

A Tale of Two Authors: Valenzuela and Borges

Sharon Magnarelli
Quinnipiac University

One could say, with only slight exaggeration, that Luisa Valenzuela grew up and developed into a writer in the presence of Borges, both literally and figuratively. Figuratively, it is doubtful that any Spanish-American writer (or perhaps any writer of the Western world) during the last half of the twentieth century could have escaped Borges's vast literary influence in some form. Literally, Borges was a friend of Valenzuela's mother (Luisa Mercedes Levinson) and therefore a frequent visitor to her home during her youth. Later, as an established writer herself, Valenzuela continued that friendship with Borges until his death in 1986. Interestingly, however, this presence was not apparent in her work until recently when suddenly we find not one but two stories that evoke the Argentine virtuoso: "La calesita," published in 1998, and "El otro libro," published in 1999.¹ In the study that follows I would like to explore Valenzuela's re-plotting of the Borgesian *mappa mundi* in these two stories.²

In "La calesita," which will not be the main focus of this study, Valenzuela borrows the Borgesian notion of two worlds or two parallel lines that come together briefly. Although the details may not be, the tone and tenor of the story are distinctly Borgesian. The tale centers on a woman and her godson (which would probably not be the focus in Borges, whose stories tend to be adult male-oriented). Preoccupied with their microcosmic worlds and personal desires (for him, a merry-go-round ride and ice cream; for her, escaping the heat and remembering her own childhood

with its rides on the merry-go-round), neither character fathoms that their worlds are unstable and multiple rather than synchronous and uniform nor that their relationships to those worlds and to each other are provisional and contingent. In the heat of an apparently mundane, drowsy afternoon, those worlds split apart, the parallel lines separate as the merry-go-round continues to circle monotonously in what evokes the repetitiveness, artificiality, and triteness of our world even as it recalls the circle or sphere, sign of the universe, that Borges so often used. When that merry-go-round stops, the woman and child have disappeared for each other, apparently having spun off into different spheres or time zones, different worlds that nonetheless are still adjoined and encircled by and in the text, which is to say, by and in literature.³ As woman and child search for each other, all else seems unchanged. The text concludes, "And we, knowing that the parallel lines will end up touching, wonder where. And above all, when" (114). Meanwhile, the reader is left with an uncanny sensation of recognition, of having been here before.

I have taken the time to outline the plot of "La calesita" because it is precisely this uncanny sensation of recognition, the two parallel lines or spheres that touch, which lead us to "El otro libro," a text far more overt in its relationship to Borges, far more subversive, and the one on which I shall focus in this paper. "El otro libro" is a story that incorporates almost every element we associate with Borges in terms of style, tone, motifs, language, complexity, etc. Oxymoronic as it may seem (and let us not forget that the oxymoron was one of Borges's favorite tropes), the story simultaneously is and is not Borges, perhaps in much the same way (if indeed inversely) the *Quijote* written by the master's Pierre Menard is and is not the one written by Cervantes. As the narrator of "El otro libro" states in regard to the book that has passed briefly through her hands, "the stories sounded vaguely familiar but there was something disconcerting in them, like a changed sign" (193-94). And, such is precisely the case in the story, "El otro libro," which becomes the synecdoche of that other book: the sign has been changed, turned, indeed, upside down.

Parallel lines or contiguous spheres, universes, have touched, if

only briefly, and the reader is again left with that eerie and oxymoronic sensation of simultaneous familiarity and strangeness, as well as the fear not of flying, but of spinning off, never to be found again.⁴

So, the plan for the coming pages will be first to review briefly the plot of "El otro libro," then to survey some of the salient elements of Borgesian prose which Valenzuela has so deftly captured in this tribute to him, and finally to explore the significance of the moments of divergence from that male model, the changed sign.

The plot of this brief story is ostensibly simple. Narrated in the first person, a woman tells of a book lent to her by a friend, a book purloined specifically from the forbidden library. As a result of having perused the seemingly inoffensive book, albeit briefly and superficially, the narrator's hands are scarred with the stigmata of the sin. Writing clandestinely at night while others sleep, she recognizes the risk both of having touched the book and of now retelling some of what she read, but she knows she is condemned anyway. The book, which she labels a time bomb, published in Madrid in 1782, is a collection of very old stories that predate "the coming/arrival of the Master" (195), four of which she recalls and briefly sketches: "El intruso," "La Arroba," "La secta de la Medusa," and "Petra Minardi, autora de las Silvas." "Contaminated" by the book, she can no longer view the world in quite the same way. As she notes, she has "seen the reflection of us [in the feminine]" (197) and now knows that she is included, allowed to play (the game) too. Specifically, she mentions a number of things she is now permitted: writing, rewriting the classics, and not looking down (one presumes with modesty) at the very mention of the master's name.

Many of the elements that link this story to Borges are doubtlessly apparent. First, in both there is an emphasis on the motif of the book and the library, literature within literature, reflections of reflections—the specular writing mentioned in the story. In "La biblioteca de Babel," Borges describes the library as a series of hexagons (a figure that evokes a book with its six sides) that encompass the world and yet paradoxically are encompassed by it.

The Valenzuela story similarly presents itself as literature that talks about other literature and about the library that contains that literature. And, in both cases the literature simultaneously reflects and affects life; paradoxically each modifies the other even as it is contained by/within it. In a dizzying *mise en abîme* of fictionality, the Valenzuela story contains the stories from the book which in turn rewrite the Borgesian stories (or, given the chronological framework posed within the story itself, perhaps we should say “pre-write” them). And, of course, as we know, much of Borges’s fiction rewrites or pretends to rewrite earlier texts, or conversely, prewrite future texts.⁵ Second, the story is narrated in the first person and intentionally blurs the lines between narrator and implied author as is so often the case in Borges. Although here, and unlike Borges, Valenzuela never refers to herself by name, little distance is established between the fictionalized narrator and the author, in a gesture that reminds us that the implied author is as fictional as the character and perhaps as the world itself. As Borges himself often obliquely suggested, first, fictional worlds and characters tend to be more memorable and obliterate the real world for us, and, second, our access to that world is necessarily mediated by narratives. Similarly, the tale begins (as do so many of Borges’s) with a chance encounter that forever changes the life of the narrator: a friend, Liliana Heer, has found the book (“managed to materialize it” in Valenzuela’s words [193]) and lent it to the narrator. As is often the case in Borges, the named agent is a real person and a writer at that, thus producing another *mise en abîme* of reality and fiction. Similarly, the story ends with the narrator being marked by the literature read, the story told, the vision. We can recall any number of Borges stories that end with the narrator’s recognition that he is condemned as a result of the experience (often related to literature), which he has just narrated.⁶ The difference perhaps is that in Borges the characters are usually condemned psychologically and frequently with insomnia; in Valenzuela, the narrator is psychologically condemned and insomniac to be sure, but she is also physically marked, stigmatized for reasons I shall discuss below.

Yet, while the tone, complexities, interrelationships, and open allusion all overtly invoke Borges, the divergences from the mas-

ter are significant and, I would argue, directly related to themes and issues Valenzuela has previously expressed in both her fiction and nonfiction. Those divergences are unquestionably the result of a single changed sign: the males of Borges's universe have been replaced by females in Valenzuela's. As we know, Borges's world is mostly populated by adult men; women seldom appear in his stories and rarely as protagonists. Indeed, as I argued in a 1983 article, women in Borges generally function as objects of desire. For the most part they are minor characters, usually already absent, male projections of male desire, what the male wants to find (or inversely, not find). I also argued there that on more than one occasion (e.g. "El Aleph" and "La intrusa") the relationship between men is predicated precisely on the death of a woman (Magnarelli, "Literature").⁷ But that does not mean that Borges was a misogynist (although certainly some of his characters are).⁸ Rather than hating women, Borges seemed somewhat indifferent or oblivious to them, at times portraying them as "little men." For example, the similarities between "El duelo" and "El otro duelo" are revealing. The protagonists of the first are females and those of the second, males. Both stories point to the competition between individuals, a competition predicated paradoxically on their mutual dependence. Although the hatred or competitiveness manifests itself differently in the two stories (perhaps due as much to social class and situation as to gender), the underlying psychological motivation is essentially the same. Yet, while one could probably not imagine substituting women in the place of the two gauchos of "El otro duelo," one could certainly imagine substituting the two females of "El duelo" with cultured, artistic men. In this sense the two women are in many ways merely "little men."⁹ I would argue that it is precisely this aspect of the Borgesian opus that Valenzuela has so cleverly recrafted. Indeed, elsewhere she is specific that women should "stop being the mirror of men's desires" ("The Word" 97).

Paradoxically, of course, Borges's works (like most master narratives) appear to be genderless in their focus on what is presumed to be that universal unmarked, uninflected (male) body. Valenzuela's inversions, however, mark the phallacy of just such a

presumed neutrality.¹⁰ And, it is precisely her change of gender inflection that makes all the difference. First of all, the narrator herself is a female surrounded by other females, seventeen women per “block” to be exact. Nevertheless, this is not an exclusively female world. On the contrary, the narrator alludes to her friend/lover Julián, who regularly visits her and who may or may not accept the changes the other book has generated in her or her newly acquired “distancing from the dogma” (198). Yet, within the representational economy of the fictionalized world, Julián is free to accept those changes or not, with no penalty for failing to embodying her desire, just as he is apparently free to come and go in a way that she and the other women are not. Furthermore, the friend that lends the book, the agent without whom there would be no story, is also female, Lilita Heer. While her surname may evoke the Germanic or Scandinavian names (along with other exotic ones) that punctuate Borges’s texts, her first name, Lilita, brings us right back to the lived, Argentine reality in what is another notable divergence of Valenzuela’s world from that of Borges, whose works are not usually considered to be very “down to earth” nor particularly related to Argentina.¹¹ Valenzuela’s story never names Argentina, but it never seems far from it either as the reference to the Argentine writer demonstrates. Similarly, Valenzuela’s reframing and recrafting of each of the four Borges tales is predicted on both its foregrounding of the local (Argentina as well as the rest of Spanish America) and that same change of sign (from male to female).

Thus, the stories in the forbidden book again mirror yet diverge significantly from Borges’s stories precisely because of this changed sign. Here as in Borges’s tales understatement and allusion reign. There is no need to retell the tales in their entirety; they are already well-recognized, so our narrator limits herself to merely sketching the outlines. Borges’s “La intrusa” is refigured as “El intruso.” The plot is essentially the same, but now the rivalry is between two sisters rather than brothers, and it is the male whom they both desire who is eventually killed in the “surprise ending” (196). And surely that ending is a surprise precisely because in the world of the master narratives (including Borges’s)

the female is generally portrayed only as an object of desire, passive and undesiring herself; it is surprising that her desire and her relationship to another female should lead to the degradation or death of a male.

Similarly, Borges's story "La secta del Fénix" becomes "La secta de la Medusa." Borges tells of the members of an ancient sect, who are the bearers of the Secret. Transmission of that secret from generation to generation (to males, of course, never to females) is not within the purview of mothers or priests. Instead it is left to mystagogues from the lower classes or to other children. The secret, never openly articulated, is evoked via the sect's name (Phoenix) and the sectarians' ritual preoccupation with the rise and fall of that mythological bird, which is metaphorized and metonymically displaced onto the male body. In Valenzuela's version, the secret is passed not to young males but to young females by servants, prostitutes, and nannies (all female rather than male) and requires only a glance (in reference to Medusa's ability to turn men to stone with just a glance).¹² Thus, the Phoenix, phallic figure of rebirth and resurgence, so fancifully worshiped in the Borges story, is replaced with Medusa, a female figure who can accomplish her feat with far less effort.

"La Arroba," which our narrator considers the most "accomplished" of the stories (196), is a revision of Borges's "El Aleph." Once again, a female rather than a male is the protagonist who has been privileged to view the tiny sphere that contains all the universe, all places and all times, past and future, including herself, her own position and actions within that universe. Significantly, the *arroba* also encompasses "El otro libro" and even more important the Master's book, which "in the middle of the twentieth century would reproduce the same stories with the sign changed" (196-97).¹³ Thus, in one swift gesture, the subject has shifted: the subversive agent who changed the sign, turned everything upside down, is neither Valenzuela nor the other book. It is the Master himself who inverted things, erased history. So, unlike the "aleph," which is small and weightless, the "arroba," as its name suggests, carries weight, as indeed have so many books and masters, all the master narratives of the world that have changed the

sign throughout the centuries and refigured history and the world so that they centralize those masters while marginalizing all else.¹⁴

And, finally, "Petra Minardi, autora de las Silvas" recasts "Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*" in a number of ways. Once again the focus is on a female as the neo-author rewrites the work of yet another female. Significantly, too, and not unlike Liliana Heer, the name Petra Minardi evokes the exotic foreigner so frequently portrayed by Borges (it might well be an Italian name) but simultaneously leaves open the possibility that she is, indeed, a Latin American author, specifically one from the Southern Cone, in what is again a subtle evocation of Argentine reality and the immigrant origins (often Italian) of many of its people. And, what she has rewritten is not the masterpiece of another master but rather the *sylvas* (a more "minor," less "weighty" art form) of a nun from colonial Mexico, clearly an allusion to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. The allusion is significant insofar as Sor Juana, often considered the first feminist of the Americas, wrote lyrical poetry that not only chastised men as she defended the rights of women but also expressed what might be read as lesbian desire, a desire that would specifically marginalize men. Surely, we might read the question of desire that elides men as an inversion of the *Quijote* and again related to the Borges story. Although don Quijote continually professes his love for Dulcinea, Dulcinea is an empty sign, a creation/projection on the part of Quijote, and has no material existence apart from Aldonza Lorenzo, who bears little resemblance to Quijote's creation. Thus, in many ways Quijote's "love" (in spite of all appearances to the contrary) elides women ("real" ones, at least). It is no doubt relevant, too, that Valenzuela has specifically chosen to mention the *sylvas*. First, the *sylva* is a medieval verse form, which thus evokes yet another anachronism. Second, the *sylva* was not the dominant form of Sor Juana's lyrical poetry. Still, that fact may well provide a comment on Borges's hyperbole when he cast Menard as the "author" of the *Quijote* in spite of the fact that he had "scribed" only two chapters and a fragment—certainly not the monumental work that is the *Quijote*. On the other hand, since Sor Juana's *sylvas* are few in number, it is less hyperbolic to posit that Minardi (re)wrote them.

In what is yet another Borgesian move, our narrator conflates time as she comments on this story, wondering how Minardi, a courtesan of the nineteenth century, could have managed to reproduce those verses and if we might consider her the twelfth muse. Both of these remarks beg further consideration. First, the narrator has indicated that the other book was published in 1782. As a citizen of the nineteenth century, Minardi would thus post-date the publication of the book in which she figures. In this way, the “deliberate anachronism” (450) of “Pierre Menard” becomes a prochronism or a prolepsis in Valenzuela. Since we normally view narrative as a representation of what has already been, how do we explain a reference to Minardi’s later writings in an earlier book? One answer, of course, is that we cannot, but again this recalls the time distortions in Borges and the notion that the book reflects both the past and the future. Another possible answer, not contradictory but more in keeping with what I shall posit as the dominant theme of the Valenzuela story, is that Petra Minardi can appear in a book that predates her because she and her “reality” are the products of narrative, literally and figuratively. I would argue that within the representational economy of the story, Minardi could write in the nineteenth century because the other book of the eighteenth provided a mirror in which she could find herself, find a reflection that she might want to embody. She could become the writer that she eventually became because some prior narrative had proposed that subject position as a possibility, something that women have not often experienced. As Borges notes in “Una rosa amarilla,” books are not, as vanity would imagine, a mirror of the world but one more thing added to it (795). Rather than simply mirroring reality, literature also creates it. Second, while it is true that Sor Juana is frequently labeled the tenth muse, one could label Minardi the twelfth muse only if an eleventh muse had existed between Sor Juana and Minardi.¹⁵ Clearly that eleventh muse would be the author of the other book, who, muse-like, inspires (and perhaps even engenders) the future Minardi.¹⁶

What perhaps all this brings us to (or back to) is the question of literature and the stigmata on our narrator’s hands. It is revealing that Borges is never named in Valenzuela’s story; he is simply

designated el Maestro—the Master (with a capital M), in what not only acknowledges and pays tribute to his literary mastery but also links him directly to all the masters of the master narratives that have shaped society. Thus, while the direct reference is clearly Borges, Borges himself is converted into a literary character (as he so often did himself). The difference is that here he also functions as a synecdoche for all the masters and their narratives. Thus, the other book becomes a sign of the other world, the one inevitably omitted from the master narratives, the one populated by females. And, not irrelevantly, the book comes from the forbidden library and had to be smuggled out and read clandestinely, for it presents a world that, in literary terms, has generally been hidden from us. As any number of feminist critics have noted (including Valenzuela herself), throughout the centuries literature has been in the hands of men. Women generally did not write, were not published, and/or were not read. And, those few who did were seldom elected to the men's club we call the canon. Thus, as we women have looked for ourselves in the mirror of literature, we have either not found a reflection at all or found one with which we could not (or would not want to) identify, leaving us to presume that there must be something terribly wrong with us: either we were incapable of recognizing ourselves in those literary mirrors or we were horribly deviant from the authorized and acceptable norm portrayed there. As Judith Fetterley has noted in *The Resisting Reader*, "As readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values" (xx). Valenzuela herself has observed that we "become what others name us" and that "our perception of reality is colored by the words chosen to describe it" ("Trying" 90). The end result has long been a series of self-images that have not quite fit.

Not irrelevantly, Borges himself frequently expressed similar reservations in regard to mirrors. Specifically, his fear was that the image in them would begin to differ or diverge from reality and/or that he would see his face in them disfigured by strange "adversities" (786)—something that women have long experi-

enced in the mirror of literature. His comment in his poem, “Los espejos,” might well apply to the metaphoric mirrors of literature: “They prolong this vain, uncertain world / In their vertiginous spider’s web” (814). Those mirrors of literature form a spider’s web from which it is difficult to escape, yet the world they cast is “uncertain” and “vain” insofar as they inevitably project the desires of some master—personal, vested desires, that are then erroneously read as a faithful reflection of some external, objective, universal reality.¹⁷ For that reason, until recently women were able to imagine themselves only as objects of desire, never as desiring, active subjects, except to the extent that we have been able to cross identify, perversely perhaps, identifying with the male desiring subject/gaze (à la de Lauretis) even as we have resisted it (à la Fetterley). In the Valenzuela story (as elsewhere in her texts), however, women are the desiring, active subjects, a fact that nonetheless does not bar the possibility for the male to occupy that position also. Valenzuela’s other book has broken through those literary mirrors, all that paper. It is like (as the narrator herself explains it) when a cigarette is held to a piece of paper and crosses/burns through the layer or cloak (the master narrative) that separates us from the real (193). The simile is literalized in the story, for the hands of the female protagonist were burned as literature passed through them.

Furthermore, as Valenzuela reminds us via those scarred hands, not only has the other book metaphorically burned through the paper (narrative) that has been cloaking reality but also every book we touch affects us, changes us and our lives to a greater or lesser extent. The stigmata are thus the bodily marks of the power of literature, the word. In the narrator’s terms, “the sign has become flesh” (194), but, of course, as Judith Butler has convincingly argued, the sign has always manifested itself in/on the body and our perception of it. And, to be sure, every master narrative marks us as it seeks (often successfully) to shape our subjectivities and demarcate our possibilities. It is perhaps for that reason that the language used to describe the knowledge obtained from the other book is so frequently violent and aggressive. That knowledge “atenaza” ‘tortures, tears’ the flesh, not from the narrator’s

body but from her days (194). And, she is adamant that her fear is related to time and memory, a memory that will have to be torn from her, as perhaps it was torn from us all when the master narratives erased female genealogy, metaphorically tore pages out of the master text Borges imagined as the universe. In "La muralla y los libros" Borges writes of the emperor who ordered the burning of all books anterior to him in order to abolish the past and any praise of what preceded his reign, so that history might begin with him (633). And, as he observes in "La otra muerte," "To modify the past . . . is to create two universal histories" (575). And, clearly one of those "histories" has been relegated to the prohibited library. Still, the question implicitly posited in the Valenzuela story is, exactly who is the agent that prohibits access to that library? And, to what extent is the prohibition self-enforced?¹⁸ That library, perhaps like that other, contiguous world inhabited by women, is there. As the narrator notes, it is a question of focus; we cannot find it in part because we have not been taught to look for it. We need to learn to seek it out, so that these other stories/versions—other potential mirrors—will materialize, quite literally, as they do here, so that we can find the "god-figure behind God" (197)—a reference to Borges's poem "Ajedrez." And, if we cannot find it, we need to create it anew as Valenzuela has done in "El otro libro."¹⁹

Before concluding, I would like to note that in a video interview with Silvia Lemus, Valenzuela reminisces about the influence of Borges on her work. She mentions two characteristics that in retrospect she believes have impacted her: first, his (often painful) search for the exact word to embrace his thought and, second, his laughter as he and her mother wrote a story together. Unquestionably, it is these two elements that Valenzuela has best captured in "El otro libro." That search for the exact word will be the subject of another paper, but, I would like to comment on the laughter in the story and insist that the story is neither satire nor parody as we generally understand them, for this story laughs with, not at.²⁰ There is imitation, intentional imitation of the Master, yes, but no mockery, no disparagement. On the contrary,

I would suggest that there is a good deal of admiration. I would

also argue that I find no traces of Harold Bloom's anxiety of influence. Valenzuela is confident and assured in this story. Furthermore, in her revision, it is a question of "and/also"—this affiliation (freely chosen) *and* others, you *and* I—rather than that "either/or" (the desire to usurp the other's mastery) which is the motivation in Bloom's anxiety.²¹ Furthermore, the misreading (intentional or not) that Bloom associates with the anxiety of influence is also absent. On the contrary, Valenzuela understands the Borgesian world and style perhaps even better than the master himself did.

Revealingly, Valenzuela's story ends with laughter, that same laughter perhaps she remembers from Borges. The text concludes, on a positive, hopeful note: "If there is always a before, there is hope that there is an after. Therefore, we will laugh with pleasure, as—they say—the Master so often laughed and laughs" (198). Insofar as Borges viewed all reading as a form of rewriting, I think he himself would have appreciated Valenzuela's "well wrought urn" here and would indeed have laughed with us. Thus, "El otro libro" repeats the gesture of Borges's "La otra muerte" by re-inscribing what might have been, or perhaps what was—who is to say? Thus, in so many ways it is the story Borges did not write, perhaps could not have written, given the parallel line on which he traveled, the sphere within which he existed, that is, his positionality in time and space.

Notes

1. Neither story has been published in English. Throughout this article the translations of both the Valenzuela stories and Borges's works are my own; the page numbers refer to the Spanish texts.
2. My reference to a map is not accidental. Elsewhere, Valenzuela has argued that "Woman, and especially that mythical nonentity called womanhood, has practically always been *mapped* by men" ("Phallus" 242; emphasis added).
3. It is probably not irrelevant that although the term *calesita(s)* rather than *tiovivo* is the term used in Argentina for merry-go-round, it is a

derivative of *calesa*, a carriage. Thus, the term, *calesitas* presumably evokes the horses that pulled the carriage and functions synecdochically as sign for merry-go-round with its wooden horses. But, significantly, a carriage also carries us somewhere, takes us away, as the merry-go-round in the story and the characters' mesmerism with it do, and as literature does, as I shall argue below.

4. Molloy alludes to a narrative grammar in Borges that brings together the familiar and the unfamiliar while ensuring their mutual contamination (79).

5. I am thinking here specifically of "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." According to Rodríguez Monegal, even when the story was first published in 1940, the lengthy "Postscript," dated 1947, was already included (347).

6. I am thinking for example of "El Aleph," "El Zahir," "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," and "La busca de Averroes," among others.

7. One story I did not discuss in that article, "Ulrica," published in *El libro de arena* (1977), does center on a female, one who is certainly an object of desire but also a desiring subject.

8. Indeed, Borges on occasion even seems critical of that misogyny. For example, in "El duelo" he notes, with what seems to be an ironic tone, that in his country "the woman is a prototype of the species, not an individual" (1056).

9. My use of the term "little men" is, of course, a reference to Freud's perception of little girls as little men and is indebted to the insights of Irigaray.

10. The term phallacy is borrowed from Felman and is intended to evoke the phallic nature of the fallacy.

11. I am not convinced that this is necessarily a valid perception of Borges's work. One of the curious, even oxymoronic characteristics of Borges's literary worlds is their evocation of both concrete Argentine reality and an exotic other world simultaneously superimposed on and often seeming to overshadow that concrete one. Still, Borges has often been criticized for his use of the exotic, what many critics read as his avoidance of the realities of Argentina. While it is certainly true that he did not deal with sociopolitical issues overtly, many of his stories, particularly the earlier ones, take place in Argentina, often in Buenos Aires (past or present), and he was very conscious of Argen-

tine "types." In what I consider an encouraging sign, however, some more recent studies on Borges examine links between his works and historical events. See, for example, Balderston.

12. To be sure, Borges's story is not specific that women cannot pass the secret on. It does state, however, that the task is left to "lower individuals" (in the masculine) and might be performed by a "slave, a leper, or a beggar," all also in the masculine (523).

13. In his *Aleph* Borges saw "every letter of every page" as well as the obscene missives that his deceased beloved, Beatriz, had written to another man (625-26), but he never mentions a book, *per se*. Valenzuela, on the other hand, mentions two books and is specific that the master rewrites the earlier book, changing the sign.

14. *Arroba* is a unit of measure: a weight of twenty-five pounds or a liquid quantity of between 2.6 and 3.6 gallons. Interestingly, however, the verb *arrobar* means to enchant or enrapture, which is what the "arroba" in this story does.

15. This entire question is complicated by the observations of Paz regarding the use of the term "tenth muse." According to him, it appeared on the first volume of Sor Juana's works, also published in Madrid, as early as 1689. He notes, however, that the term had been used in 1650 by a London publisher in reference to an American poet, Ana Bradstreet. To further complicate the issue, he also notes that Plato used the term to refer to Sappho (363-64).

16. There are, of course, other points of contact with the Borges story. First, even within the fiction, the Menard text which re-writes the earlier one does not exist; it requires an act of faith. Second, "Pierre Menard" suggests that each reading is a re-writing of the text, a notion Valenzuela literalizes in "El otro libro."

17. Borges himself theorized the relationship between art and "reality" in terms very similar to what I am proposing here. In "Arte poético" he observes, "Art should be like that mirror / That reveals our own face to us" (843). But, as I am arguing, it has seldom done that for women, although we may have often assumed it has. In "Del culto de los libros" he proposes "the universal history is a Sacred Scripture that we decipher and write uncertainly, and in which we are written" and "that unending book is the only thing there is in the world: better expressed, it is the world" (716). As he proposes in "Las ruinas

circulares,” we are all fictions, dreamed, or somehow produced by the other.

18. Valenzuela has often spoken of self-imposed censorship. In a 1981 interview she spoke of the kind of self-censorship where “[y]ou cannot see things because you do not allow yourself to see them; you are blindfolded. Like horses, we have been put into blinders so that we cannot see much of reality and deal with language” (Magnarelli, “Interview” 206).

19. In her essay, “La mala palabra,” Valenzuela calls for women writers to reconstruct and modify the text that is our mask, appropriating those words that were considered inappropriate for women to use, and arming ourselves with what was used to stigmatize us (491).

20. For me both satire and parody seem designed to prove one’s own superiority at the expense of the other.

21. My use of the term “affiliation” is indebted to Gilbert and Gubar (170-71). Along the same lines, Gilbert and Gubar generalize that “women do not engage in the kind of purely antagonistic struggle that Bloom describes” (199).

Works Cited

- Balderston, Daniel. *Out of Context: Historical Reference and the Representation of Reality in Borges*. Durham: Duke UP, 1993.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. London: Oxford UP, 1973.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *Obras completas*. Ed. Carlos V. Frías. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1974.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex.”* New York: Routledge, 1993.
- de Lauretis, Teresa. *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington: U of Indiana P, 1982.
- Felman, Shoshana. “Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy.” *Diacritics* 5 (1975): 2-10.
- Fetterley, Judith. *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*. Bloomington: U of Indiana P, 1981.

- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century. Volume 1: The War of the Words*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1988.
- Irigaray, Luce. "Psychoanalytic Theory: Another Look." *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985. 34-67.
- Luisa Valenzuela. Interview with Silvia Lemus. Video-cassette. Films for the Humanities and Sciences. 1998.
- Magnarelli, Sharon. "Censorship and the Female Writer—An Interview/Dialogue with Luisa Valenzuela." *Reflections / Refractions: Reading Luisa Valenzuela*. New York: Peter Lang, 1988. 203-19.
- Magnarelli, Sharon. "Literature and Desire: Women in the Fiction of Jorge Luis Borges." *Revista/Review Interamericana* 13.1-4 (1983): 138-49.
- Molloy, Sylvia. *Signs of Borges*. Trans. Oscar Montero. Durham: Duke UP, 1994.
- Paz, Octavio. *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o Las trampas de la fe*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1982.
- Rodríguez Monegal, Emir and Alastair Reid, eds. *Borges. A Reader: A Selection from the Writings of Jorge Luis Borges*. New York: Dutton, 1981.
- Simon and Schuster's International Dictionary*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973.
- Valenzuela, Luisa. *Antología personal*. Buenos Aires: Desde la Gente—Instituto Movilizador de Fondos Cooperativos, 1998.
- . "La mala palabra." *Revista Iberoamericana* 132-33 (1985): 489-91.
- . "The Other Face of the Phallus." *Reinventing the Americas: Comparative Studies of Literature of the United States and Spanish America*. Ed. Bell Chevigny. New York: Cambridge UP, 1986. 242-48.
- . "El otro libro." *Escrito sobre Borges*. Comp. Josefina Delgado. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1999. 191-98.

- . “Trying to Breathe.” *The Writer in Politics*. Eds. William H. Gass and Lorin Cuoco. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1996. 85-109.
- . “The Word, That Milk Cow.” *Contemporary Women Authors of Latin America*. Eds. Doris Meyer and Margarite Fernández Olmos. Brooklyn: Brooklyn College P, 1983. 96-97.