argue that the very exteriority that dictates the production of a work that defies intention à la Borges is in fact none other than the ideological web of the writer’s culture, in which he flounders like a fish? From Borges’s perspective, this contention is as interesting as it is false. As we saw above in the first circle of the controversy between Borges and Said, Borges adopts a transcultural stance that denies any national or ideological stance. The political significance of this approach lies in the fact that the writer does not work within any ideological scheme, allowing his or her perspective to shift, transcending national ideologies and cultural concepts. This social dissociation is indeed the prerequisite for authentic writing: that which is “dedicated to dreaming.” In other words, Borges’s idea of inspiration as diverging from intention restores to the literary artifact its “sacred liberty” (in Schiller’s words) and Platonic mysteriousness. From this stance, literature cannot be subjugated to the terrifying imperialism of Saidian ideology.

It would be tempting at this point to suggest that, just as Said holds a Foucauldian view of literature and art, so Borges stands at the other end of the spectrum, following in the Kantian tradition that posits that art is none other than the “free play of ideas.” Completely dissociated from truth values—possessing no neotic dimension—it is not science nor adds any knowledge to the world. Many of Borges’s readers and critics interpret his writing as a purely aesthetic game whose sole purpose is to prompt wonder and trembling in his readers. I suggest that this is far from the truth. As observed above, Borges is a great admirer of Arthur Schopenhauer, sharing his ideas regarding the artist’s cultural dissociation. Schopenhauer’s influence is greater than appears at first glance, Borges in fact tending towards the other pole of the philosopher’s attitude towards the creative process.

In the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer argues that the artistic genius first cuts the object of his gaze off from everything in his spatial and temporal environment and then, in his immersion in meditative observation to the point of self-oblivion, finds a way to grasp it as a pure and general archetype, *sub specie aeterni* (III §36). Thus, for example, he is able to see the cat not as one cat amongst other but as a general species or in its pure “cat-ness,” as a Platonic archetype or Kantian thing-in-itself.<sup>10</sup> From this perspective, aesthetics enable the artist to understand things in their essence—a form of philosophical knowledge in the classic Greek sense of *noesis*. We may thus say that

aesthetic observation of the world of objects grants the artist philosophical or noetic knowledge—“the knowledge of the archetypes,” in Schopenhauerian terms.

Here, Borges is indeed closer to Schopenhauer than to Kant. The aesthetic “game” is not a closed, perhaps even escapist, system devoted solely to the pursuit of aesthetic pleasure but ultimately a profoundly philosophically-oriented enterprise.<sup>11</sup> We shall treat this claim cautiously; even if we do not go so far as to assert that the philosophical game of literary writing grants essential knowledge about reality to the writer, we may nevertheless suggest that literature and aesthetic *stimulate* a process of inquiry that seeks the same philosophic knowledge—a process whose horizon is a complete understanding of the enigma of reality, which may never be attained. Socrates called this philosophical inquiry, an incessant pursuit of the revelation of the first principles—*dialektike*.

The contemporary literary scholar Stanley Fish exhibits distant echoes of this Socratic dialectic. Fish distinguishes between two essential types of literary artifact—those that deal purely with the establishment and inculcation of contemporary ideologies and those dedicated to discovering first principles and their origin and foundation. The former he calls “rhetorical,” the latter “dialectical”—in precisely the same sense as the Socratic term. Like Socrates and following Fish, I suggest that we can characterize Borges’s aesthetic game as investigative rather than ideological, his literary creation constituting a sophisticated and subtle form of (Socratic) dialectical literature. Like the Socratic dialogical inquiry, the dialecticism of the Borgesian artifact is oriented both inwards and outwards. In its outward movement, it comprises an investigation of national views, linguistic conventions, and the ideological infrastructure of diverse and varied cultures. Here, his transcultural stance provides his writing with the necessary aesthetic distance for the accomplishment of this task. In its inward movement—finer and subtler—it turns its gaze upon itself and seeks to inquire into its own narrative features, representational apparatus, linguistic boundaries, intertextual associations, and formation process. We may thus say that Borges’s writing forms a type of dialectical literature both in a critical sense—an examination of the validity and soundness of cultural views—and a reflective sense—self-reflection on literary representation, the creative process, and the boundaries of language.

In light of this determination, let us return to the Saidian claim that Borges’s writing is preeminently Orientalist because it accepts the essentialist distinction between “East” and “West.” Borges does indeed give the impression of being an essentialist in regard to the “East.” In the framework of his transculturalism, however, this Orientalism does not serve the web of Western ideological representations. On the contrary, it seeks to examine their premises and features, together with the mechanisms that feed them. Borges investigates the traits and definition of the “East” in precisely the same way as he does those of the “West.” More significantly, his transcultural viewpoint allows him to inquire into the mutual relations between cultures in general—and those of the “East” and “West” in particular. Here, Borges affirms Said’s contention that Orientalism is always found

outside the Orient, its representation of the “East” always being exterior. According to Said, this fact is responsible for the Orientalist sense of superiority: its arrogant gaze upon an object that holds itself up for examination.<sup>12</sup> The Borgesian transcultural view, which transcends all cultures in its philosophical stance, expands, in fact, the exteriority of the representation. It allows the observer to represent both “East” and “West” from the outside, thus permitting their comparison via a non-ideological, neutral, crystal-clear lens—a Wittgensteinian “perspicuous representation.” In other words, Borges’s critical transcultural perspective of culture is universal and non-ideological in nature, philosophical in its incessant aspiration for a synoptic gaze. Philosophy transcends ideology. In his inward-directed gaze, Borges also elucidates his own mode of literary representation in describing “Eastern” and “Western” culture. He thus inquires into the fundamental premises of literary representation, the creative process, and the boundaries of the medium of representation—i.e., literary language. This is the reflective, metafictional dimension of Borges’s dialectical writing.<sup>13</sup>

We may now clearly formulate the three circles of the dispute between Said and Borges. Contra Said’s idea of the “cultural grip,” Borges views the writer from a transcultural perspective. Against Said’s subjection of aesthetics to politics, Borges accentuates the divergence from authorial intention and the mysteriousness of the art of writing. In place of Said’s Orientalist imperialism—the web of representations the “West” imposes on the “East” in order to augment its superiority and power—Borges offers the double mirror of dialectical Orientalism, facilitating a Socratic investigation of both “East” and “West” and the features of their representation in literary texts.<sup>14</sup> Versus Said’s one-dimensional, rhetorical, violent Orientalism, Borges embodies, then, a dialectal Orientalism.

It is worth mentioning that a seemingly similar view can be found in Julia Kushigian’s groundbreaking study *Orientalism in the Hispanic Literary Tradition* (1991). Kushigian, too, seeks to liberate Latin American discourse from the fetters of Western Orientalism. Focusing on the works of Borges, Paz and Sarduy she identifies in the writings of Latin American authors a more egalitarian approach to questions of East and West. Her reading of Borges aims to illustrate this non-hegemonic perspective: she shows how Borges constructs a “textual” Orient and manifests the universal limits of human knowledge by juxtaposing Eastern and Western texts. Yet, the view she articulates still seems to be tainted by a Saidian Orientalism, since it continues to consider the East as the mere object of Western investigation, as an “other” in contradistinction to which Western identity is formed. (Consider, for instance, her remark given in page 23: “If in the West we would like to live eternally in the mind, we project this image of eternal life onto the East as Oriental reality.”) Kushigian’s perspective thus offers a kind of a dialogue which is, still, unreciprocal. What is still needed is to formulate a Socratic, mutually-disrupting interaction between the two sides; I suggest that it is actually offered in my view of Borges’s philosophically-oriented dialectical Orientalism.

Let me now examine some of Borges's texts that exemplify this dialectical—critical and reflective—movement. As demonstrated above, Said engages in a biting, singularly-Orientalist literary analysis of Dante's *Inferno*, representing the Italian's grotesque portrayal of Muhammad as a prime example of the superior, exterior "Western" representation of Islam.<sup>15</sup> It is instructive to compare this with Borges's treatment of both Dante and the Islamic prophet. He makes no attempt to hide his admiration of Dante's *Divine Comedy*—to the point that in a series of lecture he delivered in Buenos Aires in 1977 he asserted: "I have chosen the *Commedia* for this first talk because I am a man of letters and I believe that the apex of literature, of all literature, is the *Commedia*" (1984, 20). As he is prompt to point out, this praise does not "imply that I agree with its theology, or with its mythology, which is a combination of Christian and pagan myth" (1984, 20). It is rather based on the stronger aesthetic feelings it induces in him than he experienced in reading any other work. Its poetic force, he believes, derives from our conviction that Dante saw in his mind's eyes the world he describes, so that in his depiction of Hell we sense—through the intonation of his words—that he himself was horrified by the appalling scene (1984, 25). Herein, we clearly see Borges's abandonment of the ideological and cultural dimensions of the text in favour of its aesthetic and linguistic qualities.

The image of Dante also arouses Borges's curiosity, prompting him to seek to solve the riddle of the Italian poet's personality through his own writing—the same tendency to write about the figures of writers and poets that earned him the epithet "writer of writers." Borges read somewhere that, towards the end of the thirteenth century, when a leopard was exhibited in a cage in Florence Dante was one of those who saw it, being so impressed by its beauty and magnificence that he promptly inserted it into the *Inferno*. In "Inferno, I, 32" (1960), Borges describes this event and its purpose. God appears to the leopard in a dream and tells him: "You live and will die in this prison so that a man I know of may see you a certain number of times and not forget you and place your figure and symbol in a poem which has its precise place in the scheme of the universe."<sup>16</sup> When the leopard awakes, he is only left with an "obscure resignation, a valorous ignorance, for the machinery of the world is much too complex for the simplicity of a beast." The reason for his captivity—so Dante can see him and use him in a poem that forms part of the perfect divine creation—is far beyond his comprehension. Borges then surprisingly shifts to Dante:

Years later, Dante was dying in Ravenna, as unjustified and as lonely as any other man. In a dream, God declared to him the secret purpose of his life and work; Dante, in wonderment, knew at last who and what he was and blessed the bitterness of his life. Tradition relates that, upon waking, he felt that he had received and lost an infinite thing, something that he would not be able to recuperate or even glimpse, for the machinery of the world is much too complex for the simplicity of men.

Borges makes no mention here of Dante's literary involvement, his ideology, or Christian identity. The text's force and power derive precisely from the binary analogy it draws between human beings and animals, Dante and the leopard, apparent in their mutual inability to comprehend the divine machinery of the universe. Nothing remains here thus of Dante's exterior, superior, violent Orientalist gaze à la Said. He lies on his deathbed in such human helplessness (Nietzsche would say all too human) that he feels "as unjustified and as lonely as any other man." Here, too, we find Borges's aesthetic-philosophic perspective that, indifferent to national ideology, seeks out the general limits of human existence—in this particular case, the limitations of human understanding of the divine plan of the universe.

In another text, Borges's focus lies on Muhammad. A short, exemplary piece of miniature writing entitled "A Double for Mohammad" (1954), Borges added this to the new edition of *A Universal History of Iniquity*. The first paragraph reads:

Because Mohammed is always associated with religion in the minds of Mohammedans, God commanded that in heaven a spirit would sit at their head who would embody the role of Mohammed. This is not always the same person. Formerly it was a man from Saxony who had been taken prisoner by the Algerines, and had become a Mohammedan; and having once been a Christian, he was sometimes moved to speak to them about the Lord, saying that he was not Joseph's son but the son of God himself. Other Mohammedans afterward succeed this one. In the place where that representative Mohammedans has his station there appears a fire like a small torch to distinguish him; but that fire is invisible to all but Mohammedans. (70)<sup>17</sup>

In typical Orientalist fashion, Borges here identifies Islam and its founder. Rather than Muhammedanism being the name used by outsiders, however, he ascribes it to the Muslim community itself. The plot revolves around God's command to create the symbolic role of Muhammad—a fixed station signaled by a torch in heaven. While Muhammad's symbol is permanent, his representation changes, however. His image is thus dynamic and multidimensional—in direct contrast to Dante's invariable figure enclosed within the circle of hell and endlessly punished. The first Muhammad is a former Christian—who remains one in thought. Hereby, Borges blurs the religious and ideological distinction between Christianity and Islam—and thus between "East" and "West," the transcultural view being substituted for the political ideological view before our very eyes. All that is left are gaps: between Muhammad's symbol and his representation, Muhammad and Islam, and, above all, God and human beings.

In the second paragraph, the historical Muhammad appears:

The true Mohammed, he who wrote the Koran, is not seen by his followers at the present day. I was told that in former times he presided over them; but because he

desired to rule as a god over all things pertaining to their religion he was ejected from his seat, which he had beneath the papists, and was sent down to the right side near the south. A certain society of Mohammedans was once incited by some malicious spirits to acknowledge Mohammed as God. To quiet this disturbance, Mohammed was brought up from the lower earth and shown to them; and at that time I also saw him. He looked like those corporeal spirits who have no interior perception, with a face inclined to black. I heard him utter these words, “I am your Mohammed”; and immediately he seemed to sink down. (n.p.)

Here, we find another—surprising—disparity, between Muhammad’s symbol and Muhammad himself. At this point, he is represented as a supremely human figure: in his weakness, he seeks to rule over his followers and is punished by banishment. When he is brought up from hell and presented before his followers he appears in all respects like a poor, shadowy human soul. In contrast to Dante’s grotesque cleft Muhammad, Borges’s figure preserves his basic unity as a complete human being, including his weaknesses and limitations. From a more general perspective, the essence of the tension in the Borgesian text derives from the discrepancies between the fixed symbol, the signifying and changing representation, and Muhammad’s human image. All these direct us towards a question that is Platonic rather than political or ideological, namely, the reflection of the source in the mimetic inferiority of its representation. Significantly, the reflection is double here—the symbol of Muhammad in relation to his changing representatives on the one hand and the human Muhammad on the other.

Here, the human imperfection vs. divine perfection is manifestly evident, a clear analogy thus being drawn between the Borgesian Muhammad and the Borgesian Dante. Both fall far short of the magnificence of perfect divine wisdom, which determines their place in the cosmic apparatus and their essential symbols. Their limitations are exemplified in the disparity between their symbolic image—the preeminent authors of the Quran and the *Divine Comedy*—and fragile human existence. Rather than the infamous Saidian exterior representation of the “West” in relation to the “East,” we have here an inclusive transcultural exterior view that gazes from a synoptic vantage point upon the imperfections of human existence in the light of absolute divinity. This is Borges’s dialectal Orientalism in its critical, transcultural, non-ideological manifestation—a philosophic representation that is both exterior and universal.

A stranger, deeper manifestation of Borges’s dialectical Orientalism occurs in the story “Averroës’ Search” (1947). The protagonist of this piece is the illustrious twelfth-century Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd—known in the “West” as Averroës. Ibn Rushd takes upon himself the arduous mission of interpreting Aristotle’s writings so that he (Averroës) will be remembered for posterity:

That Greek sage, the fountainhead of all philosophy, had been sent down to men to teach them all things that can be known; interpreting Aristotle's works, in the same way the *ulemas* interpret the Qur'an, was the hard task that Averroës had set himself. History will record few things lovelier and more moving than this Arab physician's devotion to the thoughts of a man separated from him by a gulf of fourteen centuries. (n.p.)<sup>18</sup>

Averroës is stumped by Aristotle's use of the words "comedy" and "tragedy." Like every Muslim of his generation, he is ignorant of the theatre, thus finding it very difficult to interpret the two terms. Even as he gazes from his window at the improvised street theatre of children playing in the courtyard or listens to the traveler Abu al-Hasan's description of Chinese theatre, he has no grasp of the signification of the two terms, which "no one in all of Islam could hazard a guess as to their meaning."

This appears to be a striking example of "classic" Saidian Orientalism. The great Muslim philosopher stands in the shadow of the Greek Aristotle, the perfect exemplar of "Western" philosophy, bringing into focus the inferiority of the "Eastern" philosopher who seeks in vain to understand the Greek text. "Bounded within the circle of Islam," Averroës has no hope of interpreting Aristotle's words because he is unfamiliar with the horizon (in Edmund Husserl's terms) of the concepts "tragedy" and "comedy" or the genre of theatre. The exterior representation of the story, which gazes at Islam from above and outside, demonstrates the Muslim philosopher's inferiority to his Greek counterpart and Muslim culture is thus evinced as essentially limited, closed and delimited.

The irony sharpens the story further, the "Western" reader knowing precisely what the words mean. Said will thus argue that Borges typically represents Averroës via an exterior representation, enclosed within the circles of a hermetic and deterministic mythology upon "the theatrical stage affixed to Europe" (1994, 63). Such an Averroës is an inferior Other, limited and helpless, nothing more than a poor imitation of the "Western" original. The depiction of the other characters whom Averroës meets at the banquet is also tainted with the same Orientalist brush. Their conversation gives the reader to understand that the Quranist Faraj does not doubt for a moment the ludicrous possibility that roses exist upon which are written verses from the Quran, that the conniving traveller's memory was nothing but "a mirror of secret acts of cowardice, " or that a conservative, uncritical audience will accept any teaching that esteems the old and reviles the new. If that were not sufficient, on returning home Averroës—the wisest and most decent of them all—proceeds to render Aristotle's words erroneously, confidently asserting that "Aristotle gives the name 'tragedy' to panegyrics and the name 'comedy' to satires and anathemas. There are many admirable tragedies and comedies in the Qur'an and the *mu'allaqat* of the mosque."

The exterior Oriental representation we find here is as perspicuous as it is cruel in its assumption of "Western" superiority over the "East." Did Borges set out to create the *ultimate*

Orientalist text? The plot does not end, however, with Averroës abject failure. Rather surprisingly, the story turns its gaze inwards upon itself in a dazzling meta-text:

In the preceding tale, I have tried to narrate the process of failure, the process of defeat. I thought first of that archbishop of Canterbury who set himself the task of proving that God exists; then I thought of the alchemists who sought the philosopher's stone; then, of the vain trisectors of the angle and squares of the circle. Then I reflected that a more poetic case than these would be a man who sets himself a goal that is not forbidden to other men, but is forbidden to him. I recalled Averroës, who, bounded within the circle of Islam, could never know the meaning of the words tragedy and comedy. I told his story; as I went on, I felt what that god mentioned by Burton must have felt – the god who set himself the task of creating a bull but turned out a buffalo. I felt that the work mocked me, foiled me, thwarted me. I felt that Averroës, trying to imagine what a play is without ever having suspected what a theater is, was no more absurd than I, trying to imagine Averroës yet with no more material than a few snatches from Renan, Lane, and Asin Palacios. I felt, on the last page, that my story was a symbol of the man I had been as I was writing it, and that in order to write that story I had had to be that man, and that in order to be that man I had had to write that story, and so on, *ad infinitum*. (And just when I stop believing in him, “Averroës” disappears.) (n.p.)

Here, the story turns to an examination of its own creative process and modes of representation. Its writer wishes to describe the case of a failure to achieve a goal attainable by others and well known to his readers. The text refuses to listen to him, however, something else coming into being. This is the divergence from the writer's intention upon which Borges bases his transcultural view of literary writing. Aware of this deviance, the author acknowledges that, in his wish to portray a limited man, he himself serves as the exemplar of such a figure. The restricted understanding of the figure he creates reflects his own intellectual bounds. The limited cultural horizon of the “East” when he comes to interpret the “West” is reflected in the same restricted horizon of “Western” interpreters who seek to portray Muslim philosophers. Averroës' failure to understand Aristotle mimics Borges's failure to understand Averroës, in an endless set of reciprocal reflections.

At this point in the reflective investigation, the Saidian structure of Orientalist representation completely collapses, the exterior representation from above being replaced by a circular reflection upon the limits of the “East” and “West” alike as they attempt to understand one another, bound by the horizon of their cultural concepts. Out of an Orientalist view that takes the distinction between “East” and “West” for granted a more piercing, Socratic, brutally-clear inquiry thus arises. This precludes the perspective of observation, transforming it into something general, meta-cultural,

philosophic. This transformation reaches its peak in the concluding lines of the text. The breaking of the Orientalist representation and the mutual reflection of the author and literary figure—each dependent on the other for its existence—creates what Hofstadter calls a “strange loop”: a process that initially appears to be linear transpiring to be circular, encompassing itself within itself. This produces a distinctive and dazzling mode of literary representation that may be called a *mise en abyme* à la Gide, the mutual duality creating an endless series of reflections, resembling Escher’s surrealistic pictures. The Saidian political-ideological view recedes and gives way to the Borgesian philosophic-aesthetic approach. The meta-text at the end of “Averroës’ Search” thus turns the story into an exemplar of dialectical Orientalist writing.

Said asserts: “Perhaps the most important task of all would be to undertake studies in contemporary alternatives to Orientalism, to ask how one can study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or a nonrepressive and nonmanipulative, perspective. But then one would have to rethink the whole complex problem of knowledge and power” (1994, 24). I suggest that in his transcultural, dialectal Orientalism Borges points us in precisely this direction.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A Foucauldian, Said's explicit argument is anti-essentialist throughout the book, asserting that the separation between East and West being "imaginative geography," Orientalism is a grid of representations taken to be "real." López-Calvo thus contends that Said essentializes Europe while blaming it for essentializing the Orient.

<sup>2</sup> This perspective is made very clear in his observation: "Much of the personal investment in this study derives from my awareness of being an 'Oriental' as a child growing up in two British colonies. All of my education, in those colonies (Palestine and Egypt) and in the United States, has been Western, and yet that deep early awareness has persisted. In many ways my study of Orientalism has been an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals" (25). For the question of Borges's "cultural grip" within the framework of his literary and philosophical activity in Argentina, see Chapter 3.

<sup>3</sup> In Said's view the political effect—whether conscious or unconscious—upon authors, artists, and thinkers is nonetheless not merely negative or paralyzing, the internal constraint the ideological web imposes also arousing and stimulating their creativity.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad is accompanied here by his nephew Ali. Muhammad is the object of faith of the Sunnis, Ali of the Shi'ites. Together, they thus represent Islam in its entirety.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.oocities.org/tidbits4you/ArabianNights.Borges.html> (no page numbers included in the file). Said also recalls the presence of Persia in Greek tragedy, in particular in Aeschylus' *The Persians* and Euripides' *Bacchae*. Greek tragedy, asserts Said, deals with the defeat of the Persians in order to shape the imaginative geography of Asia as "defeated and distant" (1994, 57). Thus, for example, the chorus sings a victory ode: "Now all Asia's land moans in emptiness. Xerxes led forth, oh oh! Xerxes destroyed, woe woe!" (1994, 56).

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gwern.net/docs/1951-borges-argentinewriter.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Shlomy Mualem, *Borges and Plato: A Game with Shifting Mirrors* (Madrid/Frankfurt: Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2012), 153-74.

<sup>8</sup> [https://posthegemony.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/borges\\_collected-fictions.pdf](https://posthegemony.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/borges_collected-fictions.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> "I suppose this is merely a hoax. Poe was very fond of hoaxes. I don't think anybody could write a poem in that way... I think of writing poetry and of reasoning as being essentially different" (Barnstone, 1982, 146).

<sup>10</sup> For an extensive discussion of Borges and Schopenhauer's conception of art, see Mualem (2006).

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed discussion of the links between Borgesian aesthetics and the philosophical-cognitive dimension, see Mualem (2015).

<sup>12</sup> "The exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and *faute de mieux*, for the poor Orient" (1994, 21).

<sup>13</sup> Almond's (2004, 65-93) discussion of "Borges and the Finitude of Islam" in his review of *The New Orientalists: Postmodern Representations of Islam from Foucault to Baudrillard* draws a very different conclusion to mine here. Cf. also Almond (2004).

<sup>14</sup> As noted above, no necessary contradiction exists between the principle of divergence from the writer's intention and the quest for noetic knowledge. Following Schopenhauer, we may view these two principles as complementary, the tension between them serving as the combustion engine of the enigma of the fate of the writer. We have actually seen just such a paradoxical move in Borges's viewpoint, wherein the writer's dissociation from his or her culture (Argentine, for example) constitutes the precondition for the creation of a work of value—which returns to its cultural home and enriches the culture on which it originally turned its back.

<sup>15</sup> Gustav Doré's illustration of Muhammad's punishment clearly reflects the exteriority of this gaze: see [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/italian/digitaldante/images/dore/docs/inf\\_22.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/italian/digitaldante/images/dore/docs/inf_22.html).

<sup>16</sup> <http://biblioklept.org/2013/05/31/inferno-i-32-jorge-luis-borges/>. Cf. also "Borges on Life and Death"—an interview with Amelia Barili: <http://www.southerncrossreview.org/48/borges-barili.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *A Universal History of Iniquity* (trans. A. Hurley; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.pierre-legrand.com/borges-averroess-search.pdf>.

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