BORGES AND MY ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE

I have always maintained that one should never invite heart patients to a cardiologists' conference. However, now that I am here, my duty should be, apart from thanking you for the many kind things you have said about me in the last few days, to stay silent and be consistent with my idea that a written text is a manuscript in a bottle. This does not mean that a manuscript can be read any way we like, but it should be read when the old man's gone, to use another popular expression. That is why, as I listened to each paper over the past few days, I have been jotting down questions to answer and points to elaborate, but in the end I have decided not to discuss the papers individually.

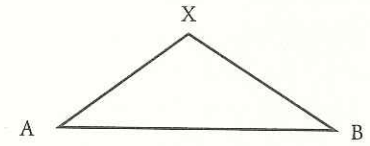
I prefer to take advantage of the suggestions received from all of you to discuss the concept of influence. It is a crucial concept for criticism, for literary history, for narratology; but it is also dangerous. Over the last few days I have noticed this danger repeatedly, and for that reason I wish to pursue these reflections.

When we speak of a relationship of influence between two authors, A and B, we are in one of two situations:

(1) A and B were contemporaries. We could, for instance, discuss whether there was any influence between Proust and Joyce. There was not; they met just once, and each of them said more or less of the other: "I don't like him, and I have read little or nothing of anything he's written."

(2) A came before B, as was the case with the two writers discussed in the last few days, so the debate is concerned only with the influence of A on B.

Nevertheless, one cannot speak of influence in literature, in philosophy, or even in scientific research, if one does not place an X at the top of the triangle. Shall we call this X culture, the chain of previous influences? To be consistent with our exchanges over the last few days, let's call it the universe of the encyclopedia. One has to take this X into account, and above all in the case of Borges, since, like Joyce, although in a different way, he used universal culture as an instrument of play.



The relationship between A and B can take place in different ways: (1) B finds something in the work of A and does not realize that behind it lies X; (2) B finds something in the work of A and through it goes back to X; (3) B refers to X and only later discovers that X was already in the work of A.

I do not intend to construct a typology of my relationship with Borges. Instead I will quote some examples in an almost haphazard order, and leave to someone else the question as to

how these examples correspond to different positions in this triangle. Moreover, it is often the case that these moments are confused because any consideration of influence must take account of the temporality of memory: an author can easily recall something he read in another author in—let's say—1958, forget that thing in 1980 while writing something of his own, and rediscover it (or be induced to remember it) in 1990. One could carry out a psychoanalysis of influences. For instance, in the course of my fictional work critics have found influences of which I was totally conscious, others that could not possibly have been influences because I had never known the source, and still others that astonished me but that I then found convincing—as when Giorgio Celli, discussing *The Name of the Rose,* spotted the influence of the historical novels of Dmitri Merezkovskij, and I had to admit that I had read them when I was twelve, even though I never thought of them while I was writing the novel.

In any case, the diagram is not quite so simple, because in addition to A, B, and the sometimes millennial chain of culture represented by X, there is also the Zeitgeist. The Zeitgeist must not be considered a metaphysical or metahistorical concept; I believe it can be broken down into a chain of reciprocal influences, but what is extraordinary about it is that it can work even in the mind of a child. Some time ago I found in an old drawer something I had written at the age of ten, the diary of a magician who claimed he was the discoverer, colonizer, and reformer of an island in the Glacial Arctic Ocean called Acorn. Looking back on it now, this seems a very Borgesian story, but obviously I could not have read Borges at the age of ten (and in a foreign language). Nor had I read the utopian works of the sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth centuries, with their tales of ideal communities. However, I had read many adventure stories, fairy tales of course, and even an abbreviated version of *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* and who knows what chemical reactions had taken place in my imagination.

The Zeitgeist can even make us think of reversals of time's arrow. I remember writing some stories about planets at the age of sixteen (so around 1948): the plots had as protagonists the Earth, the Moon, Venus falling in love with the Sun, etc. They were in their own way *Cosmicomic* stories. I sometimes amuse myself wondering how Calvino managed to burgle my house years later and find these youthful writings, which existed only in a single copy. I'm joking, of course, but the point is that sometimes one must believe in the Zeitgeist. In any case, I know you will not believe me, but Calvino's cosmic stories are better than mine.

Lastly, there are themes common to many authors because they come, as it were, directly from reality. For example, I remember how after *The Name of the Rose* was published a number of people pointed to other books in which an abbey was burned, many of which I had not read at all. And nobody bothered to mention the fact that in the Middle Ages it was quite common for abbeys, as it was for cathedrals, to burn.

Now, without sticking rigorously to my diagram, I would like to introduce into my triad—*intentio auctoris, intentio operis, intentio lectoris*—the *intentio intertextualitatis,* which must play a role in this discussion. Allow me to reflect, once more in no particular order, on three types of relationship with Borges: 1) the cases where I was fully conscious of Borgesian influence; 2) the cases where I was not aware of it, but subsequently readers (among whom I would also count you over the past few days) forced me to recognize that Borges had influenced me unconsciously; 3) the cases where, without adopting a triangle based on preceding sources and the universe of intertextuality, we are led to consider as straight two-way influence cases of three-way influence—namely, the debts Borges owed to the universe of culture, so that we cannot attribute to Borges what he always proudly declared he took from culture. It was no accident that yesterday I called him a "delirious archivist": Borges's delirium could not exist without the archive on which he was working.

I believe that if someone had gone to him and said: "You invented this," he would have replied: "No, no, it was already there, it already existed." And he would have proudly taken as his own model that phrase of Pascal's that I placed as an epigraph to my book *A Theory of Semiotics*: "And don't let anyone tell me that I have not said anything new: *la disposition des matières est nouvelle.*"

I say this not to deny my debts to him, which are many, but to lead you back, and to lead myself back, to a principle that I think is fundamental for all those who have taken part in this conference, certainly for me, and certainly for Borges: this most important point is that books talk to each other.

In 1955 Borges's *Ficciones* came out in Italy, with the title *La biblioteca di Babele* in Einaudi's Gettoni series. It had been recommended to Einaudi by Sergio Solmi, a great poet whom I really loved, particularly for an essay of his on science fiction as a version of the fantastic, which he had written some years before. You see the role the Zeitgeist plays: Solmi discovers Borges while he is reading American writers of science fiction, who write (perhaps consciously) in the tradition of the utopian tale that begins in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. Let us not forget that Wilkins also wrote a book on the inhabitants of the moon, and therefore he too, like Godwin and others, was already traveling to other worlds. I think it was one evening in 1956 or '57 that Solmi told me as we strolled together in the Piazza del Duomo in Milan: "I advised Einaudi to publish this book; we have not managed to sell even five hundred copies, but you should read it because it is very good." That was how I first fell in love with Borges, and I remember going to friends' houses and reading them excerpts from *Pierre Menard.*

At that time I was beginning to write those parodies and pastiches that later would become *Diario minimo* (*Misreadings*). Influenced by what? Perhaps the strongest influence there was Proust's *Pastiches et mélanges,* so much so that when *Diario minimo* came out in French I chose the title *Pastiches et postiches.* But I recall that when I later published *Diario minimo,* in 1963, I thought of giving it a title that alluded to a title of Vittorini's, *Piccola borghesia,* except that I would have liked to change the title to *Piccola Borges-ia.* The point of this, then, is to explain how a network of influences and echoes began to come into play.

However, I could not have allowed myself a reference to Borges at that time, because in Italy he was still known to very few people. It was only in the following decade that the publication of all his other works established Borges definitively in Italy, principally thanks to Domenico Porzio, a very dear friend of mine and a man of great intellectual openness and wide reading, though a traditionalist critic. While polemics about the neo-avanguardia raged in Italy, Borges was not considered an avant-garde writer. This was the time when the poetry anthology *I novissimi* appeared and then the Gruppo 63, and their models were Joyce and Gadda. The neo-avant-garde was interested in an experimentalism that worked on the signifier (their model was that of the illegible book); Borges, on the other hand, who wrote in a classical style, worked on the signifieds, and therefore as far as we were concerned at the time he was beyond the pale, a disturbing presence, one not easily categorized. In crude terms, while Joyce or Robbe-Grillet was on the left, Borges was on the right. And since I would not want this distinction to be understood in political terms, we could also say the opposite, and their opposition would stay the same.

In any case, for some of us Borges was a "secret love." He was reclaimed only later by the neo-avant-garde, after a lengthy and circuitous process.

In the early 1960s fantasy was either traditional fiction or science fiction, so it was possible to write an essay on science fiction and the fantastic without addressing the theory of literature. I believe that interest in Borges began midway through the sixties, with what was called the structuralist and semiological movement.

Here I must correct another error that is continually made, even in what claim to be scholarly works: today it is said that the Italian neo-avant-garde (Gruppo 63) was structuralist. In truth, nobody in that group was interested in structuralist linguistics except myself, but in my case it was a private hobby that began in university circles, between Pavia (Segre, Corti, Avalle) and Paris (my own and others' encounters with Barthes).

Why do I say that the interest in Borges began with structuralism? Because Borges carried out his experimental work not on words but on conceptual structures, and it was only with a structuralist methodology that one could begin to analyze and understand his work.

When I later wrote *The Name of the Rose* it was more than obvious that in constructing the library I was thinking of Borges. If you go and read my entry "Codice" (Codex) in the Einaudi Encyclopaedia, you will see that in one of its sections I carry out an experiment on the Library of Babel. That entry was written in 1976, two years before I began *The Name of the Rose,* which indicates that I had been obsessed by Borges's library for some time. When I began the novel later, the idea of the library came naturally to me and with it the idea of a blind librarian, whom I decided to call Jorge da Burgos. I really do not remember whether it was because I had decided to give him that name that I went to see what was happening at Burgos, or whether I called him that because I already knew that in that period *pergamino de paño,* that is to say, paper instead of parchment, had been produced at Burgos. Sometimes things happen very quickly, as one reads here and there, and one cannot remember what came first.

After that everyone asked me why Jorge becomes the "bad guy" in my story, and I could only reply that when I gave my character this name I did not know what he would do later (and that is what happened in my other novels as well, so that the game of finding precise allusions to this or that, which many people play, is generally a waste of time). Nevertheless, I cannot rule out

the possibility that at the point when this ghost of Borges appeared I was influenced by the plot of his "Death and the Compass," which certainly had made an enormous impression on me.

But you see how strange the game of influences is: if someone had asked me about influences at the time when I was depicting the mutual seduction between Jorge and William, I would have said that I was thinking of Proust, of that scene where Charlus tries to seduce Jupien, which is described with a metaphor of the bee buzzing around the flower.

I also had other models. For instance, the model of Mann's *Doctor Faustus* was fundamental, because the way Adso relives his own story as an old man, telling us how he saw it as a young man, was in some sense the way old Serenus Zeitblom looked at the story of Adrian Leverkühn. Here is another good example of unknown influences, because few critics have spotted the *Doctor Faustus* model, whereas many have seen instead an allusion to the dialogues between Naphta and Settembrini in *The Magic Mountain.*

To turn to other examples, I was grateful to the speaker who underlined the possible influence of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* on *Foucault's Pendulum.* For the fact is that while writing that novel, I thought a lot about Flaubert's book. I even promised to go and reread it, but then in the end I decided not to, because in some sense I wanted to be its Pierre Menard.

An opposite case is provided by my encounter with the Rosicrucians, which determined the structure of *Foucault's Pendulum.* Right from my youth I had devoted a shelf of my library to occult sciences; then one day I came across a totally stupid book on the Rosicrucians, and that was where I got the idea of doing a Bouvard and Pécuchet for occult idiocy. After that I collected texts by second-rate occultists on one hand, and on the other historically reliable literature on the Rosicrucians. Only when my novel was far advanced did I reread "Tlön," where Borges talks of the Rosicrucians—as he often did, taking information at second

hand (from De Quincey) and yet understanding everything about it better than scholars who have dedicated their whole lives to the subject.

In the course of this research I found a photocopy of an out-of-print book, Arnold's monograph. When the *Pendulum* eventually came out, I said that Arnold's old work should be translated into Italian; immediately afterward a French publisher decided to reprint the book and asked me to write a preface for it, and only in that preface do I refer, this time consciously, to Borges, beginning precisely with "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius."

But who can deny that from the time I read "Tlön" so many years previously, the word "Rosicrucian" might have lodged in some remote corner of my brain, so that decades later (when I read the book by the idiotic Rosicrucian) it reappeared thanks also to a Borgesian memory?

These past few days I have been led to reflect instead on how much I have been influenced by the "Pierre Menard model." This is a story that I have never tired of quoting since I first read it. In what sense has it determined the way I write? Well, I would say that the real Borgesian influence on *The Name of the Rose* does not lie in having imagined a labyrinthine library; after all, the universe is full of labyrinths from the time of Cnossos onward, and theorists of postmodernism regard the labyrinth as a recurring image in almost all contemporary literature. It lies rather in the fact that I knew I was rewriting a medieval story, and that this rewriting of mine, however faithful to the original, would have a different meaning for contemporary readers. I knew that if I rewrote what had really happened in the fourteenth century, with the Fraticelli movement and Fra Dolcino, the reader (even if I did not want him to) would see almost literal references to the Red Brigades—and I was really delighted to discover that Fra Dolcino's wife was called Margherita like the wife of Renato Curcio. The Menard model worked, and consciously so, since I knew

that I was writing the name of the wife of Dolcino, and that the reader would think that I was thinking of Curcio's wife.

After the "Menard model" I would like to discuss the "Averroes model." The story of Averroes and the theater is another of Borges's tales that have come to fascinate me more and more. In fact, the only essay I have ever written on the semiotics of the theater begins with the story of Averroes.* What is so extraordinary about that story? It is that Borges's Averroes is stupid not in personal terms but culturally, because he has reality before his eyes (the children playing) and yet he cannot make that relate to what the book is describing to him. Incidentally, I have been thinking in the past few days that, taken to its extreme, Averroes's situation is that of the poetics of "defamiliarization," which the Russian formalists describe as representing something in such a way that one feels as if one were seeing it for the first time, thus making the perception of the object difficult for the reader. I would say that in my novels I reverse the "Averroes model": the (culturally ignorant) character often describes with astonishment something he sees and about which he does not understand very much, whereby the reader is led to understand it. That is to say, I work to produce an intelligent Averroes.

As someone said, it may be that this is one of the reasons for the popularity of my fiction: mine is the opposite of the "defamiliarization" technique; I make the reader familiar with something he did not know until then. I take a reader from Texas, who has never seen Europe, into a medieval abbey (or into a Templar commandery, or a museum full of complicated objects, or into a baroque room) and make him feel at ease. I show him a medieval character who takes out a pair of glasses as if it were completely natural, and I depict his contemporaries, who are astonished at

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*See "Interpreting drama," *The Drama Review,* 21.1 (March 1977), now in *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).

this sight; at first the reader does not understand why they are amazed, but in the end he realizes that spectacles were invented in the Middle Ages. This is not a Borgesian technique; mine is an "anti-Averroes model," but without Borges's model before me I would never have been able to conceive of it.

These are the real influences, much more so than others, which are only apparent. Let us go back to the labyrinthine disorder of the world, which seems to be directly Borgesian. But in this instance I had found it in Joyce, as well as in some medieval sources. *The Labyrinth of the World* was written by Comenius in 1623, and the concept of the labyrinth was part of the ideology of mannerism and the baroque. It is no accident that a fine book on mannerism, Hocke's *Die Welt als Labyrinth,* was written in our own time, starting from Comenius's idea. But that is not all. That every classification of the universe leads to the construction of a labyrinth or of a garden of forking paths was an idea that was present both in Leibniz and—in a very clear and explicit way—in the introduction to Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie.* These are probably also Borges's sources. 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 had also influenced A.

And yet the Borgesian labyrinths probably made the many references to the labyrinth that I had found elsewhere coalesce in me, so much so that I have wondered whether I could have written *The Name of the Rose* without Borges. This is a counterfactual hypothesis of the kind: "If Napoléon had been a Somalian woman, would he have won at Waterloo?" In theory, taking Father Emanuele's machine (seeing that someone here quoted the Jesuit from my book *The Island of the Day Before*) and making it rotate at maximum speed, the libraries already existed, the arguments over laughter did take place in the medieval world, the collapse of order was a story that began, if you like, from

Occam onward, mirrors were already celebrated in the *Roman de la rose* and had been researched by the Arabs, and then when I was very young I had been fascinated by a Rilke poem on mirrors. Would I have been able to catalyze all these elements without Borges? Probably not. But would Borges have written what he wrote if the texts I have mentioned had not been behind him? How is it that he catalyzed the idea of the labyrinth and the idea of the mystery of mirrors? Borges's work also consisted in taking from the immense territory of intertextuality a series of themes that were already whirling around there, and turning them into an exemplary pattern.

Now I would like to highlight all those cases where the search for two-way influence is dangerous, since one loses sight of the networks of intertextuality. Borges is a writer who has mentioned everything. One cannot identify in the history of culture a single theme he has not touched on, even if only fleetingly. Just yesterday I listened to a speaker who suggested that Borges could have influenced Plato when he was writing the *Parmenides* since he, Borges, had portrayed the same characters as Plato. I do not remember who evoked the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy yesterday: certainly Borges talks of it, but on this subject there is an endless bibliography, which begins in the seventeenth century, continues with monumental (and crazy) works in the nineteenth century, and extends to this day with pseudosecret societies that continue to look for the traces of Francis Bacon in Shakespeare's works. Obviously an idea like this (that the work of the great bard was written by someone else, who has left constant clues in the text if you read between the lines) could not but fascinate Borges. But that certainly does not mean that an author who cites the Shakespeare controversy today is quoting Borges.

Let us consider the problem of the rose. As I have said on several occasions, the title *The Name of the Rose* was chosen by

some friends who looked at the list of ten titles I had scribbled down at the last minute. In fact the first title was *Delitti all' abbazia* (Murders at the Abbey) (a clear quotation of *Murder at the Vicarage,* which is a recurrent theme in English crime novels), and the subtitle was *Storia italiana del XIV secolo* (An Italian Tale from the Fourteenth Century) (a quotation from Manzoni's subtitle to *The Betrothed*). Subsequently this title seemed a bit heavy to me. I made a list of titles, among which I liked best *Blitiri* ("blitiri," like "babazuf," is a term used by the late Scholastics to indicate a word devoid of meaning), and then, seeing that the last line of the novel quoted a verse by Bernard of Morlaix that I had chosen for its allusion to Nominalism ("Stat rosa pristina nomine, etc."), I also put down *The Name of the Rose.* As I have said elsewhere, it seemed a good title to me because it was generic, and because in the course of the history of mysticism and literature the rose had taken on so many different meanings, often contradictory ones, that I hoped it would not lend itself to one-sided interpretations.

But it was pointless: everyone tried to find a precise meaning and many saw in it a reference to Shakespeare's "A rose by any other name," which means exactly the opposite of what my source intended. At any rate, I can swear that I never gave a thought to the appearances of the rose in Borges. Nevertheless, I find it wonderful that Maria Kodama made an allusion to Angelus Silesius the other day, probably unaware of the fact that some years ago Carlo Ossola wrote a very learned article on the links between my title and Silesius.* Ossola noticed that in the closing pages of my novel there is a collage of mystic texts from the period when the aged Adso is writing, but that I also inserted, in a wicked anachronism, a quotation from Angelus Silesius, which I had

*Carlo Ossola, "La rosa profunda. Metamorfosi e variazioni sul *Nome della rosa*," *Lettere italiane* 36.4 (1984), subsequently in "Purpur Wort," in his *Figurato e rimosso. Icone di interni del testo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1988).

found somewhere or other, without knowing (at the time) that Silesius had also dealt with the rose. Here is a fine example of how the triangle of influences becomes more complex, but there was no straight two-way influence.

Another Borgesian theme that has been mentioned is the Golem. I inserted this theme into the *Pendulum* because it is part of the bric-a-brac that makes up occult lore, but my most direct source was obviously Meyrink, not to mention the famous film, closely followed by the kabbalistic texts I had studied through Scholem.

It has been pointed out in these last few days that many ideas that Borges later worked on had been expounded by Peirce and Royce. I believe that if you scour the index of names for all of Borges's works you will find neither Peirce nor Royce. And yet it is highly possible that Borges was influenced by them via other writers. I have many experiences that are, I think, common to all who possess very many books (I now have around forty thousand volumes, between Milan and my other houses) and to all who consider a library not just a place to keep books one has already read but primarily a deposit for books to be read at some future date, when one feels the need to read them. It often happens that our eye falls on some book we have not yet read, and we are filled with remorse.

But then the day eventually comes when, in order to learn something about a certain topic, you decide finally to open one of the many unread books, only to realize that you already know it. What has happened? There is the mystical-biological explanation, whereby with the passing of time, and by dint of moving books, dusting them, then putting them back, by contact with our fingertips the essence of the book has gradually penetrated our mind. There is also the casual but continual scanning explanation: as time goes by, and you take up and then reorder various volumes, it is not the case that that book has never been glanced at; even by merely moving it you looked at a few pages,

one today, another the next month, and so on until you end up by reading most of it, if not in the usual linear way. But the true explanation is that between the moment when the book first came to us and the moment when we opened it, we have read other books in which there was something that was said by that first book, and so, at the end of this long intertextual journey, you realize that even that book you had not read was still part of your mental heritage and perhaps had influenced you profoundly. I think one can say this of Borges and his relation to Royce or Peirce. If this is influence, it is not two-way influence.

The theme of the double: Why did I put a double in *The Island of the Day Before*? Because Tesauro (in the chapter on novels in his *Cannocchiale aristotelico*) says that you have to do so if you want to write a novel in the baroque manner. Following Tesauro's rules, I put the twin brother in the opening chapter of my novel, but then I did not know what to do with him. At a certain point I found a way of using him, however. Would I have put him in if (leaving aside Tesauro's suggestion) I had not been influenced also by the theme of the double in Borges? And what if I had had in mind instead the theme of the double in Dostoyevsky? And what if Borges had been influenced by Tesauro, whom he perhaps absorbed indirectly through other baroque authors?

In these games of intertextuality and influences one must always be careful not to go for the most naive solution. Some of you at this conference recalled how Borges refers to a monkey hitting the keys of a typewriter at random and in the end writing *The Divine Comedy.* But be careful, for the argument that, if one denies the existence of God, then one must admit that the creation of the world happened rather as in the case of the famous monkey, was used countless times by fundamentalist believers in the nineteenth century (and also later) against the theory of evolution, as well as against the theory of the random formation of the cosmos. In fact, this theme is more ancient even than that;

we could trace it back to Democritus's and Epicurus's discussions of the clinamen . . .

This morning someone mentioned, referring to Fritz Mauthner, the question of whether real characters are like the characters of an ancient Chinese language (which then leads to Borges's idea of the Celestial Emporium). But it was Francis Bacon who first said that real characters had to be the same as Chinese ideograms, and that was what started the whole search for the perfect language in the seventeenth century. It was against this idea that Descartes launched his attack. Borges certainly knew this, either through Mauthner or directly from Descartes' famous letter to Father Mersenne, but did he also know Francis Bacon's discussion on real characters and Chinese ideograms? Or did he rediscover the topic through his reading of Athanasius Kircher? Or reading some other author? I believe it is fruitful to let the wheels of intertextuality rotate fully in order to see how the interplay of influence works in unexpected ways. Sometimes the most profound influence is the one you discover afterward, not the one you find immediately.

Now I would like to underline some aspects of my work that can *not* be called Borgesian, but as we are coming toward the end, I will mention only two.

First and foremost is the matter of quantity. Naturally one can write Leopardi's "L'infinito," which is a very short work, and one can write Cantú's *Margherita Pusterla,* which is a long and unbearable book; but on the other hand *The Divine Comedy* is long and sublime, while a brief sonnet by Burchiello is simply entertaining. The opposition between minimalism and maximalism is not one that entails value. It is an opposition of genre or procedure. In this sense Borges certainly is a minimalist, while I am a maximalist. Borges writes under the sign of rapidity, moves quickly to the

conclusion of his story, and in this sense it is hardly surprising that Calvino admired him. I, on the other hand, am a writer who delays (as I wrote in my *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*).

Perhaps also for quantitative reasons, I think one could define my writing as neo-baroque. Borges is fascinated intellectually by the baroque and the way the baroque maneuvers concepts, but his writing is not baroque. His style is limpidly classical.

But I prefer to pick out some strong Borgesian ideas, which cannot be reduced to a single quotation, and which probably constitute his most profound legacy, and therefore represent the way he influenced not just me but many others.

Someone mentioned narrative as a model of knowledge. Certainly Borges's fabulist narratives have influenced us in showing how one can make philosophical, metaphysical statements while telling a parable. Here too, of course, we have a topic that begins with Plato, or even with Jesus—if I may say so—and finishes with Lotman (with a textual modality as opposed to a grammatical modality), with Jerome Bruner's psychology (narrative models actually aid perception itself), and with the frames of artificial intelligence. But it seems certain to me that Borges's power of influence has been fundamental in this sense.

Now I would like to consider the call (and that is why I spoke of Borges as a delirious archivist) to reread the whole encyclopedia in the light of suspicion, and in a counterfactual way to seek the revelatory word in the margins, to reverse the situation, to make the encyclopedia play against itself.

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). What can I say? Compared with Borges's divine melodies, so instantly singable (even when they are atonal), memorable, and exemplary, I feel as if I blow into an ocarina.

But I hope that still someone will be found after my death who is even less skillful than me, someone for whom I will be recognized as the precursor.

An abbreviated version of a paper given at the conference on "Relaciones literarias entre Jorge Luis Borges y Umberto Eco," held at the University of Castilla–La Mancha (with the assistance of the Department of Italian Studies and the Emilio Goggio Chair of the University of Toronto).