

Ellery Queen and Jorge Luis Borges:
Variations on the Theme of 'Popular' and 'Serious'

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This paper will be comparative in two senses: in the more traditional sense of 'comparative literature', discussing literary works from two different cultures, written in two different languages; and in the less familiar sense of discussing at the same time and in the same voice works which are conventionally placed in different cultural categories, the 'popular' and the 'serious'. Here the accent will fall rather more insistently on the act of comparing in the second sense, not least because of the unfamiliarity and problematic nature of such a procedure. A basic assumption of such a procedure (which I shall not attempt to validate here) is that the division of the 'popular' and the 'serious' is neither natural nor universal, and is thus itself open to questioning, redefinition, or transformation. The specific division which I have in mind is that cultural discrimination which emerges in Western Capitalist societies in the last hundred years or so, a historical process described and analysed most clearly by Raymond Williams in the context of modern British society.¹ Along with Williams, I share the belief in the value of the gradual emergence of a 'common' culture in a particular society which will render the division of 'popular' and 'serious' obsolete. The connexion between these assumptions and beliefs and the practice of comparative study in the first sense, and by extension the wider field of international relations, will remain to a large extent implicit and problematic; but as a British subject writing at least in part about an Argentinian writer, it may not be entirely irrelevant to recall that, at the time of writing, the importation of Argentine books into the United Kingdom is banned by the British Government.

It seems possible to classify cultural products into the divisions of 'popular' and 'serious' according to three criteria: (a) sociological, according to the modes of production and reception (including class analysis of writership and readership); (b) formal, according to the relation to the rules and conventions of genre; and (c) in terms of cultural value. Now, although each of these three criteria is far from self-evident and self-justifying, and requires further elucidation, my own analysis will tend to concentrate on the third and most problematic of the three. Thus my consideration of the fictions of Ellery Queen and Jorge Luis Borges is involved in questions of much wider cultural significance which can be engaged with on a number of levels. Within my own work, this particular exercise forms part of a more general discussion of certain assump-

tions (which can briefly be termed Realist) concerning writing and reading narrative still dominant in the West despite a number of direct and indirect challenges to them, a discussion focusing on the forms of mystery in narrative in three broadly distinguishable literary modes: (bourgeois) Realist fiction; Modernist narrative; and 'popular' mystery genres (the detective story, in particular).

It is the project of Realism to reproduce what is discursively familiar to the reader, to reconfirm an existing (ideological) understanding of being in the world; that is, not necessarily reproducing the set of social relations familiar to a particular group of readers (ie what is known) but rather reproducing the way in which the reader generally knows the world.² This reproduction can be subdivided into three elements: illusion, closure, and hierarchy of discourses. Illusion (or transparency) is the illusion that when reading such a narrative, the reader is not engaged in a mediated, discursive, linguistic activity but is in some way directly experiencing the world. This is very frequently an illusion of depth, drawing attention away from the linguistic surface, the level of the signifier, to some suggested depth (psychological depth of character, for example), the level of the signified. Even Classical Realism cannot escape narrative as process, but here the process is consistently one of movement towards narrative closure. Characteristically this movement is from narrative problems (disruption of an established order of things, either presented at or assumed to pre-exist the opening of the narrative: most typically crime, love, war, or a journey or quest) to a solution of those problems and a restoration of the established order. Mystery is frequently important to this movement from disruption to order, which is characterised by a process of delay, of economy, in the revelation of information. Yet despite this manipulation of delay, economy, and secrecy, the security of the reader in the narrative process is generally maintained by the operation of the hierarchy of discourses, that is, a hierarchy of knowledge diffused in the narrative across a range of characters, whose perspective on the recounted events, whose discourse, is directly or indirectly presented, together with, most importantly, an authorial and authoritative discourse, which contains and controls all the other less privileged, partial discourses. This dominant, 'knowing' point of view the reader shares or comes to share. The security comes from the knowledge not only of the origin of each discourse but also of the relationships among them.

In one sense, at this general level, Modern narrative must remain negatively defined as non- or anti-Realist, since positively Modern narrative practice is both very diverse and extraordinarily difficult to classify. Nevertheless, we may be able to make some kind of positive statement by reverting to the terms 'illusion', 'closure', and 'hierarchy of discourses'. Modern narrative resists

illusion by drawing attention to its own discursiveness, interrupting the unidirectional journey from signifier to signified, decentring the stable referents of Classical narrative - time, place, and person; it disrupts the movement towards closure, satisfying itself with the progressive generation of narrative problems; and the authorised hierarchy of discourses is replaced with unauthorised atonality. Here the delay generated by narrative mystery may be permanent. Borrowing terminology from Roland Barthes, we might further distinguish Modernist from Realist narrative with reference to the pairings writerly/readerly and production/consumption, that is, the extent to which the reader is encouraged either to become actively engaged in the production of new meanings or merely to receive pre-established cultural meanings.³ The central contention is that, in its subversion of the dominant assumptions of Realism, and in drawing attention to the acts of writing and reading themselves, Modernism is a potentially radical practice which may participate in a transformation of the ways in which we read and write our lives outside the field of fiction.

Tzvetan Todorov's essay 'Typologie du roman policier'⁴ begins with a general discussion of genre theory and concludes that there are two aesthetic norms in modern Western society: those of 'l'art "populaire"', characterised by conformity to established rules and conventions, and 'le "grand" art', characterised by transgression of established rules and conventions. The relationship between these 'popular' narrative formulas and the assumptions of Classical Realism is central here. In general, the awareness of the rules and conventions of genre on both the writer's and the reader's part contributes not a little to the disruption of illusion, which is one reason why both Realist narrative practice, and the traditional critical responses to it, are in general resistant to the notion of genre itself. But more specifically, the detective story in particular, while functioning as a paradigm of the Realist enterprise in terms of closure and hierarchy of discourses, shows considerable resistance to illusion. This is partly a question of the strong ludic element (both on the level of the narrated, a game between criminal and detective, and on the level of the narration, a game between writer and reader), partly a question of the resistance to the notion of depth contained in the detective story's superordinate concern with clues, with things rather than people, with the 'how' rather than the 'why' of human action, and partly a question of the strong epistemological (the word is not too strong) interest of the classical detective story, that is in foregrounding not so much what we know as how we come to know it.⁵ In addition, there is considerable evidence that the detective story problematises the neat sociological analysis of 'popular' forms in terms of both writer- and reader-ship. There is no doubt that a not inconsiderable number of the most 'famous' of detective stories are produced by writers known also as 'serious' authors in

other fields. Such a list might begin with Poe, Conan Doyle, Chesterton, Ronald Knox, Dorothy L Sayers, JIM Stewart, and C Day Lewis. And though there is, as far as I am aware, no empirical evidence to prove it unquestionably, the common assumption that 'off duty' academics and literati form a significant sub-group among the readers of the detective story seems to have some foundation.

There are a number of points which must be stressed in conjunction with the above model. The first is that the specific focus on the detective story is in no way intended to demonstrate a special case which would then become available for elevation to the ranks of the 'serious', without disturbing the dualism itself. Rather, the point is that the contradictions inherent in a particular and widespread cultural model might emerge with greater clarity in a specific local context. Secondly, my own triadic model of Realism, Modernism, and 'Popular' is not presented as a problem-free, hard-edged, universalisation, itself free from redefinition and transformation in specific local and historical contexts. It is conceived as an analytical framework not as an empirical description, and will be most productive at the dangerous edges where the absolute-ness of the distinctions begins to break down. More specifically, in the act of confronting the widely-held and deeply-felt division of 'popular' and 'serious' with my own more narrowly based triadic model, the assumptions underlying both may be seen in a clearer perspective.

Perhaps we can clarify this point with reference to books by Julian Symons and John G Cawelti⁶ which attempt respectively a rapprochement of and a discrimination between the 'popular' and the 'serious' in the context of mystery narrative and in terms of cultural value rather than sociological or formal categories, but without any attempt to question the binary model itself. Symons' Bloody Murder presents a historical survey of the development of the 'crime novel' from the 'detective story'. The argument is organised principally around the opposition of surface and depth, and the transformation from 'story' to 'novel' indicates a bridging of the cultural divide, suggesting that the modern form is both a 'serious' psychological novel which happens to deal with the 'springs of crime', and an extension of the 'popular' formula. Symons provides a catalogue of the principal distinguishing features, all of which can be seen as reinforcements of the Realist assumption of 'illusion'. In Cawelti's investigation of the nature and significance of popular genres in Adventure, Mystery, and Romance, in the laudable attempt to escape the elitist assumptions inherent in the division of 'low' and 'high' culture, he suggests instead a distinction between the 'formulaic' and the 'mimetic', a distinction which is characterised by differing degrees of 'uncertainty' and of faithfulness to the 'representation of reality'. The argument is thus conducted within the oppositions of ideal/real and escape/confrontation. Without in any way undermining the importance of the

efforts of Symons and Cawelti to redirect serious attention towards consistently marginalised aspects of our culture, it is nevertheless clear that the procedures adopted by both allow little possibility of questioning the assumptions of Realism and thus of undermining the assumed unity of the 'serious'.

My own procedure will attempt both a rapprochement and a discrimination at different levels, and in ways that I hope may contribute to a re-thinking of the division of 'popular' and 'serious' itself. The rapprochement involves a recognition of the basic but nonetheless significant curiosities and desires that are both fulfilled and generated by the acts of writing and reading a story, any story. This point is made simply by Gabriel Josipovici:

I want to suggest that there is no clear line of demarcation between highbrow and lowbrow literature that our excitement at reading the title: 'The Body in the Library' on the spine of the book, our wanting to know: Which Body? How? Why? - that these are not questions we should be embarrassed about. On the contrary they are essential to our quest.⁷

The discriminations, which will cut across the divisions of 'serious' and 'popular', will be centred on the degree of collusion with the assumptions of Realism, and will be conducted principally in terms of degrees of producibility and vulnerability. The first has already been defined to some extent; 'vulnerability' is some form of recognition of the public nature of discursive acts, of the fact that narrative processes cannot be controlled by a single subject, whether author or reader. I hope to make the precise implications of these terms clearer in the more specific discussion which follows, but at this stage Pierre Macherey's comments provide useful indicators:

En fait... il n'y a pas de livre innocent: la spontanéité apparente du livre facile, promis à une consommation immédiate, suppose la mise en oeuvre de moyens éprouvés, empruntés souvent à la littérature la plus concertée, et transmis d'oeuvre en oeuvre par une très secrète tradition... Mais... s'il n'y a pas de livre tout à fait innocent, il n'y a pas non plus de livre tout à fait averti: conscient de la nature des moyens qu'il emploie pour être livre, sachant ce qu'il fait.⁸

I

Turning more specifically to the writings of Queen and Borges, I intend to discuss both direct (metonymic) connexions, that is overt evidence of two-way influence, and indirect (difference in similarity) relations, focusing as much as possible on narrative structure and mode and its implications for the acts of reading and interpretation.

The first detective novel by Ellery Queen (the pseudonym of the cousins Manfred B Lee and Frederic Dannay) was published in 1929,⁹ at the height of what Howard Haycraft has called 'the Golden Age of the detective story'.¹⁰ The model for the classical detective story created by Poe in the 1840s solidified into what we now call a popular genre or formula only at the end of the century, not least because of the enormous popularity of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, and the exponential increase in the writing and reading of detective narrative which it helped to generate, not only in England, but also more widely. After the turn of the century, this increasing public interest in the form was accompanied by a startling increase in the ingenuity, sophistication, and self-consciousness of both writers and (presumably) readers, a process that is perhaps best seen sub specie ludi.¹¹ The defensive tone of early essays on the detective story by its practitioners (most notably GK Chesterton and R Austin Freeman)¹² is rapidly replaced by a frank glorying in the artificiality and playful qualities of the form, as witnessed by the essays of SS Van Dine and Ronald Knox.¹³ In offering ten frivolous commandments for the detective story writer, Knox suggests that the detective story is a game played between 'the author of the one part and the reader of the other', according to rules not 'in the sense in which poetry has rules.. but in the sense in which cricket has rules - a far more impressive consideration to the ordinary Englishman'. The founding of the London Detection Club in the late 1920s (with Chesterton as its first president), is also symptomatic of the desire for public control of the rule-making process.

The ingenuity of many writers is evidenced by the fact that as much delight is taken in redefining, bending, or breaking the rules as in playing according to them. Perhaps EC Bentley's Trent's Last Case (1913), Agatha Christie's The Murder of Roger Ackroyd (1926), Anthony Berkeley's The Poisoned Chocolates Case (1929), Dorothy L Sayers' The Nine Tailors (1934), John Dickson Carr's The Hollow Man (1935), Leo Bruce's Case for Three Detectives (1936), Dennis Wheatley and JG Link's 'murder dossier' Murder Off Miami (1936) and Cameron McCabe's The Face on the Cutting-Room Floor (1937) may be seen as representative peaks of this highly sophisticated game-playing. Each of these examples works by encouraging the reader to accept the rules and conventions of the game and generating surprise by breaking them. And since each writer relies on the sophistication of the reader as regards familiarity with previous examples, the ingenuity spirals to a remarkable extent.

In order to understand this process, we need to appreciate the extent to which the model of the classical detective story as created by Poe and Doyle is founded on a series of binary oppositions, beginning with that of mystery and solution. Since the interest in the form is generated by an insistent delay in

the movement from mystery to solution, a gap emerges which must be filled in some way. In the Sherlock Holmes stories the most common strategy is the mystification of the activity of the detective. In the later 'game-playing' versions of the Golden Age, this is accompanied most frequently by a false solution (or series of false solutions) which may be either supernatural (as most frequently in Chesterton's Father Brown stories) or natural ('the thrill of having suspected the wrong person' in Knox's phrase,¹⁴ seen most notably in Christie). The opposition of chance and order (seemingly accidental, contingent details which prove to be vital links in the chain of evidence) is basic to the classical detective story, but the ingenious examples I am describing just as often exploit the second level opposition between order and plan. The specific occasions of this are the conspiracy and the frame. The former allows the criminal(s) to set traps for the detective as well as vice-versa, with the consequent possibility of double-, triple-bluffs etc almost ad infinitum. In the latter, clues are fabricated by the criminal in order to lead the detective to suspect the wrong person, so that patient appears as agent. The conspiracy and the frame are the overt signs that a game is being played inside the story between criminal and detective, as well as outside between writer and reader, that the criminal, as well as the writer, is both self-conscious and conscious of the audience. These devices allow a infinitely extendable series of inversions of false solutions, a Chinese box structure. Yet the significant point about this binary series is that (with notable exceptions such as the infinite regresses generated in the novels by Berkeley and McCabe noted above) each opposition reaches a point of stasis, where mystery gives way to solution, supernatural to rational, chance to order, order to plan, just as we finally reach the innermost box in the Chinese puzzle. Ultimately, then, the devices of the game-players present no inherent disturbance of narrative closure.

The Queen detective stories then both emerge from and contribute to this context. Like many of the 'game-playing' writers, Queen continued to write novels of the type I have been describing long after the Golden Age was supposed to have finished, producing a body of writing from the late 20s to the present day both varied and extensive. The most distinctive contributions are: the formalisation of the concept of the game between the writer and the reader, in the guise of an authorial 'Challenge to the Reader' issued before the end of each of the first nine novels, indicating that all the necessary information is now available for the reader to arrive at the correct solution; the delight in formal and symmetrical patterns, whereby the crime is made to conform to a pre-existent cultural model (a familiar narrative text, such as myth or nursery rhyme, or a game such as chess or cards), often generating the fear of the supernatural solution before restoring rational order through the revelation of

human intentions (often according to a Freudian model of depth psychology)¹⁵ on the part of the criminal, who proves to be as ingenious and sophisticated as the detective; and the extent to which the pleasure in game and pattern takes a verbal and textual form, again generating the frisson of the supernatural explanation this time through 'Kabbalistic' overtones.¹⁶

In Borges' tales the reader enters a world of stories, the world in the library, where the text is criss-crossed with literary allusions, where to tell is inevitably to re-tell. This inescapable intertextuality may also be seen sub specie ludi, for it participates in the serious delight in game, pattern, and deception which is most characteristic of Borges' fiction. It is then perhaps not surprising that Borges' interest in the detective story (and more specifically in the ingenious variety we have been describing), as witnessed throughout both his critical and fictional writings, is far from transitory. If, among the game-players, Borges' returns most often to Chesterton, (a relationship that has been well documented)¹⁷ the interest is by no means limited to a single writer. Borges' great friendship with Adolfo Bioy Casares, begun in the 1930s, has led to a long series of literary collaborations between the two. In the 1940s, their joint projects were most frequently in the field of the detective story. We must understand that the highly sophisticated Golden Age game-playing we have been describing was limited largely to Britain, the United States, and to a much lesser extent, France. Surprisingly, despite the cultural proximity of Buenos Aires to Paris, the detective story had made little impact on Argentine literature by the outbreak of the Second World War. In this context, as DA Yates demonstrates,¹⁸ Borges, fully aware of European and North American developments, acted as a sort of patron of the detective story in Argentina. In 1943, Borges and Casares produced an anthology of Los mejores cuentos policiales, including many by the game-players (Queen's 'The Adventure of the House of Darkness' was one) and a second augmented edition in 1951. Earlier, in 1942, the two writers published the volume Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi under the pseudonym of H Bustos Domecq.¹⁹

Seis Problemas is a singular addition to the annals of detective fiction, and reveals a certain indebtedness to Chesterton. According to Xavier Villaurutia, Parodi represents 'el primer detective sudamericano de calidad literaria',²⁰ According to the preliminary note by the fictitious 'Gervasio Montenegro', he is also the first authentically Argentinian detective, and the world's first imprisoned detective. Parodi conducts his investigations from Cell 273 of the National Penitentiary. According to 'Montenegro', this lack of mobility on the detective's part enables the writers to skip the tedious intermediary stage between the presentation of the mystery and the revelation of the solution. The first and best of the stories, 'Las doce figuras del mundo' is Chestertonian in

its overturning of the Lebanese mystical solution and its clever four card trick. The four cards correspond to 'los cuatro maestros que forman el velado tetragono de la Divinidad'. The follow-up to Seis Problemas, Un modelo para la muerte, published in 1946 under the pseudonym of B Suarez Lynch with a prologue by H Bustos Domecq, is also a Parodi detective story. The plot is an explicit if bizarre re-telling of Chesterton's 'The Oracle of the Dog', and Father Brown again makes a fleeting appearance transformed into the 'jefe de una banda de ladrones internacionales'. Chesterton's plot is turned upside down with great virtuosity: the only character with a water-tight alibi for not being at the scene of the crime is the victim. Yet, hardly suprisingly given the name of the detective, these Parodi stories are little more than very elaborate jokes.

In Borges' individual writings, the engagement with mystery and game can be seen in three different types of tale: (a) 'Notes towards the "metaphysical" detective story'. Borges has developed a fictional form distinguishable from his literary essays only by the fact the works discussed do not exist except inside the fiction. Of the many examples of this type of story, a number discuss postulated instances of 'metaphysical' detective stories, that is, stories which, in Borges' words, combine 'el mecanismo policial' and an 'under-current místico'.²¹ (b) 'The twist in the tale'. Tales which, without overtly using the mechanism of the detective story, exploit the possibilities of mystery and the 'final imprevisto'. (c) "'Metaphysical" detective stories'. 'La muerte y la brújula' and 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' (both from the volume Ficciones [1942]) are the examples where Borges works closest to the detective story itself. It is important to note here that the use of the term 'metaphysical' in parentheses implies that the movement of Borges' thought towards an ideal or metaphysical level is never single, but is accompanied always by a corresponding movement back towards the material, the two movements both being sited at the level of the linguistic and the narrative. Like Queen, Borges' interest in puzzle and game is generally verbal and textual and develops Kabbalistic overtones.²² Here, however, the Kabbalistic impulse which is to view language as an attribute of God, and thus as the map, indeed the origin of the universe, is opposed not so much by Freudian depth psychology as by the semiotic impulse, that is to see language as an arbitrary system of signs which nevertheless constructs the human world.²³ And while following the pattern of repeated inversions of the false solution that we have seen in the ingenious detective story, Borges most frequently resists the movement towards closure by suggesting an infinite regression of solutions within solutions by means of the figures of the labyrinth (infinity of choices of direction) or contrary mirrors (the device of mise en abyme, that is, a work reflecting its own structure internally).

If Borges' writing in the 40s reflects the influence of and interest in the ingenious Golden Age detective story, and in particular the writings of Chesterton and Queen, it is also true that the galleons return, that Queen's novels in the 1960s in turn reflect the marked influence of Borges' work. The Argentinian's work remained almost unknown to and untranslated by the English speaking world until that period. 'El jardin de senderos que se bifurcan' was first published in English translation in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine in the early 60s,²⁴ and Queen's 'Kabbalistic' novels of that period, particularly The Player on the Other Side (1963), And on the Eighth Day (1964), and The Fourth Side of the Triangle (1965), leave little doubt of the influence of Borges. Before putting a little flesh on the bones of this skeleton by attending to specific stories by Queen and Borges in a less schematic way, we may note a further point of connexion between the two writers that is not irrelevant in this context. Although I have concentrated on Queen's detective novels, we must note, that, like Borges, Queen reveals a more than personal commitment to the form of the short story at a time when the greater commercial viability of the novel threatened its existence. In both Queen and Borges this took at least in part the form of the assiduous anthologising of the short stories of other writers.²⁵ We may relate this also to the delight in re-telling old stories in both writers.

II

Ellery Queen's first few novels declare their authors' love of symmetrical pattern in their very titles: The Roman Hat Mystery (1929); The French Powder Mystery (1930); The Dutch Shoe Mystery (1931); The Greek Coffin Mystery (1932); and so on for a further five titles. And the verbal nature of the pattern is enforced when we understand that the national tag is often merely a blind: in The French Powder Mystery, for example, 'French' is the surname of the owners of the American department store in which the novel is set. ('Powder' also has a double significance, indicating both heroin and finger-print dust.) And in the same novel we can see how this verbal game-playing is given a certain literary quality in the form of esoteric reference or quotation. This habit of literary name-dropping infects the presentation of the novel itself, with its epigraphs at the beginning of each section, and casually learned footnotes. More interestingly this literary bent has a function in the plot. In the apartment at the top of the store where the murder takes place, 'Ellerius Bibliophilus' seizes upon the books belonging to the murdered man as a vital clue, and takes them home to study them. The significance of the books turns out to be not in their content but in a secret code used by the drug ring at the heart of the mystery, a code involving the first two letters of the names of the authors. This

delight in verbal puzzle takes its place in the more general context of game-playing. The plot involves the framing of a member of the murdered man's family by the murderer: the ex-policeman, store-detective, drug-ring leader, who uses his knowledge of police procedure (finger-printing etc) to attempt to outwit the detective.

After the last of the 'national' series, The Spanish Cape Mystery (1935), the authors dropped the 'Challenge to the Reader', but the game continued, particularly in the direction of verbal puzzle, developing certain 'Kabbalistic' overtones. Queen's Ten Days' Wonder (1948) demonstrates these qualities. The novel reveals a numerological obsession: with the number ten. It is divided into ten sections, 'First Day', 'Second Day', etc; the blackmail drops are a left-luggage locker No 10 and a hotel room No 1010. This symmetry is given Biblical overtones by numerous verbal echoes: 'In beginning it was without form' (the novel begins); 'The father creates the son in his own image'; 'And he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had not made'. (The confusion between the numbers seven [the days of creation] and ten [the commandments] remains rather haphazard.) The novel deals with 'Ellery Queen's' involvement in a tight family triangle of a masterful father from a Fundamentalist Christian background, his oppressed adopted son, and his young attractive step-mother, who develops a fatal attraction to her son, is blackmailed, and then strangled three-quarters of the way through the novel. 'Ellery Queen' reveals that the key to the murder is the Ten Commandments. The son's real name is revealed to be HH Waye, an anagram of Yahweh. His actions over the ten day period are seen not to be arbitrary, but the systematic breaking of the Commandments, culminating in 'Thou shalt not kill'. Yet, again, the double inversion is used. In the closing section of the novel, this solution is revealed to be a frame of the son by the father, who has partly fabricated the evidence (including the name HHH Waye), and partly used his power to make the son act in a certain way. The criminal is shown to be a lover of word puzzles who has set up the false solution precisely for that other anagram-hunter, the detective. In the novel's closure, the Gothic frisson produced by the 'Kabbalistic' overtones is dispelled, and the narrative reverts to a psychoanalytical (Oedipal) explanation of actions, and a comfortable stasis is achieved. In a touching final scene, the detective, vows, like Trent, to give up detection and never again play the omniscient 'little tin god'. Mr Queen's next novel appeared in the following year.

The Player on the Other Side employs the 'Kabbalistic' device in a particularly interesting form. The scene of the novel is York Park, where the four York cousins live in splendid isolation, each in her/his own castle in the shape of a square with the corner cut off, situated at the four angles of the square Park. This geometrical pattern corresponds to two ordering devices, the Tetragramma-

ton, and the game of chess. In turn, each of the four cousins receives a lettered card with the corner cut off shortly before being murdered. Together the cards reproduce the shape of the Park, with the addition of the mysterious four letters JHWH. At a climactic moment, 'Ellery Queen' reveals that the four letters form the initials of the York's odd-job man Walt, but also the Tetragrammaton, the secret name of God. By means of a number of double meanings, including of course the detective's name, but principally the four castles in the four corners, the pattern is also linked to the chess board. The novel is constructed in three parts: 'Irregular Opening', 'Middle Game', and 'End Play', and each chapter is given a chess term as its title. The 'irregular opening' indicates an unusual narrative ploy. The novel is bipartite, involving two (until the ending) mutually exclusive perspectives, one the private perspective of Walt, the criminal, and the other the public perspective of the detective. In this way, Queen can exploit the opposition of agent and patient. For, from the opening of the novel, the reader witnesses Walt receiving typed letters from the mysterious and imperious 'Y' ('You know who I am. You do not know that you know.'). who gives the odd-job man precise instructions to make and send the lettered cards and perform the murders. The reader but not the detective knows that Walt is only a pawn in the hands of another.

In a powerfully worked dream-sequence, which develops all the chess puns in vivid fashion, 'Ellery Queen' begins to understand 'the rules of the York Square game he was playing'. His moment of realisation is encapsulated in a quotation from Thomas Huxley: 'The chess-board is the world, the pieces are the phenomena of the universe, the rules of the game are what we call the laws of Nature. The player on the other side is hidden from us...'. (The realisation is also stimulated when a DOG called Beelzebub turns upside down!) For a time, the reader is allowed to enjoy the frisson of the the fear of a God of Vengeance who interferes in the world of the humble detective story. The final revelation that Walt is a schizoid personality with delusions of divine power is inevitably something of a let-down. The novel closes with a homely analysis of the nature of the human psyche, hung on the nail of Rimbaud's 'Je est un autre': "'It's a tough one," Ellery reflected aloud. "It calls on the head. I is someone else... Then I ran across Archibald Macleish's interpretation of Rimbaud's line... 'One is played upon, not player!' One is played upon, not player," he repeated, savouring it. "Tasty, isn't it?"

Borges' pair of sonnets 'El ajedrez' (1960) begin from a remarkably similar theme. But the final sonnet concludes:

También el jugador es prisionero
 (La sentencia es de Omar) de otro tablero
 De negras noches y de blancas días.

Dios mueve al jugador y éste, la pieza.

¿Que dios detrás de Dios la trama empieza

De polvo y tiempo y sueño y agonía? (El hacedor p81)

This is a characteristic difference. Where Queen rests in the simple dualism, Borges' exploration, as often, dissolves into infinite regression. But we should be wary of limiting our analysis to the issue of narrative closure viewed in these simple terms.

In Jean Ricardou's discussion of the infinite regression produced by the device of mise en abyme,²⁶ he notes that the device 'se présente comme la prise de conscience du récit par lui-même', and thus has an element of narcissism. Ricardou's discussion helps to point out a potential weakness in certain of Borges' fictions. There, he discusses Poe's use of mise en abyme and demonstrates that it is made possible by his [Poe's] 'absolutisme du dénouement', outlined in 'The Philosophy of Composition', which makes plotting antecedent to narrating and rejects any notion of writing as exploration. In certain of Borges' fictions also, the argument seems to precede the narrative. This prior 'knowingness' on the part of the narrator can both reduce the narrative to a mere intellectual game, and generate a 'synoptic vision' which reintroduces the hierarchy of discourses in a particularly dangerous form. The 'opening out' of infinite regression is notoriously easy to produce. Sometimes Borges' addiction to Zeno's second paradox seems to produce a rather facile 'opening out' that is unprepared for by contrary voices in the narrative. Here the subversion of illusion and closure is effected at the expense of a reinforcement of the hierarchy of discourses, and a concomitant reinstatement of the myth of total artistic control.

Let us turn now to those texts where Borges works closest to the conventional forms of detective fiction, the 'metaphysical' detective stories. 'La muerte y la brújula' is in form all that a detective story should be, even obeying Knox's commandments. The story is set up as though one of a series, in the conventional manner, with the principal detective role taken by Erik Lönnrot, who is contrasted with Poe's Dupin: 'Lönnrot se creía un puro razonador, un Auguste Dupin, pero algo de aventurero había en él y hasta de tahir'. The apocalyptic note, familiar from Doyle's His Last Bow and Trent's Last Case is also sounded by the enigmatic reference to 'el último crimen'. After these traditional opening veiled allusions to the conclusion, two familiar oppositions are proposed: firstly, that of detective and master criminal (Red Scharlach); and secondly that of the mystifying superiority of the private detective with the bluntness and relative stupidity of the official police investigator, 'el comisario Treviranus'. After the presentation of the first crime, the stabbing of Dr Yarmolinsky, delegate to the Third Talmudic Conference, in his hotel room,

this second opposition is developed in the following exchange:

"No hay que buscarle tres pies al gato," decía Treviranus, blandiendo un imperioso cigarro. "Todos sabemos que el Tetrarca de Galilea posee los mejores zafiros del mundo. Alguien, para robarlos, habrá penetrado aquí por error. Yarmolinsky se ha levantado; el ladrón ha tenido que matarlo. ¿Que le parece?"

"Posible, pero no interesante," respondió Lönnrot. "Usted replicará que la realidad no tiene la menor obligación de ser interesante. Yo le replicaré que la realidad puede prescindir de esa obligación, pero no las hipótesis. En la que usted ha improvisado, interviene copiosamente el azar. He aquí un rabino muerto; yo prefería una explicación puramente rabínica, no los imaginarios percances de un imaginario ladrón."

This passage continues the debate on juxtaposition and causation begun in Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' and continued in, among other, Chesterton's 'The Blue Cross'. The two solutions offered exploit the antithesis of chance and order. Just as Kabbalistic interpretation, based on the concept of sacred text as God's script, reduces the intervention of chance to zero, Lönnrot's solution excludes contingency. His rabbinical, Kabbalistic explanation, which appears to be confirmed when the unfinished sentence 'La primera letra del Nombre ha sido articulada' is discovered on the sheet of paper in the type writer, allows a spine-chilling dose of Jewish mysticism to be injected into the story. Like the 'Ellery Queen' of The French Powder Mystery, 'bruscamente bibliófilo', Lönnrot takes home the dead man's Kabbalistic books to his apartment. Lönnrot's interest in a rabbinical solution appears in the press, and ensuing events confirm his suspicions that the murder is a Hasidic sacrifice. Two further supposed murders are committed which confirm the symmetry of time and place - the murders occur on the evening of the third of consecutive months and at points which form an equilateral triangle based on three point of the compass. Both are accompanied by further references to the uttering of the letters of the Name. Despite indications to the contrary, Lönnrot, firm in his knowledge that the secret name of God is four lettered, the tetragrammaton, anticipates the fourth murder and sets off to the fourth point of the compass to prevent it.

On the journey to the villa at Triste-le-Roy, the pace of the narrative slows markedly and the suspense mounts. Here, Borges' first double-take occurs. At the villa, Lönnrot is suddenly captured and disarmed. The quadrilateral labyrinth is revealed to be a spider's web, where the detective is the fly and the master criminal Scharlach the spider. Inspector Treviranus' initial 'uninteresting' explanation proves to be correct, and the symmetrical pattern a frame, a trap set to catch the detective who has been reading too many detective stories. Thus far, in terms of plotting, we have not stepped outside the tradition of the

ingenious detective story, and here Ellery Queen would stop. Borges takes us one step further. After Scharlach's revelation sequence, the detective is given the right to reply before his death:

"En su laberinto sobran tres líneas," dijo por fin. "Yo sé de un laberinto griego que es una línea única, recta. En esa línea se han perdido tantos filósofos que bien puede perderse un mero detective. Scharlach, cuando en otro avatar usted me dé caza, finja (o cometa) un crimen en A, luego un segundo crimen en B, a 8 kilómetros de A, luego un tercer en C, a 4 kilómetros de A y de B, a mitad de camino entre los dos. Aguárdeme después en D, a 2 kilómetros de A y de C, de nuevo a mitad de camino. Mátame en D, como ahora va a matarme en Triste-le-Roy."

"Para la otra vez que lo mate," replicó Scharlach, "le prometo ese laberinto, que consta de una sola línea recta y que es invisible, incesante."

Retrocedió unos pasos. Después, muy cuidadosamente, hizo fuego.

Now this sudden intrusion of a further Kabbalistic notion, that of metempsychosis, the doctrine of the Ibbur, along with the infinite regression of Zeno's second paradox, which undercut completely the closure of the detective story, is to a large extent unprepared for. It remains too much on the level of an intellectual exercise. The shock that the reader experiences is largely produced by the 'final imprevisto' alone, and insufficiently by opposed voices encountered in the journey through the text. A similar point is made by Macherey: 'Ses meilleurs récits ne sont pas eux qui sont ainsi facilement ouverts [he cites the instance of the mise en abyme followed by a series of dots], mais d'autres au contraire parfaitement clos, qui n'ont pas de ces issues... [concerning 'El jardín'] Enfermé entre le problème (pas besoin qu'il soit posé) et sa résolution, cerclé: le récit'.²⁷ Let us now turn to that story.

In 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' we find that the tensions are most completely integrated. Although the tale does employ the 'final imprevisto', the reader's insecurity is generated by the constantly unstable interplay between two opposed narrative voices, with no possibility of establishing a hierarchy of discourses. The final surprise is merely the ending (?) of this process. The story is rather less faithful to the classical form of the detective story. In Bioy Casares' words, 'se trata de una historia policial, sin detective, ni Watson, no otros inconvenientes del género, pero con el enigma, la sorpresa, la solución justa'.²⁸ The narrative form is rather more complex than in 'La muerte y la brújula'; the first person narration of Dr Yu Tsun which forms the body of the tale is prefaced by a scholarly note which seems to vouch for its authenticity and historical accuracy: 'En la página 22 de la Historia de la Guerra Europea, de Liddell Hart, se lee que una ofensiva de trece divisiones británicas (apoyadas por mil cuatrocientas piezas de artillería) contra la línea Serre-

Montauban había sido planeada para el veinticuatro de julio de 1916...'. This framework lends certainty and security to the act of beginning to read. Exact numbers and dates are reassuring. But after the scholarly framework is recalled in an early foot-note to Yu Tsun's account, it disappears for good. By the end of the narrative, the assured tone of these prefatory remarks mocks the reader's uncertainty; the relation between Liddell Hart and the rest remains to some extent enigmatic.

The interplay of opposed modes is between a variation of the spy thriller and a mystico-philosophical meditation on art and life. The representative of the former is the Irish Captain Richard Madden of British Intelligence, and of the latter the sinologist Stephen Albert. The former mode is apocalyptic, deterministic, moving in an irrevocable, unbroken line (figured in the chase) towards a final and only solution; the latter is at home in a world of infinities, of innumerable choices, of labyrinths. The point of tension of these two modes is the Chinese narrator in the service of German Intelligence, the field of play his narration.

Yu Tsun's narrative begins with the recognition of the finality of his position: that his cover is blown and that he is being hunted by his enemy Madden. This felt ultimacy is reflected in a series of apocalyptic details: 'implacable' (the adjective occurs three times in the first 200 words of the narrative), 'el fin', 'único', 'último', 'irrevocable'. And the journey to the irrevocable conclusion is mirrored in the breakneck pursuit of Yu Tsun by Richard Madden. In many ways the mode of the narrative reproduces this sense of speed and directness. The one significant gap in this 'línea recta' occurs when the narrator deprives the reader of the Secret Name which must be communicated to Germany, and of the nature of his plan to accomplish this: 'Vagamente pensé que un pistolazo puede oírse muy lejos. En diez minutos mi plan estaba maduro. La guía telefónica me dio el nombre de la única persona capaz de transmitir la noticia: vivía en un suburbio de Fenton...'. As in Agatha Christie's ten minute gap in The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, this enigmatic hiatus allows the surprise of the final solution. From this point on, the irrevocable direction of Yu Tsun's actions remains somewhat hidden from the reader. This lack of certainty is explored more radically than in the popular forms.

From the very beginning, the directness of the thriller has been opposed by another mode. Yu Tsun is the descendent of the artist-philosopher Ts'ui Pen. His speculations allow the narrative to modulate rapidly to abstract meditations on identity and time: 'Después reflexioné que todas las cosas le suceden a uno precisamente, precisamente ahora. Siglos de siglos y sólo en el presente ocurren los hechos; innumerables hombres en el aire, en la tierra y el mar, y todo lo que realmente pasa me pasa a mí...'. In this mode, of which we hear a brief

echo in the above passage, 'única' and 'última' are superseded by 'innumerables' and 'infinitas'. Here, past and future are not irrevocable but multiple. The disjunction between the two modes is further reflected in the temporal gap between the time of the narrated and the time of the narration, which is frequently brought to the reader's attention: 'En mitad de mi odio y de mi terror (ahora no me importa hablar de terror: ahora que he burlado a Richard Madden, ahora que mi garganta anhela la cuerda) pensé que ese guerrero tumultoso y sin duda feliz no sospechaba que yo poseía el Secreto'. Similarly the narrative and the reader experience a constant hesitation concerning the assignment of supernatural or natural explanations to events. On Yu Tsun's journey to the house in Fenton, coincidence intervenes so copiously that the order of his plan seems about to be superseded by a supernatural conspiracy. When he arrives at Ashgrove Station, the bizarre familiarity with which he is received by the boys on the platform, who seem to know his very thoughts, seems to suggest a mystical order; yet once allowed the coincidence of Stephen Albert being a sinologist, the incident is recalled to the plane of the possible. Continually, the alternative explanation draws us back just before the critical line is crossed.

The speculative mode is most at home in Albert's garden. As Yu Tsun approaches the house, the uni-linear train journey gives way to a labyrinthine path. The narrative decelerates markedly. Time seems to stop: 'La tarde era íntima, infinita'. Yu Tsun and Albert, descendant and scholar respectively of Ts'ui Pen, engage in a Platonic dialogue on his literary labyrinth which gives the title to Borges' story. In this ideal, impossible structure, a temporal labyrinth, all the innumerable choices at a given point in time are chosen: time is multiple. It is suggested that this structure is an image of the universe. Yet, throughout this labyrinthine speculation, the narrative constantly reminds us of the Ariadne's thread of the thriller plot. The tension between the two modes is extreme as the values of the detective story reassert themselves in this Garden of Limpid Solitude:

Volví a sentir esa pululación de que hablé. Me pareció que el húmedo jardín que rodeaba la casa estaba saturado hasta lo infinito de invisibles personas. Esas personas eran Albert y yo, secretos, atareados y multiformes en otras dimensiones de tiempo. Alcé los ojos y la tenue pesadilla se disipó. En el amarillo y negro jardín había un solo hombre; pero ese hombre era fuerte como una estatua, pero ese hombre avanzaba por el sendero y era el capitán Richard Madden.

Even in the ending of the story, which closes the plot level problems as Yu Tsun shoots Albert and the puzzle is solved, the tension between the two unreconciled narrative voices remains:

Abominablemente he vencido: he comunicado a Berlín el secreto nombre de la

ciudad que deben atacar. Ayer la bombaron; lo leí en los mismos periódicos que propusieron a Inglaterra el enigma de que el sabio sinólogo Stephen Albert muriera asesinado por un desconocido, Yu Tsun. El jefe ha descifrado ese enigma. Sabe que mi problema era indicar (a través del estrépito de la guerra) la ciudad que se llama Albert y que no hallé otro medio que matar a una persona de ese nombre. No sabe (nadie puede saber) mi innumerable contrición y cansancio.

The 'secret name' is shown at once to be absolute, unique (the town to be destroyed) and arbitrary, infinitely variable (the man to be killed). The reader is thus at once granted and denied the pleasures of closure; for the disturbance has never been generated merely by the unrevealed information, but rather by the interplay between the two modes.

III

Returning to the terms producibility and vulnerability, we can see that these values are not contained neatly in the division of 'popular' and 'serious'. The Ellery Queen novels are not completely 'innocent' texts, and involve some recognition of their own processes, even if the final gesture is to conceal such recognition. And if the final gesture of the Borgesian story is to reveal its own procedures, this gesture is itself not unequivocal, since such a gesture would itself reinstate the myth of total authorial control and invulnerability. Both texts works are thus open to a critical practice which will not only reveal but also engage with the contradictions which are either displaced or manifested in the narrative process, a practice that will be not so much empirical and descriptive as analytical and transformational.

I hope that the above discussion will have demonstrated at least two points: (1) that, by drawing too narrow a circle around a single author allocated to the 'serious', we are in danger of avoiding significant questions concerning tradition and influence even at the level of pure literary 'scholarship'; and (2) that any attempt to discuss the division between the 'serious' and the 'popular' only in the terms of surface/depth and mimesis/escape will be unable to go beyond our own local cultural habits and prejudices and participate in any transformation of social and cultural values. If nothing else, these recognitions might encourage us to re-examine the nature of the 'canon' of literary texts operating in educational institutions, whether overtly in the form of a syllabus, or covertly in the form of undeclared assumptions concerning the 'object' of literary studies. At this point it is as well to suggest that in critical writing also (including this exercise), if there is no completely self-controlled text, neither is there any entirely innocent text.

Notes

1. Raymond Williams Culture and Society 1790-1950 (1958), The Long Revolution (1961), and Communications (1962) - all London: Chatto and Windus.
2. This formulation and the more general analysis of Realism which follows is indebted to: Roland Barthes Le degré zéro de l'écriture (1953), Essais critiques (1964), and S/Z (1970) - all Paris: Seuil; Stephen Heath The Nouveau Roman (London: Elek, 1972) pp15-43; Colin McCabe 'Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure' Screen 17 no 3 (1976) pp7-27; and Catherine Belsey Critical Practice (London: Methuen, 1980).
3. Cf Roland Barthes Le degré zéro p27, and S/Z pp9-10, 161-2, and 187-8.
4. Tzvetan Todorov 'Typologie du roman policier' Poétique de la prose (Paris: Seuil, 1971) pp55-65.
5. Todorov op cit and François George in La loi et le phénomène (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1978) both develop this concept of the detective story as an epistemology.
6. Julian Symons Bloody Murder (London: Faber, 1972; rev ed Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974) especially pp182-202; John G Cawelti Adventure, Mystery, and Romance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) especially pp5-36.
7. Gabriel Josipovici Writing and the Body (Brighton: Harvester, 1982) p2.
8. Pierre Macherey Pour une théorie de la production littéraire (Paris: François Maspero, 1966) pp38-9.
9. Specific citations from the novels of Ellery Queen refer to the following editions: The French Powder Mystery (1930), Ten Days Wonder (1948), and The Player on the Other Side (1963) - all London: Gollancz.
10. Howard Haycraft Murder for Pleasure (New York: Appleton-Century, 1941).
11. In using the terms 'game' and 'play', I do not intend to invoke a distinction between 'playful' and 'serious'; rather I would argue for an extended notion of the role of 'play' in society. Cf J Huizinga Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949).
12. GK Chesterton 'A Defence of Detective Stories' The Defendant (London: RB Johnson, 1902) reprinted in Howard Haycraft (ed) The Art of the Mystery Story (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946; exp ed Biblo and Tannen, 1975) pp3-6; R Austin Freeman 'The Art of the Detective Story' Nineteenth Century and After (May 1924) reprinted in Haycraft (ed) op cit pp7-17.
13. SS Van Dine (pseudonym of Willard Huntington Wright) 'Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories' American Magazine (Sept 1928) reprinted in Haycraft (ed) op cit pp189-93; Ronald Knox 'Introduction' to Knox and H Harrington (eds) The Best Detective Stories of the Year: 1928 (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1929) ppvii-xxiii.

14. Knox loc cit pxii.
15. For a more extended discussion of the relationship between the Freudian analytic model and the epistemological concerns of the classical detective story cf my two-part paper 'Reading the Signs' [forthcoming in PSELL vols 7 and 8 (Dec 1983 and 1984)].
16. I use the word 'Kabbalism' here in a general 'journalistic' sense rather than in a scholarly one, much as both Queen and Borges themselves do.
17. Cf in particular: Ronald J Christ The Narrow Act: Borges' Art of Illusion (London: University of London Press, 1969); and M Berveiller Le Cosmopolitisme de Jorge Luis Borges (Paris: Didier, 1973).
18. DA Yates 'The Argentine Detective Story' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 1960).
19. Specific citations from the works of Borges refer to the following editions: Ficciones (1970), El hacedor (1972) - both Madrid: Alianza; and in collaboration with Adolfo Bioy Casares Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi (Buenos Aires: Sur, 1942) - under the pseudonym of H Bustos Domecq, and Un modelo para la muerte (Buenos Aires: Oportet y Haereses, 1946) - under the pseudonym of B Suarez Lynch.
20. Xavier Villaurutia 'Tres Notas Sobre JL Borges' El hijo prodigo (Mexico: 1944-5) reprinted in Jaime Alazraki (ed) Jorge Luis Borges (Madrid: Taurus, 1976) pp64-8; here p68.
21. Borges 'El acercamiento a Almotásim' Ficciones p37.
22. For a more detailed discussion of Borges' interest in Kabbalism cf Jaime Alazraki 'Borges and the Kabbalah' Tri-Quarterly 25 (Fall 1972) reprinted in Prose for Borges ed Charles Newman and Mary Kinzie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974) ppl84-211. The best introduction to the Kabbalah itself remains Gersholm Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (London: Thames and Hudson, 1955), a work which stimulated Borges' own interest in the subject.
23. Jaime Alazraki underlines the importance of the concept of the arbitrary nature of the sign for Borges' writing; he notes Borges' 'aceptación axiomática de la irrealidad del arte, pero a condición de que reconozcamos que la única realidad a la cual tiene acceso el hombre es esa ficción fabricada por la inteligencia humana. El carácter de signo de lenguaje recobra así su vigencia en un mundo trenzado con sistemas semióticos' ('Introducción' to Alazraki (ed) op cit p15).
24. This fact is given by John Updike in 'The Author as Librarian' New Yorker (30 Oct 1965) pp223-46; here p223.
25. Besides the numerous 'Ellery Queen' novels, Queen has published approximately ten collections of short detective stories besides other uncollected short stories in periodicals and anthologies. As regards 'anthologising', cf

the publication of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine from 1941 onwards and the annual selection of 'best stories' which accompany it. In the case of Borges, in addition to Los mejores cuentos policiales, we may note: Cuentos breves y extraordinarios and Libro del cielo y del infierno - both with Casares; and Antología de la literatura fantástica - with Casares and Silvina Ocampo.

26. Jean Ricardou 'L'histoire dans l'histoire' Problèmes du nouveau roman (Paris: Seuil, 1967) p171ff.

27. Macherey op cit p280.

28. Bioy Casares 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' Sur 92 (May 1942) pp60-65; here p60.