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IL SEGRETO

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**A Secret Demand: On Endless Forms of Fiction in Borges’
*El Milagro Secreto***

...the edges of a secret are more
secret than the secret itself.
– Maurice Blanchot (2003: 188).

It is possible that in every work, language is
superimposed upon itself
in a secret verticality...
– Michel Foucault (1977: 57).

Although Jorge Luis Borges’ writings are often revered as masterworks of twentieth-century fiction, his stories, or *ficciones*, still sit uncomfortably within the literary canon. While they are often grouped within specific literary movements, such as modernist and postmodernist fiction, they also remain largely elusive to their readers, and resist any clear understanding.¹ In particular, one can argue that through their many contradictions, perplexing details, and condensed narratives, the Argentine author’s works are in fact, unclassifiable; not bound to a single national literature, they also fail to unite their readers around a set of recognizable literary forms.²

¹ The debate regarding where to place Borges’ works in literary history is ongoing. He has been described as both a late modernist, and an early postmodernist. For example, see Javier Cercas’ recent study, *The Blind Spot: An Essay on the Novel*, for a discussion of how in literature, “postmodernity begins with Borges” (2018: 31). Alternately, for a strong endorsement of Borges as a modernist writer, see Sylvia Molloy’s “Mimesis and Modernism: The Case of Jorge Luis Borges,” in the edited collection, *Literary Philosophers: Borges, Calvino, Eco* (2002: 109).

² My point is not to suggest that Borges’ stories are “universal,” but rather that

For these reasons, as I would like to propose, Borges' stories are strangely "secretive" (from the Latin: *secretus*); meaning, they are set outside of, and set apart from what readers typically understand to be the established borders of literature. While his stories often travel between distant regions of the world, and between alternating temporalities, both ancient and modern,³ they also present a series of secrets that resist being answered. These secrets are demands in Borges' works that continuously challenge their readers, while also seeming to escape the limits of literary genres. In short, they question the meaning of literature, and in so doing, also help to expose literature's most secret quality of all; its inherent uncertainty and ambiguity, and as I will argue, its potential to produce unexpected forms.

In more detail, as I would like to make clear, nowhere are these forms more apparent than in Borges' short story, "El milagro secreto" [The Secret Miracle], an often overlooked writing from paradoxically, his most famous collection, *Ficciones* (1944).⁴ The story is unique, in that it is entirely centered on a single secret that occurs towards its final scene. Set in 1939, during the German occupation of Prague, it recounts the struggles of an unknown writer who is sentenced to death by a Nazi firing squad. However, in the exact moment before his execution, as the narrator reveals, the universe suddenly freezes before his eyes. Mysteriously in that instant while awaiting the soldiers' bullets, we learn that the Czech-Jewish author, Jaromir Hladik, is given an entire year to complete his unfinished

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there are qualities within them that resist such classifications altogether. Although Borges is an Argentine writer, his writings are so elusive that they no longer belong to him alone, nor to any literary movement, or national literature. In this sense, they are closer to what Deleuze and Guattari describe as a "minor literature," in that they paradoxically resist such conventions from within the literary cannon – from within, "great (or established) literature" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 18).

3 See for example, "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" [The Garden of Forking Paths], and "Pierre Menard autor del Quijote [Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote] (Borges 1974; 472, 444).

4 See also, Abreu Mendoza, 2009; Montes Capó, 2003; Foucault, 1977; Rivero-Potter, 1991; and Waisman, 2008; for the most in depth readings of the story.

play titled "Los enemigos" [The Enemies], a work that he had been perpetually putting off writing. And so for precisely one year after first dreading the horrible circumstances of his situation, he works secretly and tirelessly on his drama. At the end of the story, although he is eventually killed by the soldiers' bullets, Hladik simultaneously finishes the final line of his play, and as Borges writes, releases "un grito enloquecido" [a crazed cry] (Borges 1974: 513).

Remarkably though, as I would like to demonstrate, when reaching the final line, as readers, we still remain desperately outside of its main secret. One reason is that against a traditionally hermeneutic model of interpretation, in which the "true" meaning of a text is meant to be located at its center, and only needs excavation to come to light; Borges' stories produce forms of meaning in a deceptively digressive fashion, often aimless, circling, and never quite arriving at a discernible end. For example, as André Maurois observes, within Borges' works, our thoughts often circle back upon themselves in perplexing ways: "...we find roads that fork, corridors that lead nowhere, except to other corridors, and so on as far as the eye can see" (1964, *xiii*). In this sense, as with Borges' other writings, when reading "El milagro secreto" we are left frustratingly with far more questions than answers. For example, how should we interpret the main miracle in the courtyard? Why is it a secret? And also, what does the story reveal about the hidden qualities of literature? How through its strange spaces and times, does it propose a distinct value of literary writing?

My main aim below is to explore these questions in more detail, not by arriving at a single conclusion, but rather by attempting to highlight the subtle relations between them. In particular, I would like to outline the presence of secrets in Borges' stories, as forms of writing that defy any previous literary classifications. In light of these secrets, and through a close examination of their forms, I will also turn to Maurice Blanchot's writings on literary space, and to Michel Foucault's concept of literary repetition. Both authors are helpful to analyze Borges' works, because they read them from outside of any fixed literary tradition. Finally, through my close reading of the story itself, I hope to show how its central secret challenges readers

to rethink the possibilities of literature, both as an ambiguous, yet transformative experience.

A Secret Space

To begin, a first way that we can approach the presence of secrets in Borges' fictions relates to an understanding of literature, as a necessarily *secret* space. Although Borges was clearly fascinated with the concept of time, and it plays a key role in almost all of his writings,⁵ I would like to also argue that one should pay close attention to how the concept of space is expressed in his stories. Moreover, as with other elements in Borges' fictions, the concept of space is critically not fixed, and is constantly being tested and questioned by the writer's formal experimentations. In particular, what readers most often confront in Borges' works is a clear tension between experiences of space that are equally oppressive and liberating, ordered, and elusive.

For example, if we return to the central secret of "El milagro secreto," it is quite literally the space provided to Hladik to write his drama, a space located paradoxically, within the courtyard of the Gestapo headquarters (the same authorities who control everyone's movements in the city). However, through its frozen expression in the narrative, we as readers are also led to imagine its setting as a mysteriously separate place, one that becomes a unique sanctuary, "cut off from" the horrible circumstances of its historical locale (the oppressive spaces of the German occupation). In this sense, quite provocatively, we can think of the frozen courtyard scene as the perfect allegory to help understand the critical importance of literature. More than an actual place, it is above all, a secret space; one that is not fixed, and that resists being reduced to a single form.

If we return briefly to the definition of a secret mentioned above, as that which is separate and "set apart" from what it relates to, then

5 As Clive Griffin states, "of all the metaphysical questions that absorbed Borges, the most important for him was time" (2013: 9). And similarly, a critical emphasis on temporality in Borges' fiction is central to analyses by Montes Capó 2003; and Abreu Mendoza, 2009.

we can also think of literary writing, including Borges' story, as that which affirms itself as literature, precisely through an act of spatial distancing. In Borges' fictions for example, this endless distancing is most often expressed through images that test the limits of representation.

For example, in *Borges: A Writer on the Edge*, Beatriz Sarlo argues that, "placed on the limits between cultures, between literary genres, between languages, Borges is above all, the writer of the *orillas*" (Sarlo 2006: 6). From the Spanish, Sarlo translates the term roughly as, "edge, shore, margin, [and] limit;" but more importantly, as she highlights, "for Borges, the *orillas* possess the qualities of an imaginary territory, an indeterminate space..." (20, 21). In other words, as Sarlo helps to make clear, the images of the margin and the border between what is established, and what is not, are central to the language Borges uses, and also to the manner in which he composes his stories. On the one hand, his short fictions are initially inviting, and draw the reader in through their deceptively straightforward style of prose. While on the other hand, and quite paradoxically, their themes, figures, and philosophical questions are incredibly difficult to penetrate and to comprehend. It is in this secretive sense then, that Borges' stories' produce a type of displacement. They fundamentally challenge and put into question, how we come to think about literary categories and concepts.

Most convincingly, in his essay, "Literary Infinity: The Aleph," Maurice Blanchot examines a similar understanding of displacement in Borges' fiction, to highlight its critical potential as literature. In particular, he provides a reading of Borges' writings that corresponds with his own thoughts about the inherently spatial qualities of literature.⁶ For instance, he claims there is a secret quality to literature that remains at a distance from its author, and that with certain writings, a separation occurs, that not only distances oneself from one's work, but

6 For example, see Blanchot's *The Space of Literature* (1986). The original French title, "*L'Éspace littéraire*," conveys Blanchot's thesis even more faithfully, as an examination of a "literary space" that stands out, within and between key works in Western literature.

also from oneself.⁷ For these reasons, as Blanchot argues, literature is essentially ambiguous. It always begins as a question that continually emerges in relation to its necessary separation from everyday life; from its proposed usefulness and “work,” in the traditional sense of the term. Particularly in relation to Borges’ writings, Blanchot argues that the question one most confronts with literature is “not only the ability to make [*faire*], but that great ability to feign [*feindre*], to trick and deceive, of which every work of fiction is the product” (2003: 4). In other words, the distancing of literature becomes a form of deception: one no longer recognizes the forms and images one sees. Literature confuses, and as Blanchot argues, “unworks” specific concepts, such as space, that provide us with a stable sense of both ourselves and the world around us.⁸

By choosing the story “El Aleph” [The Aleph] (1949) as his main example, Blanchot thus provides us with a specific case of how both such displacements and deceptions are experienced in Borges’ fiction. In particular, as we find similarly in “El milagro secreto,” the story serves as a critical allegory to help understand the very practice of literature as a fully disorienting experience. This element is not surprising in either work, since as Milan Kundera argues, every great work of literature is in some way reflecting on the form of literature itself, and on the very definition of literary writing.⁹ In other words, when reading stories such as “El milagro secreto,” and “El Aleph,” we are reading stories about literary forms, and their own relation and place within literary history. Most clearly, references to both space (form), and literature (writing), become interchangeable in both stories.

In “El Aleph,” for example, we find a narrator who befriends a poet who is writing a long poem titled “*La tierra*” [*The Earth*], which as

7 For a similar argument, see Roland Barthes’ “The Death of the Author” (1986: 45).

8 See also, for a more detailed examination of this point, Blanchot’s own writings on the concept of “*désœuvrement*” in *The Infinite Conversation* (1993: 356).

9 In his collection of essays, *The Art of the Novel*, Kundera writes that, “every novelist’s work contains an explicit vision of the history of the novel, an idea of what the novel is” (2000: 1).

Borges explains, consists of a supposedly complete “descripción del planeta” [description of the planet] (1974: 619). The poet’s work is meant to provide an account of all spaces on earth, but also, and including, the history of literature. As the poet himself declares, in only four lines of the poem, he includes references to “treinta siglos de apretada literatura” [thirty centuries packed with literature] (*ibidem*). However, he is only able to work on the poem from a strange space in the basement of his house, which he is threatened to lose in the course of Borges’ story. The space, which also serves as the story’s title, is as Borges describes: “uno de los puntos del espacio que contiene todos los puntos” [one of the points in space that contain all other points] (*ivi*: 623). And as the poet himself explains, “el lugar donde están, sin confundirse, todos los lugares del orbe, vistos desde todos los ángulos” [it is the only place on earth where all places are seen from every angle, each standing clear, without any confusion or blending] (*ibidem*). But when Borges’ narrator enters the space himself towards the end of the story, he is suddenly overcome by the sheer vastness and limitlessness of the Aleph. He explains to the reader:

Arribo, ahora, al inefable centro de mi relato; empieza, aquí, mi desesperación de escritor. Todo lenguaje es un alfabeto de símbolos cuyo ejercicio presupone un pasado que los interlocutores comparten; ¿cómo transmitir a los otros el infinito Aleph, que mi temerosa memoria apenas abarca?

[I arrive now at the ineffable core of my story; and here begins my despair as a writer. All language is a set of symbols whose use among its speakers assumes a shared past; how, then, can I translate into words the limitless Aleph, which my floundering mind can scarcely encompass?] (*ivi*: 624).

In short, Borges’ narrator confronts the ultimate paradox of literary writing; he would like to represent its apparent limitlessness, but through the limitations of language, finds himself unable to capture the full details of what he sees before him. For this reason, as Blanchot argues, literature’s “...infinite vastness is [like] a prison, being without an exit – just as any place absolutely without exit becomes

infinite” (94). That is, once a writer engages in literary writing, the literary space that she creates, eludes her endlessly. But at the same time, there is no escape from this space, and from the distance that it creates between them.

As tragically as Borges’ stories often end, there is still an important value located within the thought of literature as an ultimately endless space. For example, in “El milagro secreto,” the work of literature that Hladik creates can serve no purpose to the soldiers who have been ordered to kill him. In Blanchot’s terms, such a work of writing helps us to experience the endlessly elusive qualities of literature: “to make us experience the approach of a strange power, neutral and impersonal” (2003: 95). This neutral quality arises through the fact that, even if the Nazis could somehow penetrate Hladik’s thoughts, his drama would be of no use to them. In short, the work would resist their attempts to make sense of it.

A Secret End

Phrased somewhat differently then, another way of describing Hladik’s experience of writing in “El milagro secreto” is to state that it is essentially “pointless”: that it is not governed by any specific point in time, and that also, it does not strive towards a specific end.¹⁰ Although it may seem contradictory to state that something pointless can at the same time, be a critical experience, this is essentially the central philosophy of literary autonomy that Borges reinforces consistently throughout his body of writings.¹¹

For example, to highlight these qualities more closely, in another short story, the well-known, “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote” [Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote] (1944), Borges writes that,

10 It is helpful to remember the Ancient Greek term, “telos,” which implies both, an “end,” and a “purpose.”

11 For a similar analysis of artistic autonomy, see also Theodor Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*, where he argues that the true function of art lies in its inherent “functionlessness” (2000: 297). Importantly for Adorno, the autonomy of art derives from a critically negative relation to the society in which it is read, viewed, and performed. As such, true art resists any easy interpretation, and by turn, any simple appropriation by those in power.

“no hay ejercicio intelectual que no sea finalmente inútil” [there is no intellectual exercise that is not ultimately pointless] (1974: 449). What he means is that to call literature “pointless” is another way to state that it should be free and protected as literature; that it should remain autonomous, and free from any outside control. Interestingly, in his study on the author, John Sturrock reinforces this view, when he highlights how the word “inútil” in the story has also been translated in specific English editions, as “useless” (1977: 203). Sturrock explains that ultimately, the word is significant for understanding Borges’ views on the critical value of literature. He argues, “Borges is only pretending to belittle what he has spent part of his life doing; he is really defending and not condemning ‘intellectual exercises’ when he calls them ‘useless’” (ivi: 205). What Borges is defending, then, is the freedom of literature to have no predefined purpose or end.

Importantly, as I would like to make clear, what such experimentations also help to reveal in Borges’ fiction is an image of literature that is not only endless, but also timeless. To imagine literature as an autonomous space, free from time, is in a certain sense, also to move closer toward the specific ontology of literature that Borges proposes throughout his body of writings. In particular, there are specific forms in Borges’ stories that attempt to slow down, stop, or even to cancel time altogether; and these forms are critical to understanding his overall philosophy of literature.

In more detail, on the opening page of “El milagro secreto,” we encounter such experimentations immediately, when as readers, we are confronted with a series of references to “everyday” time. Moreover, in a typical chronology, the story begins, “La noche del catorce de marzo de 1939, en un departamento de la Zeltnergasse de Praga” [on the night of March 14, 1939, in an apartment on Prague’s Zeltnergasse]” (1974: 508).¹² Following this event, we learn that on the nineteenth of the month, Hladik’s address is given to the Nazis by an informer (ibidem). Later that day, he is arrested by the

12 This reference by Borges is a clear homage to the famous Czech-Jewish writer, Franz Kafka, who also resided on the street around twenty-five years before the story takes place.

Gestapo. And then finally, during his interrogation by the Gestapo captain, Hladik's execution is scheduled for "el día veintinueve de marzo, a las nueve a.m." [the twenty-ninth of March at nine a.m.] (ivi: 509). When grouped together, what becomes clear is that more than markers of narrative development, these dates and times also act as signs of regulation over Hladik's life. Moreover, they outline a political form of control over his experience of time, that Borges' story will eventually subvert and unravel.¹³ In particular, there are clear moments in the story when we begin to notice that time no longer flows in its expected linear and measurable fashion.

The first of these experiences appears during the interrogation scene just mentioned. If readers pay close attention, they will notice that there is an unfortunate delay between Hladik's arrest on the nineteenth of the month, and the actual date of his execution, which is scheduled for March 29, at 9:00 A.M (ibidem). This temporal delay is critical, because it demonstrates how time can be used as a form of punishment in the story. Instead of directly shooting Hladik during or after their interrogation, for no apparent reason, the soldiers decide to wait an extra ten days before they actually kill him. As a result, Hladik is forced to endure an increased level of suffering while waiting in prison. What makes this form of punishment even more tragic is the fact that it was decided purely arbitrarily by the Gestapo captain. As Borges writes, "esa demora... se debía al deseo administrativo de obrar impersonal y pausadamente, como los vegetales y los planetas" [that delay... was caused by the administrative desire to work impersonally and deliberately, as vegetables do, or planets] (ibidem). In other words, the impersonal bureaucracy of the Gestapo is removed from any form of sentient life.

Most depressingly, as we learn from Borges' narrator, following the scheduling of his execution, Hladik, "anticipaba infinitamente el proceso, desde insomne amanecer hasta la misteriosa descarga" [anticipated the process endlessly, from the sleepless dawn to the mysterious discharge of rifles] (ibidem). What this sentence reveals is

¹³ For example, As Daniel Balderston argues, "The Secret Miracle" is a work in which, "against a historical background... the prison house of chronology closes in on the subject" (2013: 120).

that, by replaying the moment repeatedly in his mind, Hladik "murió centenares de muertes" [died hundreds of deaths] before the actual date of his execution (ibidem). Thus, through a bureaucratic act of indifference, with absolutely no regard for his life, in the days leading up to the execution, the Gestapo not only control Hladik's body, they also control his time.

Importantly though, as the story also demonstrates, in contrast to this seemingly absolute form of control over Hladik's life, we also confront an aesthetic experience, that appears to resist such outside forces altogether. The experience arises most mysteriously during the courtyard scene and the secret miracle of the story's title. Let's examine the scene in more detail now, to gain a better understanding of why the story is so crucial to both Borges' oeuvre, and to his overall philosophy of literature.

A Secret Miracle

The first point to highlight is that although as readers, we follow an entire year in Hladik's mind, in fact, only two minutes have actually passed before he is killed by the firing squad in the story's final scene. More specifically, the execution is scheduled for March 29, at 9:00 A.M, but as the final sentence in the story clearly states: "Jaromir Hladik murió el veintinueve de marzo, a las nueve y dos minutos de la mañana" [Jaromir Hladik died on the twenty-ninth of March at 9:02 A.M] (ivi: 513). Thus, what this seemingly small detail reveals is that Hladik's "frozen year" in the courtyard takes place outside of any rational understanding of time. Critically, the moment involves an experience that cannot be measured by the oppressive world of the occupation – a world that systematically reduces one's life to the realms of the material and to the biological. What makes the courtyard scene so mysterious then, is that Hladik is able to experience a form of life that resists any chronological constraints. It is a form of life tied to literature, and to the critical possibilities that literary writing awakens.

In a similar sense, when commenting on the immemorial aspects of literature in his novel *Immortality*, Milan Kundera states that through

a series of distinct novelistic values, “there is a certain part of all of us that lives outside of time” (1992: 4). What he means is that there are similarly elusive and self-effacing qualities of literature that have the potential to uncover experiences that are greater than any individual life. These moments in literature are seemingly timeless for both writers and for readers. Kundera explains that such moments are experienced as timeless, particularly because “the history of literature is not a history of events but [rather] the *history of values*” (2007: 16). Accordingly, the author argues that these values are always present, always with us; but often, they “lie buried... [and] have been underestimated, unrecognized, or forgotten” (ivi: 17).

Importantly, the view that literature contains values that are essentially timeless, is a view shared by both Borges and by his protagonist, Jaromir Hladik.¹⁴ For instance, close readers of Borges’ stories will recognize an uncanny resemblance between the two writers that appears throughout “El milagro secreto.” First, in the opening pages of the story, Borges’ narrator explains that one of the few books that Hladik has in fact published, in his somewhat short and mostly anonymous life, is a philosophical treatise titled, “*Vindicación de la eternidad*” [*A Vindication of Eternity*] (1974: 510). The title is remarkably similar to Borges’ first collection of poems, *Historia de la eternidad* [*A History of Eternity*] (1936). In both titles, we can read an explicit desire to affirm values that are as Kundera describes, “outside of time.”

However, even more explicitly, as close readers of Borges’s works will soon discover, these titles also share numerous similarities with his supposedly non-fictional essay, “Nueva refutación del tiempo” [*A New Refutation of Time*] (1974: 757). In particular, Borges states clearly in the essay that: “esa refutación está de algún modo en todos mis libros” [this refutation [of time] is to be found, in one form or another, in all of my books...” (ivi: 759). Thus, it is an important statement to highlight from an author known specifically for his endless deceptions and literary games. Quite simply, we can find no better explanation of Borges’ own views on literature than in this specific essay.

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 14 See also, Abreu Mendoza, 2009, for a close discussion on this point.

For example, in one of the clearest articulations of these views, and in one especially resonant line, Borges writes that: “negar la sucesión temporal, negar el yo, negar el universo astronómico, son desesperaciones aparentes y consuelos secretos” [to deny temporal succession, to deny the self, to deny the astronomical universe, are measures of apparent despair and of *secret consolation*] (ivi: 771, emphasis added). What he means is that, however nonsensical or futile it may appear to others, writers such as Borges have realized that literature offers the ideal of a timeless value, that ultimately transcends the particularities of everyday life. In other words, we can read Borges’ statement as the perfect summary of Hladik’s own experience in the story. Through a final act of literature, he hopes to ultimately lose himself to the “secret consolation” of writing.

Most significantly, in one of the few philosophical commentaries on the story, Michel Foucault attempts to affirm the critical importance of Hladik’s final literary act. In his essay “Language to Infinity” (1977), Foucault highlights “El milagro secreto” as one in a series of works in western literature that successfully plays with the motif of duplication as a form of aesthetic resistance. In other words, the story helps to reveal the critical qualities of literature, “beginning with these phenomena of self-representation in language” (Foucault 1977: 57).¹⁵

In particular, the form of repetition that Foucault is concerned with, is located in “El milagro secreto” within Hladik’s play, as a work within a work, or what can be described in literary theory, as *mise-en-abyme*. As Lucien Dällenbach clarifies in *The Mirror in the Text* (1989), the most exhaustive study on the subject, “‘*mise en abyme*’ is any aspect enclosed within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it” (1989: 8).¹⁶ Its key characteristic then is the “‘Chinese box’ effect”, which “often suggests an infinite regress, i.e.

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 15 See again, Abreu Mendoza, 2009.

16 See for example, André Gide’s, *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* [*The Counterfeiters*] (1926), which recounts the life of a novelist who is also working on a novel by the same name. Another, well known example is Italo Calvino’s, *If on a winter’s night a traveller* (1982), in which the narrative depicts a reader who is also reading a novel titled, “If on a winter’s night a traveller.”

an endless succession of internal duplications" (Baldick 2008: 211). Although Hladik's play is not titled "El milagro secreto", it still shares important "similarities" with the story in which it is contained (it also follows a man in Prague, whose life begins repeating itself endlessly). For these reasons as Foucault argues, through its mirroring forms, Borges' story attempts to arrest both our senses of death and time. He writes that the story reveals, "a virtual space...[that] discovers the endless resourcefulness of its own image, and where it can represent itself...to infinity" (Foucault 1977: 91). In other words, there is a self-effacing quality to literature, that is based on repetition, and that critically arrests one's sense of time.

In this way, we can understand that the endlessness of Hladik's final moment in the courtyard is not centered on the future (the anticipated execution he is eager to postpone), but rather on the seemingly endless and recurrent present of literary writing. This, I would like to argue, is the main secret that the story proposes. By embracing the present, and by immersing himself in the process of writing, Hladik overcomes his horrible situation, and recuperates what according to Borges is most, "fundamental de su vida" [fundamental to his life] (Borges 1974: 511).

Conclusion

Finally, it is important to remember that although Hladik may believe that he is virtually alone in the courtyard, and that he has no readers but himself; he is also critically a creation in Borges' story, which by the very fact that we're reading it, confirms that his thoughts will carry on and have a life of their own, even after he's gone. This is not simply a nice idea to contemplate at the end of the story, but also further proof that both the secrets in a fiction, and the number of ways in which they can be interpreted, are essentially endless.

While reinforcing a similar idea in his essay *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975), Roland Barthes describes this open and endless interpretation of texts as his "circular memory", a term he uses to highlight his own intimate relationship with the infinite movement of literature. For example, when writing about his constant habit of reading

Proust into almost every text that he comes across, he states:

I savor the sway of formulas, the reversal of origins, the ease which brings the anterior text out of the subsequent one... Proust is what comes to me, not what I summon up; not an "authority", simply a *circular memory*. Which is what the inter-text is: the impossibility of living outside the infinite text – whether this text be Proust or the daily newspaper or the television screen: the book creates the meaning, the meaning creates life (Barthes 1975: 36).

And so for Barthes, whenever we are reading a text, we are also bringing with us a selection of "anterior texts" – that are secretly present in the work before us. These other texts create a dialogue with the primary work under consideration, and open-up its possible meaning.

I hope I have now helped to illuminate this process of intertextuality, which through the reader's circular memory, guarantees a future life for both Borges' and Hladik's works beyond the ones in the story.¹⁷ Is this not the ultimate aim of Hladik's miracle in the narrative; to repeat his writing infinitely and eternally? Critically, with his "crazed cry," Hladik not only finishes the final line of his drama, he also asserts an important degree of autonomy over the future life of the work. After he finishes his play, (the greatest ambition of his life); the only thing left for the soldiers to shoot is a body.

It should now be clear that the main secret I have been analyzing is neither material, nor biological, but rather literary. What "El milagro secreto" ultimately reveals is that writing is not the assertion of a writer, but rather the effacing of a self. It is the ability to lose oneself in one's writing, and through a literary work, to hope that this work will have a life of its own, far removed from the monotony or tragedy of an individual life. Above all, as Borges' story helps us to understand, one should embrace the secrets of literature, revel and wade in their forms, and finally, wish for them never to end.

But in all truth, how can we ever prove the existence of such se-

¹⁷ For a further discussion of the term "intertextuality," see also Julia Kristeva's seminal text on the subject, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," in *Desire and Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1982: 64).

crets? As Borges wisely reminds us, “el mundo, desgraciadamente, es real; yo, desgraciadamente, soy Borges” [the world, unfortunately, is real; I, unfortunately, am Borges” (1974: 771).

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