"The Providential Apotheosis of His Industry"

Display of Causal Systems in Borges

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IN A 1938 ARTICLE IN WHICH HE REVIEWS A MYSTERY NOVEL BY J. B. PRIESTLEY, Borges states:

> Para un criterio cotidiano, el azar interviene increíblemente en esta novela. En su decurso hay demasiadas coincidencias "providenciales." Con igual justicia, un literato puede reprochar a la obra su desanimada (y desanimadora) falta de azar. Abundan las "sorpresas," pero todas ellas son previsibles, y, lo que es peor, fatales. Para el hombre avezado, o resignado, a este género de ficciones, lo verdaderamente sorprendente sería que no sucediera. . . . (1986, 266)

> [For a daily criterion, chance intervenes incredibly in this novel. During its course, there are too many "providential" coincidences. With equal justice, a man of letters can reproach the work for its discouraged (and discouraging)

lack of chance. "Surprises" are abundant, but all of them are predictable and, what is worst, fatal. For someone who has experience in, or is resigned to, this genre of fictions, what would be truly surprising would be that it did not happen. . . .][1]

Thus, the novel has two flaws: there is too much chance, and this chance is predictable. It is particularly predictable, writes Borges, to someone familiar with the mystery novel, since the reader who is "resigned to this genre of fictions" easily guesses scripts and conventional cause-effect chains (patterns such as: "He came back to the crime scene because the murderer always goes back to the crime scene"). The problem lies in the articulation of Priestley's plot, which makes excessive use of two overly apparent resources: on the one hand, chance (which arbitrarily justifies that which intrigue does not sustain); on the other hand, the most elemental scripts of the mystery novel genre, which the reader easily anticipates. In other words: there is neither need nor surprise because—and this is what Borges seems to disapprove of—the threads that causally link events are too easily seen.

The objection is somewhat puzzling if we consider that Borges's writing is strongly marked by the display of causal threads. Some very evident examples come to mind: "Emma Zunz" is a manual on the construction of parallel causalities; "La lotería en Babilonia" ("The Lottery in Babylon") narrates the systematic and apocryphal invention of a causation system (which is chance); "La otra muerte" ("The Other Death") shows at least three types of opposite causalities (fantastic, metafictional, and supernatural[2]) condensed in the word "destiny," which simultaneously explain the death of one single man. In all of these examples, the causation system that sustains the articulation of the facts—be it called "Company," Emma's "plan," or "destiny"—is a construct that the story advances in a thorough, delighted manner. Why, then, is Borges so displeased with the visibility of causal threads in Priestley's novel?

A first (and a rather obvious) answer is that the way in which they are revealed is very poor. In Priestley's novel, the display of causal threads is a consequence of a weakness in the plot: chance is used to bridge gaps, and contingency accounts for certain facts that would otherwise remain

unmotivated. To put it plainly, the causal system is not intentionally shown to highlight plot structure; it merely palliates its flaws a posteriori. On the contrary, in Borges, and this is one of the central points I will seek to develop in this work, the emphasis on causal systems is justified by the plot; it is born out of the plot itself.

Another reason for irritation may be the lack of purpose in the display. And by "purpose" we should understand the historical purpose, the statement of an aesthetic stance. The texts in which Borges shows causal threads with greatest strength are the fictions of the thirties and forties; likewise, the problem of causality reappears in essays and reviews of the same period, for example, in the 1933 review of *45 días y treinta marineros* (45 days and Thirty Sailors) by Norah Lange, where Borges quite categorically holds that "the central problem of the novel is causality" (2001, 77).[3] The problem of causality, which partly arises out of his readings of Paul Valéry,[4] is also derived from a dialogue between Borges and late avant-gardes, particularly surrealism and its own deconstruction of causality.[5]

In this sense, it should be noted that Borges's proposal of divergent causal series that meet at only one decisive moment—a moment the story narrates and which constitutes its climax (think about "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," "La muerte y la brújula," "Emma Zunz")—is not alien to the concept of *objective chance,* as defined by Breton in the 1937 text *L'amour fou.* In Breton's definition, objective chance "evidences the dependency bonds that join two causal series . . . subtle, fugitive bonds that are disturbing for the current status of knowledge, but that sometimes, in the insecure steps of men, give birth to an intense glare" (1990, 32).[6]

The style and the imagery of the (otherwise) much vilified Breton are far from those of Borges.[7] However, they share the desire, specified by the same time, to evidence the hinges (Breton's "dependency bonds") that join together divergent causal series. It could even be said that that desire is avant-garde, if it is true that avant-gardes play with form and reveal literary devices at the same time at which they operate. What changes perhaps is the purpose, because it is uncertain (but that is another discussion[8]) whether Borges's playing with form is the protocol of a political and social experience, as Peter Bürger described the project that propelled historical avant-gardes (1993, 24–25).

In any case, and unlike by now poor Priestley, the display of causal systems in Borges is the result of a common aesthetic and historical context. But the shape that this display adopts is surprisingly peculiar. My contention is that, to the author of "La lotería en Babilonia," the display of the system only becomes stimulating when it is the result of an internal need of the plot; that is to say, when it retains the method of classical writing, in which facts must succeed each other—as prescribed by Aristotle—according to an inherent and necessary causal order. This method, I believe, arises from something that is deeply integrated in Borges's writing, something that could be described as the deliberate motivation of each of the parts that compose the story. In Borges's words, a text is "an artificial object which does not suffer from any unjustified parts" (1995, 8). Moreover, the problem of causal motivation lies in the origin of a dialogue between Borges and Aristotle's *Poetics* that indirectly takes place in fiction, particularly in a 1933 text, "El impostor inverosímil Tom Castro" (The Improbable Impostor Tom Castro).

Thus, texts from the thirties and forties show a peculiar dynamic in which the avant-garde desire to exhibit causality's rules of construction co-exists with the classical use of those very same rules. It is this dynamic that needs further exploration.

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Undoubtedly, the weak plot arising from invasive chance in Priestley's novel is opposed to other more successful concatenations of facts that Borges examines in reviews and essays from that time. He holds that a coherent causal concatenation, where facts arise from something previous and where each action is potentially contained in a hint, is preferable to mediocre scripts and implausible abuses of coincidence. That hint, in retrospective reading, becomes a cause. This is why the novel "should be an accurate game of vigilances, echoes, and affinities" where "every episode . . . is subsequently projected" (1997, 1:231). In this aspect—as is known—Borges is loyal to the principles expounded by Edgar Allan Poe in "The Philosophy of Composition": "It is only with the *dénouement* constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the

incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention" (2009, 288).

Both Borges and Poe prescribe a narrative teleology in which the end justifies the means and the whole justifies each of its parts. These teleological poetics will be sharply theorized (though not mentioned) by Gérard Genette in his 1968 article, "Vraisemblance et motivation." To Genette,

> One must admit that what appears to the reader as mechanical determinations was not produced as such by the narrator . . . [and that the author] chooses the middle according to the ending. . . . These *retrograde* determinations constitute exactly what we call the story's arbitrariness, that is, . . . the determination of means by ends or, to put it bluntly, *of causes by effects*. . . . Fiction's rule: the task of the *because* is to succeed in making the *what for* be forgotten. (1968, 13–18)

Ultimately, everything that the reader interprets as cause is, in fact, a concealed purpose. If, to the reader, *le père* Goriot is a "Christ of paternity" *because* he sacrifices himself for his daughters throughout the novel, from the viewpoint of composition, that very same man sacrifices himself willfully throughout that very same novel *in order to* become a Christ of paternity, to execute a project thought beforehand by Balzac. Accordingly, everything leads to a point that necessarily accounts for antecedents; at least theoretically,[9] teleological poetics exile chance from the method of composition and from the structure of the plot.[10] Besides, the "episodic fable" vituperated by the *Poetics* is avoided. In the "episodic fable," facts succeed each other haphazardly, outside all causality: "I call a fable episodic when there exists neither probability nor need in the sequence of episodes," defines Aristotle, who then adds with disdain, "fables of this kind are created by bad poets because of their incapacity" (2001, IX, 1451b, 37). Along the same line, in the memorable prologue to *La invención de Morel,* Borges speaks of a "mere successive variety" that loosens plots (1995, 8).

Undoubtedly, chance is banned from composition if, from the beginning and in a steady manner, a certain point to be reached is taken into account. Borges relates this process to the notion of *premeditation*. The models of

writing he endorses, the novels or stories he praises in the reviews from those years (I think of *Las ratas* [The Rats] by José Bianco, the short stories from *La espada dormida* [The Sleeping Sword] by Manuel Peyrou, or the eulogizing of *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James)—all these texts are celebrated precisely for their "premeditated" nature:

> En lo que se refiere a la ambigüedad . . . se trata—en James y en Bianco—de la *premeditada* omisión de una parte de la novela, omisión que permite que la interpretemos de una manera o de otra: ambas contempladas por el autor, ambas definidas. . . . Obras como ésta de José Bianco, *premeditada,* interesante, legible,—insisto en esas básicas virtudes, porque son infrecuentes—prefiguran tal vez una renovación de la novelística del país. (Borges 1999, 272–74)

> [As regards ambiguity . . . —in James and in Bianco—we find the premeditated omission of part of the novel, which allows us to interpret it one way or another: both have been contemplated by the author, both have been defined. . . . Works like this one, by José Bianco, *premeditated,* interesting, legible,—I insist on these basic virtues, because they are infrequent—probably anticipate a renewal in novel writing in the country.]

The word "premeditation," which is repeated over and over again in the critiques, conveys the need for a plan preceding execution: indeed, as in crime, premeditation in writing demands a purpose that motivates the development of the action. This is in fact the essential requirement of crime novels, where, as Borges and Bioy Casares define in "¿Qué es el género policial?" (What is Crime Fiction?), the story must be put together in terms of a rigorous teleology:

> . . . las ficciones policiales requieren una construcción severa. Todo, en ellas, debe profetizar el desenlace; pero esas múltiples y continuas profecías tienen que ser, como las de los antiguos oráculos, secretas; sólo deben comprenderse a la luz de la revelación final. El escritor se compromete así a una doble proeza: la solución del problema planteado debe ser necesaria, pero también

debe ser asombrosa. (Lafforgue and Rivera 1996, 249–50)

[. . . crime fictions require severe construction. Everything in them should an-
nounce the ending; but these numerous and continuous prophecies should
be secret, such as those of ancient oracles; they have to be understood only
in light of the final revelation. The writer thus commits himself to a twofold
exploit: the solution to the problem should be not only necessary but also
amazing.]

"The solution to the problem should be not only necessary but also amaz-
ing": this last sentence establishes a dialogue with chapters 9 and 10 of the
Poetics (2001, IX, 1451b, 34–40), where it is held that the change of fortune
of the hero (*metabasis*) should be a necessary or plausible consequence of
previous events. What is interesting, of course, is that what is "necessary"
and "plausible" in Aristotle becomes "necessary" and "amazing" in Borges.
This combination of the necessary and the amazing as something typical of
fiction reappears in other Borgesian definitions, as in the above-mentioned
review of Peyrou's book, where Borges holds that rigor and amazement in
fiction should prevail over unpredictable chance and useless details (1999,
282).

In the tragic model proposed by Aristotle, amazement occupies a central
and productive place, as Paul Ricœur points out in the extraordinary reading
he makes of the *Poetics* in the first volume of *Temps et récit* (1983, 66–104). I
will briefly discuss this reading, since I find it useful to present the central idea
of this work. In some texts by Borges of the 1930s and 1940s, the "amazing"
is shown through the fictional display of causal threads, and the "necessary"
is shown through the incorporation of that display to the intrigue. Borges
defends this need and amazement-based poetics from different and comple-
mentary places. One of them—as we have been discussing—is critical work;
the other one is the fictionalized dialogue[11] with Aristotelian precepts, which
appears in fictions where causal surprise and need go hand in hand. There is
more than one example to illustrate this, but I will work principally with "El
impostor inverosímil Tom Castro" (The Improbable Impostor Tom Castro).

However, I would first like to discuss the dynamics between the amazing and the necessary as proposed by the *Poetics* and as read by Ricœur in *Temps et récit.* For Ricœur, the tragic model of the *Poetics* arises from the tension between need and what Aristotle calls "to thaumaston": "amazement," "surprise." This tension between need and surprise causes, writes Ricœur, a "discordant concord," which is most perfectly illustrated by the sudden change of fortune that makes the hero go from happiness to misery. According to Ricœur, it is in the change of fortune where need and surprise reach their highest point of tension and union. Maximum surprise flows from the nature of the resources that make the sudden change of fortune possible: these resources—described in chapter 11 of the *Poetics*—are, as it is known, reversal of fortune (Ricœur translates *peripeteia* as *coup de théâtre*), recognition (or anagnorisis), and pathos. Maximum need arises from the fact that destructive and painful incidents should succeed each other, according to Aristotle, one because of another, and not one after another: "it makes all the difference whether one event is the consequence of another, or merely subsequent to it" (2001, X, 1452a, 39). In fact, great tragedies—the customary example is *Oedipus Rex*—perfectly merge what is paradoxical (and surprising) and what is causal (and necessary). Most importantly, in Ricœur's reading of Aristotle, the art of composition consists precisely in making surprise necessary, or in making discord seem concordant ("la concordance discordante" [1983, 86]). This is the reason why the effect is so strong when an apparently random fact is inscribed in the intrigue, as in the case (told by Aristotle) of the statue of Mitys, which—accidentally?—falls on Mitys's unpunished murderer's head while he was looking at it. This means that the highest point of dramatic tension occurs when the facts are produced "against our expectations" and, at the same time, "chained to one another."[12] Ricœur rightfully insists on the deeply paradoxical nature of the two conditions imposed by Aristotle: against our expectations *and* chained to one another. "An amazing, yet necessary solution," Borges would later write.

Ricœur wonders next whether this model of tension between surprise and causal need can be applied to the narrative structure. It seems to me (as already stated) that Borges asks himself the same question, with Aristotle as

the starting point, in "El impostor inverosímil Tom Castro" (1997, 1:301–5). The novelty is the twist given by Borges to the dynamics between need and surprise: the mechanisms that create causal need are scandalously displayed, and it is out of this display that surprise is born. Furthermore, it should be noted that the mechanisms that Borges displays in the story are precisely those that Aristotle considers essential for the creation of dramatic tension. The first mechanism, of course, is anagnorisis or recognition. The fourth part of this *historia de infamia* is titled "El encuentro" (The Meeting), and it narrates Lady Tichborne's recognition, in the shapeless body of impostor Tom Castro, of the child who had been lost at sea fourteen years earlier:

> El 16 de enero de 1867, Roger Charles Tichborne se anunció en ese hotel. Lo precedió su respetuoso sirviente, Ebenezer Bogle. El día de invierno era de muchísimo sol; los ojos fatigados de Lady Tichborne estaban velados de llanto. El negro abrió de par en par las ventanas. La luz hizo de máscara: la madre reconoció al hijo pródigo y le franqueó su abrazo. Ahora que de veras lo tenía, podía prescindir del diario y las cartas que él le mandó desde el Brasil: meros reflejos adorados que habían alimentado su soledad de catorce años lóbregos. Se las devolvía con orgullo: ni una faltaba. Bogle sonrió con toda discreción: ya tenía dónde documentarse el plácido fantasma de Roger Charles. (Borges 1997, 1:303)

> [On January 16, 1867, Roger Charles Tichborne called upon his mother. His respectful servant, Ebenezer Bogle, preceded him. It was a winter day of bright sunshine; Lady Tichborne's tired eyes were veiled with tears. The black man threw the windows open. The light served as a mask; the mother recognized the prodigal son and opened her arms to him. Now that she had him, she might do without his diary and the letters he had written her from Brazil— the treasured reflections of the son which had fed her loneliness through those fourteen melancholy years. She returned them to him proudly; not one was missing. Bogle smiled discreetly; now he could research the gentle ghost of Roger Charles.] (Borges 1998, 11)

"Joyous recognition," he states further on, "that seems to obey the tradition of

classical tragedies." Indeed, all the imagery of anagnorisis is announced and deconstructed in these extraordinary lines: secrecy and revelation, fallacious recognition, theatrical mise-en-scène: "The black man threw the windows open," "the light served as a mask," "her tired eyes were veiled with tears." What is remarkable is that the false recognition leads to the delivery of the true son's letters, and to the final perfection of the delusion: "Bogle smiled discreetly; now he could research the gentle ghost of Roger Charles." Thus each fact, as required by Aristotle, necessarily happens as a consequence of another. However, contrary to Aristotle's precepts, what goes "against our expectations" is not the overly announced anagnorisis, but the exhibition of the devices that constitute it.

The refinement of the quote even leads Borges to parody Aristotle's description of anagnorisis. In chapter 16 of the *Poetics, The Odyssey*'s episode of the bath is mentioned: Ulysses returns incognito to Ithaca; while washing his feet, nursemaid Eurykleia recognizes him by the childhood scar on his knee (Homer 1999, XIX, v. 350–475). Following the same tradition, Tom Castro will ground his identity by invoking "the irrefutable proof of the two moles near his left nipple and that painful and therefore unforgettable episode from his childhood when a swarm of bees had attacked him" (Borges 1998, 11). The evidence is thus brutally inverted: what in classical poetics is a sign of plausibility, in this case works effectively to justify what is implausible: this is why Lady Tichborne will "recaptur[e] the recollections her son had invoked" in very few days. The evident falseness of the clue reveals the mechanics of the device and, at the same time, prepares the ephemeral triumph of Bogle and Tom Castro: on the one hand, a necessary chain of events; on the other hand, a surprising exposure of narrative tools.

Simultaneously, "El impostor inverosímil Tom Castro" displays the intrinsic justification of its parts. Surprisingly enough (or not), this display is not usually what Borges as a reviewer searches for in other fictional texts. Thus, for example, in his review of *La Espada Dormida* by Manuel Peyrou, he celebrates the craftiness of the author in covering—and not revealing—his method of composition:

Tan hábilmente disimulan estas ficciones los arduos y tenaces borradores

que sin duda las precedieron, que corren el albur de parecer meros favores del azar y la negligencia, meras felicidades fortuitas. . . . [En este libro] todo ha sido premeditado, todo parece una improvisación venturosa, un don accidental de las divinidades secretas. (1999, 282–83)

[These fictions are so skillful in concealing the laborious and tenacious drafts that undoubtedly preceded them that they run the risk of appearing as mere favors of chance and negligence, mere fortuitous joys. . . . [In this book] everything has been premeditated, everything seems to be a lucky improvisation, an accidental gift of secret divinities.]

Premeditation (that is, the justification of the parts) supports Peyrou's writing, though it remains hidden: the *lucky improvisation* covers the *tenacious drafts*. The remark is interesting because it gives the hiding of threads a positive value, and it celebrates apparent gratuity and spontaneity in composition. This is exactly what Borges does not do in "El impostor inverosímil Tom Castro" (or, for that matter, in many other short stories of the same period), where the narrator literally announces each of the parts: "we shall describe below" the visit of the god; "We shall see the proof [of Bogle's genius] soon enough" (1998, 10). Premeditation is emphasized even to the point of nullifying suspense. At the very beginning of the story, the narrator tells us that Bogle "took a long time at the street intersections, distrusting . . . the violent vehicle *that would bring his days to an end*," and then verifies the fateful subordinate clause at the end of the text, with the brutal reappearance of "the terrible vehicle that from the depth of years had been chasing" Bogle to kill him (1998, 10, 12). The first paragraph of the story thus anticipates Bogle's death, and—indirectly—Tom Castro's decadence: amazement and surprise result from resources other than suspense.

Perhaps, as its title suggests, the most amazing part of the story is the causal principle that sustains the whole scheme; that principle could be paraphrased as follows: *because they do not resemble each other at all, they have to be the same individual.* I quote the well-known text that describes Bogle's "ocurrencia genial":

> Bogle sabía que un facsímil perfecto del anhelado Roger Charles Tichborne
> era de imposible obtención. Sabía también que todas las similitudes logradas
> no harían otra cosa que destacar ciertas diferencias inevitables. Renunció,
> pues, a todo parecido. Intuyó que la enorme ineptitud de la pretensión sería
> una convincente prueba de que no se trataba de un fraude, que nunca hu-
> biera descubierto de ese modo flagrante los rasgos más sencillos de convic-
> ción. (1997, 1:303)

> [Bogle knew that a perfect facsimile of the beloved Roger Charles Tichborne
> was impossible to find; he knew as well that any similarities he might achieve
> would only underscore certain inevitable differences. He therefore gave up
> the notion of likeness altogether. He sensed that the vast ineptitude of his
> pretense would be a convincing proof that this was no fraud, for no fraud
> would ever have so flagrantly flaunted features that might so easily have
> convinced.] (1998, 11)

This causal principle—which we will call from now on, following Genette, a guarantee (1968, 15–19)—is the basis upon which the entire story is built. From a more theoretical point of view, the guarantee is a prototypical device that builds narrative causality. Genette was among the first to highlight the hidden presence of these principles in fictional texts. He particularly observed in the *Comédie humaine* a large number of general statements aiming to explain the acts and motivations of the characters, when those acts did not conform to a causal Doxa shared by the reader. (At some point, we could speak of a causal horizon of expectations.) When the reader wonders about a character's motivations and is unable to find a conventional answer, the text—Genette contends—will build a specific causal framework to answer the question. In this sense, an attempt is made to offer the reader a series of artificial maxims, apparently consensual, that account for the story when what happens appears strange in terms of mimesis. I think that Bogle's paradoxical reasoning, rigorously exposed by the narrator, works like those theoretical justifications that causally legitimize action. There exists, however, an essential difference that lies, once again, in the display. Usually guarantees, as artificial operators of causality, are prudently interwoven within the story

to ensure the referential illusion. Instead, in "El impostor inverosímil Tom Castro," the guarantee stands out for its conspicuous nonconformity to all forms of mimetic pretension. Hence the surprise aroused by the paradoxical causal reasoning, and the necessary concatenation of facts, based on those "virtues of the disparity" that justify Bogle's scheme.

All these narrative devices reproduce the Aristotelian tension between need and surprise; that tension reaches its climax when Lady Tichborne dies, a fearsome unexpected event that marks the sudden change of luck in our heroes' lives. This event, once again, entails the violent display of the causation system and an ironic reference to the generic conventions of tragedy:

> Ese reconocimiento dichoso—que parece cumplir una tradición de las tragedias clásicas—debió coronar esta historia, dejando tres felicidades aseguradas o a lo menos probables: la de la madre verdadera, la del hijo apócrifo y tolerante, la del conspirador recompensado por la apoteosis providencial de su industria. El Destino (tal es el nombre que aplicamos a la infinita operación incesante de millares de causas entreveradas) no lo resolvió así. Lady Tichborne murió en 1870 y los parientes entablaron querella contra Arthur Orton por usurpación de estado civil. (1997, 1:303–4)

> [That joyous recognition, which seems to obey the tradition of classical tragedy, should be the crown of this story, leaving happiness assured (or at least more than possible) for the three persons of the tale—the true mother, the apocryphal and obliging son, and the conspirator repaid for the providential apotheosis of his industry. But Fate (for such is the name that we give the infinite and unceasing operation of thousands of intertwined causes) would not have it.] (1998, 11)

When Borges writes that Fate is "the name that we give the infinite and unceasing operation of thousands of intertwined causes," he explicitly states his rejection to the very possibility of a metaphysical system. In this case, and because of the implicit dialogue with Aristotle, the word "Fate" refers to the Greek worldview, yet other names could have been used as well: Providence, Misfortune, Luck, Chance. All are artificial frameworks that causally arrange

the narrative matter, and that additionally (pretend to) organize "the Asian disorder of the real world" (Borges 1997, 1:231). By exposing the factitious, ready-made nature of metaphysical systems, the text nullifies its gnoseologic dimension. Even chance—as shown in "La lotería en Babilonia"—is a narrative construct that obeys certain rules. Here I return (for the last time) to the *Poetics,* chapter 8, where Aristotle holds that the most beautiful fables are those in which chance seems to be motivated. To motivate chance: that may be one of the main purposes of "La lotería en Babilonia." For, as Borges would put it in *Siete noches,* "there is no chance, what we call chance is our own ignorance of the complex machinery of causality" (no hay azar, lo que llamamos azar es nuestra ignorancia de la compleja maquinaria de la causalidad) (1997, 3:208). Borges's literature ambiguously resolves that ignorance by making up fictional artifacts that reproduce (and undermine) causal models of reasoning and inference.

Therefore, the purpose is twofold: to put together all-encompassing systems that treacherously comply with classical rules, and to display the factitious nature of causal systems. We mentioned in the introduction that the display of causal systems was an avant-garde gesture because it implied experimenting with form. Still, the big difference between Borges and historical avant-gardes lies in the fact that his experimentation with form is never made at the expense of content, but is instead subordinated to content; hence the definition in the first prologue to *Historia universal de la infamia* of the texts that follow as "ejercicios de prosa narrativa" (exercises in narrative prose) (1997, 1:289). Devices are displayed (arousing surprise), but such display serves the development of the diegesis (arousing need).

Finally, this kind of display-, need-, and amazement-based poetics indirectly explains the constant Borgesian practice of short fiction. Questions usually arise, on analyzing Borges, about why he *never* (and in this "never" is a shade of disapproval) wrote a novel. A possible answer can be found in the dynamics of need and astonishment, inherent to classical forms of short fiction. As Boris Eichelbaum defined in "Sur la théorie de la prose," the *nouvelle,* unlike the novel, is prone to the unexpected and entails a necessary link between the parts (1965, 197–211). In Borges's terms (and arguing that surprise and need are literary artifices): "these artifices prevent the use of

mere reality (governed by routine and denunciation, unpredictable chance and vain details)" to "judge fiction (governed by rigor and amazement)." [Tales artificios impiden que para juzgar la ficción (en la que priman el rigor y el asombro) se recurra a la mera realidad (en la que priman la rutina y la delación, el imprevisible azar y el vano detalle)] (1999, 283).

Undoubtedly, this conformity of his writing to Eichelbaum's and Tomashevski's theories (1965, 267–312) would have deeply displeased Borges, who saw in Formalists "a Russian version of Calixto Oyuela" (Bioy Casares 2006, 1498). This, however, does not render any less true a practice of writing where the craftsman's *industry* is displayed at the same time that it is being used, and where causality—displayed in its artifice and in its *providential apotheosis*—serves the story perfectly well.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise credited, all translations are my own.
2. For a theoretical definition of these three types of causality, see Brian Richardson's inaugural study on narrative causality, *Unlikely Stories* (1997, 61–88). As for Borges, Sylvia Molloy was the first to give a sharp critical reading of the philosophical implications of Borges's critique of causality (1977, 381–98).
3. "Norah Lange. *45 días y treinta marineros,*" *Crítica,* Revista Multicolor de los Sábados, (1933, 1, no.18), collected in *Textos recobrados 1931–1955.* Borges's classic essay on narrative causality is "El arte narrativo y la magia," first published in *Sur* (May 1932) and collected the same year in *Discusión* (1997, 1:232).
4. For further discussion on Borges's reading of Valéry, see Cámpora (2007).
5. See Jerónimo Ledesma's interesting discussion on Borges's complex relation to the avant-garde (2009, 167–99).
6. "Nous comptons sur toutes [les] observations . . . pour mettre en évidence les liens de dépendance qui unissent les deux séries causales (naturelle et humaine), liens subtils, fugitifs, inquiétants dans l'état actuel de la connaissance, mais qui, sur les pas les plus incertains de l'homme, font parfois surgir de vives lueurs." See also Breton (1990 [1937], 28).
7. The 1938 review of a manifest signed by Breton and Rivera may serve as a token of Borges's disdain: "Un caudaloso manifiesto de Breton," from *El Hogar,* December 2, 1938, which is collected in *Textos cautivos* (Borges 1986, 285).
8. For an original insight on Borges's "deviant" practice of political commitment during

these years, see Louis (2006; 2007).

9. Borges gently questions Poe's method in "La génesis de 'El cuervo' de Poe" (*La Prensa,* August 25, 1935): "I—somewhat naively—believe in Poe's explanations. Aside from some possible burst of charlatanry, I think that the mental process he alleges ought to be more or less identified with the true creative process. I am certain that this is the way intelligence proceeds: through repentance, obstacles, removals. . . . The foregoing does not mean that the secret of poetic creation—of this poetic creation—has been revealed by Poe. In the analyzed links, the conclusion that the writer draws from each premise is, of course, logical, but it is not the only necessary one. . . . I will say it with other words: Poe declares the different moments of the poetic process, but between each moment and the following one there remains an infinitesimal moment: that of invention" (Borges 2001, 120–23).

10. For a discussion on formal *contraintes* and the banishment of chance from composition, see Pablo Ruiz's surprising article, "La novela sin E y el secreto borgeano de Georges Perec" (2010).

11. The dialogue with Aristotle refers here to the modes of construction of the plot. This is not, however, the only *Poetics*-related topic Borges discusses in his fiction. In "La busca de Averroes" for instance, as Daniel Balderston has shown, the *Poetics* is used to question the actual scope of literary theory (1996, 201–7).

12. As smartly remarked by Ricœur, the deeply paradoxical nature of these two conditions is shown at the grammatical level through an "extraordinary expression in the form of an anacoluthon": "by surprise, the one after the other" (*para tèn doxan, di'allèla*) (1983, 87).

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