The labyrinth of meanings: Borges and his self-deconstructing poetry

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Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges used devices, principles, and strategies that today we would call deconstructionist, to write poetry that could transcend the communicative limits of language, which according to the author himself, it is not an effective tool to truly represent what is real. To accomplish this task, we first frame our work in the context of Derrida's Deconstructionism, specifically in the area of literary criticism, defining what it means to take a deconstructive approach to critical theory. We then introduce Borges and his ideas, situating him within the sphere of deconstructionist theory as a sort of precursor (a word that we want to use carefully here, as we will be arguing for something different from a precursor). Next, we present the hard data obtained from an experiment involving thirty-two participants, analyzing the interpretations our volunteers gave to verses and poems by Borges, and we use the significant variety of meanings that emerged from the experiment to support some of our points, offering a different and new perspective. Finally, we engage in a critical analysis of Borges' poetry, elaborating on concepts such as *symbolic system*, *the use of opposites*, *referentiality*, *paradoxes*, *circularity*, *reversion of author-reader role,* among others. This analysis supports our theory, which posits that the processes we now classify as deconstructive play a fundamental role in Borges' construction of poetry. In fact, it is through these processes that the Argentinian transcends the limits of language, creating labyrinths of meanings – as we call them, using some *borgean* terminology – where the author relinquishes control to favor readers' own agency and, in turn, the readers can get closer to some of the author's intentions.

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tibi semper, Silvia…

et Dylan et Neil

The Meaning of Text: a Deconstructionist Perspective

Since its first stipulation in the 1960s, the philosophical and critical movement known as deconstruction has permeated into many spheres of art and thinking, from architecture to politics. Many important thinkers have analyzed it and use it in their philosophy, like Paul de Man or Judith Butler, while many others have criticized it, with John Searle and Jürgen Habermas among them. The roots of deconstruction's ideas can be traced all the way to the philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, to Ferdinand de Saussure's theories of linguistics and semiotics, and according to many also to the works of Jorge Luis Borges, a claim and a relationship that we will explore in this thesis. With all this in mind, it becomes clear that extensive works can be written focusing only on some specific aspects of this topic, which is not the objective of this paper. For the purposes of this thesis, this chapter sets to summarize the ideas of deconstructionism, especially as initially proposed by Jacques Derrida, as a theory for literary analysis and criticism, particularly in the context of the meaning of text.

In the critical context, deconstruction offers a reading strategy opposed to structuralism and New Criticism, to the point that Christopher Norris defines it as "the active antithesis of everything that criticism ought to be if one accepts its traditional values and concepts" (Norris). This analysis derives from the fact that deconstruction does not look to find or determine a complete meaning of literary works. On the contrary, it refuses "to accept the idea of structure as in any sense given or objectively 'there' in a text" (Norris 3), while instead works to bring to the spotlight the theoretical or linguistic contradictions that limit any given text's abilities to possess a full and definitive meaning. This comes from the idea that texts are intrinsically plural, not merely in the sense of the semantic variety that we can find in literary works, but truly – and mostly –

because all interpretations must be seen as arbitrary reconstructions, while also being operations aimed at determining what is, fundamentally, indefinite[1]. In this sense, "Deconstructionism is always an on-going process because the constantly shifting nature of language means that no final meaning or interpretation of a text is possible" (Holland 2). The ties between the nature of language and our ability to attribute meaning to any text it is also a key tenet of Jorge Luis Borges vision, something that will be argued in the next chapter.

It is exactly in this idea of text as something that cannot be ultimately defined, that the fiercest opposition to structuralism manifests itself in deconstruction theory. Indeed, according to Derrida, Saussure's and Lévi-Strauss' classic structuralism is victim of the inherent difficulty encountered in establishing the truth of its signifier-signified proposition. The French-Algerian philosopher argues that, if it is true that the signification of a sign is not intrinsic, but it is given from its differential relation with all other signs – in other words, if it is true that in language only exist differences, with no positive terms – then no meaning can be fully present in any signifier. Because the significate of a sign is given by that which the sign does not represents, in a way such significate will always be partially missing. If every signifier is what it is because it is not any of the other signs constituting a given language, each signifier does nothing but sending back to an infinite number of other signifiers. To use Derrida's own words:

> "The *signatum* always referred, as to its referent, to a *res*, to an entity created or at any rate first thought and spoken, thinkable and speakable, in the eternal present of the divine logos and specifically in its breath. If it came to relate to the speech of a finite being […] through the *intermediary* of a *signans*, the *signatum* had an *immediate* relationship with the divine logos which thought it within presence and for which it was not a trace. And for modern linguistics, if the signifier is a trace, the signified is a meaning thinkable in principle within

[1] See Jacques Derrida's *Dissemination* and *The End of Men*

> the full presence of an intuitive consciousness. The signified face, to the extent that it is still originally distinguished from the signifying face, is not considered a trace; by rights, it has no need of the signifier to be what it is. *It is at the depth of this affirmation that the problem of relationships between linguistics and semantics must be posed*.[2] This reference to the meaning of a signified thinkable and possible outside of all signifiers remains dependent upon the onto-theo-teleology that I have just evoked. It is thus the idea of the sign that must be deconstructed through a meditation upon writing which would merge, as it must, with the undoing *sollicitation* of onto-theology, faithfully repeating it in its *totality* and *making it insecure* in its most assured evidences. One is necessarily led to this from the moment that the trace affects the totality of the sign in both its faces. That the signified is originally and essentially (and not only for a finite and created spirit) trace, that it is *always already in the position of the signifier*, is the apparently innocent proposition within which the metaphysics of the logos, of presence and consciousness, must reflect upon writing as its death and its resource" (Derrida, Of Grammatology, 73).

To better understand this, we can also think about the action of looking for a headword on a dictionary: for any word we search, we receive a series of other words that will need to be looked, searching again the dictionary, getting again a series of other words, and so on, in "a potentially infinite process" (Holland 3). In the same way, because made of combinations of such signifiers, a text will always be a system of signs constantly referring to other things, which also becomes an object that is always itself referring to other things (to another book, a painting, a fact, a natural event, a dream, etc.). This constant, and virtually infinite referentiality, makes valid to find and to argue for some specific meanings in a text, but it also makes impossible to attribute only one final

[2] The italics in the last sentence are mine.

and definitive meaning to any text, because that would mean having to exclude all other possibilities that, as said, are virtually infinite.

Another critic that Derrida makes to the western philosophical tradition is about the differentiation between spoken language and written language, with a subordination of the latter to the former. The spoken language, in this tradition, is seen as characterized by a sort of purity, in its spontaneity, and by a natural bond with senses (Saussure 35), while the written word is seen as a degeneration of speech, to the point that Saussure argues that "[w]riting veils the appearance of language; it is not a guise for language but a disguise" (Saussure 30). In clear opposition to this point, Derrida argues that such a vision is the result of blind prejudice and that, in reality, "what is natural to mankind is not spoken language but the faculty of constructing a language" (Derrida, Of Grammatology, 66). He relates this phonocentric tentation to logocentrism – that is the illusion that only through phonics an authentic meaning can be found, which privileges the Logos as the transcendental signifier for the Divine Mind, the infinite understanding of God, and, closer to our time, the self-presence of full self-consciousness (Spivak). This is important because goes to the hearth of the nature of language, arguing in favor of a language that is, indeed, a system of traces based more on the difference to what they are not, than not to a real or divine, as Derrida would say, link between signifier and signified.

In all this argument, Derrida's proposition is to stick to the indefinable character of signifiers, in this way allowing any text – either philosophical, literary, or of any other kind – to reveal that which is not possible to comprehend from the classic philosophy's perspective of binary oppositions; to reveal that which is neither good nor bad, neither true not false, neither pure nor impure. It is this des-construction of the text, this openness of its incoherencies, that defines literary deconstruction theory.

Now, it is important to underline that “Derrida’s scepticism is not what some of his interpreters would make of it, a passport to limitless interpretative games of their own happy devising” (Norris 125); indeed, deconstruction cannot be seen as an “out-and-out hermeneutic license, a pretext for critics to indulge any kind of whimsical, free-wheeling or ‘creative’ commentary that happens to take their fancy” (Norris 136). There is, for deconstructionism, a clear distinction between interpretations that are sustained by the text itself and what the text does not say nor do. Without this distinction, the deconstructive process would not be able to sustain anything at all, because if everything is relative, how could a deconstructive analysis show the intrinsic contradictions of a text, as those found by Derrida in Plato’s, Russeaus’, and many others’ works?

In conclusion, in the context of literary criticism, deconstructionism does not claim that all or any interpretations are acceptable. Instead, it sustains that in the realm of valid readings – readings that are well-argued and demonstrated – no single interpretation holds greater truth than another, ultimately determining that no fixed and final meaning can be assigned to any literary work. This is particularly true in consideration of the fact that many factors – linguistic, historical, philosophical, etc. – can bring to light new valid interpretations of texts, adding possible readings or even proving wrong some critical analysis that had seemed solid and justified before. In this regard, the written word can be likened to the author's children, as Derrida argues in his *Plato’s Pharmacy*, therefore having by its own nature a certain degree of independence – as any child has or will have, eventually. This means that all texts are going to express things unintended by the author or fail to convey the author’s intended meaning, due to the inherent imperfections of that system of signifiers we call language.

Jorge Luis Borges' Self-Deconstruction

Jaime Alazraki, one of the most important critics of Borges' work, affirms that no other writer, "in the realm of Hispanic literature, has awaken so much interest […] among Spanish-speaker scholars and readers" (Alazraki, 1978, 2)[3] as has done Jorge Luis Borges. There are no doubts that Borges has conquered such a position in international literature because of his incredible knowledge, accumulated while reading (often in original language) philosophers, writers, and fundamental religious texts ranging from Parmenides to Schopenhauer, from Dante to Whitman, and from the *Talmud* and – of course – the *Bible* to the *Buddhacarita*. Through his stores of cultural knowiledge, he was able to accomplish the incredible task of "reabsorb[ing] the most memorable things of the Western culture" (Alazraki, 1976, 11). Nonetheless, such vast knowledge was only a component of the success of the Argentinian writer, an aspect that he complemented with the original transformation of those memorable things of western culture to produce *uncanny* texts, as Sylvia Molloy as adjectivized them: texts that shift perspective and constantly look "for nonfixity, accompanied by its tenuous longing for what is fixed" (Molloy 2).

This uncanniness – which comes, among other things, from the fact that, "far from setting up rigid categories, his statements create doubt, hesitation; they work against fixed definitions" (Molloy 9) – is what allows Borges to anticipate some post-structuralist theories, such as Derrida's deconstructionism. Indeed, Borges and his writings work against fixed definition even against themselves and, as we could say, they do so by deconstructing themselves. It is enough to think that Borges "refuses being considered a thinker who elaborates original theories or who disseminates clues to unravel esoteric thrust, [insisting] that his work does not go beyond the realm

[3] From here on, all translations of this and other works of Alazraki are my own.

of literature (with a preference, of fiction)" (Rest 45) [4]. Indeed, on many occasions Borges denied making philosophy and even made fun of those transcendentalisms that critics saw in his work. And yet, the writer himself has pointed out that "the creations of philosophy are not less fantastic of those made by art" (Alazraki, 1978, 39), and that "metaphysical speculation 'is a branch of fantastic literature' destined to postulate 'incredible systems, but made of pleasant or sensational architecture" (Rest 60). If philosophy, then, is no more than a work of art, just a fiction like those of fantasy literature that tries to lay out provisory human diagrams, in front of our impossibility of truly penetrating the divine outline of the universe (Borges, Otras Inquisiciones, 143): what is then the difference between the works of a philosopher and those of a writer of fiction? If both are just producing works of literature, preferable of fiction, why can be said that Nietzsche, for example, is a philosopher who disseminates transcendental messages, but that could not be said about Borges? These intrinsic contradictions, this "dialectic process that assimilates contradictory elements" (Gertel 137)[5], and this pretended simplicity of a work that, in reality, hides profound deliberations on ontological, epistemological, and existential issues, is what launches the self-deconstruction of his own thoughts and texts, ultimately making Borges' writing uncanny and truly uneasy.

In a very clear example of this, there is the approach that the Argentinian has towards language: although in his youth he had an opposing point of view, for "[t]he mature Borges … [l]anguage is not *expressive* at all; words are not images of reality and in fact can only be used to *mention* or *allude to*, but not to *express*; […] therefore, what can be said is limited" (Echavarría Ferrari 110). This rejection of expressive writing is direct consequence of the idea of the sign's signification being given by its differential relation with all other signs, "since the text, [therefore],

[4] From here on, all translations of Jaime Rest's *El Laberinto del Universo* are my own.
[5] From here on, all translations of Zunilda Gertel's *Borges y su Retorno a la Poesía* are my own.

is not generated starting from an anterior subject or substance, rather from the gameplay of differences" (Rodríguez 90)[6]. In this context, any word can have – and by all means does have – multiple meanings, just as any thing can be other things, and any place can be another. That is why Borges' minotaur in *The House of Asterion* arrives to the point of thinking "that nothing is communicable through the art of writing" (Borges, EA, 86); or why, in his *The Library of Babel*, we can find the question: "you who read me, are you sure you understand my language?" (Borges, F-OC, 94).[7] Note, in this last example, that the issue is posed in the form of a question, leading us to read it with a certain playful irony, while forcing us to look for answers, instead of offering ones; while giving us "the pleasure of searching, yearning inscribed in men's heart as suggested Aristoteles, [which] is yet more important than that of finding" (Sáinz de Medrano 93)[8]. This is exactly why, being conscious of all this, Jorge Luis plays with words and their possible significates, making his texts uneasy and anticipating in many ways Derrida's argument about the truth of the signifier-signified proposition of the classic structuralism[9].

Nonetheless, Borges never gives up the dream of the perfect poem and never stops believing in the power of the words, if none other at least its aesthetic one, as Jaime Rest elaborates with some interesting deductions about the Argentinian poet's points of view: "the fact of admitting language's limitations as a cognitive instrument does not entail, in the slightest, the lack of acknowledgment of the convincing strength that the verbal subject exerts on us. […] Language simultaneously limits our possibilities of knowing things and subdues us to his controlling grip, and this second action requires that we give to it the outmost possible consideration" (Rest 95).

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[6] From here on, all translations of Mario Rodríguez's *Borges y Derrida* are my own.
[7] From here on, all translations of Jorge Luis Borges' *Ficciones* are my own.
[8] Medrano authored a section of *Borges y Su Herencia Literaria*, edited by José Luis de la Fuente. From here on, all translations of any section of this book are my own.
[9] This concept has been elaborated on the previous chapter.

Another great agreement "among the approaches of the Argentinian writer and those of the French philosopher" (Monegal 10)[10] is found on the significance of art works, especially those of literature. Regarding this point, one might ask: what does happen to texts, being them made of combinations of words, if words are limited in the way Borges argues? To complicate more things, it is necessary to remember that, in the Argentinian's perspective, the "textual realm [is one] in which everything has been said, everything is repeated, and everything may be transformed" (Molloy 95), something that taps to concept of the referentiality of texts. Nonetheless, even if all this could lead us to the wrong conclusion that nothing certain nor anything new can be said, to the South American writer this actually means all the opposite. Indeed, he believes that "it is always possible to make versions, combinations, and variations or to change emphasis" (Kristal 135), which is especially important when thinking about this author, since himself said that "maybe the universal history is the story of the different intonation of some metaphors" (Alazraki book 18). Furthermore, repeating and transforming previous texts is like mirroring the literature we are using, and to Borges "each mirrored image is stylistically superior to the preceding one, as the dyed cloth is more beautiful than the plain, the distorted translation richer than the original, Ménard's Quixote aesthetically more complex than Cervantes's. [Eventually], by carrying this process to its limits, the poet can achieve ultimate success – an ordered picture of reality that contains the totality of all things, subtly transformed and enriched by the imaginative process that engendered them" (De Man 149). All these transformation, duplications, and disseminations "are no more than the presence of the trace, […] which means that the text is *deferred* as in the presence of what is real to acquire a sense only in relation to another text, to the gramma, to the trace" (Rodríguez 86).

[10] From here on, all translations of Emir Rodríguez Monegal's *Borges y Derrida: Boticarios* are my own.

In this context, then, not only new things can absolutely be said, but it is also inevitable that some significance is always going to be expressed by any text, even if such meaning might not be exactly what the author intended. In fact, in their referential nature, any kind of text carries any number of possible interpretations, because any "literary piece, once it has been publicly disseminated, it stops from being a belonging or an attribute of its own author to turn into a text now subject to all valid reading" (Rest 45). Furthermore, this referentiality also makes any book as a "palimpsest which content changes inevitably with time, product of those influences that its readings exert over a text apparently already motionless" (De La Fuente 10). These ideas of dissemination and motion are the ones that lead Derrida to the same conclusion about the sense of texts, since it is this *movement* that allows the text to stop being something closed, "identical to itself (in opposition to all that is outside it)", having only one fixed meaning (Arenas Cruz 76)[11]. Let us also underline the term *valid* used by Rest: this does not suggest that all readings are valid but, to the contrary, that the text is subject to any of the suggested readings that can be demonstrated being valid.

At this point, it is almost unavoidable to bring into the conversation *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*. In this famous short story written by Borges, the protagonist Pierre Menard writes a "Quixote in the XX century identical to Cervantes' but at the same time immensely richer" (Alazraki, 1978, 72). This text is extremely telling of many of Borges' points of view about literature and the interpretation of its meanings, with its argumentative peak at the point in which the narrator compares two portions of the two Quixotes, one Cervantes' and one Menard's. The two quotes are completely identical to the last comma, and yet it is said that the words mentioning "history, the mother of truth" (Borges, F-OC, 55), when written by Cervantes are a "mere rhetorical

[11] From here on, all translations of Elena Arenas Cruz's *El Libro Incesante: La Deconstrucción Del Prefacio En Borges y Derrida* are my own.

laud of history" (Borges, F-OC, 54), and yet produced – actually, reproduced – by Menard, a contemporary of William James, are simply astonishing (Borges, F-OC, 55). In this section, the irony towards the twisted and pretentious readings that critics can give to any text is clear, hidden in plain sight behind the fact that we are talking about the rewriting of an original work, which is also being here downplayed as a trivial piece of literature, even though we are talking about one of the greatest and most famous novels of all times. And yet, it is also true that the narrator brings up a very interesting point: the interpretative differences between two identical texts could be immense, depending on when and where the two versions were written.

Indeed, if we decide to believe the ironic premises, the same words do have very different connotations based on when they were written, prompting very different reactions and considerations. That deconstructive work that Derrida invites us to undertake regarding texts, finding their internal contradictions, for example, would lead us to two very different directions if we were to analyze a Don Quixote written over the end of the XVI century and the beginning of the XVII, and one written in the XX century: all this would leave us with the exact same text carrying multiple and very different meanings. To a certain extent, then, it can be argued that if changing the century in which a novel was written would certainly change its connotations and even its entire sense, reading a work in a different century from that in which it was written will bring, inevitably, different reactions and previously unthought interpretations, confirming the idea of texts as fluid, open to multiple and unfixed meanings.

All of this things that Borges does with this short story, by the way, are not only an anticipation of some of the theories presented many years after by the deconstructionism, but they are also an example of the deconstructionist thought that goes into the writing of a story: *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote* is, indeed, a self-deconstructing text, exposing itself its own

contradiction and even thriving on those paradoxes, because through them it creates a complexity that perfectionates the communicative capabilities of an imperfect and limited language. Its author, in fact, through proposing opposing attitudes – the irony with which he criticizes literary critics, but with which he also builds premises to argue in favor of his points about interpretation of meanings – basically uses deconstructive theory, not to expose intrinsic contradiction, but rather to augment the message through them. This is, ultimately, why the great scholar Emir Rodríguez Monegal wrote: "[t]he famous 'deconstruction' was making an impression on me, because of its technical rigor and the infinite seduction of its textual mirror, but it was already familiar to me: I had already performed it in Borges *avant la lettre* [12]" (Monegal 6).

But maybe the most deconstructive thing that Borges does with his writing are the proposal of a subjective reading of the text and the dismantling of the author, with their profound consequences on author/reader relationship, text/reader rapport, and even on the sense and use of the preface. Herminia Gil Guerrero, in interpreting the words of Hans Blüher, explains that Borges has "a *semiotic conception* of the literary work", which comes from Valéry's "*theory of signs* 'conceived as a semiotics of communication'" (Guerrero 52-53)[13]. In this context, against Saussure's theories of the signifier-signified, Valéry proposes a triadic theory based on the elements "*émetteur-signe-récepteur*[14] […], even though the accent of his communicative esthetic is positioned on the relations between signs and recipients (listeners and readers), that is, on the problems of the literary reception" (Guerrero 53). In the same way, Borges will focus on the text and the reader, which are basically just different words to say signs and recipients, considering the author (that is, the emitter) a "mere 'writer who does nothing more than re-write in new

[12] This translates to: "before the (specified) word or concept existed" (see Merriam-Webster)
[13] From here on, all translations of Herminia Gil Guerrero's *Poética Narrativa de Jorge Luis Borges* are my own.
[14] This translates to: emitter-sign-recipient (my translation)

combinations what is preexistent in the written traditions'" (Guerrero 53), a consideration that connects this theory to what we have seen about referentiality and the reproduction of texts. To quote Borges' himself regarding this concept:

> "The taste of the apple (declares Berkeley) lies in the contact of the fruit with the palate, not in the fruit itself; comparably (I would say) poetry lies in the trade between the poem and the reader, not in the series of symbols printed over the pages of a book. What is essential is the aesthetic act, the thrill, the physical change aroused each reading".
>
> (Borges, OP, 11)[15].

With those words, the Argentinian accomplishes two incredible things at the same time: on one hand, he completely dismisses the emitter, the author of any writing, while on the other he even downplays, somehow, the importance of the text. Indeed, the most important thing is not anymore in what it is written in the text itself, but in how such words are received – are tasted – by the reader: it is this relationship, this trade – as he designates it –what counts the most. This takes Borges to the ulterior astonishing consideration that "the same text can belong to different literary genres if it is read from different attitudes *a priori*, [with] reader's *individual will"* playing a very important role, therefore, in the interpretation and even in the categorization of any given literary work (Guerrero 59). Again, this confirms the ideas previously explored about the unfixity and the multiplicity of the meaning of texts, to the point of suggesting that there might be as many readings as there are readers – although, clearly, not all those readings would be actually valid and supportable.

Borges does not leave all these ideas and the dismissal of the author just to the theoretical realm, but he puts them into practice in some dedication pages and some prologues, where "some

[15] From here on, all translations of Jorge Luis Borges' *Obra Poética* are my own.

of Derrida's deconstructionist strategies [about prefaces] can be perceived" (Arenas Cruz 75). To summarize the French-Algerian approach to this matter, it will be enough to state that he thought impossible to make a true *praefatio* for various reasons, among them because, being "[s]ituated both inside and outside, both before and after the 'book' whose 'book-ness' it both promotes and transgresses, the preface has always inscribed itself in a strange warp of both time and space" (Derrida & Johnson 1); also, always according to the philosopher, "it is impossible to reduce a text to its effects of meaning, of content, of thesis, or of subject" (Arenas Cruz 74), making a preface a theoretical impossible. With this in mind, Derrida suggested especially that prologues should avoid anticipating what is to be read in the book, and should not even be written based on what the book is going to be about. In an example of this, he wrote his preface to his book *Dissemination* starting with a very discombobulating sentence, saying "[t]his (therefore) will not have been a book" (Derrida, Dissemination, 3), then proceeded to somehow partially introduce the book contents, and finally deconstructed the preface itself, talking in it about the sense of prefaces, disseminating the word dissemination everywhere, and becoming more a confusing essay on dissemination that an anticipation to the book.

Curiously, even before Derrida even published that book, presenting to the word his ideas about prefaces, Borges had already written many prologues, most of which not only used the strategies that Derrida suggested and used himself, as mentioned before, but he went even deeper, mostly thanks to the des-construction of the author/reader relationship. There are several examples of prologues in which Borges follows Derrida's strategies, as in the prologue to *El Otro, el Mismo*, in which Borges talks more about his writing process and his experience as an author, and the meaning of words, than about the book itself and its poems. It is also worth mentioning his prologue to he book *El Idioma de los Argentinos*, just a couple of discombobulating paragraphs in

which, among other surprising things, Borges says: "The prologue wants to be the transit from silence to voice, its arbitrage, its twilight; but it is so verbal, and so resigned to the deficiencies of verbality, as that which is derived from it" (Borges, *IA,* 9)[16]. In this example, we can see how Borges accuses the prologue of being resigned to the verbal deficiencies, while becoming excessively and unnecessarily verbal, even overcomplicated, all while proving his point and making the prologue resigned, even devoted (to use another possible translation of the word *entregado*) to verbality.

But perhaps the apex of this deconstruction of the preface, that comes from the complete subversion of the author/reader rapport, it is found in the dedication that works as a prologue to the book *Fervor de Buenos Aires*:

> "To whom might read
>
> If the pages of this book permit some fortunate verse, may forgive me the reader the discourtesy of having usurped them, previously. Our nothingness does not differ much; it is trivial and fortuitous the circumstance of being you the reader of these verses, and I his editor" (Borges, PC, 17)[17].

In here, Borges attributes to mere fortuitous circumstances the fact that he is the writer of some verses that the reader – any reader! – could have written instead, creating in this way, together with the complete blurring, reversion, subversion, and deconstruction of the author/reader reality, a remarkable identification between the feelings of the reader and those of the writer. This coincidence can be fully possible at this scale (all possible readers who might find any verse *fortunate*) only if we assume that the reader might be interpreting the verses in a different way than meant by the author, finding individual meanings to them; only if we accept that his text "stop[s]

[16] From here on, all translations of J.L. Borges' *El Idioma de los Argentinos* are my own.
[17] From here on, all translations of J.L. Borges' *Poesía Completa* are my own.

belonging to the author to get to the hands of a reader who rewrites it according to its own possibilities" (De la Fuente 10). In that case, the suggested reversion of roles between who is the editor and who is the reader would not only be a sophistic game, a mere suggestion in a page, but a hard reality, with the recipient reading on a page what they might have truly written themselves. In this way, with just a few words, the Argentinian poet dismantles completely the sense of a prologue, renounces somehow to his own authorship, confuses the reader/author roles, and ends up putting in complete charge the readers: they are not, anymore, looking for what the writer placed in there for them, but they are ready to search for what they themselves are bringing to their readings. Borges, with just a few words, has truly deconstructed his own work and, with it, centuries of literary tradition.

Now, it is worth noticing that the analysis to and the connections between Borges writings and Derrida's deconstructionism have been done mostly regarding his narrative, the works of the Argentinian over which the critic has been more prone to delve on and to apprise (see Gertel 9; Cortínez ix; De La Fuente 130). Nonetheless, in this paper we would like to sustain that such considerations work for all Borges' production and, indeed, we have just used the preface of a poetry book. Even more, we are convinced that they could be even truer when analyzing his poetry. This statement has two fundamental arguments: the first one regards the nature of poetry, a literary form in which any author depends on just a few words and a series of rhetorical figures and devices to send or to convey a message. Furthermore, if words as signifiers limit our effectiveness in communication, as both our Argentinian poet and Derrida suggest, then conveying a message in less words could be even harder. And yet, as we will see in a future chapter, to resolve this limit Borges relies in a "symbolic system that does not have only an equivocal representative value, but that is also the carrier of metaphysical thought. It has structural value, it works intrinsically in

poetry and it creates the contradictory ambivalence that characterizes Borges' metaphysical lyric" (Gertel 134). In this sense, the writer of *El Otro, el Mismo* does more than discovering a solution to the limits of language through poetry and its symbolic system: indeed, in suspecting that "[t]he root of language is irrational and of magical character", he finds that "poetry wants to return to that old magic" (Borges, PC, 164-165), making of his poems "gifts of the night or, more accurately, of dawn, not deliberate fictions" (Borges, PC, 583). In other words, his poems tap to what might be real or, at least, what may be most real for him.

The second argument regards the relation of Borges with the lyrical art: when asked what poetry meant to him, he said that "I should say that it means everything to me" (Cortínez 21). Indeed, the Argentinian himself told to Madeleine Chapsal in an interview: "If I am something, is a poet; perhaps a clumsy one, but a poet, I hope" (Ferrer 25n30)[18]. Zunilda Gertel offers a possible explanation for this feeling, arguing that Borges returns to poetry "when the poet finds in the mythical world of his poetry the conducting symbol of the metaphysical restlessness" (Gertel 134). This consideration makes of poetry central and essential for Jorge Luis Borges, someone "who searches relentlessly to find a stable single condition, a label or formula or key to his essence, but […] is fated to follow the voyage of the seeker, not the finder" (Barnstone 135). Note, indeed, the tension created by the idea of *find* opposed to the constant search represented by *restlessness*. A tension that is perfectly *borgian*, describing how, in poetry, Borges finds the inquisitive tool that allows him to keep asking questions, to keep questioning everything, responding in this way to his nature of seeker, of skeptic; of constant reader.

Reassuming all that has been said in this chapter, it is not the intention of this paper to sustain that Borges was a precursor of the deconstructionism or that his work influenced in any

[18] From here on, all translations of Manuel Ferrer's *Borges y la Nada* are my own.

way Derrida's theories. Although that might be a possibility, since it has been said that "the Argentinian writer results – from the praxis – as a kind of precursor of modern literary critical theory" (De La Fuente 119), and the same "Derrida declared decisively: 'Il m'a séduit'"[19] (Monegal 10), we agree here with Erin Graff Zivin in saying that "[t]he comparison between Borges and Derrida is impossible; what's more, it's highly unoriginal: in the 1980s, the Latin American literary critics Roberto González Echevarría and Emir Rodríguez Monegal attempted to trace the textual and conceptual links between Borges and Derrida, and others have followed suit since then" (Zivin 144). Therefore, what this paper focuses on is the idea that Borges anticipated some of the ideas Derrida proposed in the sixties, not as a philosopher but as a writer and a maker of literature. It is our intention to demonstrate that these ideas, that we could call today deconstructive, like the ambiguity and limits of the language or the referentiality of any written text, among others, fueled in Borges the conviction that any literary work has multiple and unfixed meanings, just as Derrida has thoroughly argued.

The author of *El Hacedor* went even further than the French-Algerian philosopher in many of his beliefs, thinking for example that "in the face of their impotency to perceive the laws that govern reality's order, humanity has invented its own reality, organized, based on human laws that can achieve to understand" (Alazraki, 1978, 42). From this perspective, he believes that "certain details of a text do not have any meaning at all" (Rest 44), and that one could often say of "some critics what that French proverb says about Spanish hostels: they found what they carried themselves" (de Milleret 159)[20], as Borges himself told once to Milleret. But no matter how far he got his ideas, or how close they were to what we call today deconstruction, he used them not only in his analysis of the literary works of others, as a fervent reader and as an acute critic himself, but

[19] This French citation translates in "He has seduced me".
[20] This translation is my own.

also and foremost in the construction of his own writings. He used paradoxes and oppositions that would tear apart many other texts, to instead create his own stories and poems and to augment the power of his message. Borges, in short, self-deconstructed his own work. Or maybe it would be more accurate to say that he des-constructed himself, to then construct his writings. We will see, further on, the power that this process confers to his poetry.

The Experiment

When conceiving this thesis, it was difficult not to thing in the practical side of the concept of meaning. Returning to Valéry's theories, he argued that language "is an exchange act: … to learn a language was to Valéry the same as acquiring a certain number of exchange possibilities through words" (Massuh 77)[21], a concept that also takes us back to the *borgean* trade between text and reader. This conceptualization of language, simply put, derives from the obvious fact that languages are used as a tool to communicate, and the fact that we humans do successfully accomplish millions of those exchanges in our lifetimes means that it is, one way or another, an effective tool; at least, it is so for our basic needs.

In handling here the matter of language and the interpretation of meaning, therefore, we could not avoid the question: what do people understand when they read Borges poetry? If we are to argue in favor or against the idea of any text being interpreted in diverse ways, in favor or against the idea of any literary work having a fixed and ultimate meaning, can we do so without going out to the world, to see how texts are actually tasted by the readers, to use Borges' own analogy? We did not have the pretentiousness to have a definitive answer to such questions, but we thought it would be interesting to try and find out how people actually react to some of the poems we wanted to explore in this thesis. In doing so, as far as we know, we have stepped on a path that none has tried before: building an experiment to bring hard data in the context of a literary critical work. The basic idea for this was to evaluate the responses of the typical reader of poetry, when they are asked to interpret the meaning of what they are reading and, specifically, their reactions in reading Jorge Luis Borges' poems.

[21] From here on, all translations of Gabriela Massuh's *Borges: Una Estética del Silencio* are my own.

In the next few sections, the experiment procedure will be laid out, to then proceed to a short discussion of the results. Not being able to find any previous work like this, the categorizations for the results were developed by us, and we do not exclude that they could be improved. Nonetheless, we believe them to be organized well enough for the purpose of this thesis.

1. **PROCEDURE**

Two poems of Jorge Luis Borges were selected from those that had been previously chosen to be analyzed in this paper: *El Golem* and *Signos* (Appendixes A and C). The selection was made based on the fact that both poems focus on metalinguistic issues and they both play with the ambiguity of signification, which is perfectly on topic and had the potential to make readers' interpretations much more interesting, from a theoretical point of view.

Using the Gorilla platform, we built and experiment made of steps, all aimed at exploring the effects of both contextualization and extrapolation. We chose this platform because of the professional outlet that it guarantees, being used for many linguistic experiments by the AreytoLab at UCI, and because of the options it gave to the researchers. Especially important was the possibility to cut off the participants from going back to previous answers, to guarantee they would not change their previous interpretations.

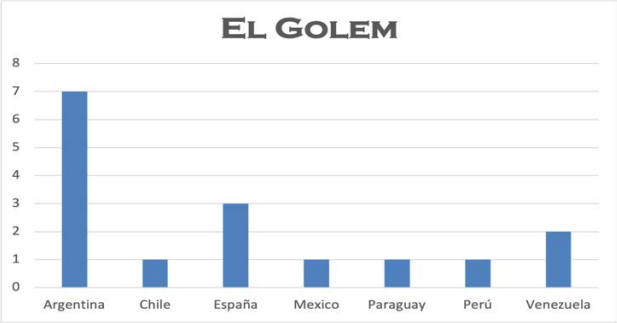
In this framework, participants were randomly assigned by the system one of the two poems. In the case of *El Golem*, they would start from a single verse (marked in bold/blue in Appendix A), and they were asked to explain shortly what the verse meant to them. After, the experiment showed them the highlighted verse inserted in its own stanza (marked in bold in Appendix A) and, this time, they were asked to offer again an interpretation of that verse seen before, as well as to offer one for the stanza. The third step consisted in showing the participants

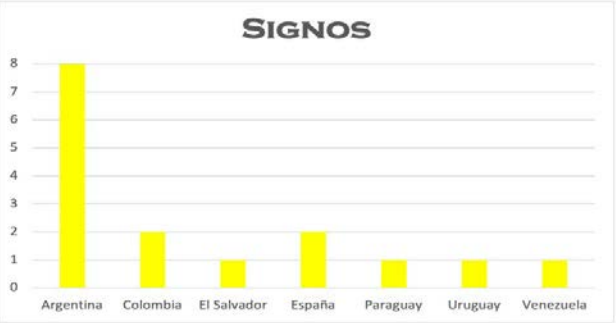
the entire poem, in which the verse and the stanza previously analyzed were highlighted. This time, the prompts were three: to offer an interpretation of the verse, one of the stanza, and one of the entire poem. Finally, some background information was given about the poem they have just read, including the name of the poem, the author, and some other info we considered could be relevant, while some other potentially not relevant at all (see Appendix B), which was done to see how some subject tests could use that information to derive conclusions. Participants were then asked again their interpretation of that same first verse, of that same first stanza, and of the poem as a whole. It is important to note that this produced three different analyses, that we here call issues: the issue of the verse, the issue of the stanza, and the issue of the poem. The issue of the verse had four (4) total interpretations by each participant, with one (the first one) constituting the base and then three subsequent chances to maintain or change their previous interpretation. The issue of the stanza had three (3) total answers (two chances to review), and that of the poem two (2), with only one chance to review the interpretation based on new information.

In the case of the poem *Signos*, the direction was reversed: participants were given first the entire poem and they were asked to express their interpretation of it. Then, we selected a smaller portion of the poem (marked in bold in Appendix C), and asked participants to explain what that specific fragment meant to them, in the context of their previous overall interpretation. The third step consisted in selecting just a sentence (marked in bold/blue in Appendix C), and again asking participants what meaning they gave to that specific verse. Finally, as in the case of *El Golem*, we gave information about the poem, as in its title, its author, and info about it, but we also added a few very important lines of introduction written by Borges right above the poem, after the title (see Appendix D). Clearly, we asked our test subjects to elaborate the meanings of poem, fragment, and sentence based on the new information given. Also in this case, the experiment produced three

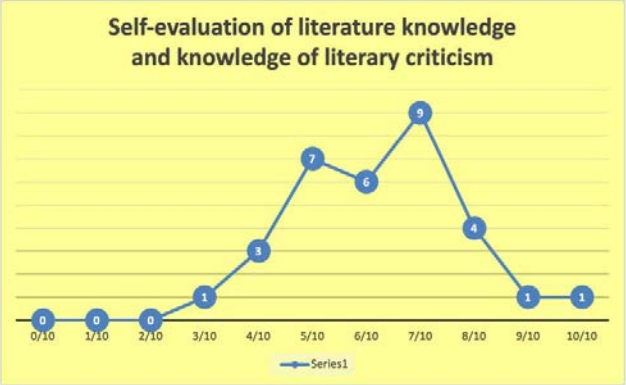
different issues, the verse's, the stanza's, and the poem's, but this time all of them had only two answers, which means only one chance to review the information given based on new information provided.

The process of selection of our candidates was done through passing around the word in environments where we knew we could find suitable participants. Our target was to have thirty (30) subjects, all Spanish native speakers, preferably having completed higher education, and from a diverse cultural background, not focusing only on one nationality but making sure we could have representation from most of the Spanish speaking countries, which would open our linguistic spectrum to different version of the language. We managed to obtain a total of thirty-two (32) participants from 10 different countries, divided as shown in the two next graphics:





As it can be seen, although most subjects come from Argentina, in both cases we have significant participation from countries other than Argentina (56% for *El Golem* and 50% for *Signos*), which guarantees enough diversity in linguistical variation. Out of all thirty-two (32) volunteers: almost half (15) are over fifty years old, with two (2) under thirty years old (both of them have completed higher education); three (3) do not have a degree, although two (2) of them are currently completing it; thirty (30) are native speakers of Spanish, with two (2) having working proficiency as native speakers; and the majority of them self-evaluated themselves as being sufficiently knowledgeable in Spanish literature and acquainted with theory of criticism, as it can be seen in the following chart:



All these questions were asked in order to assess the quality of the participant's pool, and based on the diversity of nationalities, the fluency in the target language, the maturity expressed by their ages, the elevated level of education, and the positive sign in the self-evaluation – obtained by an average score of 6.25/10 – we consider the volunteers as forming an excellent pool for the purposes of this research experiment, which is, as said, to evaluate the responses of a typical reader of poetry when asked to interpret the meaning of what they are reading.

2. DATA INTERPRETATION AND SCORING SYSTEM

To interpret the results, we read all the answers given by participants and we divided them in categories, which are different for each poem. In this way, for example, in the context of the selected verse of the poem *El Golem*, "en las letras de *rosa* está la rosa" (Borges PC 193)[22], we labeled as *Literal* the following interpretation: "the flower is found in the letters of such a color" (Appendix E, PG6)[23]. Instead, the following answer to the same question was labeled *Subjective*: "the essence of the rose lies in how we interpret the rose ourselves" (Appendix E, PG11). The categories for each poem and their evolution step to step will be analyzed below, in the respective

[22] This translates to English: the rose is in the letters of *rose*, but it is worth mentioning that rose and pink are homographs in Spanish.
[23] From here on, all translations of participants' answers are mine, and the originals can be found in the proper Appendix.

subchapters dedicated to each of the two poems, but we want to explain here our rationale for the evaluations, that will make clear our interpretation of the data obtained in the next subchapters.

By clustering answers according to categories, we were able to analyze all the data following two directions: on the first one, we worked across participants, as we compared the interpretations given by all of them, therefore showing if and how different people found different meanings while reading the same text. The idea behind this was that, if we were to find only one category of interpretation – or if we were to see that most of the elaborations of meaning fell into one category only – then the results would be showing that the meaning of text to the average reader it is not so variegate, concluding therefore that poetry texts have a fixed and possibly definitive meaning. If, instead, we saw many different categories of interpretation, with a substantial distribution of the answers among them, then the data would be pointing toward the idea of Borges' poetry as interpretable in many ways, confirming that his texts have not one fixed and main sense, at least for the average reader, as we have shown it was argued by Derrida's deconstructionism and by the work of Borges himself.

The second direction of exploration is the one regarding the evolution of interpretation in the same reader, based on the contextualization that was given to them, the information available to them, and the process to which they had to undergo, either from verse to poem or vice versa. In this case, we chose a scoring method, following a crossing-category rationale: to every issue, we gave a plus one score (+1) to those interpretations that did not changed category compared to the previous step, a score of minus one (-1) to those that did change category, and a zero (0) to those few cases in which the answer was not clear and did not allow us to pin them to any category. For example, taking again the cases used before, remember that we categorized as *Subjective* the answer of subject PG11 when asked the interpretation of the verse by itself, in question number

one, but when the same participant was asked to give again their interpretation of the meaning of such verse in the context of its own poem, in question number four, the answer was: “the word makes the thing” (Appendix E, PG11). This answer falls into a category we called “Creative/Metalinguistic”, which means the answer changed category and got a score of negative one (-1).

Scoring in this way each participant’s answer after the first one, for each different issue, we were able to determine how much variation there was in the meanings that each participant interpreted moving from one question to the other. In the case of *El Golem*, there were nine (9) total questions and six (6) scoring ones (the first time they offered a reading of any issue was not scored, clearly), which meant three (3) scoring answers for the verse issue, two (2) for the stanza issue, and one (1) for the poem issue. Therefore, a plus 3 (+3) score for the verse issue would mean there was no variation whatsoever in the participant’s interpretation, while a change of categories at every answer would return a total score of minus three (-3). The range for the stanza issue would be from plus two (+2) to minus two (-2), while for the entire poem we would have only either a positive one (+1) or a negative one (-1). For the poem *Signos*, due to the inverse process that went from poem to verse, the total number of questions was only six (6) and only three (3) could be scored, one per issue, making all scoring ranges going from positive one (+1) to negative one (-1). In this context, for both poems and for all issues, any negative value would show changes in the interpretations, arguing in favor of the theory that the meaning of any text changes based on its context, and that extrapolating pieces of a poem to analyze them specifically can lead to different perceptions of the same text, even by the same reader. Instead, any positive value would mean that a specific average reader would always interpret a verse, a stanza, or a poem mostly in the same way, no matter their contextualization nor the extrapolation process that goes into the analysis.

3. RESULTS[24]

a. EL GOLEM

Based on the sixteen (16) responses obtained for this poem, we were able to determine five (5) different categories of meaning at the verse and stanza levels:

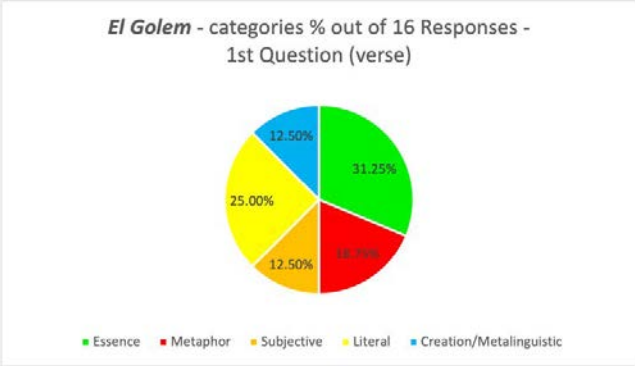
a. *Essence:* indicates the category for those significations that saw the word as representing the entire thing they signify, meaning that the word rose indicates all the rose qualities, as its color, its form, its texture, its beauty, etc.
b. *Metaphor:* the category in which we clustered the answers when the participant attributed a metaphorical sense to the verse, like seeing in the rose the "unreachable love" (Appendix E, PG3).
c. *Subjective:* it groups those interpretations that saw the verse as meaning that the word rose recalls the reader's personal experience with it, therefore bringing in not what rose means in general terms, but what it means specifically for the reader.
d. *Literal:* corresponds to those interpretations that staid close to the literal sense of the verse
e. *Creation/Metalinguistic:* refers to the category of those who made sense of the verse in the creative power of the word, digging also into the metalinguistic realm of word referring to themselves and their symbolic nature.

As it can be seen by the graphics below, the variation in interpretation was such that, by the time we reached the last step – in which the volunteers had to offer their interpretation of the verse having already contextualized it inside the entire poem, also knowing all the info offered (poem's name, author, etc.) – we needed to add a sixth category,

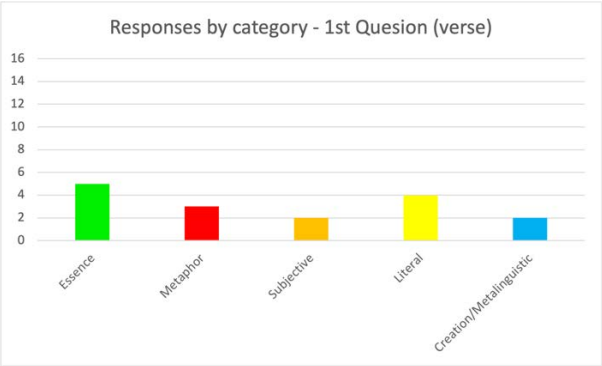
f. *Ironic*: interpretations that saw the verse as carrying a strong sarcastic connotation.

[24] Following, we will be offering the most significative findings from the data analysis of both poems, but it will not be offered the entire analysis of all the results, since what it will be discussed here will be more than enough for the purposes of this thesis and to propose a solid argument.

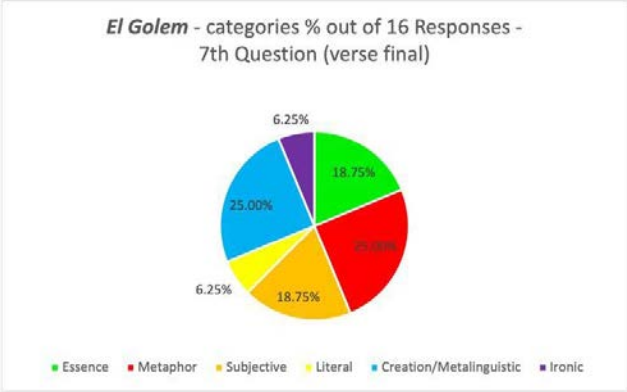
Graphic 1.a



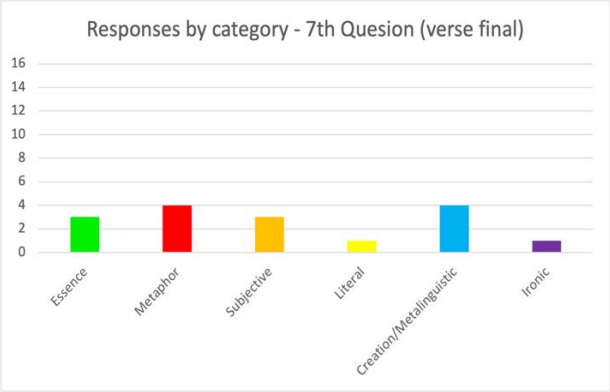
Graphic 1.b



Graphic 2.a



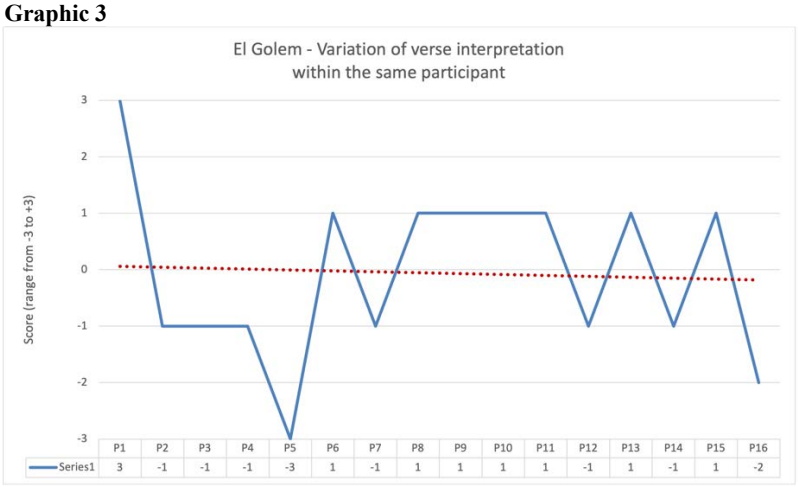
Graphic 2.b



Regarding the first direction of analysis, the one made across all participants, in the context of the verse analyzed alone and with no contextualization whatsoever, the results show significant variation in both the number of categories, as well as in the distribution of participant's interpretations, having no more than five (5) answers falling into one single category and at least two (2) in each. Note that category (d) *Literal* was the second most numerous at this step, with twenty-five percent (25%) responses, but by the time our volunteers had fully contextualized the verse, to the extent this experiment allowed them, all categories were still represented and a sixth needed to be added. Furthermore, the distribution among them changed drastically, indicating that variations within the same participant also occurred, so much that the category (d) *Literal* ended up with only one response (6.25%), while categories (b) *Metaphor* and (e) *Creation/Metalinguistic* took the lead, to become the most represented meanings our test subjects attributed to the verse.

That great variation is shown also in the second direction of our analysis: as it can be seen by the next chart (Graphic 3), only one (1) participant never changed interpretation, keeping the same analysis on the meaning of the verse question after question. For the rest, each other participant changed their interpretation at least one time, with eight (8) out of sixteen (16) changing at least two times out of three.

Graphic 3



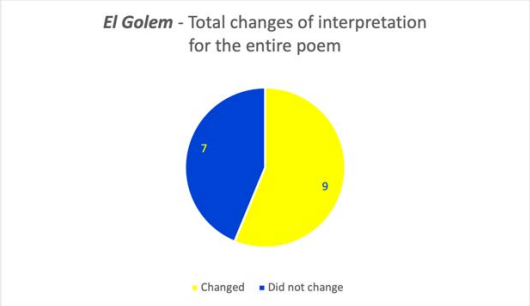
The most interesting thing is that eleven (11) out of the sixteen (16) responders changed their interpretation at the third step, when they got to contextualize the verse into the entire poem. As it can be seen in the respective Appendix E, answers started showing much more sophistication at this point, which demonstrates that participants were change how they were making sense of those words guided by the entire narrative proposed by the poem. Their interpretations, for ten (10) out of sixteen (16), did not change even after reading the additional information, showing in this way that the information given was not considered very significant to reinterpret the specific verse.

Contrary to what happened at the verse level, the results show that when our volunteers had to analyze the entire poem, the information offered in the last step had a major impact, with nine (9) out of sixteen (16) changing category of interpretation, with the rest seven (7) maintaining

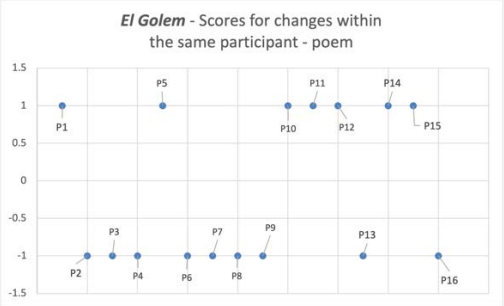
their previous reading (Graphics 4.a and 4.b). But what was most impacting about the analysis of the poem, and the changes dictated by the additional information, was the factor of the categories that we had to develop when we analyzed the data across all participants. As it can be seen in the Graphic 5 in the next page, we needed six categories to cluster some of the meanings our volunteers expressed, some of them needing to be created just for one participant, since their answers were just too different and could not be grouped with any other. The categories, with their rationale, are as follows:

a. *Divine*: for these participants, the sense of the poem is the effort of men to imitate/substitute God.
b. *Metaphor*: as for the verse level, the poem is just a big metaphor, such an ode to life.
c. *Literal*: as for the verse level, their interpretation I very literal and descriptive, for example that the poem is just telling a story.
d. *Creation/Metalinguistic*: again, in here is key the creationist power of the words and the metalinguistic reflection.
e. *Ironic*: The sense of the poem is to make some irony to the kabalistic belief of the power of the word. In this sense, this category could also have been called anti-metalinguistic.
f. *Interpretation*: the meaning of the poem focuses on the universe being interpretative.

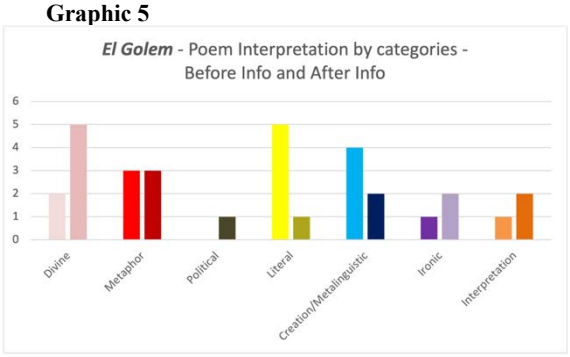
Graphic 4.a



Graphic 4.b



Graphic 5



The responses not only show many different categories, which means great variety on meanings, but also a great distribution, with the most represented category being (c) *Litearal*, counting five responses. And yet, that changed drastically after our volunteers were able to get relevant information, other than just reading the verses, even with a seventh category added:

g. *Political:* poetry as a political and propagandistic weapon.

Graphic 5 is pretty eloquent about the shift, but it is worth noticing that does not say everything: for example, even though (b) *Metaphor* kept its value of three (3), only one participant kept its metaphoric interpretation between steps, whether two abandoned that interpretation and two different volunteers shifted towards it.

Our analysis reveals clearly that *El Golem* is extremely open to heterogeneous interpretations. The meanings that our volunteers extrapolated – many of which are valid and can be argued for with the information they had available, so much that we will be using some of their analysis in our next chapter – are too variated and can only be explained with the idea of open and fluid texts. Furthermore, the contextualization process offered interesting insights as well: especially valuable was to discover that the same info that induced so many to reevaluate their answers at the level of the entire poem, did not have a great impact when they had to reevaluate for the third time a specific verse, which seems to argue in favor of the deconstructive process.

b. SIGNOS

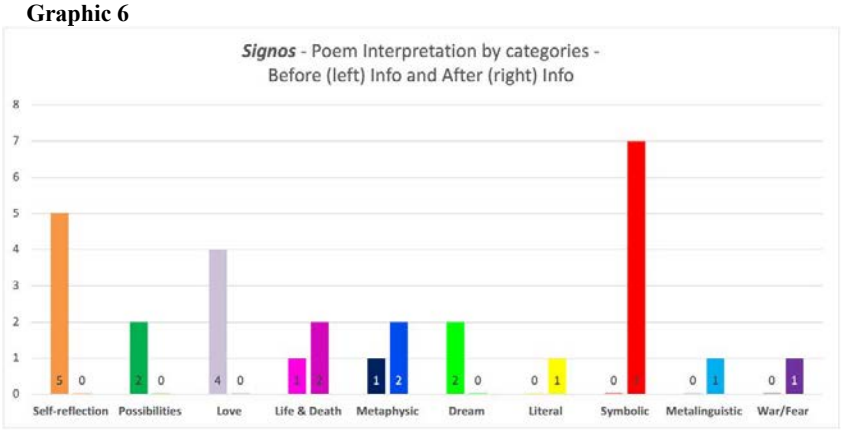
The participants randomly assigned to this poem were sixteen (16), as for *El Golem*, but we had to discard one entire set because the volunteer did not really answer the prompts. We were able to identify ten (10) different categories regarding the meaning assigned to the poem issue, with six (6) of them present in the first interpretation from our subjects as well as at the end of the experiment, after responders had already all the info we gave them to help them contextualize what

they were reading; although only two (2) categories were present in both steps. The following table summarizes the categories at the poem level:

CATEGORY	DEFINITION	FIRTS STEP	LAST STEP
Self-reflection	The poem represents a kind of self-reflection of the narrating voice/author.	5	0
Possibilities	The poem talks about the multiplicity of possibilities of our intellect/personality.	2	0
Love	The poem talks about someone being in love.	4	0
Life & Death	The poem talks about issues related with life and death.	1	2
Metaphysical	The poem has a metaphysical meaning, representing the search for the sense of the universe.	1	2
Dream	The poem describes the world of dreams.	2	0
Literal	The poem narrates the uses of a bell.	0	1
Symbolic	The bell is used as a symbol to represent something else, like Borges' blindness.	0	7
Metalinguistic	The poem refers to the sense of the words and their indecipherability.	0	1
War/Fear	The poem represents the fear of the author, especially the fear of War.	0	1

As we can see in the table, as well as in the next chart (Graphic 6), the contextualization drove most participants to lean toward a symbolic interpretation of the poem, seeing the bronze bell at the center of *Signos* as a symbol for something related to the life or the feelings of the poet.

Graphic 6



Nonetheless, what the graphic does not express is the diversity within that same category. Indeed, responses categorized as *Symbolic* range from the idea of longing to be something for someone, but choosing to stay in the shadows (Appendix F, PS14), to a self-reflection on the author's own blindness, as three participants suggested with their interpretations (Appendix F). The ten (10) different categories and the heterogeneity within category speak loudly about the incredible range of interpretation present in this text, when approached by the average reader. this clearly confirms the thesis sustaining that any written work is not closed, having just one or few significations. This analysis gets broaden by the one on the responses within the same participant: in fact, interpretations in the categories of *Self-refection* and *Love* were the most represented when our test subjects were trying to make sense of the poem without any information about it, but they completely disappeared when they were able to put what they were reading in a specific context.

The variation within participant is so remarkable, that fourteen (14) out of the fifteen (15) responders changed category of interpretation after the additional information was given to them, all therefore scoring a negative one (-1), based on our procedures. The contextualization of the poem was so influential, that many saw in the biographical information of its author the key to decode the meaning of the text, some focusing on Borges blindness, some others on the wars that happened during Borges' life. This is, at least at a basic reading level, a confirmation of Derrida's theories of deconstruction when applied to literary critical theory.

All of this shows what we have seen in the previous analysis made on *El Golem*, which leaves us with a pool of thirty-one readers that clearly present an incredible variety in the ways of interpreting the meaning of a Borges' poem, many of which were completely valid and justified by the text, so much that we will be quoting some of them in our next and last chapter. Nonetheless, the analysis of the data obtained by the *Signos* experiment reveals something that *El Golem* did

not, and this is due to the reversed process used in this second case. Indeed, what impressed us the most during our analysis of this poem was the incredible variation of categories we found within the same reader, when comparing verse and poem interpretations. In fact, except for three participants who saw the poem and the specific sentence as being in the same category, all others assigned to the verse a different hue than that they had assigned the poem.

This means that, when analyzing it, the typical reader would make sense of a poem in a certain way, but when asked to dig deeper and to express the meaning of one specific sentence in that same poem, that simple exercise is already enough to expose differences, sometimes even contradictions, to their own analysis. That simple exercise can be enough to read different things inside the same text. In this way, for example, participant PS7 saw in the poem (prior to getting the contextualization) the subjectivity of interpretation and the indecipherability of dreams (Appendix F, PS7), but when the same person needed to explain that verse saying "la sentencia en que se cifra el sabor de una vida o de una tarde" (Borges, PC, 468)[25] their interpretation was very realistic and referred not to subjectivity but to generic truth, arguing that the verse indicates that "an instant can define an existence" (Appendix F, PS7). This, in a way, is deconstruction in its essence, reveling that digging deeper into a text, we will always find parts of it fighting against themselves and opposing our previous interpretations.

[25] "the sentence in which the flavor of a life or of an afternoon is encoded"

Borges' Self-Deconstructing Poetry

We have built, so far, a specific framework. We first glanced at some of Derrida's deconstructionist ideas in relation to literary critical theory, presenting the argument that texts are fluid, open to multiple and unfixed interpretations. We then moved to analyze Jorge Luis Borges' as a writer, proposing the thesis that the Argentinian used many of those same principles – that he elaborated before Derrida did – to construct his writings, planning, using, and even thriving on contradictions and paradoxes that would be the objective of a deconstructive analysis to find and to expose. After that, we presented our findings during the experiment we run with thirty-two participants, which showed, as explained in the previous chapter, that Borges poem do indeed work as their author and the French-Algerian philosopher suggested any text would do. At least, we show that Borges' poems do so for the average poetry reader, which is still significant because, ultimately, literature does not reach only the academic environments, but has the potential to reach every reader in the world (and even across time), and it certainly reaches more non scholars than scholars. Point being, the target of literature is virtually anyone and everyone, so it can still be meaningful to see how random readers react to a given text. Now, it is time to build an academic argument that can both sustain our thesis, while also showing why and how the poems of Borges provoke so many different reactions in its readers. It is time, therefore, to demonstrate the self-deconstructing power of Borges' poetry.

In order to do so, we have selected a few poems of Borges that we find significant from a deconstructionist point of view: we have already introduced two of them, *El Golem* and *Signos*, the ones used in our unique experiment, and we will analyze them both extensively in this chapter. In addition, we will be also mentioning other poems and we will be seeing relevant fragments from some of them, as *Fundación Mítica de Buenos Aires*, *Juan, I, 14*, and *Ajedrez*, among others. In

all of them, we will get to their hearts and we will show how, to a certain degree, labyrinthic structures, paradoxical meanings, and contradictory elements work to create an individual symbolism that can "access a signifying element more efficient than the word" (Massuh 73) or, in other words, to transcend the limits of language. We will also focus on that individual symbolism, showing its key role in the power of Borges poetry.

SIGNOS

Let us begin with *Signos*, a poem published for the first time in *La Moneda de Hierro* (1976). Borges, in a very rare case of contextualization of one of his poems, puts right after the title and the dedication (dedications were common for him) the following sentence: "Hacia 1915, en Ginebra, vi en la terraza de un museo una alta campana con caracteres chinos. En 1976 escribo estas líneas" [26] (Borges PC 468). It is worth noticing right away, then, that the title and this contextualization point toward the idea of the entire poem being developed around the Chinese characters, those enigmatic symbols or signs that cover an object that has become symbolic itself. The verses

> "Undeciphered and alone, I know I can
> be in the vague night […]
> the universe or your secret name
> or that enigma which you investigated in vane"
> (Borges PC 468)

confirm indeed the mystery of signification created by those symbols over a symbol, an enigma that could mean anything and that leads the narrating voice to list a series of significations that reflect its own concerns. Indeed, different viewers asking themselves what the bell might mean

[26] "Around 1915, in Geneva, I saw in a museum's terrace a tall bell with Chinese characters. In 1976 I write these lines" (the translation is mine)

could offer answers very different from those written in these verses, which leaves us with potentially infinite interpretations; but in here, we see specific options mentioned, which ultimately reflect – at least partially – the author's reactions. It is in this framework that the mentioning of the universe takes the poem to an universal and transcendental level, and in consideration of the analysis we have done so far about Borges' poetics, and the emphasis he puts in searching more than in finding, the metaphysical level becomes evident especially in the last verse: "I can be all. Leave me in the shadow" (Borges PC 468).

In fact, as long as we do not define this symbol, leaving it undeciphered, its signification power is immense, carrying that infinite array of connotations suggested above. Furthermore, the centrality of the linguistic issue is reinforced in the seventh verse of the poem, which tells us that this undeciphered thing could be a "huge emperor, today a few syllables" (Borges PC 468), a verse that accomplishes two things: first of all, this shows the complete dehumanization accomplished by language, which has transformed a person – even a great one – in just a linguistic symbol, a mere combination of syllables. Secondly, right to our point, this line reinforces the Chinese characters as the main object of the poem, since the bell cannot be itself an emperor, but the writing of a name could perfectly represent one and would in fact make of him, literally, just syllables, when reading those characters aloud.

Curiously enough, only one of our participants focused their interpretation on the idea of the power of symbols, as a reference to words and signs and to what they can mean to us: "it takes me to the word, to the meaning, to the secrets, sometimes it is better to leave them in the shadow" (Appendix F, PS5). It is true that the analysis offered by us before requires a deeper knowledge of Borges' work as a whole, but since the title itself is *Signos* (signs), it was surprising that most of our readers went in another direction, without linking this poem to the symbology of the Chinese

characters. And yet, it was also somehow to be expected, because the author does here things that lead readers to other possible dialogues, those same things that make "the 'secret complexity' of Borges' poetry" (Running 97), as Thorpe Running would say. One of such things, in here, is the fact that the Argentinian wrote this poem in the first person, which explains why, prior of having any contextualization, many of our volunteers interpreted this poem as a self-reflection, maybe about love or about the meaning of life and death (Appendix F). This decision puts the bell at the center and has even the power to hide those Chinese symbols. Working in that direction, the second person used in the fifth verse results very important, "the dream of Chuang Tzu, which you already know" (Borges PC 468), since the ability to speak directly to the reader gives an incredible depth to the personification of the narrator, which is then more natural to identify with an object than with characters or text. Indeed, without the preface telling us that this was written about a bell, it would be almost impossible to guess at all that the narrating voice was not a person.

Nonetheless, even with a full contextualization, this poem still works to take the reader toward different directions and to leave open the doors for multiple significations, as those components mentioned before clearly show. Of those readings differing from the one offered by us, probably the most valid and most interesting ones made by the participants of our experiment were those seeing the poem as symbol for Borges himself, with a strong reference to his own blindness. We need to remember, in fact, that "[a] blind man and owner of books is a splendid oxymoron, one of the many that inhabit the verses and the prose of Borges" (Sáinz de Medrano 92), and people tend to get attracted by the blindness of the Argentinian, which somehow has contributed to a sort of mythification of this author. Getting back to our participants, one of them, for example, mentions that "a possible explanation [for his self-identification with the bell] is that the author, becoming blind, would identify his existence more with sounds […] than with images.

Also the last word (shadow) takes another value now, as if the author would not only accept his lack of vision but even would consider it a sort of protection, of intimacy, of introspection" (Appendix F, PS1). Again, another volunteer sees in these verses a reference "to handicaps and to what [Borges] is still able to do, […] telling us through metaphors that he can still offer his help, no matter his situation" (Appendix F, PS12).

Let us dig deeper into this interpretation. In the framework of a reality where words are not effective at representing it, as Borges suggests himself, it makes totally sense that he would identify himself with a bell, a symbol of sound, especially having been cut off from the visual experience. Furthermore, if this mysterious entity could be anything and, in fact, presented as it is in this poem it almost seems like it could be everything at the same time – like a sort of Aleph, "through the vision [of which] the word becomes present instantaneously and accurately" (Massuh 90), then we ought to ask ourselves: would not make sense for a blind poet who "desire[s] to return to linguistic origins, to a 'lenguaje del alba'[27], as he calls it" (Running 104), to become in his poem the bell, the enigmatic object of sound itself? This symbol – which is marked with other symbols – that carries so much signification, then, could not be a representation for Borges and for the endless possibilities that the life of a human being implies? Would not make sense for Borges to take advantage of the power of his intellect to build a literary world – that does not differ much from what we call reality, in his perspective – where he is that "enigma which you have investigated in vane" (Borges PC 468)? If the bell is at the center of the poem, then the answer to all those questions can surely be a sounding yes. This means that *Signos* also carries a symbolic meaning, and can therefore be read as mirror for Borges himself. The mysterious bell, which is "a bronze prayer or the sentence in which it gets decoded / the flavor of a life or of an afternoon", is then

[27] "language of dawn" (my own translation).

also the symbol in which the reader can decode the flavor of Borges' own life, or maybe that of the simple afternoon in which he saw the bell, or in which he wrote this poem.

This reading of *Signos* as a symbol for Borges himself – and for his hope to be still significant, his desire to be kept in the shadow, and the symbol of his own blindness – is an interpretation that results extremely different from the metaphysical and linguistic one that we elaborated initially, and yet it is as much valid. This duality of signification – with the possibility to have even more than two – it is not only the result of the reader's analysis, of the reader finding whatever they brought with them, as Borges would say. Instead, the two meanings we discussed are both planted in the poem and simultaneously hinted by the author, who has inserted in this work conflicting elements on purpose, opening in this way its power of signification.

These contradictions are everywhere: a title and a preface that play against the first person used in the narration, giving the poem at least two focal centers; a last verse ambiguous, that works with the multiplicity of meanings that we can attribute to the idea of being left in the dark; the paradoxical idea of a something decoding a life or a simple afternoon, bringing to the discourse even the relativization of time; the command to stop wondering, to leave the enigma unanswered, that nonetheless comes after a list of interpretations that show an uncontainable curiosity to imagine, to understand; to know. All of them are contradictory elements, all of them working not to merge all together in a unisonous sense, like the voices of a choir working toward the same melody, but purposedly going in opposite directions and directing us toward different paths. All this considered, then maybe Zunilda Gertel came a little short when she saw "borgean poetry as a dialectic process that assimilates contradictory elements in a new unity" (Gertel 137), because our analysis leads us to think that Borges poetry transcends unity, looking instead for signification in its own multiplicity, oftentimes even through those same contradictory elements.

THE TWO – OR MORE – BORGESES

At this point, it is crucial to remember a vital contradiction in Borges' attitude toward writing, which has been explained in a previous chapter but that we can elaborate even more now, clarifying any possible doubt that a reader may have to the why an author would purposedly plant contradictions in their own writings, being even able to transcend in this way the limits of communication. This derives from the idea of *two Borgeses*, something that the same Argentinian poet has created and somehow explained in writings like *Borges y Yo*[28], for example. In that prose, a narrating voice opens the texts telling us that "to the other, to Borges, is to whom things happen" (Borges AP 168). This voice is that of the Borges inside another Borges, and tells us of his destiny of losing himself inside the other, of how he tried to escape "years ago […] and [he] moved from the suburban mythologies to the games with time and with that which is infinite, but those games are Borges' now and [he] will have to devise other things" (Borges AP 168)[29]. Yet, the text closes saying: "I do not know which of the two writes this page" (Borges AP 168). This discombobulating sentence leads us to a labyrinth in which Borges is at the same time both the person walking the corridors and the corridors themselves, trapping us in the uncertainty of where a Borges ends and where the other starts.

This is very important, because it makes us understand that the Argentinian conceived of himself as a multiple, not as a unity, and therefore should not be strange that such multiplicity gets also voluntarily expressed in his own work. With this idea in mind, it is worth to crystalize who those two Borges are or, at least, what are the characteristics they show us about themselves. On one hand, we have a Borges who creates the "fictional country of the Urnos, [in which] all words

[28] "Borges and Me" (my own translation).
[29] From here on, all translations of J.L. Borges' *Antología personal* are my own.

uttered mean nothing" (Massuh 213), and who deduces "that language can hardly become fully connected to reality, since its own nature drives itself to provoke mirages and daydreams that impose themselves for the efficiency […] of a nominal primordial balance" (Rest 91). That Borges, ultimately, believes that "words fulfill a fundamental task in human sphere, although they fail in all attempts to transcribe faithfully the nature and the essence of the universe" (Rest 153). The other Borges, instead, knows that "language, nevertheless, possesses the quality to identify, to summarize, is arbitrary and conventional, but it also creates words and models consciousnesses" (Hamui 137)[30]. It is to this Jorge Luis that "the poetic creation reveals […] the paradox of feeling poetry's idealism and the anguish before the conviction that the perfect poem is intangible" (Gertel 147), although he never gives up the search of it, never stops trying to compose it.

The two Borgeses explain why Efraín Kristal argues that "Borges moved happily between an objectivist aesthetic according to which the cadences and arbitrary associations of words can produce specific emotions, and a more relativist aesthetic, according to which ideas can be readily transferred and transformed from word to word and reading to reading" (Kristal 136). These two Borges clearly coexist, and even though they do not create unity, they both work to find their own ways to transcend the limits of language. They are both obsessed with revising and correcting and tunning their writings, so to have better chances to transmit at least a partial message, and they both write at the same time any text authored by Borges. At the end of the day, for our poet, "the written word […] is bounded to a single meaning, [which is why] the work of art must transcend it by inserting it in the sphere of plural significations, in a space that amazes and dazzles" (Massuh 239). Which better way to insert plural significations, than that of putting contradictory elements in his own writings, leading the reader to different and sometimes even opposite interpretations,

[30] This translation is my own.

hinting in this way the freedom of all readers to look for different significations and to find themselves in the text they are reading? We assert that this is exactly the scope and the magnificence of Borges, and that this is one of the reasons why he has even deconstructed the relationship author/reader and the very concept of authorship, as we showed in a previous chapter (see pages 18-19).

Failing to see this duplicity of Borges – that is actually a multiplicity – can lead even major authors, like Manuel Ferrer, to the wrong conclusion that "a fair share of the later poetry [after his ultraist period] is sufficiently cold, intellectualized, and reiterative to make of Borges something more than an excellent narrator or a virtuous essayist, if he had not kept his first creations[31]" (Ferrer 25). Among many shortcomings of such analysis, Ferrer makes the mistake of judging negatively Borges' repetitiveness, that constant circling back to central themes such as the chaos of the universe, the organization of the world created by men, time's circularity, the meaning of language, and many others. Such a consideration is a mistake: the reiterative character of Borges' poetry – by the way, a feature that is very characteristic also of his narrative – is exactly what allows the poet to develop that symbolic system that gives his work a private and individual symbolism.

In fact, that repetitiveness opens his text to a referentiality that connects each of his poems to all of his writings, and to all his readings as well. Borges himself said: "I do not write, I rewrite. My memory produces my sentences. I have read so much and I have heard so much. I admit it: I repeat myself" (Kristal 135). We need to remember that each rewriting for Borges is like a mirror image, and he was fascinated by the mirroring effects in literature, so much that it is that multiplicity of reflections that constitutes, to him, the sign of poetic success (De Man 148). It was the opinion of the poet, in fact, "that some of the most cherished pleasures of literature become

[31] Ferrer is here referring to the poems from Borges' ultraist period.

available only after a work has passed through many hands and undergone many changes" (Kristal xiii).

As a clear demonstration of this, let us take, for example, *Juan, I, 14*. When reading that title, who knows well Borges will ask immediately: which one? Surely, Borges published two poems with that title, the first one in *El Otro, el Mismo* (1964) and the second one in *Elogio de la Sombra* (1969). The latter is not a revision of the first one, but it is a different and unique poem, and opens with these lines:

> "This page will be no less a riddle
> than those of My holy books
> nor those others repeated
> by ignorant mouths,
> believing them a man's, not mirrors
> obscure of the Spirit.
>
> (Borges PC 295)

Right away, we see here the mirror. This mirror works, of course, within Borges' symbology, expressing a reality that is nothing more than an imperfect reflection of God's plan, although mirrors well positioned could give us infinite reflections, thus opening the doors of what is real. At the same time, the mirror here works also to tell us that this page we are reading is a mirror, one reflecting the old homonymous poem. That one is a sonnet, where a narrator tells the story of a God that wants to walk among man. It is a snapshot of the story of Jesus told by a writer, and describes what we humans understand about that peculiar narrative:

> "God wants to walk among men
> and is born form a mother, like are born
> the lineages that dissolve in dust,
> and the globe will be given to him,
>
> air, water, bread, mornings, stones and lily,
> but later the blood of martyrdom,
> the scorn, the nails, and the timber."
>
> (Borges PC 202)

The later poem is, instead, told in the first person, and it is pretty clear that the voice talking is that of God responding to that earlier poem, and telling Its side of the story. God entrusts "this writing to a random[32] man", but knows that "it will never be what I want to say, it won't stop being its reflection" (Borges PC 296). Borges here tells his readers that he is just the "scribe" (Borges PC 296) of this poem, which is being dictated to him by God Itself. And yet, we have again the concept of mirrors, of a reflection, and we know this is not just a random man, because God is responding to that other poem that was written by Borges. We know this especially because of the last two verses, in which God tells us: "sometimes I think with nostalgia / in the smell of that woodwork" (Borges PC 296), closing again with the cross, just as in the older poem. *Juan, I, 14*, therefore, are a clear example of the referentiality and even self-referentiality that Borges uses to transcend the page, opening up new and numerous significations, and a very direct demonstration of the deconstructive devices that structure his poems.

In fact, when analyzed singularly, we can have specific readings that are completely valid. Thorpe Running, for example, focusing especially on the word reflection, saw in those mentioned verses (where God declares that the poem will never be able to represent what the divinity wanted to say) a clear echo of Derrida's trace, that term representing the lack of a fixed center to which words are condemned (Running 101). In doing so, he took a reading at the poem from 1969, at least to a part of it, as a metalinguistic reflection, as Borges' deliberation about his own metaphysics of the language. There is no doubt that such a reading is accurate and, indeed, it makes sense in the framework we are building here, arguing in favor of Borges' individual symbolism and the deconstructive ideas (or, as it would be better said, those ideas we would call deconstructive today) that went into the making of his poems.

[32] Note that "a un *hombre cualquiera*", which we have translated here as a random man, could also mean "to a nobody" or "to any men".

But when we take both poems together, we can see that they actually work to contrast each other: on one side, we have the 1964 text that tells us of the history of humanity, talking about "Oriental stories" and of "the story of that one king of time […] Harún" (Borges PC 202), to then go, as mentioned, to a very human and very matter of fact – although still poetic – brief analysis of the story of Jesus, who is even compared to Harún in his longing to walk among men. In the later poem, instead, we have God's version, who being what It is, of course talks in a manner that can be cryptic to us, digressing about memory, about the stars, about the meaning of language, about tigers, about the labyrinths of reason, and about mirrors and reflections. Both together, these two poems create an argument about how limited the human perspective can be, when compared to God's, because in Borges perspective, at the end of the day we are trying to glance at a reality that it not possible for us to see; while God, when he wanted to see ours, made Itself a man.

At the same time also, in a certain way, the first poem seems to be replying to the first one, underlining how a king had already had the idea to walk among his lesser to see their lives, their reality, and so maybe God did end up copying humans. In this context, it is worth noting that this self-referentiality has Borges beating the spacetime in which our reality seems to be stuck, because the later poem is not simply responding to the earlier one: both are in a constant dialogue with each other, even if they had been published five years apart and they cannot, technically, talk to each other. Moreover, they are both also in dialogue with the Gospel, as clearly indicated by the title. We could conclude, then, that Borges deconstructed this conversation and re-constructed parts of it separately, to work with and against each other, both with and against the Bible, creating thus a palimpsest of meanings that enriches his text, while finding signification outside the word, in a space beyond those pages, perhaps in those obscure mirrors of the Spirit.

SYBOLIC SYSTEM

Going back to Ferrer, we admire the analysis he made about the concept of *la Nada* in his *Borges y la Nada*, in which he gets into an elegant conversation with philosophy and critical theory to explore Borges idea of non-existence, that subjectivism in full Schopenhauer style, thinking that the universe is his idea and that all he sees is what he imagines to be in front of the Veil of Maya. Nevertheless, we need to disagree again in the way he reads the poetry of our Argentinian writer, since he seems to be taking an exclusively ultraist stance, assuming "an attitude of innate distrust towards all that is affirmative and an inclination opposing doubts and perplexities, as much as in the aesthetical nature as in the philosophical" (De Torre 81)[33]. In fact, if it is true, as Gertel tells us, that "ultraism is […] a new opening to art whose bold touch lies in the word used with an autonomous meaning, with an end in itself, 'not as a bridge of ideas'", and that it "appeals to the primitive and intuitive value of the word in what the image suggests" (Gertel 52), then certainly Ferrer judges all Borges poetry especially form that perspective, which determins his appraisal of Borges first years of poetry and his underestimation of his posterior (and most substantial) work. This underrating of Borges poetic production after his return to poetry at the beginning of the sixties, is evidently due to the lack of appreciation of Borges' symbolic system and the deconstructive techniques that get into the making of his poems.

Let us get, for example, Ferrer's analysis of the changes made by the Argentinian to his poem *La Fundación Mitológica de Buenos Aires*, written originally in 1926 (Borges' Ultraist period) but always published, after that date, in a version modified by the author himself. In analyzing a verse that changed from "Un almacén rosado como rubor de chica" to "Un almacén

[33] This translation is my own.

rosado como revés de naipe" (Ferrer 29)[34], Ferrer rightly points out that "[n]one would dare to suppose that such changes could be dictated by a simple and mere whim of its author" (Ferrer 29), and then argues that "Borges has substituted what is purely descriptive, sentimental, with a form – later, one of his most common symbols – that […] opens to us the doors of the insidious word of chance and the infinite possibilities" (Ferrer 29). Clearly, the writer here sees Borges' symbolism but underestimates it, considering more important the ultraist sentimental expression and the strength of its imagery, than the symbolic use of the *naipe*, the playing card.

The Argentinian knows that *rubor de chica* (maiden's blushing) and *revés de naipe* (the back of a playing card) are both just analogies, maybe one more suggestive than the other; maybe even more emotional. But the first one has an end in itself, while the other is more than it looks, and in Borges hands becomes the door of the labyrinth. For once, it suggests what Ferrer saw himself, representing the chance and the infinite possibilities, having therefore the connotative strength of all the philosophy of our writer. But the door lies somewhere else, specifically in the connection between texts. Indeed, that *naipe* connects to the *baraja* (the deck of cards), a word used to adjectivize the past of the city in the poem *Buenos Aires*. Once more, we need to ask which one we are referring to, since there are several poems with such a title. Curiously enough, it would not even be enough to mention the year (1964) nor the book (*El Mismo, el Otro*), since that volume featured two poems titled *Buenos Aires*, one in front of the other.

Wanting to take the bait, we explored them both. The one with the word *baraja* in it, is the one that starts with the verse "Antes, yo te buscaba en tus confines"[35] (Borges PC 260), and it comes first. The other one, printed just in the next page, starts with the verse "Y la ciudad, ahora,

[34] From "a general store rosy as a maid's blushing" to "a general store rosy as the back of a playing card"
[35] "Before, I looked for you in your borders".

es como un plano"[36] (Borges PC 261),[37] and it features the concept of labyrinth ("here my steps / plot their incalculable labyrinth"). Deciding to follow the white rabbit down its hole, we looked for the poem *El Laberinto* (The Labyrinth), which curiously enough is featured in *Elogio de la Sombra* (1969), in the page right before the poem *Laberinto* (Labyrinth), a poem that describes the labyrinth as "not having nor front side nor reverse" (Borges PC 307), in an imagery that could recall a coin, as well as a playing card. In this way, we went from one analogy basically saying that a general store was pink, in a poem dedicated to Buenos Aires, to two descriptions of the *urbe* (by the way, both of them play against the idea of a mythical foundation of Buenos Aires) and two poems dedicated to the Labyrinth. We could keep following this rabbit, and we have no doubts that we would both keep going down the hole, deeper and deeper, while also going back to the beginning, a *borgean* paradox that perfectly explains "Saúl Yurkievich's characterization of Borges as 'the circular poet'" (Kristal 53). This change of a single expression, introducing the concept of *naipe*, shows us the full power of Borges' symbology: with only one word, but a significant one in his system, the Argentinian has given to his poems an intertextuality that extends – virtually to infinity – the limits of a single text, offering in this way an incredible array of meanings. It is clear, therefore, that Borges' symbolic system uses principles that look to us very deconstructive, like the word as a trace and the referentiality of texts (with the inevitable process of transformation), to create in this way symbology, to construct poems, and to transcend language. It is clear, then, that we should never underestimate Borges' symbolism nor the repetitiveness that creates it.

[36] "And the city, now, is like a plane"

[37] The two verses could go together, especially due to the second poem starting with "and", another clear hint at reading these poems together: "Before, I looked for you in your borders and the city, now, is like a plane".

EL GOLEM

In one example of his constant games with paradoxes and contradictions, Borges declared: "poetry [cannot] be analyzed, or explained. If it is explained, it is explained away" (Cortínez 10). And yet, right after saying so, he also stated: "But of course, analyzing is a pleasure, also. Why deny ourselves that pleasure? I mean, the search for explanation is a pleasure, even if we don't find it" (Cortínez 10). Contrary to these utterances, Borges was an attentive and very scrupulous critic, especially of his own work. He constantly revised and corrected his writings, in particular his poems, as himself says also in some of his prefaces, and he was always ready to listen to possible explanations of his own work. In one of his self-reflections about himself as a writer and about the value of his work, he has said "that he would like to survive in the 'Poema Conjetural', in 'Poema de los Dones', in 'El Golem', and in 'Límites', all of them of unquestionable metaphysical meaning" (Gertel 133).

Quoting again Zunilda Gertel and her *Borges y su Retorno a la Poesía*, she sees in *El Golem* the success in verses of one of Borges' main issues, the theme of the dream: "A rabbi dreams and creates the Golem, and the rabbi is, in turn, God's dream" (Gertel 69). The author sees in those eighteen stanzas both the "projection toward eternity [and] the power of the dreamer-creator [which] is, nonetheless, limited, since this one it is also the instrument of another dreamer-creator" (Gertel 70). Gertel makes a connection with what happens in another poem of Jorge Luis, *Ajedrez II*, especially in this verse: "God moves the player, and this one, the piece" (Borges PC 116). This connotation is not really intuitive, and it does require a certain degree of deconstruction to get to it. To explain it, we will be using the words of Jaime Alazraki, who also has linked *El Golem* and *Ajedrez II* in saying: "In all these metaphors – a dream, a line of text, an imperfect puppet, the pieces of chess – we recognize the condition of human destiny reduced to a fragile and conceivable

manifestation of an indisputable Will (the evocation of Schopenhauer is inevitable). That will which dreams of us or which writes us, and of which we are imperfect simulacra or pieces of an infinite game, is God" (Alazraki, 1978, 54). What happens here, basically, is that both Gertel and Alazraki use Borges symbolic system to traduce the act of creation in the act of dreaming, since they know this equivalence dream-creation is "an essential element in borgean work and is intimately related to the concept of literature-universe and author-reader's identity" (Gertel 69). To anticipate a little what will be said next, it is worth mentioning that Alazraki also focuses on the idea of infinite in Borges, which he refers to as "an insistent adjective [and] a 'linguistic tic'", […] which repeats itself with an almost obsessive frequency" (Alazraki, 1978, 54).

With the infinite in mind, Karina García Albadiz concludes her attempt at deconstructing *El Golem* by saying that "all the text has infinite meanings" (García Albadiz 22)[38], referring to the incredible referentiality of this poem starting right from its title, which immediately refers to the Jewish myth of the Golem. She even considers her work as proving "that Derrida was not wrong when he said that Borges used to do in literature what himself used to in philosophy" (García Albadiz 22). In that provocative framework, it would be very interesting to delve into García Albadiz's analysis of the sixteenth stanza:

> "The rabbi was looking at him with tenderness
> and with some horror. *How (he told himself)*
> *could I beget this pitiful son*
> *and idleness I left, wherein sanity lies?"*
>
> (Borges PC 195).

The Chilean poet argues that the parenthesis we find here puts the emphasis in the words: "the existential crisis of the rabbi, and extrapolating of all humanity, lies on the words and not on things, not in reality but in the language with which the reality is constructed" (García Albadiz 20). We

[38] From here on, all translations of García Albadiz's paper are my own.

absolutely agree with this point of view – in our opinion the most interesting insight of this paper – and, accepting this, we see clearly the relation made by the author between Borges and Derrida, which confirms the idea we have been proposing in this thesis: that in playing with those concepts that would later become the essence of deconstruction, Borges constructs his poems with a structure that makes inevitable their constant self-deconstruction.

Nevertheless, since we know the importance of this poem – as representative of Borges' poetics and as a text that was cherished by the poet himself – and since we feel that the readings offered by Albadiz, Alazraki, and Gertel do not fully explore the radical consequences of the self-deconstructing process of this poem to its outmost extremes, we would like to offer now some possible readings, showing how this text's components work to pull us in different and often opposite directions, something that we have already showed is Borges' own way to transcend the limits of language. Let us start from the beginning of the poem, with the first two stanzas:

> "If (as the Greek affirms in the *Cratylus*)
> the name is archetype of the thing,
> in the letters of *rose* lies the rose
> and all the Nile in the word *Nile*.
>
> And, made of consonants and vowels,
> there'll be a terrible Name, which the essence
> will decode of God and which the Omnipotence
> could guard in cabalistic letters and syllables."
>
> (Borges PC 193).

Right from the start, as Albadiz suggested, the emphasis is on the words, which are here bestowed great power, that of signification but also, and foremost, that of creation. It is also the power of control, which is why the name of God would be terrible, while being also the guardian of the *Omnipotence*. Clearly, the reference to Cratylus confirms the main theme as being the power of words and the idea of true names, which are imitations of their referents, but it also sends us to the counterargument that was made in that Plato's work, arguing against the power of language to

reach any real knowledge: language might describe things, but it may also describe false things. And in fact, we do have here two verses that are very ambiguous, which are the third and the fourth: saying that a rose lies in the letters of rose, as all the Nile in the word Nile, it is saying that the word makes the thing, but at the same time that the thing is contained in the word; and the two do not mean the same.

In fact, the idea of the Nile being inside the word means also that the thing can modify the word: if we think about it, in seeing the Nile for the first time, a person could come up with something never thought before about it, for example that the river is made of stones. If this person were to write about the *stony Nile*, and such writing were to become popular, then for many the Nile would become associated with stones. Therefore, now this new meaning would be linked to the *Nile*, a word that to some would refer to God, to others just to a river, to some others now even to rocks, and so on. Basically, then, the word makes the thing, but the connotation we give to the thing itself with the passing of time ends up defining the connotations of the word, which containing the thing cannot avid the absorption of all its new meanings. This thought experiment hints that the relation between word and thing, for Borges, is bidirectional, which totally makes sense for someone who believes that words cannot absolutely describe reality, but that can create one (like a literary one). If this is the case, then why would the Argentinian be writing a poem attributing so much power to words and language?

One of the participants of our experiment must have asked the same question, and they came up with an answer that is a curious reading of the third verse specifically, and of the poem in general: “a mocking of Jewish devotion for the Kabbala and of what is related to their linguistic analysis (Appendix E, PG12). Although we can see where that interpretation comes from, we clearly do not agree with it, since we see some other powerful things in play here, than just a

mocking of an entire tradition. Indeed, Borges reasoning in here does not seem to be truly in the power of the words, but more in our innate incapacity to grasp the real concept of creation, especially the process of creation through the use of words. We can find some clues in the next verses:

> "Thirsting to know what God knows,
> Judah Loew applied himself in permutations
> of letters and complex variations
> and finally pronounced the Name, which is the Key,
> […]
> Why did I add to the infinite
> series another symbol? Why to the vain
> skein that winds in the eternal
> did I give another cause, another effect, and another sorrow?"
> (Borges PC 193,195).

In the first stanza above, which is the sixth of the poem, we see the rabbi Judah Leow, from the myth of the Golem, wanting to know what God knows. Then, in the other stanza (the seventeenth), we see him wondering, and being upset with himself, because he added a symbol, which clearly he thinks it was the cause of his failure. Now, there is a vast array of considerations to be made in here, like the arrogance of a man trying to become a God and deciding he can do better, adding something. There is the idea of the rabbi being destined to failure by his own nature: in fact in the third Stanza Borges brings into the conversation Adam and the Eden, saying that he knew in that place the terrible Name of God, but that sin has deleted it. If that it is so, then how could Judah have succeeded? There is also the clear paradox of a man doing something infinite, with the additional impossible thought of adding something, anything, to an infinite series. Surely, there are many other considerations that could be made, in addition to those few.

Nonetheless, our reasoning does not lie in any of those arguments, but in all of them together. Point being, the rabbi's arrogance, the denial of his own human condition, his paradoxical adding to an infinite series, and even the blaming of himself for doing so – still thinking he had

some power to control creation – all those components show the complete ignorance of the rabbi, who cannot comprehend the powers he wants to deal with, and yet he still tries, he still believes he can succeed, and he still blames himself for the failure, implying that with some more attention he could still make it. There is a clear lack of comprehension of how language works, especially this creative language. Language is fluid, and any given word has one meaning, while also, contemporarily, can have many hues and multiple significations. Words constantly refers to all the things they are not, until one item of that potentially infinite list suddenly becomes linked to it; then the list changes, although it is still virtually infinite. Words, for Borges, limit our ability to describe reality, but have the power to create our own realities. Then the real mistake that the rabbi does is not wanting to create with words, but wanting to imitate God with Its words, trying to reach for a creation that is beyond his possibilities, instead of focusing on the creation he could have accomplished with his own language, inside his own means.

One of our volunteers pointed out that, in their perspective, "the fundamental verse is 'Thirsting to know what God knows', that somehow it takes us to the original sin (Appendix E, PG1). Another argued that "the poem talks about humanity's limitation facing divinity. […] God created the man, just as the rabbi created the Golem. The man cannot understand God, just as the Golem cannot understand his (men is his God)" (Appendix E, PG4). They both sensed the importance of the divine theme in here, but they both focused on what they could read, which clearly reflects in the words and arguments they used, bringing to the discourse the same expressions and the same references that the poem gives them. But those analysis, although valid, are still limited, because they lack the transcendental view that is required to explore the multiple options that Borges lies in front of us. One of them is the deconstruction of the very valid interpretation about the divine, which in part contrasts our own signification given in the previous

paragraph, not invalidating it, yet showing a very different path. A path that, like a labyrinth, opens up when we thought we had finally reached the exit. These the last four verses of the poem:

> "In the hour of anguish and hazy light,
> on his Golem the eyes he was focusing.
> Who shall tell us the things that was feeling
> God, in looking at his rabbi in Prague?"
>
> (Borges PC 195).

This stanza does incredible things: it is true that it shows that hierarchy mentioned by our participant, making of men the creatures of God and also the gods of the Golem, but in creating these hierarchies while also connecting the rabbi's anguish to the insinuated torment of God, Borges is linking humans and God. Not only in their feelings, in their possible caring for others only as a mirror of themselves, but also – and foremost – in their failures. The las two verses, in fact, hint to the idea of God having failed with humans as the rabbi has failed with the Golem. In that case, then, the powerful language would be out of reach even for God, who masters it better than we do, and in fact he able to make a less imperfect creature, when compared to the Golem, but we are still not creatures that can learn "the hidden mysteries of Letters, of Time, and of Space" (Borges PC 194); at least, not as God knows and conceives them. To Its eyes, we might be barely "sweeping well or badly the synagogue" (Borges PC 194).

If this is so, then, after decoding it through some of Borges' symbology, the poem tells us very different things: for example, that the rabbi should had created through the means he had, his own words and his own language, but also that God had made the same mistake, attempting the creation of something similar to Itself, but failing. This last two distinct readings can mean truly anything and everything: they could mean that the rabbi is destined to try, and fail; that the rabbi should keep trying, because if we are the product of a mistake, of an imperfect sequence, who is to say what we could be able to create, even when failing? They could mean that the Golem could

be more than what the rabbi thinks of it, just as we humans surely feel more than what God might think of us. They might mean that there is something above God, a God's creator, who powerful language God tried to used but failed, just as the rabbi try to use God's writing to create something like himself, ending up with a different being.

All these possibilities are, at the end, what we were looking for. Because finding a definitive answer would mean that, maybe, this text was not so self-deconstructing as we argued for. After all, when Borges mentions the cat, the one who would hide when the Golem passed by, that one which "is not present in Scholem / but, through the sands of time, I divine it" (Borges PC 195), he is probably suggesting to us to stop looking for punctual things, to reverse that author-reader role and to take charge of his text. To start, in this way, to imagine, suspect, suppose, guess, assume, speculate, question, divine, and even dream, just to use a few of those verbs that Borges uses obsessively, as Alazraki would say.

Conclusions

Borges, as discussed, is convinced that language is limited and that we cannot hope to describe reality through it. Nevertheless, he also believes that to keep trying is our most brilliant accomplishment and our most important duty, which is why he closes *Diecisiete Haikus* with this last haiku:

> "La vieja mano
> sigue trazando versos
> para el olvido."[39]
> (Borges PC 574)

Even when suspecting, and possibly fearing, that sooner or later humanity could forget about him and his work; even in the certainty that time will, eventually, transform everything to dust; even in his old age, close to the end of his days; even then, he keeps *trazando* verses, that is tracing verses. Not writing nor scribbling, but tracing, a word that recalls so much Derrida's idea of trace. Having been this poem published in 1981, we are confident the use of the term is not a coincidence, and that this time Borges is not divining Derrida: he is referencing him.

This is the Borges we are left with, after we have attempted to expose the self-deconstructionism in his poetry. It was not an easy path, because in looking for those internal contradictions, the different significations, and the intrinsic tensions that work within the text, we found ourselves lost in a labyrinth engineered by a master of circularity. In this literary journey, we worked bringing into the analysis the texts of the Argentinian poet and the ideas of many of the most prominent critics of his work, with the intention to demonstrate that Borges invites contradictions and paradoxes and plays with them, leading the readers to different paths and nudging them toward different interpretations of his own work. Doing so, we have shown that

[39] "The old hand / keeps tracing verses / to oblivion".

Borges arrived at the point of inverting the roles between reality and fiction and between author and reader, inviting the latter to rewrite his texts and, in the process, recreating reality.

We even brough into the conversation thirty-two participants in a unique experiment, which had the power to ring to our eyes a different perspective on to the incredible array of interpretations that Borges' poetry delivers, at least when approached by the average poetry reader. Furthermore, through this experiment we worked with deconstructive ideas, manipulating the level of contextualization that our volunteers were given, so to study how additional information – or the lack of it – can influence the attribution of meaning to any text. In this framework, we consider the experiment as extremely successful, since the results show even more diversification than what we had anticipated during the planning phases, which was a clear confirmation of the arguments proposed in our thesis.

About those arguments, we have proposed that Borges thrived in the use and the implementation of those devices that today we would call deconstructionist, not only as tools to approach the works of others as a fervent reader and as an acute critic himself, but also and foremost in the construction of his own writings. We have asserted that the Argentinian poet assumes and even plants those tensions that Derrida would use to tear apart many philosophical texts, and that he does so to guarantee that his poems can reach their full potential, transcending through a vast net of referentiality the limits of language. More than anything else, we have argued that all such devices were mainly used to equip his texts with a certain multiplicity of interpretations, and that he has equipped them so by taking advantage of opposing and contradictory words, thoughts, and messages, and through the use of a symbolic system that opens all his poems to virtually his entire work, both as a writer and as a reader.

We *suspect* that we have been able to prove those arguments.

F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote: “the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function” (Fitzgerald). If we accept this premise, then Jorge Luis Borges’ intelligence is simply out of this world, considering that the Argentinian was not only able to hold opposing ideas in his mind at the same time but, as we have shown here, he was even able to develop an entire literature based on the idea that, in the impossibility to express meaning, it is the clash of contradictions, the insolvability and logic-braking of paradoxes, and the merge of opposing things what can – and will – open the full spectrum of a text for us. This opening is, ultimately, what can get the reader a little closer to some of the author’s intentions, while also getting authors more prone to submit to the readers’ own agency, and to make peace with the idea that their texts will do their own thing. Again, we are not sure of this, but we sure do *suspect* it.

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AP: Borges, Jorge Luis. *Antología Personal*. Sol 90, 2001.

EA: Borges, Jorge Luis. *El Aleph*. Vintage Español, Una División de Random House, Inc., 2011.

F-OC: Borges, Jorge Luis. “Ficciones”. *Obras Completas*, II, Emecé, Barcelona, 1989.

IA: Borges, Jorge Luis. *El Idioma de Los Argentinos*. Seix Barral, 1994.

OI: Borges, Jorge Luis. *Otras Inquisiciones*. Editorial Sur, 1952.

OP: Borges, Jorge Luis. *Obra Poética: 1923-1969*. Emecé Ed., 1972.

PC: Borges, Jorge Luis. *Poesía Completa*. Vintage Español, Una División de Random House, Inc., , 2011.

APPENDIX A

Si (como afirma el griego en el *Crátilo*)
el nombre es arquetipo de la cosa
en las letras de *rosa* está la rosa
y todo el Nilo en la palabra *Nilo*.

Y, hecho de consonantes y vocales,
habrá un terrible Nombre, que la esencia
cifre de Dios y que la Omnipotencia
guarde en letras y sílabas cabales.

Adán y las estrellas lo supieron
en el jardín. La herrumbre del pecado
(dicen los cabalistas) lo ha borrado
y las generaciones lo perdieron.

Los artificios y el candor del hombre
no tienen fin. Sabemos que hubo un día
en que el pueblo de Dios buscaba el Nombre
en las vigilias de la judería.

No a la manera de otras que una vaga
sombra insinúan en la vaga historia,
aún está verde y viva la memoria
de Judá León, que era rabino en Praga.

Sediento de saber lo que Dios sabe,
Judá León se dio a permutaciones
de letras y a complejas variaciones
y al fin pronunció el Nombre que es la Clave,

la Puerta, el Eco, el Huésped y el Palacio,
sobre un muñeco que con torpes manos
labró, para enseñarle los arcanos
de las Letras, del Tiempo y del Espacio.

El simulacro alzó los soñolientos
párpados y vio formas y colores
que no entendió, perdidos en rumores
y ensayó temerosos movimientos.

Gradualmente se vio (como nosotros)
aprisionado en esta red sonora
de Antes, Después, Ayer, Mientras, Ahora,
Derecha, Izquierda, Yo, Tú, Aquellos, Otros.

(El cabalista que ofició de numen
a la vasta criatura apodó Golem;
estas verdades las refiere Scholem
en un docto lugar de su volumen.)

El rabí le explicaba el universo
esto es mi pie; esto el tuyo, esto la soga.
y logró, al cabo de años, que el perverso
barriera bien o mal la sinagoga.

Tal vez hubo un error en la grafía
o en la articulación del Sacro Nombre;
a pesar de tan alta hechicería,
no aprendió a hablar el aprendiz de hombre.

Sus ojos, menos de hombre que de perro
y harto menos de perro que de cosa,
seguían al rabí por la dudosa
penumbra de las piezas del encierro.

Algo anormal y tosco hubo en el Golem,
ya que a su paso el gato del rabino
se escondía. (Ese gato no está en Scholem
pero, a través del tiempo, lo adivino.)

Elevando a su Dios manos filiales,
las devociones de su Dios copiaba
o, estúpido y sonriente, se ahuecaba
en cóncavas zalemas orientales.

El rabí lo miraba con ternura
y con algún horror. *¿Cómo* (se dijo)
pude engendrar este penoso hijo
y la inacción dejé, que es la cordura?

¿Por qué di en agregar a la infinita
serie un símbolo más? ¿Por qué a la vana
madeja que en lo eterno se devana,
di otra causa, otro efecto y otra cuita?

En la hora de angustia y de luz vaga,
en su Golem los ojos detenía.
¿Quién nos dirá las cosas que sentía
Dios, al mirar a su rabino en Praga?

APPENDIX B

Considere ahora la siguiente información respecto al poema que usted acaba de leer:

a. El poema se titula *El Golem*. Es de Jorge Luis Borges y se publicó en 1964 (escrito en 1958) en su libro *El Otro, el mismo*.
b. Borges nació en Buenos Aires, Argentina, pero vivió y estudió ya desde joven en Europa, especialmente en Suiza. El autor hablaba fluentemente muchos idiomas, entre los cuales el Español, su lengua nativa y en la que escribió sus poemas, el inglés el francés y el alemán.
c. El mito del golem al que se refiere el autor es el del cuento folclórico del rabí Judá León (Judha Loew), de Praga, quien se narra hubiese creado una creatura a partir del barro, insuflándole después una chispa divina que le habría dado la vida.
d. En 1955, antes de escribir este poema, Jorge Luis Borges había perdido completamente la vista, factor que muchos críticos sugieren haya sido clave en la activa imaginación que le permitió al autor argentino crear símbolos literarios innovativos.

APPENDIX C

Indescifrada y sola, sé que puedo
ser en la vaga noche una plegaria
de bronce o la sentencia en que se cifra
el sabor de una vida o de una tarde
o el sueño de Chuang Tzu, que ya conoces
o una fecha trivial o una parábola
o un vasto emperador, hoy unas sílabas,
o el universo o tu secreto nombre
o aquel enigma que indagaste en vano
a lo largo del tiempo y de sus días.
Puedo ser todo. Déjame en la sombra.

APPENDIX D

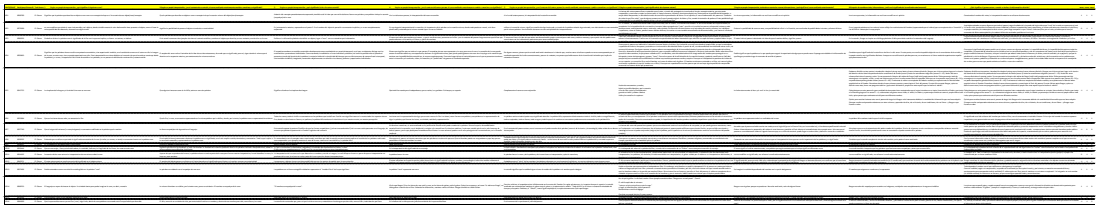
Considere ahora la siguiente información respecto al poema que usted acaba de leer:

1. El poema se titula *Signos*. Es de Jorge Luis Borges y se publicó en 1976 (escrito el mismo año) en su libro *La Moneda de Hierro*.
2. En su publicación, el poema está introducido por el siguiente fragmento:

   "Hacía 1915, en Ginebra, vi en la terraza de un museo una alta campana con caracteres chinos. En 1976 escribo estas líneas".
3. Borges nació en Buenos Aires, Argentina, pero vivió y estudió ya desde joven en Europa, especialmente en Suiza. El autor hablaba fluentemente muchos idiomas, entre los cuales el español, su lengua nativa y en la que escribió sus poemas, el inglés el francés y el alemán. Borges no hablaba ni sabía leer en chino.
4. En 1955, antes de escribir este poema, Jorge Luis Borges había perdido completamente la vista, factor que muchos críticos sugieren haya sido clave en la activa imaginación que le permitió al autor argentino crear símbolos literarios innovativos.
5. Jorge Luis Borges vivió, si bien con algo de distancia física – pero no intelectual – las dos guerras mundiales y muchos de sus ensayos, artículos y hasta cuentos denunciaron los horrores de la guerra y aún más los fallos que llevan al hombre a tales horrores.
6. En la cultura en la que creció Borges, la campana fue sinónimo de alarma pero también de llamada a la comunidad, fuertemente ligada tanto a las iglesias (misa, luto, celebración del día de fiesta, etc.) como al sistema de las ciudades europeas y de estampo europeo de avisar de algún peligro tocando al unísono todas las campanas de la ciudad.

APPENDIX E

APPENDIX E



APPENDIX F

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT	Participant Private ID	Task Name	object-7-value	object-3-value	object-26-value	object-33-value	object-35-value	object-37-value	verse	stanza	poem	TOT
PS1	8268866	Signos	El poema nos transmite un sensación de absoluta indefinición (Indescifrada palabra clave) y al mismo tiempo de presunta omnipotencia del autor / protagonista ("Puedo ser todo", sentencia al cabo de una larga lista de diferentes opciones, cuyo último elemento es sin embargo "un enigma que indagaste en vano"), omnipotencia que en el fondo no es foriera de una sensación de verdadera satisfacción o felicidad sino más bien de miedo, angustia y tristeza, que provoca la sentencia final "Déjame en la sombra"	La primera estrofa es clave, porque comprende la indicación inicial de "indescifrada" y de poder "sé que puedo". Es también indicativo que los primeros elementos del elenco, que seguirá en el resto del poema, también hay un primer atisbo de omnipotencia, "la sentencia en que se cifra el sabor de una vida"	Respecto a lo expresado anteriormente, vale subrayar como el poner en un mismo plano "el sabor de una vida entera o de una tarde" subentienda un profundo pesimismo y relativismo, como se la vida de uno pudiera valer lo mismo que la tarde de otro	No cambia la interpretación anterior	La palabra indescifrada ahora toma también un sentido descriptivo, puesto que el autor, a no conocer el idioma chino, no podía descifrar las inscripciones sobre la campana. Pero el sentido y la interpretación quedan iguales en el uso metafórico que el autor hace del objeto en cuestión (la campana)	En la lectura original, "indescifrada y sola" sugería un autor femenino. Con el conocimiento de que quien habla es en realidad un objeto (campana china), cabe preguntarse porque el autor se identifica con ese objeto y lo hace protagonista, narrador de sus propias reflexiones. Una posible explicación es que el autor, al volverse ciego, identificara su existencia más con los sonidos (las palabras son sonidos) que con las imágenes. Y también la palabra final (Sombra) toma ahora otro valor, como si el autor no sólo aceptara su falta de visión sino que hasta la considerara una forma de protección, de intimidad, de introspección	1	1	-1	1
PS2	8285819	Signos	*Las posibilidades multiplas e infinitas de nuestro intelecto.*	Se refiere al significado de la vida quizás s, pero es un poco vago.	El objetivo o en última instancia el significado que tuvo la vida.	La campana y su sonido, pueden ser aviso del significado de la vida.	La campana y su sonido son metáfora de poder ver realizadas las proprias esperanzas y sueños.	La campana es una metáfora, según por qué suene puede ser portadora de buenas o malas noticias y otorgar el significado de la vida. Se transforma, por lo tanto, en una guía también interior.	1	-1	-1	-1
PS3	8303552	Signos	Interpreto la expresión de una persona atravesada por un difícil momento, en el cual se cuestiona su existencia y sobre todo que caminos tomar dentro de la situación que atraviesa. Tal vez sea una desilusión de amor, entonces esta persona no sabe que valor tiene, o cuanto lo valora su pareja.	La persona en cuestión sufre la soledad y se cuestiona que a veces tiene valor para alguien y a veces no. La persona puede ser fuertemente deseada por alguien que quiera compartir mucho tiempo, o no tan deseada y que se quiera compartir poco tiempo, tal vez un placer rápido.	Significa un tiempo muy largo o un tiempo muy corto, de un solo día. Relacionado a cuánto tiempo quiere pasar una persona con otra, si hay un interés real de compartir una vida juntos o solo compartir un momento.	La sentencia de la campana, en el sentido de si es un campanal de peligro o un campanal de un evento social.	De bronce por el material de la campana, plegaria por la vinculación con la iglesia. "Indescifrada" tal vez porque al haber letras en chino en la campana y Borges que no podía entender el idioma.	Creo que se refiere a las diferentes interpretaciones que tiene el sonido de la campana, por lo mencionado en la explicación, puede significar peligro, la misa, un velorio, etc.	-1	-1	-1	-3
PS4	8307327	Signos	El poema habla de la búsqueda de su identidad por parte de su autora. Esta habla de sus muchas facetas, de todas las posibilidades que se presentan ante ella. Se dirige a un interlocutor que puede ser un amante, ella misma o el universo.	La autora considera que ante ella se despliegan múltiples posibilidades, que puede ser una cosa efímera y relacionada con la fe, como es una plegaria; pero también algo muy concreto y terrenal, como una sentencia.	Son las palabras que recogen la experiencia.	Entendiendo que quien habla es la campana, el verso habla de su función de aviso, por ejemplo de la hora, de una alarma o de la muerte de alguien.	La campana, indescifrada porque el autor no sabe leer los caracteres que la decoran y sola, es consciente de su gran valor como herramienta de comunicación.,	La campana se interroga sobre su identidad, su rol, y manifiesta su gran importancia. Las campanas nos atraen, pero a la vez son cerradas, misteriosas.	-1	-1	-1	-3
PS5	8327097	Signos	Pareciera hablar de la potencialidad de ser de algo. Como si fuera una entidad abarcativa y a la vez diminuta. Como el tiempo. Pero no se, no soy de la poesia	Que decirte. No la entiendo. Funciona de manera comparativa, tratando de que en la comparacion encontremos sentido.	Me remite a descubrir el codigo de el adn. Comu si descubriendolo pudieras encontrar el significado de la vida.	Con la nueva información pareciera hablar del repiqueteo de una campana, según la circunstancia podría significar una señal de alarma o una experiencia en comunidad.	Pareciera hablar sobre la potencialidad de descubrir el significado de algo, puede ser un ejercicio placentero o no.	No se la verdad me remite a la palabra, al sentido, a los secretos, a veces mejor dejarlos en la sombra. Como si los aspectos de la vida que no son agradables no necesitaran ser nombrados. Borges nunca adopto una postura critica sobre el contexto político de su pais así que tiene sentido. Pero la mía es una lectura prejuiciosa porque no me gusta Borges ni la poesía.	-1	-1	-1	-3
PS6	8328656	Signos	Significa una descripción interior de un momento de sufrimiento por la poca atención de alguien importante.	Hay un sentimiento de una persona que expresa que no la entienden.	Tiene que ver el efecto de esa persona en su estado de ánimo.	Conociendo la historia, puede ser que le esté haciendo el verso a la campaña.	Definitivamente los sentimientos despertados por una campaña, positivos o negativos.	La mirada poética de un maestro de las letras para reflejar sentimientos sobre ciertas vivencias.	-1	-1	-1	-3
PS7	8330329	Signos	Cómo toda interpretación es subjetiva. A mí me remite al mundo vasto e indescifrable de los sueños, allí donde el inconsciente se siente a gusto bailoteando sin permiso por todos los rincones del alma.	Me produce una leve alarma porque todo puede suceder.....	Las marcas que deja la vida no dependen del tiempo. Un instante puede definir la existencia.	La alarma frente al todo puede suceder remite a situaciones extremas cómo la guerra en donde el miedo en las sombras es el protagonista y acecha a cada instante.	Sentencia, situación atrapante, incontrolable que marca el destino de una comunidad.	El horror de la guerra, la imposición violenta que proviene del afuera y el guardar todo lo que sucede en el mundo interno relacionado a lo trágico y al pánico que provoca.	-1	1	-1	-1
PS8	8330720	Signos	Pienso que puede referirse a algo divino, al misterio de la vida misma que como misterio debe permanecer. Lo pienso por el sueño de Chuang Tzu, que supongo se refiere al poema de Borges sobre el sueño de convertirse en mariposa, la pregunta por el ser y la transformación.	Pienso que puede referirse tanto a la vida como a la muerte	Este verso en particular me hace pensar en el sentido de una vida	Seguramente puede tener que ver con el sonido de la campana de bronce pero no deja de coincidir con mi interpretación sobre la vida y la muerte en el contexto de una guerra en este caso	Que es simbólico el toque de campana en el sentido que la vida o la muerte están siempre como una posibilidad	Me parece muy complejo interpretar a Borges, siempre va a haber algún sentido que se nos escapa y al mismo tiempo deja lugar a múltiples maneras de pensarlo. Pienso en la vida, la muerte como transformación. El sentido y el misterio	1	1	-1	1
PS9	8331449	Signos	Habla de aquello que tiene nombre pero no alcanza ese nombre: el amor	Todas las cosas que pueden ser el amor	Lo que dice.	Podría referir también a la muerte, pero después de haber leído a Borges, no sería la primera vez que alude a dos temas diferentes con un mismo texto.	Lo mismo que puse anteriormente.	Lo puse más arriba. Puede ser tanto el amor como la muerte.	-1	-1	-1	-3
PS10	8338768	Signos	Un desenamoramiento.	El escriba está en estas palabras realizando un intento desesperado de demostración de amor hacia el destinatario o destinataria del poema	Que es la única chance que va a tener para llevar a cabo lo que quiere realizar-	Mi mirada sobre el verso no varía, ya que para analizar el verso, reflejo lo que me sucede a mí al leer el poema.	A la primera lectura, en la que a mi parecer se encuentra un sentir amoroso hacía alguien, se le puede agregar una segunda, en la cual apreciar la importancia que Borges le dedica a lo basto, ya que es una dimensión que a costa de su ceguera va perdiendo y solo pasa a ser una mera sensación.	Se puede apreciar un dejo de desdicha hacia un mundo que ya no le pertenece, recuerdos que atesora pero no va a volver a vivir	1	-1	-1	-1
PS11	8341605	Signos	Es una reflexión sobre el motivo de la existencia de la vida del autor, donde lo embarga la nostalgia.	Una exclamación de lo incomprendido que se siente el autor, que no sabe claramente que es lo que él es	El autor se siente juzgado, por lo que ha hecho en su vida, que no sabe a ciencia cierta si ha sido bueno o malo.	Un alerta ante el peligro que representa un guerra y un llamado de alerta a resguardar la vida ante el peligro que acecha en la sombra.	El significado es de nostalgia ante la situación tan triste que se vive ante la guerra.	Ante la falta del sentido de la vista del autor, el se sentía informado ante los sonidos de la campana, y él podía intuir cuando se trataba de un peligro que lo acechaba producto de la guerra o cuando se trataba de un llamado al pueblo por una misa, un acontecimiento especial del pueblo, etc.	-1	-1	-1	-3
PS12	8345751	Signos	Pienso que el poema significa el sentimiento expresado de una mujer que se siente sola y busca formas que seam metáforas para expresar este sentimiento. Una mujer que quizás se adapte al ambiente en que se encuentre y poder así seguir sobreviviendo.	Pienso que esta estrofa significa/hace referencia a la soledad que caracteriza a esta mujer pero a la misma vez nos da a entender que ella se considera de mucho valor para algún hombre.	Pienso que el verso que esta escrito arriba significa que quizás la mujer del poema puede ser una sentencia dulce en la vida de un hombre.	Tomando en cuenta la información dada, puedo decir que el verso analizado anteriormente puede hacer referencia a los horrores que vivió en el contexto de la guerra y así poder ver el gran cambio que la vida hizo no solo a él sino a todo su entorno, familias, ciudades, etc. Esto sin duda alguna hace que todos los días de su vida no hayan sido igual ya que el recuerdo de lo que paso sigue intacto y las secuelas que dejo ese amargo pasado esta presente en su nación y las personas.	Pienso que el significado de la estrofa pudiera hacer referencia al hecho que unos años antes perdío la vista pero eso no fue impedimento para seguir haciendo lo que le apasionaba. Quizás haya una colección entre la vaga noche y el hecho de estar ciego ya que hace sinónimo de oscuridad pero a la misma vez el hecho de ser una plegaria de bronce puede significar que dentro de la oscuridad puede haber un rayo de luz que haga que el panorama cambie y se pueda sacar/hacer algo bueno de ello.	Pienso que el poema entero hace referencia a que las indiscapacidades así como a lo que es capaz de hacer. Es decir, que en este poema el de manera no muy directa utilizando metáforas nos dice que puede ser de gran ayuda independientemente cual sea su situación. Que el hecho de haber perdido la vista no es un impedimento para poder seguir desarrollandose en su area y que todo lo que ha vivido a lo largo de su vida le ayudo a convertirse en lo que fue.	-1	-1	-1	-3
PS13	8362384	Signos	Una evocación a la muerte tal vez. Dejar en la sombra lo desconocido, lo que puede ser definitivo, enigmático y todo al fin y al cabo.	Algo definitivo desde lo simple. Abarcando una experiencia de vida o de un momento, como una tarde	Es tan importante un momento en la existencia, como varios.	Agonía y muerte cercana	Se siente triste y presiente el final	Es su manera de entender la muerte y su trascendencia	-1	-1	1	-1
PS14	8374799	Signos	Entiendo que es un poema en que alguien está en una posición desconocida para otra persona. Pero que pese a ese desconocimiento, prefiere la incertidumbre, prefiere no obtener una respuesta definitiva	Entiendo que es la certeza que tiene su autor de ser la respuesta que busca alguien a sus inquietes más profundas	Entiendo que el autor se refiere a sí mismo como la solución para algo efímero o más duradero	Entiendo que el autor se refiere a las muchas posibilidades que tiene ser en la vida de otra persona, pero que prefiere mantenerse en duda de saber exactamente qué es	Entiendo que se refiere a sentirse o muy pequeño o muy grande	Entiendo que se refiere a querer ser algo para alguien, entre muchas posibilidades, pero sin embargo, preferir mantenerse en la eterna duda	-1	-1	-1	-3
PS15	8400910	Signos	Es un poema de Borges. Habla de una persona que puede tomar muchas personalidades, tantas como se le pida, pero que prefiere seguir donde está.	El mundo puede cambiar, depende del momento, del lugar, de las ganas. Nuestro mundo siempre depende de nosotros, en qué transformarse, cómo hacerlo.	La vida toda o una tarde, tienen situaciones que la marcan, que sentencian cuál ha sido nuestra huella.	Cada campanada funciona como elemento vital para orientar el día, la tarde, la vida. Darle sentido a las cosas a partir de ese momento en el que esa campana suena y dispara la imaginación de Borges.	La campana, indescifrada y sola, en lo alto puede funcionar de muchas maneras. La plegaria de bronce es esa campana que al sonar, en forma de oración, orienta en la vaga noche a Borges.	En Borges la búsqueda de los signos para darle sentido al universo, más aún luego de perder la visión, fue casi una obsesión. La interpretación que hago del poema es la de un autor que cada campanada la imagina de una manera diferente, que cada vez que la escucha le da un sentido. Puede ser todo lo que quiera ser, cosas que conoce y que desconoce. Pero que al final prefiere volver al centro, al silencio, a la soledad.	-1	-1	-1	-3