

Borges and the Avant-garde:
A Transatlantic Foundational Exchange, 1919-1923

By

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INTRODUCTION

The essential unity of Borges' *oeuvre* derives its aesthetic and conceptual underpinnings from his foundational contact with the European avant-garde. Positioning Borges in dialogue with his European avant-garde contemporaries enables a discussion of his early influences within the framework of European poetic renewal in the early 1920s, as well as an examination of his own considerable role in the crystallization of a transatlantic vanguard. The question at the core of this investigation is two-fold: 1) What influence did the European avant-garde precepts have on Borges, and 2) what influence did Borges exert on the European—and, in particular, on the Spanish—vanguardist poetic vision? I intend to show that Borges, in his early work published in Spain, assimilates the Spanish avant-garde discourse, engaging in an active dialogue with his European contemporaries and the spirit of the times. Borges' espousal of the Spanish Ultraist aesthetic is quite profound, despite the relatively short time of his participation, taking into account 1) Borges' influence on the movement through theoretical manifestos and critical essay publications, 2) his prolific poetic contribution to Spanish Ultraist magazines, and 3) the personal contacts and deep-seated influence which Borges derives from his time in Spain. Furthermore, Borges' rejection of his own 'precursor' texts becomes a necessary starting point for the subsequent evolution of his aesthetic. The aim of this study, then, is to advance the critical discussion of Borges' early years of literary formation in Europe, to systemize Borges' earliest poems published in Spain and to view them in context of an interaction with his contemporaries in the Spanish vanguard,

underscoring Borges' mutually beneficial contact with the Spanish Ultraist movement as one of its intellectual leaders and theorists, as well as the ephemeral movement's influence on Borges, insofar as it underlies his later writing and transition toward fashioning of a universal voice.

Borges' participation in the spirit of the European literary vanguard while in Spain fosters a productive exchange, both in terms of the formative influence which the contact exerts on Borges' aesthetic development as a poet and his own role in effectuating and propagating the movement through theoretical manifestos. Largely underappreciated within the critical study of Borges' *oeuvre*, the period between 1919 and 1923—encapsulating Borges' two trips to Europe—constitutes a prolific segment of his career, with the publication of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) as the period's culmination. In 1919, the young Argentine poet arrived in Seville with his family and, in his words, “fell in with the literary group formed around *Grecia*. This group, who called themselves the ultraists, had set out to renew literature [...]”¹ In *Inquisiciones* (1925), Borges postulates Spanish Ultraism as “una voluntad de renuevo, [...] la voluntad de ceñir el tiempo del arte con un ciclo novel,”² underscoring the movement's basic themes of rebellion against the established paradigm and celebration of linguistic and thematic renovation. As a movement, Ultraism began to emerge in 1918, focusing primarily on poetic discourse and synthesizing other concurrent avant-garde movements³; in “El movimiento ultraísta español,” Guillermo de Torre views Ultraism as “la etiqueta

¹ Jorge Luis Borges, “An Autobiographical Essay,” *The Aleph and Other Stories 1933-1969*, ed. and trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (New York: Dutton, 1970) 220.

² Jorge Luis Borges, *Inquisiciones* (Madrid: Alianza, 1998) 105.

³ See Gloria Videla, *Ultraísmo*; Guillermo de Torre, *Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia and Historia* (1925). Also see José Luis Bernal, *El Ultraísmo: ¿Historia de un Fracaso?* (Cáceres: Universidad de Extremadura, 1988).

genérica de un movimiento que engloba varios ‘ismos’ específicos en una perfecta coexistencia, como rosas consanguíneas, aun en su diversa foliación polipétala.”⁴

Nebulously defined, the movement vehemently rejected the *modernista* aesthetic of the past, seeking, rather, to replace it with revolutionized poetic expression on the pages of literary magazines: “Fue *Grecia*, con *Cervantes*, *Ultra*, *Tableros* y los efímeros números de *Perseo* y *Reflector* la manifestación difícil de una nueva conciencia artística, tendencia novísima, aunque clásica, dentro de su arbitrariedad desconcertadora,”⁵ states an Ultraist manifesto, “Nuestras Normas.” These literary magazines regularly published poems and theoretical essays encapsulating this vision of innovation by the movement’s leading participants, such as Rafael Cansinos-Assens⁶, Guillermo de Torre, Adriano del Valle, Pedro Garfias, José Rivas Panedas, Gerardo Diego, Eugenio Montes, Jacobo Sureda, and Jorge Luis Borges.⁷

Ultraism, as a quest for a new poetic discourse, eschews confessionism and anecdotal narration in favor of linguistic innovation through a focus on sensorial imagery and shocking metaphor; repudiation of causality and, rather, rapid juxtaposition of individual images strive to create a snapshot of reality, enigmatic and suggestive in nature. The objective of such an ‘ultra’ poem is to render a poetic reality devoid of human passion, calling for a complete separation from human reality, as proposed by Ortega y Gasset. In *The Dehumanization of Art*, Ortega y Gasset argues for a “tendency

⁴ Guillermo de Torre, “El movimiento ultraísta español,” *Cosmópolis* 11 (1920): 475-6.

⁵ “Nuestras Normas,” *Mediodía* 1(1926): 1-2.

⁶ This spelling will be used throughout the present study. For a discussion on origins and alternative spelling, see Ramón Oteo Sans, *Cansinos-Assens: Entre el Modernismo y la Vanguardia* (Alicante: Aguacilar, 1996) 19.

⁷ Gloria Videla reviews the major and minor contributors to Ultraism in *Ultraísmo: Estudios sobre los movimientos poéticos de vanguardia en España* (Madrid: Gredos, 1963).

toward a purification of art,” occurring as a response to the romantic and naturalistic patterns imbued with human content.⁸ This new artistic sensibility relies on a host of precepts: “1) to dehumanize art, 2) to avoid living forms, 3) to see to it that the work of art is nothing but a work of art, 4) to consider art as play and nothing else, 5) to be essentially ironical, 6) to beware of sham and hence to aspire to scrupulous realization, 7) to regard art as a thing of no transcending consequence.”⁹ These principles encapsulate the basic tendencies which anchor the conception and articulation of Ultraism, among other European vanguardist trends.¹⁰ In the case of the Ultraist movement, this cohort of young Spanish poets—with Borges in the lead—coalesce in a reaction against *modernismo* in search of a contemporary and, at the same time, atemporal, poetic language which would transcend the confines of rhyme and local color to effect a cross-cultural platform, precise in its metaphor and brevity of expression. Such a platform—“disencumbered,” in the words of Ortega y Gasset—is no longer “laden with human matter,”¹¹ rather seeking to achieve an ethereal poetic space.

In his book-length study of the Ultraist movement—*La nueva poesía argentina: ensayo crítico sobre el Ultraísmo (1921-1929)*—Néstor Ibarra posits the rise of Ultraism within the framework of the European “lo moderno,” arising in response to a confluence of factors—mainly the cultural destruction posed by the First World War and the

⁸ José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1968) 12.

⁹ Ibid. 14.

¹⁰ See, among others, Guillermo de Torre’s *Historia de las Literaturas de Vanguardia* (Madrid: Guadarrama: 1974), wherein De Torre discusses the interrelationship among the movements comprising the evolution of the vanguardist aesthetic. For a detailed discussion of Ultraism, see De Torre’s *Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia*, ed. José María Barrera López (1925. Sevilla: Renacimiento, 2001).

¹¹ Ortega y Gasset 30.

necessity for a re-building of literary discourse; moreover, Europe experienced what Ibarra calls “una fatiga,” positioning the European cultural milieu in search of a reactionary sentiment against “la excesiva cultura, contra la excesiva inteligencia.”¹² As one of the pivotal influences of the Ultraist movement, Ibarra credits Ramón Gómez de la Serna; laying the preliminary groundwork for the Ultraists, Gómez de la Serna belonged to an earlier generation of poets, publishing his “Proclama Futurista a los Españoles” in 1910:

Futurismo! Insurrección! Algarada! Festejo con música wagneriana!
Modernismo! Violencia sidereal! Circulación en el aparato venoso de la vida!
Antiuniversitarismo! Tela de cipreses! Iconoclastia! Pedrada en un ojo de la Luna! [...] Voz juvenil a la que basta oír sin tener en cuenta la palabra: ese pueril grafito de la voz! Voz, fuerza, volt, más que verbo! Voz que debe unir sin pedir cuentas a todas las juventudes como esa hoguera que encienden los árabes dispersos para preparar las contiendas! Intersección, chispa, exhalación, texto como de marconigrama o de algo más sutil volante sobre los mares y sobre los montes! [...] Camaradería masona y rebelde! [...] ¹³

In his tone and message, De la Serna echoes Marinetti’s Futurist manifesto of 1909, which advocates “the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness,” as well as “courage, audacity, and revolt”¹⁴ as essential to Futurist poetics. “We intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer’s stride, the mortal leap, the punch and the slap,” writes Marinetti, underscoring the basic elements of the Futurist poetic vision. “The poet must spend himself with ardour, splendour, and generosity, to swell the

¹² Néstor Ibarra, *La nueva poesía argentina: Ensayo crítico sobre el Ultraísmo (1921-1929)* (Buenos Aires: Molinari, 1930) 125.

¹³ Ramón Gómez de la Serna, “Proclama Futurista a los Españoles,” in *Manifiestos, proclamas, panfletos y textos doctrinales (Las vanguardias artísticas en España: 1910-1931)*, ed. Jaime Brihuega (Madrid: Cátedra, 1979) 89-90.

¹⁴ F.T. Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism 1909,” in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. and intr. Umbro Apollonio, tr. Robert Brain et al. (Boston: Artworks) 21.

enthusiastic fervour of the primordial elements. [...] No work without an aggressive character can be a masterpiece. [...] We will sing of great crowds excited by work, by pleasure, and by riot; we will sing of the multicolored, polyphonic tides of revolution in the modern capitals [...].”¹⁵ Bringing this revolutionary literary sentiment into Spain, Gómez de la Serna espouses the notion that poetic beauty is effected through conflict and evocation of velocity, as well as in freeing the voice from convention and antiquated methods, thereby striving to attain what Marinetti terms the “absolute [...] eternal, omnipresent speed.”¹⁶

Ultraism’s sentiment of renovation and rejection of its precursors fits within the aesthetic spirit sweeping across Europe in the early decades of the twentieth century. Assimilating the tenets of poetic renewal propagated by De la Serna, “Ultra: Un manifiesto de la juventud literaria” begins to circulate the Madrid press in the fall of 1918¹⁷; in this publication, the young Spanish poets articulate the movement’s basic premise, inspired by Cansinos-Assens’ delineation of the modern sentiment, in that

el porvenir intelectual reside únicamente en la poesía ultrarromántica. [...] La poesía debe desprenderse en absoluto de la retórica, y la oratoria sobre todo. La guerra no influyó absolutamente nada en nuestra literatura. Estamos igual que en el novecientos. Sigue siendo la misma novedad la novedad de entonces, o sea el modernismo, no aceptado por la gente no literaria. Y no tan sólo no avanzamos sino que más bien parece que retrocedemos. [...] La salvación reside en aceptarlo todo: todo lo que venga, lo que sea nuevo.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid. 21-22.

¹⁶ Ibid. 22.

¹⁷ The official publication date of “Ultra: Un manifiesto de la juventud literaria” is 15 March 1919 in *Grecia*.

¹⁸ Xavier Bóveda, “Los intelectuales dicen. Rafael Cansinos Assens,” *El parlamentario* (15 Dec.1918).

In this forward-looking declaration of a need to resuscitate poetic expression in Spain, Cansinos-Assens proposes the term ‘poesía ultrarromántica,’ from which the young poets derive the term ‘Ultra.’ “Nuestro lema será ‘ultra,’ y en nuestro credo cabrán todas las tendencias, sin distinción, con tal que expresen un anhelo nuevo,”¹⁹ states the first manifesto, noting that further development of these ideas is yet to come. The document entreates: “Jóvenes, rompamos por una vez nuestro retraimiento y afirmemos nuestra voluntad de supercar a los precursores,”²⁰ thus setting the scene for Ultra’s campaign to revolutionize poetic expression in Spain. Poetics of the time thrived on the destruction of outdated paradigms; to this end, Zunilda Gertel observes the methods through which such renovation was possible: “1) Negación del arte anterior; 2) Eliminación de la anécdota y proscripción de lo descriptivo sentimental. Valoración de la imagen absoluta, autónoma; 3) Tensión y disonancia que rompe la armonía tradicional; 4) Evasión y deformación de la realidad. Deshumanización; 5) Exaltación del verso libre; 6) Innovaciones en la puntuación y en la sintaxis.”²¹ Spanish Ultraism adheres closely to these tenets of avant-garde poetics, seeking to produce an aesthetic which bears no resemblance to the ‘novecentismo’ of the past, and instead aims to “desanquilosar el arte.”²² This cosmopolitan sentiment toward the essence of art—a desire to integrate the principles of European poetic innovation into ‘stagnant’ Spanish aesthetic discourse—produced poetry

¹⁹ Xavier Bóveda et al., “Ultra: Un manifiesto de la juventud literaria,” *Grecia* 11 (1919): 11, in *Manifiestos* 102.

²⁰ Ibid. 102.

²¹ Zunilda Gertel, *Borges y su retorno a la poesía* (New York: U of Iowa and Las Americas, 1967) 49.

²² *Manifiestos* 108.

which shuns anecdotal elements and traditional versification in favor of free verse, the primacy of metaphor, and visual-sensory imagery.

“Poetry has become the higher algebra of metaphors,”²³ writes Ortega y Gasset. A reliance on visual metaphor—a synthesis of multiple images into one poetic reality devoid of superfluous connectors—serves as the fundamental element of the Ultraist vision. The Ultraist poem’s primary purpose is to conjure up a space which escapes reality, achieving emotional resonance through a mere string of images. Reinforced by the strength of metaphor to effect an inherent unity of tone and purpose, such a poem eschews anecdotal narrative, ornamentation, and confessionality.²⁴ To this end, Borges succinctly summarizes the core principles of Ultraism in a 1921 essay “Ultraismo”: “1) Reducción de la lírica a su elemento primordial: la metáfora; 2) Tachadura de las frases medianeras, los nexos, y los adjetivos inútiles; 3) Abolición de los trebejos ornamentales, el confesionalismo, la circunstanciación, las prédicas y la nebulosidad rebuscada; 4) Síntesis de dos o más imágenes en una, que ensancha de ese modo su facultad de sugerencia.”²⁵ The Ultraist vision, as proposed here by Borges, purports to simplify poetic expression, while at the same time capitalizing on the capacity of metaphor to achieve the desired poetic effect. Elaborating further on the primacy of metaphor within the framework of Ultraism in “Manifiesto del Ultra,” Borges underscores the movement’s search for “la estética activa de los prismas,”²⁶ seeking to encourage the progressive purification of art,

²³ Ortega y Gasset 32.

²⁴ See Gloria Videla, *El Ultraísmo: Estudios sobre movimientos poéticos de vanguardia en España* (Madrid: Gredos, 1963) 93.

²⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, “Ultraísmo,” *Nosotros* 39 (1921), in *Textos Recobrados (1919-1929)* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1997) 154-161.

²⁶ “Manifiesto del Ultra,” *Baleares* (131) 1921, in *Textos Recobrados* 106-8.

as envisioned by Ortega y Gasset. The strength of the Ultraist brand of metaphor relies on the primacy of the image and the unexpected juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated snapshots of reality. As set forth by Ultraist Gerardo Diego in 1919, the basic element of the poem's ability to elude reality is *imagen múltiple*—a confluence of images which combine to effect the poetic equivalent of music, untranslatable into prose.²⁷ Ultraist poetic evocation, then, distances itself from the realism of modernist expression, elevating poetic discourse to a new level and rendering a parallel reality through surprising sensorial metaphor and amalgamation of disparate realities.

Contributing actively to this campaign for literary renovation, publishing poetry that adheres to Ultraist methods, and attending Cansinos-Assens' literary *tertulias*,²⁸ Borges emerges as one of the intellectual leaders of Spain's avant-garde; in his "Al margen de la moderna estética," Borges delineates "una actitud ante el ultra."²⁹ "El ultraísmo es la expresión recién redimida del transformismo en la literatura," writes Borges in January of 1920. "Esa floración brusca de metáforas que en muchas obras creacionistas abruma a los profanos, se justifica así plenamente y representa el esfuerzo del poeta para expresar la milenaria juventud de la vida que, como él, se devora, surge y renace, en cada segundo."³⁰ Placing the emphasis of poetic expression on metaphor, Borges proffers his vision of modern poetry as that which leaves behind "la fastuosa

²⁷ See Gerardo Diego, "Posibilidades creacionistas," *Cervantes* (Oct. 1919): 26-7.

²⁸ Also see Rafael Cansinos-Assens, "Jorge Luis Borges (1919-1923)," in *La nueva literatura (1917-1927)*, vol. 3 (Madrid: Páez, 1927) 280-301.

²⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, "Al margen de la moderna estética," *Grecia* 39 (1920), in *Textos Recobrados* 38.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 38.

fantasmagonía mitológica,”³¹ and, rather, is “la espléndida síntesis de la literatura antigua,” resulting in “una premisa tan fecunda que considera las palabras no como puentes para las ideas, sino como fines en sí.”³² “Manifiesto del Ultra” identifies the Ultraists’ primary aim—to create by imposing “facetas insospechadas al universo.”³³ The poet, then, should espouse “una visión desnuda de las cosas, limpia de estigmas ancestrales; una visión fragante, como si ante sus ojos fuese surgiendo auroralmente el mundo.”³⁴ Thus, as the new poetic vision abolishes antiquated paradigms of expression, the poem’s renovated strength relies on the images’ power of suggestion. As this Ultraist aesthetic gains traction within the Spanish literary circles and matures in its purpose and methods, Borges co-writes in 1922—along with Guillermo Juan, Eduardo González Lanuza and Guillermo de Torre—“Proclama,” a document which effectively synthesizes his views of contemporary poetics, as the movement seeks to overcome “martingalas de siempre i descubrir facetas insospechadas al mundo”:

Hemos sintetizado la poesía en su elemento primordial: la metáfora, a la que concedemos una máxima independencia, [...]. Cada verso de nuestros poemas posee una vida individual i representa una visión inédita. El Ultraísmo propende así a la formulación de una mitología emocional i variable. Sus versos que excluyen la palabrería i las victorias baratas conseguidas mediante el despilfarro de palabras exóticas, tienen la textura decisiva de los marconigramas.³⁵

³¹ Ibid. 38.

³² Ibid. 39.

³³ *Manifiestos* 105.

³⁴ Ibid. 105.

³⁵ Ibid. 108.

It is during the time of his involvement in Ultraism that Borges begins to contemplate the role of metaphor, negotiating a relationship with what he calls “una ligazón entre dos conceptos distintos,”³⁶ “esa curva verbal que traza casi siempre entre dos puntos—espirituales—el camino más breve.”³⁷ Borges’ own poetry of this period thrives on the Ultraist brand of metaphor, producing images such as “la catedral que es una inmensa parva,” “la catedral es un avión de piedra,” “la catedral sonora como un aplauso o como un beso” (“Catedral,” lines 5, 12, 15-16); “el viento es una vara de bambú entre las manos,” “El mundo crece como un árbol claro,” “el sol toca la diana sobre las azoteas,” “Arriba el cielo vuela / y lo surcan los pájaros como noches errantes” (“Mañana,” lines 2, 3, 5, 9-10); “Las fluviales lenguas frescas del viento lamen mis manos y mejillas” (“Aldea,” lines 5-6), “mi alma pajarero oscuro ante su cielo” (“Prismas: (Acordes-Mendicantes-Ciudad-Pueblo),” line 2), “El viento es la bandera que se enreda en las lanzas” (“Guardia Roja,” line 1), “La oscuridad es la sangre / de las cosas heridas” (“Atardecer,” lines 5-6), “La luz / como una enredadera / pende de las paredes” (“Fiesta,” lines 3-5). These lines exemplify Borges’ early experimentation with metaphor, insofar as his Ultraist poems serve as training ground for refining his poetic approach. The purely sensory images succeed in evoking what Borges hails in “Anatomía de mi ‘Ultra’” as the presence of “la *sensación en sí*, y no la descripción de las premisas espaciales o temporales que la rodean,” rendering the poem a representation of “la estética activa de los prismas.”³⁸

³⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, “Examen de metáforas,” *Inquisiciones* (1925. Madrid: Alianza, 1998) 74.

³⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, “Anatomía de mi ‘ultra’,” *Ultra* 11 (1921), in *Textos Recobrados* 118.

³⁸ In *Textos Recobrados* 117, emphasis in the original.

In *Borges and the European Avant-garde*, Linda Maier emphasizes Borges' reliance on metaphor as a notable element of his writing, proposing that it serves as a link between his earliest poems and subsequent works.³⁹ Throughout his career, Borges continuously evolves his conception of metaphor; in "Examen de metáforas" Borges sets forth the nuanced variations:

- a) La traslación que sustantiva los conceptos abstractos
- b) Su inversión: La imagen que sutaliza lo concreto
- c) La imagen que aprovecha una coincidencia de formas
- d) La imagen que amalgama lo auditivo con lo visual, pintarrageando los sonidos o escuchando las formas
- e) La imagen que a la fugacidad del tiempo da la fijeza del espacio
- f) La inversa: La metáfora que desata el espacio sobre el tiempo
- g) La imagen que desmenuza una realidad, rebajándola en negación
- h) La inversa: La artimaña que sustantiva negaciones
- i) La imagen que para engrandecer una cosa aislada la multiplica en numerosidad⁴⁰

Published in *Inquisiciones* in 1925, this meditation illuminates a growing complexity in Borges' continuous contemplation of metaphor's poetic capacity. Notably, in his examples, Borges synthesizes the work of a variety of time periods, juxtaposing lines by Cervantes with those of Ramón Gómez de la Serna, and Browning with Norah Lange. These examples infuse the Ultraist images with Borgesian universalism, underscoring the fact that his participation in Spanish Ultraism was never an isolated event or an adherence purely to a movement in and of itself; rather, Borges contributed to Ultraism insofar as it represented a platform for developing ideas and methods, subsequently continuing to refine and evolve them throughout his career. Segueing away from metaphor within the

³⁹ Linda Maier, *Borges and the European Avant-garde* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996) 125-30.

⁴⁰ *Inquisiciones* 77-81.

confines of the vanguardist paradigm, Borges continues to emphasize the essential role of image in poetry in a context unrestricted by Ultraist precepts.⁴¹

The primacy of metaphor within the Ultraist poetic aesthetic constitutes a formative idea for Borges during his participation in the Spanish avant-garde; his continued contemplation of metaphor's function and potential in poetry underpins his body of work. In *The Narrow Act: Borges' Art of Allusion*, Ronald Christ discusses Borges' shift from rhetorical metaphor in his Ultraist poetry to metaphysical proposition which characterizes Borges' later writing.⁴² In Christ's view, Borges, in his "fully conscious" evolution, moves away from individual rhetorical metaphor to writing of total metaphor, conjuring up seamlessly an ultimate reality, while "decreasing dependence upon descriptive and metaphoric language."⁴³ Building upon Christ's study, Maier discusses the concision of Borges' style as a residual Ultraist trait, underscoring such features as his sparing use of adjectives and color primitivism.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Maier focuses on Borges' proclivity for total metaphor, i.e., literature that fuses form and content, rendering the text's structure emblematic of its theme. Proffering Borges' "Poema conjetural" as an example of a text imbued with a double meaning—treating concerns of national consciousness and those of universal man—Maier contends that Borges succeeds in attaining the Ultraist goal originally proposed in "Ultraismo": the synthesis of two or more images into one, which increases the image's power of

⁴¹ Also see Zunilda Gertel, "La metáfora en la estética de Borges" *Hispania* 52 (1969): 33-8.

⁴² Ronald Christ, *The Narrow Act: Borges' Art of Allusion* (New York: Lumen, 1995) 15.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 13.

⁴⁴ Maier 125-138. For analysis of Borges' treatment of metaphysical themes in his mature works, see Ana María Barrenechea's *Borges the Labyrinth maker*, ed. and trans. Robert Lima (New York: NYU P, 1965).

suggestion.⁴⁵ Borges' earliest Ultraist poems, then, serve as precursors to his subsequently evolving aesthetic, fundamentally shaping his poetic sensibility and literary concerns which would dictate the direction of his career.

Borges' participation in the European avant-garde discourse—and the poems he published during this time—have received limited critical treatment. In *Borges and the European Avant-garde*, Linda Maier points out a tendency in criticism to subdivide Borges' career based on genre, resulting in a segmented examination of his works, rather than a focus on the interdependence in Borges' *oeuvre*.⁴⁶ Maier's chapter titled "Borges the Ultimate Ultraist" sets out to cast Borges in his quest for a timeless poetic language—a quest, which, as the title suggests, transcends Borges' brief participation in the Spanish vanguard and permeates his later career. Moreover, Ronald Christ proposes that Borges, despite repudiating his early Ultraist goals and techniques, retains the movement's stylistic elements in his writing; as observed by Christ, the ideals of Ultraism remain the ideals of Borges' writing in his later career.⁴⁷ Christ further illuminates this argument with two central stylistic elements that characterize Borges' writing—concentration and metaphor—attributing these features to Borges' lingering espousal of Ultraist principles throughout his career. Drawing on the parallels between the Imagist and the Ultraist movements, such as poetic clarity in language through a focus on image and concentration as the essence of poetry, Christ underscores Borges' sparing use of adjectives, emphasis of primary colors, elimination of 'unnecessary' transitions,

⁴⁵ Maier 131.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 125.

⁴⁷ Christ 2.

condensing, and abbreviation.⁴⁸ The preponderance of these basic elements in Borges' mature writing—brevity of expression, primacy of metaphor, concentration of style—makes a strong case for Ultraism as a foundational aesthetic underpinning Borges' later stylistics.

Yet this overarching unity in Borges' work may be observed not only in his poetic style, but also in the thematic concerns Borges espouses. In her study *Borges y su retorno a la poesia*, Zunilda Gertel postulates a unity encapsulating Borges' early work and that of his later career, suggesting that in his published work between 1919 and 1925 Borges develops and showcases the fundamental concepts of Ultraism, while beginning to treat “las raíces de la estética en la inquietud metafísica”;⁴⁹ Gertel further notes four themes that patently emerge in Borges' Ultraist writings:

1. La identidad y pluralidad de la personalidad. Sentido panteísta de que el hombre es uno y es muchos.
2. La literatura como condensadora de valores intemporales que encierran lo perenne y lo removable de la creación poética, a la cual ve como una transmutación de la realidad concreta en un mundo interior.
3. La inquietud metafísica de ahondar en lo esencial de la realidad.
4. La metáfora, como categoría lingüístico- estilística, en cuya fusión de elementos el poeta cree posible lograr una realidad transmutada.⁵⁰

These topics permeate and broadly characterize Borges' poetry during the period of his Ultraist participation in Spain, as well as continue to dominate his later poetry and prose publications. One such salient theme within the Borges canon emerges in the form of Borges' struggle with the inherent poverty of language and what Guillermo Sucre calls

⁴⁸ Christ further argues that “[t]he goal of abbreviation justifies Borges' own use of epigrams and his love of encyclopedias, dictionaries, maps, and atlases, all of which figure prominently in his stories as resúmenes of the universe.” *The Narrow Act* 11.

⁴⁹ Gertel 46.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 59.

“el sentimiento del fracaso.”⁵¹ In Sucre’s analysis, Borges’ sense of perpetual failure of expression “se dirime ante el lenguaje, ante la realidad,” only to be redeemed by his “confianza en el acto poético mismo.”⁵² This theme begins to take shape in Borges’ earliest poetry from the Spanish period, most prominently in “Himno del Mar” and “Poema.” Borges’ poetic theory and evolution as a poet and writer, then, derive their underlying basis from the works he published during his contact with Spanish Ultraism, only to be perfected throughout his later writing. By virtue of these thematic elements, which appear in Borges’ earliest publications and remain on the forefront of his literary concerns, we are able to establish the essential unity of his *oeuvre*—a cohesiveness that is obscured by the continuous self-(re)-fashioning of Borges’ poetic voice and his evolving aesthetic and methods.

In becoming a prominent leader of the Ultraists, Borges participated by contributing theoretical material to the intellectual exchange, synthesizing and systemizing the movement. Applying the basic tenets of Ultraist innovation to his own poetry, Borges published twenty-eight⁵³ poems in Spanish literary magazines between December of 1919 and March of 1922:

1. “Himno del mar” (*Grecia*, no. 37, Dec. 31, 1919)
2. “Motivos del espacio y del tiempo (1916-19)” (*Gran Guignol* 24 Feb 1920)
3. “Trinchera” (*Grecia*, no. 43, June 1, 1920)
4. “Hermanos” (*Grecia*, no. 45, July 1, 1920)
5. “Señal” (*Grecia*, no. 46, July 15, 1920)
6. “Rusia” (*Grecia*, no. 48, Sept. 1, 1920)

⁵¹ Guillermo Sucre, *Borges, el poeta* (Caracas, Venezuela: Monte Avila, 1967) 55. For a detailed analysis of Borges’ language and linguistics, also see Arturo Echavarría, *Lengua y Literatura de Borges* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1983).

⁵² *Ibid.* 55.

⁵³ “Catedral” was published twice, with minor variations.

7. "Insomnio" (*Grecia*, no. 49, Sept. 15, 1920)
8. "Poema" (*Baleares*, no. 121, Sept. 15, 1920)
9. "Mañana" (*Ultra*, no. 1, Jan. 27, 1921)
10. "Aldea" (*Ultra*, no. 3, Feb. 10, 1921)
11. "Catedral" (*Baleares*, no. 131, Feb. 15, 1921, later reprinted in *Ultra*)
12. "Gesta maximalista" (*Ultra*, no. 3, Feb. 20, 1921)
13. "Prismas (Acordes—Mendicates—Ciudad—Pueblo)" (*Ultra*, no. 4, March 1, 1921)
14. "Guardia roja" (*Ultra*, no. 5, March 17, 1921, later reprinted in *Tableros*)
15. "Tranvías" (*Ultra*, no. 6, March 30, 1921)
16. "Norte" (*Ultra*, no. 7, April 10, 1921)
17. "Cingladura" (*Ultra*, no. 8, April 20, 1921)
18. "Distancia" (*Ultra*, no. 9, April 30, 1921)
19. "Atardecer" (*Ultra*, no. 14, June 20, 1921, reprinted in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* as part of "Atardeceres")
20. "Fiesta" (*Ultra*, no. 15, June 30, 1921)
21. "Arrabal" (*Cosmópolis*, no. 32, Aug. 1921, reprinted in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* with variations)
22. "Catedral" (*Ultra*, no. 19, Dec. 1, 1921, previously published in *Baleares*)
23. "Último rojo sol" (*Ultra*, no. 20, Dec. 15, 1921)
24. "Montaña" (*Tableros*, no. 2, Dec. 15, 1921)
25. "Aldea" (*Ultra*, no. 21, Jan. 1, 1922)
26. "Escaparate Porcelana" (*Tableros*, no. 3, Jan. 15, 1922)
27. "Prismas: Sala vacía" (*Ultra*, no. 22, Jan. 15, 1922)
28. "Tarde Lacia" (*Tableros*, no. 4, Feb. 28, 1922)
29. "Siesta" (*Ultra*, no. 24, March 15, 1922)

An examination of this set of Borges' early poetry calls for a preliminary attempt at a comprehensive taxonomy. Zunilda Gertel approaches these poems thematically, proposing the following categories: "1) La bélica y de ideología socialista; 2) La ciudadana, que incluye valores de la técnica y el progreso; 3) La de captación de rasgos del paisaje."⁵⁴ Notably, the poems which belong to Gertel's first thematic group—"Trinchera," "Rusia," "Gesta maximalista," "Guardia roja," "Último rojo sol"—appear to

⁵⁴ Gertel 52.

betray an influence of German Expressionism, which Borges recasts to portray imagery of the Russian Revolution; on the other hand, the themes of urbanization and technology, as well as images of Nature, are grounded in elements of Futurism, but ultimately align more closely with the Ultraist poetic doctrine. Whereas a thematic approach is evident in Gertel's classification of Borges' early poetry, Vicente Cervera Salinas groups Borges' early poems into three sections conceptually, placing "Himno del Mar" and the five war-themed pieces into two separate categories. The remaining third subset of poems, as delineated by Cervera Salinas, reflects an

implícita aceptación del ideario empírico-fenomenológico sobre el conocimiento humano, que al negar la existencia sustancial del objeto sensible contemplado (Berkeley) y hasta la personalidad contempladora (Hume), dota consecuentemente de única validez a la transformación perceptiva de la realidad que en la mente del sujeto se produce (Husserl), y de la cual el poema resulta ser su más fiel y controlado reflejo.⁵⁵

In this classification, Cervera Salinas proposes to subdivide the poems further according to two qualities: "poemas espaciales de interiores," which comprise "Sala vacía," and "poemas espaciales de exteriores," including "Catedral," "Aldea," "Prismas," "Distancia," "Último rojo sol," "Montaña," "Cingladura." Cervera Salinas' observation reaffirms Gertel's proposed essence of unity in Borges' work, taking root at the outset in the form of metaphysical contemplation permeating Borges' poetics, which otherwise appears to espouse Ultraist stylistics and an aesthetic of rebellion.⁵⁶ This set of poems, then, constitutes a telling microcosm of Borges' poetic evolution: in some respects, these

⁵⁵ Vicente Cervera Salinas, *La Poesía de Jorge Luis Borges: Historia de una Eternidad* (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 1992) 51.

⁵⁶ See Gertel 75-83.

poems assimilate the avant-garde discourse in their innovative purpose, reliance on metaphor, and vanguardist themes; yet, on the other hand, they are as eclectic and intimately authentic as Borges' mature poetics, treating themes of the author-reader dialectic, creation of poetry and art, as well as metaphysical concerns—topics which Borges spends much of his career developing and perfecting.

For the purpose of this investigation, we will discuss Borges' early poetry as it dialogues with germane—primarily Ultraist—poetic selections, illuminating his earliest influences and thereby facilitating a discussion of the overarching unity within Borges' poetic canon. The discussion of influence throughout this study will be informed by the definition proposed in Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*, grounded in the concept of “poetic misprision,” or a strong misreading of the precursor work necessary for the process of “creative correction.”⁵⁷ This “wilful revisionism”⁵⁸ on the part of the poet, then, yields a complex response of rebellion and (mis)interpretation, appropriating the original text and resulting in a multifaceted poetic voice. We begin this examination by underscoring the significance of Borges' involvement in German literary Expressionism, primarily insofar as his translations serve to elucidate Borges' own aesthetic. In her analysis of Borges' relationship with Expressionism, Linda Maier underscores the relative lack of critical spotlight on Borges' translations and dissemination of Expressionism in Spain; Maier subsequently identifies and examines Borges' war-themed poems published in Spain as characteristic of an Expressionist influence.⁵⁹

Fundamentally relevant to the present study is Laura Sager Eidt's “Borges's Translations

⁵⁷ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997).

⁵⁸ Ibid. 30.

⁵⁹ See Maier 97-119.

of German Expressionist Poetry,” which identifies Borges’ translations and dissemination of Expressionist theory as pivotal in introducing the movement into Spanish literary discourse. Furthermore, Eidt argues that Borges sought to propagate aesthetic and social renewal in Spain and, while he had a firm grasp of the German language, the changes Borges makes to the original German texts in the process of translation are, in fact, “conscious transpositions of the social criticism and the linguistic innovations of German Expressionism in terms of the Spanish aesthetic climate of Ultraism.”⁶⁰ While I concur with this argument inasmuch as Borges’ periphrastic approach to translation of Expressionism appears, at least in part, informed by his own aesthetic theory, further side-by-side examination of the originals with Borges’ Spanish versions elucidates this appropriation of text as partially accidental, or, rather, uniquely Borgesian, in nature. This analysis illuminates Borges’ early conception of translation, as well as provides a perspective of Borges’ influence on the avant-garde precepts in Spain.

We then proceed with an examination of Borges’ first published poem, “Himno del mar”—a unique piece in that it appropriates Whitman’s tone and style while exemplifying a Borgesian search for authenticity. Not yet manifestly adhering to the tenets of Ultraism, “Himno del mar” is imbued with, in the words of Cervera Salinas, “características peculiares que lo acercan a una dirección poética marcadamente romántica [...], pero estilísticamente tamizada por la concepción poética de Walt Whitman.”⁶¹ As the nineteen-year-old Borges dialogues with Whitman’s larger-than-life poetic manifesto, a valuable opportunity for a discussion of Borges’ significant precursor

⁶⁰ Laura Sager Eidt, “Borges’s Translations of German Expressionist Poetry: Spaniardizing Expressionism,” *Comparatist* 32 (2008): 115.

⁶¹ Cervera Salinas 50.

influence emerges. To this end, María Luisa Bastos proffers “Himno del Mar” as part of her discussion in “Whitman as Inscribed in Borges”; establishing the points of contact between an early Borges and Whitman’s project—evidenced by elements such as Borges’ diction, imagery, enumeration, anaphoric repetition, and “a syntax of a paradoxically grandiloquent ease”⁶²—Bastos concludes that Whitman’s voice is profoundly inscribed into Borges’ writing, remaining a “permanent force”⁶³ within Borges’ poetic quest. We will examine “Himno del mar” in the context of Whitman’s “Song of myself,” negotiating a relationship between the two works while taking into account Harold Bloom’s concept of a strong misreading as a basis for poetic influence. Despite the significance of “Himno del mar” as the first published poem in the Borges canon, it has received relatively little critical attention: Linda Maier analyzes the poem as part of *Borges and the European Avant-garde*, underscoring its *Modernista* influence and conventional thematic elements⁶⁴; in *El Primer Borges*, Carlos Meneses highlights the smorgasbord of influences encapsulated by “Himno del Mar,” given that Borges writes the poem prior to his participation in the Ultraist poetic discourse⁶⁵; finally, Carlos Cortínez explores the theme of the sea as it permeates Borges’ work and acquires a palette of nuanced variations throughout his poetic evolution.⁶⁶ The present study, then, aims to further the critical analysis of Borges’ first published poem, placing the emphasis

⁶² María Luisa Bastos, “Whitman as Inscribed in Borges,” tr. Daniel Balderston, *Borges the Poet*, ed. Carlos Cortínez (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 1986) 225.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 229.

⁶⁴ Maier 73-6.

⁶⁵ Carlos Meneses, *El Primer Borges* (Madrid: Fundamentos, 1999) 32-5.

⁶⁶ Carlos Cortínez, “‘Himno del Mar’: El primer poema de Borges,” *Revista Chilena de Literatura* 25 (1985): 73-86.

on an understanding of his earliest influences so as to frame and pre-empt the discussion of Borges' subsequent, albeit brief, espousal of avant-garde methods.

The second chapter underscores Borges' fruitful exchange within the framework of Spanish Ultraist discourse, both in terms of his theoretical contribution to systemizing the movement and prolific publication of poems which showcase the Ultraist tenets of innovation, centrality of sensory imagery, and metaphor. The aim of this chapter is to position Borges' poetics during his participation in the Spanish avant-garde in dialogue with his contemporaries, so as to elucidate the significant affinity between Borges' early work and the avant-garde sentiment of the time, as well as to highlight the extent to which Borges is, in fact, a full-fledged Ultraist. We first examine Borges' relatively extensive theoretical publications, in which he outlines—in a quintessentially Borgesian manner characteristic of his later essays—the inherent flaws of traditional verse and the 'novecentismo' against which the Ultraists have launched an aggressive attack. We then delve into the rich dialogue which emerges between Borges' Ultraist poems and those of other prominent Spanish vanguardists in accordance with an antithetical pair of themes: Modernity and Nature. Deriving an influence from Futurist precepts, a number of Borges' poems from this early set focus on the theme of urbanization, exploring the advent of an era of innovation and the whirlwind of post-war industrialization. The inherent conflict with the urban environment, asphyxiation, and the image of the avant-garde metropolis as monstrous are at the core of Borges' choice of theme; furthermore, these poems underscore the interrelationship—and the tension it yields—among modernity, the natural world, and its human inhabitants, intensified by fragmented perspective and emphasis on simultaneity characteristic of the avant-garde aesthetic. A sense of physical and

psychological imprisonment, claustrophobia, profound loneliness—or rather, aloneness—emerges in several of Borges’ early poems, despite his insistent use of a collective first-person plural speaker. Borges patently undertakes avant-garde themes in his early poems, celebrating the image of dawn and the sensorial effects of vertiginous flight and velocity; stylistically, Borges’ voice also embraces mainstream Ultraist poetics. Lastly, we end the examination of Borges’ adherence to the apogee of Ultraism with a discussion of Borges’ multifaceted first-person speaker. As proposed by Gloria Videla, the avant-garde “yo” is imbued with a detached artificiality, despite, on occasion, appearing to approximate the confessional first-person poetic “I.”⁶⁷ With the autobiographical first person banned by the Ultraists, Borges’ “yo” fosters a variety of nuanced perspectives, subscribing to the avant-garde search for a dehumanized speaker who serves as a mere conduit for the reader’s sensory experience. This examination seeks to establish a point of departure for the construct of Borges’ first-person speaker, the prevalence of which characterizes his subsequent *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), as well as his later poetry.

The publication of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (FBA) in 1923 serves as a logical endpoint for Borges’ experimentation with purely European avant-garde technique and themes, marking the first milestone in Borges’ continuous evolution as a poet. Upon his return to Argentina, Borges embarks on a re-conceptualization of the periphery, composing poems which contextualize his homecoming to what he conceives as a mythical Buenos Aires. None of the early poems published in Spain survives Borges’ re-reading of himself—with the exception of “Sala vacia” and “Arrabal”—facilitating an almost complete refashioning of Borges’ poetic voice. Repudiating his earlier European avant-garde belonging, purifying his poetics of Ultraist demands he views as limiting and

⁶⁷ See Videla 92-7.

radical, Borges constructs a highly personal narrative of Buenos Aires, underscoring the conflict between tradition and modernity within a poetic space that is atemporal. As Borges enters into the discourse of cultural nationalism, he also begins to re-appropriate his own text, commencing a lifelong re-reading of himself. An examination of “Sala vacia” and “Arrabal” in the context of their publication in *FBA*, as well as their variants among the subsequent editions of the compilation, illuminates Borges’ approach to poetics as he begins to transition away from the Spanish avant-garde and to fashion a progressively more universal—and yet more intimate—poetic voice. This shift and maturation of tone, I argue, may be attributed to the influence of Rafael Cansinos-Assens, whose own poetry betrays an affinity with Borges’ *FBA* in its anecdotal narrative and solipsistic quest. As Borges fashions a personal, self-consciously authentic voice in *FBA*, his themes and imagery acquire a retrospectively nostalgic element, grounding the work in the mythical past, rather than in the present or future. Evident from Borges’ mention of Cansinos-Assens—“el más admirable anudador de metáforas”⁶⁸—in several essays is the young Argentine’s admiration for Cansinos-Assens’ stylistics and nuanced metaphor; furthermore, Borges’ poems in *FBA* contemplate many of the themes prevalent in Cansinos-Assens’ Ultraist work—death, immortality, fragmentation and the inherent multiplicity of life, as well as the universal narrative of the cityscape. A dialogue between Borges and Cansinos-Assens posits a significant link between the two poets, with the influence of the latter emerging as a source of Borges’ shift toward an existential anxiety which abounds throughout his ‘post-Ultraist’ poetry.

Ultimately, the aim of the present study is to facilitate a critical discussion of the multifaceted influences which characterize Borges’ formative period of involvement in

⁶⁸ *Inquisiciones* 52.

Spanish Ultraism, positioning an examination of his earliest set of poems in discourse with the works of other Ultraists. With this investigation, then, I seek to further the critical dialogue on this understudied period in Borges' career and to illuminate the crystallization process of his poetics.

CHAPTER 1

Borges' (mis)reading of German Expressionism and Whitman

Poetic Influence—when it involves two strong, authentic poets,-- always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation.⁶⁹

In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Harold Bloom defines “poetic misprision” as a poet’s strong misreading of a literary work, which, in turn, exerts an influence on the young poet’s—the ephebe’s—own poetry. In the case of Borges, a study of his early poetic influences elucidates the subsequent evolution of his voice, both within the framework of the Spanish Ultraist doctrine and in the context of his refashioning as an Argentine poet. German Expressionism constitutes Borges’ initial contact with the avant-garde, fostering a fruitful platform for poetic exploration. In translating the German Expressionist poets into Spanish, Borges re-interprets the texts, appropriating and adapting them to his own emerging aesthetic. The present study examines Borges’ involvement with Expressionism in terms of 1) Borges’ periphrastic approach to translation, 2) his influence on the Spanish avant-garde in propagating German Expressionism in Spanish literary publications, and 3) the influence of Expressionism on Borges’ Ultraist poetry and subsequent aesthetic. Borges derives further influence from his reading of Whitman, insofar as a (mis)reading of *Leaves of Grass* manifests itself patently in Borges’ first

⁶⁹ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997) 30.

published poem in Spain, “Himno del Mar.” As we negotiate a link between “Himno del Mar” and Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” we aim to establish a critical understanding of Borges’ earliest influences, as well as to contextualize the discussion of his assimilation of the Spanish avant-garde poetics.

Chapter One proposes a study of Borges’ “complex act of strong misreading”⁷⁰: on the one hand, of the German Expressionist poets insofar as they influence Borges’ conception of the vanguard, and, on the other, of Whitman, whose style and voice Borges emulates in his first poem. Section 1.1 examines Borges’ (mis)interpretation of the Expressionists in his translations, which underscore his relationship with the German language and, furthermore, elucidate Borges’ early conception of a text’s translatability. Section 1.2 posits Borges in dialogue with Whitman, concentrating in particular on “Song of Myself” as a precursor-poem for Borges’ “Himno del Mar.” In this chapter, we seek to illuminate two examples of Borges’ (mis)reading and appropriation of text, while establishing a point of departure for the evolution of Borges’ poetics.

⁷⁰ Ibid. xxiii.

1.1 Borges in dialogue with the German Expressionist poets

Borges' translations of and cultural commentary on the German Expressionists were instrumental in bringing the movement to Spain. The dynamic of Borges' dialogue with the Expressionists, however, is complex; moreover, the extent of his impact on the Spanish vanguardist aesthetic by means of his Expressionist translations and critical contribution, and, by the same token, the Expressionist influence within Borges' own work, constitute sources of implicit disagreement among critics.⁷¹ Furthermore, Borges' familiarity with the German language comes into question, with some critics attributing the changes Borges makes to the German originals to his imperfect knowledge of the language,⁷² while others deem the infidelity in translation of the Expressionists deliberate and purposeful, thereby encapsulating Borges' early conception of the periphrastic approach to translation. In support of the latter argument, Laura Sager Eidt, in her "Borges's Translations of German Expressionist Poetry: Spaniardizing Expressionism," posits Borges' German translations as "conscious transpositions of the social criticism and the linguistic innovations of German Expressionism in terms of the Spanish aesthetic

⁷¹ See, among others, Rodolfo Modern, "Borges y el expresionismo," *Boletín de la Academia Argentina de Letras* 64.253-4 (1999): 389-99; Enriqueta Morillas, "Borges y la marea expresionista," *Revista de lengua y literatura* 9-11.17-22 (1997): 73-94; Laura Eidt, "Borges's Translations of German Expressionist Poetry," *Comparatist* 32 (2008): 115-39; Hugo Montes, "Borges y la poesía de vanguardia," *Estudios Filológicos* 14 (1979): 139-46; Stelio Cro, "La deshumanización de la literatura en J. L. Borges," *Cuadernos para Investigación de la Literatura Hispánica* 1: 79-98; Linda Maier, "Borges and German Expressionism," *Borges and the European Avant-garde* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996) 97-123.

⁷² For example, see Carlos García, "Borges, traductor del Expresionismo: Wilhelm Klemm," *Especulo: Revista de estudios literarios* 26 (2004) <http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numeros26/klemm.html>; and Rafael Olea Franco, "Borges y el civilizado arte de la traducción: una infidelidad creadora y feliz," *Nueva Revista Hispánica* 49.2 (2001): 439-73.

climate of Ultraism.”⁷³ Borges’ translations of the Expressionists are indeed, as proposed by Eidt, “versions” of the originals, recast or (mis)interpreted, in most cases deliberately, to re-contextualize the poems so that they may fit a more Ultraist paradigm, and in other cases, perhaps accidentally, due to Borges’ lapses in German knowledge.

Several circumstances must be considered in the context of this discussion: at the time of pursuing many of the translations, Borges was likely a teenager in Geneva, publishing the poems immediately upon his arrival to Spain—before the apogee period of his Ultraist involvement there. It is, then, perhaps overreaching to conclude that an eighteen or nineteen-year-old Borges had by that point formed and articulated a definitive conception of translation, grounding it in a nuanced poetics. Secondly, it should be noted that, while speaking French at Collège Calvin and English in the home,⁷⁴ Borges’ knowledge of German was self-taught. Hence, whereas Borges manages a wide range of vocabulary in his translations, with the aid of a dictionary, it is possible that his knowledge of complicated German grammar—and specifically word order rules crucial to poetic translation—was less than perfect, thus accounting for some of the (mis)interpretation of the original German texts.

Addressing the question of the critical presence of German Expressionism within the Borges *oeuvre*, Linda Maier argues that the insufficient treatment of the German Expressionist influence on Borges’ poetics results from a lack of critical familiarity with the Expressionist movement *per se*, leading to “misunderstanding and disagreement

⁷³ Eidt 115.

⁷⁴ See “An Autobiographical Essay” 213-223.

about the nature and extent of its impact in Spain.”⁷⁵ In *Historia de las Literaturas de Vanguardia*, Guillermo De Torre elaborates on the multifaceted nature of the movement that has presented scholars with challenges in ascertaining formal definitions⁷⁶; according to De Torre, the inherent difficulty in delimiting German literary Expressionism lies “[p]recisamente en su polifacetismo, en la variedad de rasgos y multiplicidad de géneros con que se manifiesta, en sus desdoblamientos internos y proyecciones exteriores.”⁷⁷ Proposing a method of addressing commonalities within the movement, Egbert Krispyn, in his study on *Style and Society in German Literary Expressionism*, postulates a definitive framework, which posits “pathos”—“human suffering caused by the discrepancy between reality and ideal”⁷⁸—as the hallmark of German Expressionism. Ideologically inclined, the Expressionists betray an “urge to destroy symbolically the world and authority of the ‘fathers,’ not as a nihilistic end in itself, but in order to pave the way for a better, higher form of life.”⁷⁹ This attitude serves as a uniting characteristic for the movement’s poetry—a trait which likely impressed Borges with its forward-looking vehemence. In his essay “Acerca del Expresionismo,” published in *Inquisiciones* (1925), Borges proposes a definition of German literary Expressionism, underscoring

⁷⁵ Maier 100.

⁷⁶ On defining and delimiting the German literary Expressionism see, among others, Richard Brinkmann, *Expressionismus: Internationale Forschung zu einem internationalen Phänomen* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1980) and *Expressionismus: Forschungsprobleme, 1952-1960* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1961); Egbert Krispyn, *Style and Society in German Literary Expressionism*, Gainesville, Florida: U of Florida P, 1964); Weisstein, Ulrich, ed., *Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon* (Paris: Didier, 1973); Soergel, Albert and Curt Hohoff, *Dichtung und Dichter der Zeit. Vom Naturalismus bis zur Gegenwart* (Düsseldorf: August Bagel, 1964); Walter H. Sokel, *The Writer in Extremis: Expressionism in Twentieth-century German literature* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964); Paul Raabe, ed. *The Era of German Expressionism*, trans. J. M. Ritchie (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1974).

⁷⁷ Guillermo de Torre, *Historia de las literaturas de vanguardia* (Madrid: Guadarrama, 1974) 183.

⁷⁸ Krispyn 7.

⁷⁹ Krispyn 25.

“vehemencia en el ademán y en la hondura, abundancia de imágenes y una suposición de universal hermandad”⁸⁰; the Expressionist stylistics and—more significantly—thematic elements, such as the depiction of human pain and solidarity of mankind, constitute a pivotal point of Borges’ initial contact with the avant-garde.

In his encounter with the German language in Geneva,⁸¹ Borges became captivated by the German Expressionist poets, forging a relationship fundamental to the discussion of his poetics; in “An Autobiographical Essay,” Borges delineates his preference for German Expressionism as a movement superior in its poetic accomplishment to “other contemporary schools, such as imagism, cubism, futurism, surrealism, and so on.”⁸² Furthermore, in an interview in 1962, Borges elaborates on the elements of German literary Expressionism, which, in his words “ya contiene todo lo esencial de la literatura posterior”⁸³; specifically, Borges’ interest in Expressionism lies in its thematic conception, which “refleja toda una serie de preocupaciones profundas: la magia, los sueños, las religiones y las filosofías orientales, el anhelo de hermandad universal.”⁸⁴ These themes leave a lasting imprint on Borges’ evolution as a writer, re-appearing continuously throughout his career in both his poetry and prose, thus underscoring the profound influence of Borges’ early contact with the Expressionist movement. Moreover, by the time Borges arrived in Spain to espouse the Spanish Ultraist campaign for poetic innovation, he had begun to develop and refine his conception of

⁸⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, *Inquisiciones* (Madrid: Alianza, 2008) 161.

⁸¹ See “An Autobiographical Essay,” pp. 213-18; and Emir Rodríguez Monegal, *Jorge Luis Borges: A Literary Biography* (New York: Dutton, 1978) 107-50.

⁸² “An Autobiographical Essay” 216.

⁸³ Qtd. in Guillermo Sucre, *Borges, el poeta* (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1967) 27.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 27.

metaphor as the central element of poetry in his translations of the German Expressionist texts; as he notes, “el alemán, con sus infinitas posibilidades verbales, se presta más a la metáfora. Por eso el ultraísmo no significó nada nuevo para mí.”⁸⁵ Encouraged by the inherent qualities of the German language, Borges appears drawn to the subtlety of metaphor which accounts for the unconventionality of German Expressionist poetics.⁸⁶ Thematically, German Expressionism constituted for Borges a connection to a poetic intensity of expression—a link which the rather isolated circumstances of his forced stay in Geneva did not allow.⁸⁷ Interrogating the thematic and stylistic eclecticism⁸⁸ of the German Expressionist aesthetic, Borges translated its poets prolifically and, upon his arrival in Spain, sought to propagate the movement through his publications in Spanish literary magazines.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 27. Sucre notes the influence of Expressionism on Borges’ later work, citing as one of the examples the story “El Milagro Secreto,” in which Borges’ intellectual double edits a series of Expressionist poems. Sucre further contends that “[h]ay, por supuesto, una relación entre el ultraísmo y el expresionismo. Fue precisamente el escritor argentino uno de los que introdujo y divulgó al segundo en España. De modo que cuando llega a este país, Borges era ya un iniciado en los nuevos movimientos estéticos; ello explica también el que su adhesión al ultraísmo fuese tan individual.” 27.

⁸⁶ See Roy F. Allen, *German Expressionist Poetry* 82-5. Allen underscores Expressionist use of “absolute” or “alogical” metaphor, acting as “oblique fragments of the poet’s total sensibility, which treats the things of reality directly, i.e., without the obvious intervention of consciousness. It is only in the total context of the poem that the chaos of the poet’s images begins to assume clearer meaning. Since it is the reader’s mind that must, in the end, achieve the synthesis of all these disparate images, he has to become much more intimately and actively involved in the poetic process in this kind of poetry than in more conventional verse.” 83.

⁸⁷ Rodríguez Monegal affirms that Borges was likely “extremely susceptible to German poetry. [...] The expressionists were the first truly modern poets Georgie read, the ones who introduced him to the new poetics.” *Jorge Luis Borges: A Literary Biography* 144.

⁸⁸ What appealed to Borges was likely the inherent eclecticism of German literary Expressionism, with its wide range of styles and themes; as noted by Roy F. Allen, “the number of authors and the volume of literature strongly militated against the possibility of any one style” within the Expressionist aesthetic, yielding “an eclectic complex of various techniques instead of a rigid, homogeneous system.” *German Expressionist Poetry* 77.

Borges began the dissemination of his Spanish translations of the German Expressionists in late 1919⁸⁹, often accompanying the poems with critical commentary. His first such annotated anthology, “*Lírica Expresionista: Síntesis*,” was published in *Grecia*, in August of 1920. In this publication, Borges unites the poetry of Heynicke (“*Detras del Frente*”, “*Esperanza*”) and Klemm (“*Los Sentidos*”), who belonged to the opposing camps of Expressionism: literary magazines *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion*, respectively.⁹⁰ In his introductory note, Borges postulates German Expressionism as “la tentativa de crear para esta época un arte matinalmente intuicionista, de supercar la realidad ambiente y elevar sobre su madeja sensorial y emotiva una ultra-realidad espiritual.”⁹¹ Even prior to his espousal of Ultraism, whose central aim encourages a similar quest to effect an ‘ultra-reality’—or to elude reality within a poetic construct—Borges contemplates the poem’s emotive capability in conjuring up such a ‘magical’ space. Borges’ second “*Antología Expresionista*,” which appeared in *Cervantes* in October 1920, comprises a more extensive selection of Expressionist poets, including thirteen poem translations of Ernst Stadler, Johannes R. Becher, Kurt Heynicke, Werner Hahn, Alfred Vagts, Wilhelm Klemm, August Stramm, Lothar Schreyer, and H. von Stummer. In another Expressionist publication, titled “*Lírica Expresionista: Wilhelm Klemm*,” appearing in *Grecia* in November of 1920, Borges discusses Klemm’s poetics in an “*Efigie Prefacial*, while Borges’ “*Horizontes: Die Aktion-Lyrik (1914-1916)*,”

⁸⁹ See “An Autobiographical Essay” 218; also see Emir Rodríguez Monegal, “Back to the Old Country,” *Jorge Luis Borges: A Literary Biography* 150-6.

⁹⁰ In “Borges, traductor del Expresionismo: Wilhelm Klemm,” Carlos García writes: “Llama la atención la perspicacia del joven Borges, quien en 1920 reúne a ambos [Klemm y Heynicke] en un mismo trabajo.” 2. For a discussion of the two Expressionist literary magazines, see Erwin Piscator, “The political significance of *Die Aktion*,” and Lothar Schreyer, “What is *Der Sturm*?” *The Era of German Expressionism*, ed. Paul Raabe, trans. J. M. Ritchie (Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press, 1974) 181-5 and 193-9.

⁹¹ Jorge Luis Borges, “*Lírica expresionista: síntesis*,” *Textos Recobrados* 66.

Berlin,” last publication in this series in *Ultra*, constitutes a review of an Expressionist anthology. Ambitious in number and scope—often including works of lesser known figures in German literary Expressionism—Borges’ translations contribute in a significant way to introducing the movement into the Spanish avant-garde sphere.

In a review of an Expressionist publication *Die Aktion-Lyrik (1914-1916)*, Borges delineates his admiration for the anthology’s “gran calor de corazón, cualidad notable.”⁹² The reviewed publication features poems, “conscientemente duros y dolorosos, forjados por Wilhelm Klemm, Ludwig Baumer, Alfred Vagts, Julius Talbot Keller y otros poetas, en la nadería y el fatalismo de las trincheras, en Polonia, en Rusia y en Francia.”⁹³ In Borges’ view, this anthology “presenta dos aspectos: el uno, documental, histórico, de apuntación inmediata de los instantes de la guerra; el otro, de muestrario del expresionismo, lírico en sus albores,” with Borges expressing his preference for the latter, “[u]na emoción viviente que tiembla muchas veces en el fondo como una lámpara sepulta y que se expresa en frases truncadas y en un heroico barroquismo verbal.”⁹⁴ Citing examples from Keller, Klemm, Kanchl, Ferlf, Plagge, all of whom go beyond the chronicling of history in search of an objective truth, Borges likens these poets’ linguistic renovation to the superior expression of the Greeks, who “visualizaban [...] la Historia como una bella narración o como una herramienta de moral.”⁹⁵ This essay further elucidates Borges’ relationship with the poetry of German Expressionism, as he underscores the movement’s salient elements of poetic perspective and narration. In his

⁹² Jorge Luis Borges, “Horizontes: *Die Aktion-Lyrik (1914-1916)*,” *Ultra* 20 Oct. 1921; *Textos Recobrados* 129.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 129.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 129.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 130.

seminal *Historia de las Literaturas de Vanguardia*, Guillermo de Torre cites Borges' review of *Die Aktion-Lyrik (1914-1916)*, including Borges' selections of the anthology's "metáforas más llamativas"⁹⁶; this reference to Borges as an authority on German Expressionism is in and of itself telling, in that, as noted by Stelio Cro, it constitutes "una prueba suficiente de la difusión del expresionismo en España y en América Latina por obra principalmente de Borges."⁹⁷

In a study of Borges' translations of the original German Expressionist texts, Laura Eidt argues that Borges' choice of poems and his Spanish 'versions' reflect a "combination of aesthetic and social renewal that Borges sought to disseminate in Spain."⁹⁸ Eidt focuses specifically on Borges' syntactic and nuanced semantic choices in these translations. Certain rather obvious discrepancies between the German originals and Borges' Spanish translations⁹⁹ have thus far been largely unexplained, or written off as Borges' self-admitted imperfect command of German grammar. Eidt, however, posits these variants in meaning and phrasing as deliberate "acculturations" of the originals, serving as "conscious transpositions of the social criticism and the linguistic innovations of German Expressionism in terms of the Spanish aesthetic climate of Ultraism."¹⁰⁰ Conversely, Carlos García explains Borges' 'variants' in translation by proposing that some of them had to be accommodations of Borges' less-than-perfect knowledge of

⁹⁶ De Torre 202.

⁹⁷ Cro 82. Cro contends that the assimilation was so profound that Borges' adherence to various "conquistas expresivas" continued well past the end of the movement.

⁹⁸ Eidt 117.

⁹⁹ See Carlos García, "Borges, traductor del Expresionismo: Wilhelm Klemm," and "Borges y el expresionismo: Kurt Heynicke," by the same author.

¹⁰⁰ Eidt 115.

German.¹⁰¹ Thus, on the one hand, Borges' evidently imperfect familiarity with the language yields various (mis)interpretations; on the other hand, however, it appears that Borges adjusts the German poets' vision to his own poetic conception.

An examination of Borges' translations of the Expressionists invites a hypothesis regarding Borges' familiarity with the German language. In "An Autobiographical Essay," Borges delineates a clear preference for German over French, English, and even his native Spanish, commenting on the "loveliness" of the German language—"perhaps more beautiful than the literature it has produced."¹⁰² For Borges, the assiduous learning of German in youth evolved into a lifelong admiration. Many years later, in *El Oro de los Tigres* (1972), Borges would address the German language as a long-lost, beloved companion in "Al idioma alemán": "Pero a ti, dulce lengua de Alemania, / Te he elegido y buscado, solitario. / A través de vigiliyas y gramáticas, / De la jungla de las declinaciones, / Del diccionario, que no acierta nunca / Con el matiz preciso, fui acercándome."¹⁰³ Poeticizing his adolescent nights in Geneva, filled with his struggles to translate precisely the works of Hölderlin, Heine, Goethe, Keller, Borges praises the language, despite its challenging mechanics, for its unequivocal beauty. Recalling the days of his youth and his study of German, Borges concludes: "Te tuve alguna vez. Hoy, en la linde / De los años cansados, te divisó / Lejana como el álgebra y la luna." Holding the German language in high esteem, Borges' contact with the Expressionist texts constituted a profound and multifaceted relationship. And yet, the fact that Borges never

¹⁰¹ Carlos García, "Borges, el traductor del Expresionismo: Wilhelm Klemm."

¹⁰² "An Autobiographical Essay" 217.

¹⁰³ Jorge Luis Borges, "Al idioma alemán," *Selected Poems*, ed. Alexander Coleman (New York: Penguin, 1999) 326.

undertook any formal study of the language may explain at least some of the discrepancies—or (mis)interpretations—between the originals and Borges’ ‘versions.’

That said, many of the changes Borges makes when ‘re-writing’ the Expressionists appear deliberate, underscoring Borges’ early conception of (un)translatability. To this end, in “Las dos maneras de traducir,” Borges elaborates on his preference for a liberal, rather than literal, translation, proposing the prevalence of “dos clases de traducciones. Una practica la literalidad, la otra la perífrasis. La primera corresponde a las mentalidades románticas, la segunda a las clásicas.”¹⁰⁴ This ‘Romantic’ translation, in Borges’ view, is often more cumbersome, “ridícula,” and translators—“unos chapuceros irreparables, padres del frangollo y de la mentira”—owe it to verse to recreate “su ambiente, su connotación, su ademán. Las palabras se hacen incantaciones y la poesía quiere ser magia.”¹⁰⁵ This approach to translatability of poetic text manifests itself in Borges’ translations of the Expressionists as early as a decade before the publication of “Las dos maneras de traducir” in 1925, underscoring the significance of Borges’ avant-garde contact in shaping his subsequent views and aesthetic. Analyzing Borges’ preference for periphrastic translation, Efraín Kristal notes that “Borges knew it could be difficult to transfer the meaning of each word of an original in translation and did not think it desirable to do so when translating a work of literature [...]. He recognized that in translation some aspects of an original will disappear, but he did not consider those losses necessarily undesirable.”¹⁰⁶ In his study of Borges’ theory and praxis of translation,

¹⁰⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, “Las dos maneras de traducir,” in *Textos Recobrados* 315.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 314.

¹⁰⁶ Efraín Kristal, *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2002) 3.

Kristal points out several strategies characteristic of Borges' approach to translation, including paring the text down, removing distractions, and adding nuances.¹⁰⁷

Bearing in mind Borges' emerging conception of translation, as well as the circumstances of his relationship with the German language, let us first examine his translation of Wilhelm Klemm's "Reifung":

"Reifung"

Die unendlichen Experimente der Natur
Verfolgen uns bis zur völligen Erschöpfung.
Wir treiben weltvergleichende Klinik
Um die Absterbeordnung zu bestimmen.
In uns arbeiten athletische Maschinen,
Du hörst die See brausen nachts im Ohr.
Ausbrüche verpuffen. Wir sind fröstelnde Insekten
Lebend im Klima der Besessenheit.
Das nennt man Entwicklungsmechanik,
Entelechie des Aristoteles.
Abscheuliche Folgezustände setzen ein.
Wir wünschen uns, grenzenlos Tier zu sein.¹⁰⁸

Here is Borges' translation of this text, found in a letter to Jacobo Sureda (November 1920):

"Madurez"

Los interminable experimentos de la naturaleza
Nos persiguen hasta dejarnos totalmente rendidos.
Estudiamos clínica comparada de los mundos
Para determinar la colocación de los años.
En nosotros trabajan máquinas atléticas.
De noche sientes hervir un lago en tu oreja.
Las revoluciones fracasan. Somos tiritantes insectos
Que viven en el clima de la demencia.
Esto se titula mecánica evolutiva,
Combinación de un tal Aristóteles.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 87.

¹⁰⁸ Wilhelm Klemm, "Reifung," *Traumschutt: Gedichte* (Hannover: Steegemann, 1920) 10.

Consecuencias asquerosas ocurren.
 Desearíamos ser infinitamente animales.¹⁰⁹

My translation of Klemm's German text:

"Maturity"

The endless experiments of nature
 Chase us until total exhaustion.
 We practice comparative clinic of the world
 To determine the order of extinction.
 Athletic machines work in us,
 at night you hear the roar of the sea in your ear.
 Outbursts fall flat. We are shivering insects
 That live in the climate of the possessed.
 This is called evolutionary mechanics,
 Entelechy of Aristotle.
 Horrible consequences take place.
 We desire to be animals without borders.

The original German text undergoes a number of changes—intentional and perhaps unintentional—throughout Borges' Spanish version. In an analysis of Borges' translation approach to "Madurez," Carlos García underscores line 4 as the most notable discrepancy between the original and Borges' version; here it is likely that Borges misread the font of the poem, and mistook the "s" in "Absterbeordnung," for an "f," thereby rendering the composite word to be understood as "After" (year) and "beordnung" (ordering), a combination which yields Borges' "colocación de los años."¹¹⁰ More glaring, however, than Borges' misinterpretation of the word, is his misreading of the idea inherent in lines 2 and 3 ("Wir treiben weltvergleichende Klinik / Um die Absterbeordnung zu bestimmen"). Here Klemm seems to evoke the idea of practicing triage on the world, in

¹⁰⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, trans., "Madurez," *Cartas del Fervor* 175.

¹¹⁰ Carlos García, "Borges, traductor del Expresionismo: Wilhelm Klemm," <http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero26/klemm.html>

order to assess the order of extinction—an image which would have been appropriate for the poem’s theme of war, suffering, and oppression. In Borges’ translation this element is lost, as he chooses a slightly imprecise “estudiamos” for an image which calls for “practice” (“treiben” in the German text). Another similar misreading appears in line 7, “Ausbruche verpuffen,” which Borges translates as “Las revoluciones fracasan”; “Ausbruche”—“outbursts”—are perhaps not intended explicitly as “revolutions” in Klemm’s text. Further, in line 10, Borges chooses “combinación” for “Entelechie,” possibly seeking to evoke the idea of a “combination” of moves in chess; he completes the line by de-formalizing the original with the addition of “un tal” Aristotle. These variants suggest some awkwardness in fluency of usage in German, or perhaps an imprecise familiarity with the language. In another vein, however, these discrepancies in translation may be attributed to Borges’ re-reading of the text in the context of his own poetic project, as he patently re-writes portions of Klemm’s “Reifung.”

Conversely, in translating Kurt Heynicke’s “Augenblick,” Borges remains rather faithful to the original, while, nevertheless, still adapting the German text to his own vision and poetic sensibility:

“Augenblick”

Mein Herz hebt die Hand.
Viel Garten blühen auf,
ein Blick aus deinem Auge sinkt
und meine Seele trinkt ihn aus.

Ein Geigenton –
sing ich – singst du?
Wir klingen mit.
Und blühen alle Rosen zu.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Kurt Heynicke, “Augenblick,” *Gottes Geigen: Gedichte* (München: Roland-Verlag, 1918) 22.

And here is Borges' translation, published in "Antología Expresionista, in the October of 1920 volume of *Cervantes*:

"Instante"

Mi corazón alza la mano.
 Muchos jardines florecen.
 Una mirada cae de tus ojos
 Y la bebe mi alma.
 Un violín.
 Canto yo—cantas tú?
 Sonamos juntos
 Hacia nosotros florecen todas las rosas.¹¹²

My translation of the German original:

"Instant"

My heart raises the hand.
 Many gardens bloom.
 A look falls from your eyes
 And it drinks my soul.

 A tone of a violin.
 I sing—you sing?
 We resonate together
 And bloom all the roses.

Borges' obvious change from the German text is his choice to do away with rhyme and quatrain structure and to alter the punctuation; the more terse lines as self-contained sentences, along with the absence of rhyme, render Borges' version of Heynicke much more avant-garde than perhaps the latter had intended. In this case, Borges enacts what Eidt proposes as one of Borges' "subtle shifts in his translations [that] adapt

¹¹² Jorge Luis Borges, trans., "Antología Expresionista," *Textos Recobrados* 80.

Expressionism by merging it with avant-garde aesthetics,”¹¹³ thereby approximating the Ultraist aesthetic and rendering the Expressionist poems more palatable to the Spanish audience. A curious detail is Borges’ decision to change “Geigenton” to simply “Un violín,” placing the emphasis on the object itself, rather than on the sound it produces, which would have made the Spanish version more sensorial. Borges’ choice to translate this poem is significant in and of itself, as Heynicke’s “Augenblick” exerts an influence on Borges’ “Poema,” which Borges likely composed around the time he translated “Instante.”¹¹⁴ In its imagery and style, “Poema” echoes Heynicke’s “Instante”: “La estrella / que huyó de tu garganta madura / no es más que un eco del formidable poema” (“Poema,” lines 1-3) parallels “Una mirada cae de tus ojos / Y la bebe mi alma” (“Instante,” lines 3-4). Moreover, “Poema” closes with an image of the broken violin (“el violín que se ha roto” (line 14))—symbol of the failed creation of art—in its tentative dialogue with the definitive image of the violin in line 5 of “Instante.” In “Poema,” we also sense Borges’ reading of Klemm’s “Reifung”; the endless experiments of nature (line 1) in Klemm’s text are akin to the endless—and futile—experiments of art in “Poema,” which leave the poet exhausted “en el supor de las alcobas pesadas” (line 8). In “Reifung,” the speaker, just one of the “shivering insects” (line 7), appears to be crushed by forces of defeat and, ultimately, the inevitability of surrender to the “evolutionary mechanics” (line 9) and the Someone in the “climate of the possessed” (line 8). The

¹¹³ Eidt 124. In her analysis, Eidt argues that by incorporating “recognizable techniques (such as the deformation of nature, condensation of language, or enumeration of unconnected image), while highlighting the Expressionists’ concern for human isolation and anguish and the need for human solidarity, Borges’s translations point Spanish avant-garde poetics in a new direction.” 124.

¹¹⁴ See “An Autobiographical Essay” 218. “Poema” was not published until September 15, 1920; however, Borges likely had begun it much earlier, as he recalls writing poems in Geneva “imitative of symbolist poetry.” One such poem, “Poème pour être recité avec un accent russe,” contained a line: “Petite boîte noire pour le violon cassé;” this line corresponds to “Cajita negra para el violín que se ha roto” in “Poema.”

speaker of Borges' "Poema," too, is crushed by the necessity of surrender to the "Alguien" who determines the parameters of the poet's creation. Borges' (mis)reading of the Expressionists, then, appears to influence Borges' own earliest poetry, as his involvement in the movement enables an initial contact with the avant-garde conception of metaphor and a poetic 'ultra-reality,' upon which Borges would expound extensively in his essays on Ultraist theory.

Underscoring a complexity inherent in Borges' encounter with the German Expressionists, his re-reading of the poems is multifaceted, akin to his relationship with the aesthetic. In possible linguistic (mis)interpretation and a liberal re-appropriation of the German texts, Borges' approach to translation becomes evident; as a result of Borges' re-reading of the German poems—in some cases *Spaniardizing*, as noted by Eidt—the translations acquire what Kristal calls "Borgesian touches,"¹¹⁵ as the poet renders the texts his own. An examination of these texts elucidates not only the evolution of Borges' approach to translation and poetics, but also informs the study of Borges' work within the context of his interaction with the European avant-garde.

¹¹⁵ Kristal 87.

1.2 Borges in dialogue with Whitman and the Sea

Before emerging as one of the leaders and theorists of the Spanish Ultraist movement and publishing poems which subscribe to the Ultraist poetic precepts, Borges derives an influence from the work of Whitman; a misreading of Whitman, then, constitutes a key influential element in Borges' first published poem: "Himno del Mar." The relationship of Borges' poetry with that of Whitman is a curious one, as Borges' subject matter and style appear, at least on the surface, to differ from Whitman's. In "What Borges Learned from Whitman: The Open Road and its Forking Paths," Joseph Benevento observes that the influence Whitman exerts on Borges is quite different from the way Whitman ostensibly influenced other Latin American poets, such as Pablo Neruda or José Santos Chocano.¹¹⁶ Borges' reading of Whitman, however, is, in essence 'Borgesian'—subtly complex yet omnipresent, as Borges internalizes and (re)appropriates Whitman's project—a force, according to María Luisa Bastos, interwoven intensely into the fabric of Borges' poetics.¹¹⁷ Of Borges' early set of poems written in Spain, Whitman's influence is evident in "Himno del Mar," the experiment in poetic misprision.¹¹⁸ In his subsequent poetry of the early 1920s in Spain, however, Borges distances himself from the Whitmanesque grandiloquence, assimilating the

¹¹⁶ Joseph J. Benevento, "What Borges Learned from Whitman: The Open Road and Its Forking Paths," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 4 (Spring 1985): 21.

¹¹⁷ See María Luisa Bastos, "Whitman as Inscribed in Borges," *Borges the Poet* 219-231.

¹¹⁸ Harold Bloom postulates influence as "a metaphor, one that implicates a matrix of relationships—imagistic, temporal, psychological—all of them ultimately defensive in their nature. [...] The strong misreading comes first; there must be a profound act of reading that is a kind of falling in love with a literary work. That reading is likely to be idiosyncratic, and it is almost certain to be ambivalent, though the ambivalence may be veiled." *The Anxiety of Influence* xxiii.

demands of Ultraism's campaign for reductive poetics, brevity of expression, and precision of metaphor. No other poem in Borges' *oeuvre*, then, so patently betrays the (mis)reading of Whitman's "Song of Myself" as "Himno del Mar"; furthermore, as Borges' later poetry continues to engage in dialogue with that of Whitman, a prominent composite "I" emerges in Borges' "Mi Vida Entera" (1925), which, in turn, parallels Whitman's "Song of Myself" both in its form and Borges' focus on the self.

The dialogue with Whitman begins with Borges' first meeting "Walt Whitman through a German translation by Johannes Schlaf," prompting Borges to order an English edition of *Leaves of Grass* from London. "For a time," Borges writes, "I thought of Whitman not only as a great poet but as the *only* poet. In fact, I thought that all poets the world over had been merely leading up to Whitman until 1855, and that not to imitate him was a proof of ignorance."¹¹⁹ This encounter with Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* led Borges to compose "Himno del Mar," appropriating Whitman's bardic tone and free verse structure. Despite Borges' post-Ultraism rejection of his first poem, its initial publication garnered Borges fame in Madrid as "a singer of the sea."¹²⁰ In a letter to Maurice Abramowicz dated January 19, 1920, Borges discusses "un himno escrito en Valldemosa. No es gran cosa, pero es ingenuo y entusiasta."¹²¹ Initially skeptical toward the Ultraist movement, and the avant-garde in general, Borges explains that he has composed his first poem in the vein of Whitman: "Todo este movimiento ultraísta español es pariente cercano del expresionismo alemán y del futurismo italiano. Para mí,

¹¹⁹ Borges, "An Autobiographical Essay" 217.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 220.

¹²¹ *Cartas del Fervor* 75.

el Maestro sigue siendo Whitman.”¹²² Borges’ attitude toward Ultraism in the early 1920s underscores the movement’s vanguardist eclecticism, which, in light of Borges’ prior contact with the German Expressionists, does not appear to impress him—at least at the outset—as “nada nuevo.”

Although never republished subsequent to its initial appearance in *Grecia* on December 31, 1919, “Himno del Mar”¹²³ constitutes an impressive accomplishment for the nineteen-year-old poet, and stands apart from the rest of his Ultraist work:

Yo he ansiado un himno del Mar con ritmos amplios como las
 olas que gritan;
 Del Mar cuando el sol en sus aguas cual bandera escarlata
 flamea;
 Del Mar cuando besa los pechos dorados de vírgenes playas
 que aguardan sedientas;
 Del Mar al aullar sus mesnadas, al lanzar sus blasfemias los
 vientos,
 Cuando brilla en las aguas de acero la luna bruñida y sangrienta;
 Del Mar cuando vierte sobre él su tristeza sin fondo
 La Copa de Estrellas.

Hoy he bajado de la montaña al valle
 y del valle hasta el mar.

El camino fue largo como un beso.
 Los almendros lanzaban madejas azuladas de sombra sobre la
 carretera
 y, al terminar el valle, el sol
 gritó rubios Golcondas sobre tu glauca selva: ¡Mar!
 ¡Hermano, Padre, Amado...!

¹²² Ibid. 75.

¹²³ Linda Maier analyzes “Himno del Mar” in *Borges and the European Avant-garde*; in her analysis, she contends that “Himno del Mar,” as Borges’ first publication “holds the key to a deeper understanding of the internal aesthetic struggles of Borges the young vanguard poet.” 73. Furthermore, Maier underscores the poem’s nineteenth-century influences in its rendering of the ode to the sea, depiction of the sea at various times, and use of visual imagery. “Himno del Mar,” according to Maier, is representative of Borges’ “defiance of Ultraism,” evidenced by his use of “[l]iterary confessionism, rhetoric, and dependence on familiar Modernista themes and techniques.” 76.

Entro al jardín enorme de tus aguas y nado lejos de la tierra.
 Las olas vienen con cimera frágil de espuma,
 En fuga hacia el fracaso. Hacia la costa,
 Con sus picachos rojos,
 Con sus casa geométricas,
 Con sus palmeras de juguete,
 Que ahora se han vuelto lívidos y absurdos como recuerdos
 yertos!
 Yo estoy contigo, Mar. Y mi cuerpo tendido como un arco
 lucha contra tus músculos raudos. Solo tú existes.
 Mi alma desecha todo su pasado
 Como en nórdico cielo que se deshoja en copos
 errantes!

Oh instante de plenitud magnífica;
 Antes de conocerte, Mar hermano,
 Largamente he vagado por errantes calles azules con oriflamas
 de faroles
 Y en la sagrada media noche yo he tejido guirnaldas
 De besos sobre carnes y labios que se ofrendaban,
 Solemnes de silencio,
 En una floración
 Sangrienta...
 Pero ahora yo hago don a los vientos
 De todas esas cosas pretéritas,
 pretéritas... Sólo tú existes.
 Atlético y desnudo. Sólo este fresco aliento y estas olas,
 y las Copas Azules, y el milagro de las Copas Azules.
 (Yo he soñado un himno del Mar con ritmos amplios como
 las olas jadeantes.)

Ansío aún crearte un poema
 Con la cadencia adámica de tu oleaje,
 Con tu salino y primeral aliento,
 Con el trueno de las anclas sonoras ante Thulés ebrias de luz y
 lepra,
 Con voces marineras, luces y ecos
 De grietas abismales
 Donde tus raudas manos monjiles acarician constantemente
 a los muertos...
 Un himno
 Constelado de imágenes rojas, lumínicas.

Oh mar! oh mito! oh sol! oh largo lecho!
 Y sé por qué te amo. Sé que somos muy viejos.
 Que ambos nos conocemos desde siglos.

Sé que en tus aguas venerandas y rientes ardió la aurora de la
 Vida.
 (En la ceniza de una tarde terciaria vibré por vez primera en
 tu seno).
 Oh proteico, yo he salido de ti.
 Ambos encadenados y nómadas;
 Ambos con una sed intensa de estrellas;
 Ambos con esperanza y desengaños;
 Ambos, aire, luz, fuerza, obscuridades;
 Ambos con nuestro vasto deseo y ambos con nuestra grande
 miseria!¹²⁴

The first stanza of “Himno del Mar” serves as the introduction of the poem, fourth and fifth stanzas as the conclusion, while stanzas three and four follow a bifurcated structure. The first line declares the speaker’s longing to create a hymn which would mimetically reproduce the rhythm of the waves and lines 2-4 conjure up this rhythm through anaphoric repetition (“Del Mar”). In the second stanza, the speaker descends from the mountain into the valley, and then from the valley into the sea. The tense change occurs in line 14 (“Entro al jardín enorme de tus aguas y nado lejos de la tierra”), as the speaker swims out into the Sea and looks back at the shore from a new perspective. The swimmer is then one with the Sea (“Solo tú existes”), renouncing his past in this baptismal ritual: “Mi alma desecha todo su pasado / Como en nórdico cielo que se deshoja en copos errantes.” A similar bifurcation occurs in the structure of stanza 3: lines 25-32 draw on the images of the speaker’s previously nocturnal life (“Largamente he vagado por errantes calles azules con oriflamas de faroles”) and then transition, after line 32 (“Sangrienta...”), into the present state of purity. Line 36 (“Atlético y desnudo”) underscores the speaker’s condition as he enters the Sea; however, the line’s position directly after “Sólo tú existes” makes it a possible reference to the Sea itself and is, then,

¹²⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, “Himno del Mar,” *Grecia* 31 Dec. 1919.

perhaps purposely ambiguous. Stanza 4 segues into the concluding rhythm, wherein lines 40 through 43 begin with “Con,” and later, in Stanza 5, lines 54 through 58 echo the previous stanza with the anaphora of “Ambos.”

Borges focuses on fashioning a speaker whose anecdotal journey into the waters would underscore the psychological impact of the Sea’s vastness and powerful imagery.¹²⁵ In “Himno,” the speaker addresses the Sea as though it were an old friend: “Yo sé por qué te amo. Sé que somos muy viejos. / Que ambos nos conocemos desde siglos” (lines 62-63). The Sea breathes (“Con tu salino y primeral aliento” (line 52)), and kisses (“Del Mar cuando besa los pechos dorados de vírgenes playas” (line 5)) and has “raudas manos monjiles” (line 57), which caress the dead. Foreshadowing Borges’ subsequently favored Ultraist imagery, “Himno del Mar” depicts “casas geométricas” (line 24) and likens the sun to a red flag, fluttering in the wind or in the waters: “Del Mar cuando el sol en sus aguas cual bandera escarlata flamea” (line 2). Similarly, in Borges’ “Mañana,” the sunrise arrives with a singing band of flags (“Las banderas cantaron sus colores” (line 1)), while the flags’ unfurling in “Fiesta” welcomes the morning (“Por la mañana suelta / se desperezan miles de banderas” (lines 1-2)). With a focus on sensory imagery, the speaker in “Himno del Mar” succeeds in the evocation of a psychologically nuanced impact of a descent into the Sea’s waters.

At the core of the speaker’s journey in “Himno del Mar” is Borges’ ‘misprision’ of Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” as, in particular, the closing lines of Borges’ poem closely parallel Whitman’s apostrophe:

¹²⁵ For an analysis of Borges’ relationship with the Sea in his poetry, initiated by “Himno del Mar,” see Carlos Cortínez, “‘Himno del Mar.’ El primer poema de Borges,” *Revista Chilena de Literatura* 25 (1985): 73-86.

You sea! I resign myself to you also—I guess
 what you mean;
 I behold from the beach your crooked inviting fingers;
 I believe you refuse to go back without feeling me;
 We must have a turn together—I undress—hurry
 me out of sight of the land;
 Cushion me soft, rock me in billowy drowse;
 Dash me with amorous wet—I can repay you.

Sea of stretch'd ground-swells!
 Sea breathing broad and convulsive breaths!
 Sea of the brine of life! sea of unshovell'd yet
 always-ready graves!
 Howler and scooper of storms! capricious
 and dainty sea!
 I am integral with you—I too am of one phase,
 and of all phases.¹²⁶

Borges' (mis)reading of Whitman is evident in the stylistic elements, such as Borges' liberal use of the Whitmanesque anaphora; moreover, Borges' speaker in "Himno del Mar" engages in dialogue with Whitman's vision of the Sea in its portrayal as a "resting place" (Borges) and "unshovell'd yet always-ready graves" (Whitman). Both speakers enter the Sea as if in a baptismal ritual—stark naked: "Athletic and naked" (Borges) and "I undress" (Whitman). As they become one with the Sea, both speakers are eager to enter the waters and swim out: "I enter the enormous garden of your waters and swim far away from land" (Borges) and "hurry me out of sight from the land" (Whitman). Furthermore, both poems deal with clearly delineated physical/visual planes: as the speakers descend towards the waves, they leave behind the beach, enter the waters, swim

¹²⁶ Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," *The Works of Walt Whitman*, intr. David Rogers (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1995) 46-47.

out into the sea, thus effecting a shift of perspective. These parallels in imagery and point of view facilitate a multi-layered dialogue between the two poems.

Thematically, Whitman's depiction of the Sea influences Borges' choice of setting for his first poem, as "Himno del Mar" praises the Sea for its capacity not only to preserve the dead, but also to nurture the living: "Entro el jardín enorme de tus aguas y nado lejos de la tierra" (line 20). This sense of peaceful oneness with the Sea emerges in Whitman's "I sing the body electric":

The swimmer naked in the swimming-bath, seen as he swims through the
transparent green-shine, or lies with his face up, and rolls
Silently to and fro in the heave of the water¹²⁷

Like the speaker of "Himno del Mar," Whitman's swimmer is also naked, interacting with the waters in a sensorial contact. Borges' depiction of the Sea is likely grounded in his own experience as a swimmer; to this end, Borges writes of his swimming in the Balearic Islands in a letter to Maurice Abramowicz:

Por las mañanas voy en tranvía hasta Portopí, un lugar de la costa donde la gente se baña. Es agradable eso de desvestirse sobre la arena solitaria, correr, ver el inmenso mar azul donde a veces por el horizonte pasa un velero, oler ese gran aliento salado de las aguas anhelantes, sentir las caricias de las olas felices, después nadar...¹²⁸

As proposed by Rodríguez Monegal, "[b]y the time [Borges] went to Spain he was probably as good as he claimed to be. [...] A swimmer such as Georgie must have caused

¹²⁷ Ibid. 89.

¹²⁸ *Cartas del Fervor* 59.

quite a sensation in the Majorca of those days.”¹²⁹ Borges’ victorious tone in “Himno del Mar” encapsulates the disposition of a healthy, youthful speaker, who is a proficient swimmer and lover of Nature.

The theme of the Sea continues to figure prominently in Borges’ Ultraist poems, as well in his subsequent poetry. For instance, in “Catedral,” the Sea appears in “Las olas de rodillas” (line 1), propelled by the wind’s muscles (line 2); this setting parallels that of “Cingladura”: “El viento esculpe oleaje” (line 3), while in the speaker’s hands “el mar / viene a apagarse / el mar catedralicio / que iba empotrando agujas y vitrales” (lines 7-10). In these examples, Borges’ Sea is enmeshed with the renewal of a sunrise, underscoring the moment’s exuberance and epiphanic liberation. Borges’ mature poem, “El Mar” from *El Otro, el Mismo* (1964), proffers an antidote of sorts to the sensorial journey of a young speaker in “Himno”; a sonnet, “El Mar” illuminates the speaker’s evolution in his relationship with the Sea:

Antes que el sueño (o el terror) tejiera
 Mitologías y cosmogonías,
 Antes que el tiempo se acuñara en días,
 El mar, el siempre mar, ya estaba y era.
 ¿Quién es el mar? ¿Quién es aquel violento
 Y antiguo ser que roe los pilares
 De la tierra y es uno y muchos mares
 Y abismo y resplandor y azar y viento?
 Quien lo mira lo ve por vez primera.
 Siempre. Con el asombro que las cosas
 Elementales dejan, las hermosas
 Tardes, la luna, el fuego de una hoguera.
 ¿Quién es el mar, quién soy? Lo sabré el día
 Ulterior que sucede a la agonía.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Emir Rodríguez Monegal, *Jorge Luis Borges: A Literary Biography* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978) 153.

¹³⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, “El Mar,” *Selected Poems*, ed. Alexander Coleman (New York: Penguin, 1999) 240.

Initially, the speaker is a detached observer of the Sea; like others who see it, he experiences it for the first time. The Sea of “El Mar” is eternal—it is an entity outside of time, as it existed before and will remain after human perception. This same “siempre mar” appears in “Himno” (“Que ambos nos conocemos desde siglos. / Sé que en tus aguas venerandas y rientes ardio la aurora de la Vida” (lines 63-65)). Both poems personify the Sea: in “Himno” the Sea is a breathing Being (“Con tu salino y primeral aliento” line 52), while in “El Mar” it becomes a “violento y antiguo ser” (lines 5-6). In “Himno,” however, the Sea constitutes a source of Life (“Oh proteico, yo he salido de ti” (line 68)), and as Borges’ relationship with the image of the Sea evolves, it acquires a menacing set of characteristics in “El Mar,” representing a violent entity “que roe los pilares / De la tierra” (lines 6-7).

The perspective of “El Mar” shifts from an all-encompassing eternity encapsulated in the Sea itself (“Mitologías y cosmogonías” (line 2) and “el tiempo se acuñara en días” (line 3)) to the speaker’s desire to define the Sea’s physical Being (“¿Quién es el mar?” (line 5)), to the elemental things distilled in the Sea (“Tardes, la luna, el fuego de una hoguera” (line 12)), and finally to the closing question of the poem: “¿Quién es el mar, quién soy?” (line 13). Who is the Sea in relation to the speaker? In “Himno” the young swimmer appears to know the Sea well (“Y sé por que te amo. Sé que somos muy viejos. / Que ambos nos conocemos desde siglos.” (lines 62-63)), and yet the speaker of “El Mar” betrays a certain epistemological surrender, arriving at the conclusion that the Sea is unknowable (“Lo sabré el día / Ulterior que sucede a la agonía” (lines 13-14)). In another corresponding similarity, both “Himno” and “El Mar” contain a line which seeks to define the Sea in four nouns; in “Himno” those nouns are “aire,”

“luz,” “fuerza,” and “oscuridades”; in “El Mar” the Sea is “abismo,” “resplandor,” “azar,” and “viento.” The second set of nouns echoes the first, as the dialoguing images underscore the deliberate interdependence and overarching unity of Borges’ work. The nouns from “Himno” betray a patent set of antitheses: light and darkness; the antitheses in “El Mar,” albeit less clear, are “abismo” and “resplandor.” If “air” may be seen as a static version of “wind,” then the puzzle leaves us with “strength” versus “chance.” Here we see Borges’ metaphysical concerns surface—the Sea’s “strength,” attesting to its physical traits, becomes the elusive “chance.” The Sea is all things, complex and primeval; it is wonder and a leap of a bonfire: “Es uno y muchos mares” (line 7). Both Seas—the Sea of “Himno” and that of “El Mar”—are uncontrollable, whether by physical strength or the randomness of chance.

Borges’ dialogue with the image of the Sea, then, elucidates the evolution of his poetics, underscoring the inherent interrelationships. To this end, Whitman’s “Or From that Sea of Time” further informs Borges’ depiction of the Sea in “Himno del Mar,” as Whitman’s image of the Sea similarly engenders and nurtures Life and is a source of joy and plenitude:

Or, from that Sea of Time,
 Spray, blown by the wind—a double winrow- drift of weeds
 and shells;
 (O little shells, so curious-convolute! so limpid-cold and
 voiceless!
 Yet will you not, to the tympan of temples held,
 Murmurs and echoes still bring up—Eternity’s music, faint
 and far,
 Wafted inland, sent from Atlantica’s rim—strains for the
 Soul of the Prairies,
 Whisper’d reverberations—chords for the ear of the West,
 joyously sounding
 Your tidings old, yet ever new and untranslatable;)

[...] ¹³¹

Eternal and timeless, the Sea gives birth to the continent (“Currents of starting a Continent new, / Overtures sent to the solid out of the liquid” (lines 19-20)); conversely, the Sea of Borges’ “El Mar,” in its violence and unpredictability, is not a source of life and vibrancy, but rather a destructive force, gnawing at the foundations of earth. Whereas the waters of the Sea in Borges’ “Himno” invigorate the speaker, Whitman’s Sea is ultimately disapproving and destructive of human presence. The Sea’s inherent randomness, its “azar” with which Borges imbues the Sea of “El Mar,” appears in Whitman’s closing lines of “Or From that Sea of Time”:

Fusion of ocean and land—tender and pensive waves,
(Not safe and peaceful only—waves rous’d and ominous too.
Out of the depths, the storm’s abysms—who knows whence?
Death’s waves,
Raging over the vast, with many a broken spar and tatter’d
sail.)

One minute gentle and joyous, and the next turning into a “Death’s waves,” the Sea of Whitman encapsulates the antitheses of Borges’ two Seas; it is air, light, splendor, wind, and by means of chance and strength, it turns the ships of its invaders into darkness and abyss.

Exerting additional influence on Borges’ (mis)reading, Whitman’s “Song of Myself” features a prominent composite “I” ¹³²—a speaker who is at once the author, the

¹³¹ Walt Whitman, “Or From That Sea of Time,” *The Works of Walt Whitman* 529.

¹³² On Whitman’s treatment of the “self” and the search for identity, see E. Fred Carlisle, *The Uncertain Self: Whitman’s Drama of Identity* (Michigan State UP, 1973). In his analysis of the ‘self’ in Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” Carlisle contends that the “poem moves essentially from concentration on the monological self to a discovery of the dialogical self—the man who shares his being and experience with

character “Whitman” and, simultaneously, all male and female readers; “I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul,” (“Song of Myself,” 21) writes Whitman, emphasizing the “deathless” speaker/character “Whitman,” who is the “poet of the woman the same as the man” (“Song of Myself,” 21). The idea of a composite speaker—one man and all men—resonates with Borges on a deeper level; however, he does not fully develop this concept until his later work, treated largely in prose.¹³³ Of Whitman’s larger-than-life composite persona as speaker in his poetry, Borges writes in “El Otro Whitman” (*Discusión*, 1929): “lo gigantesco puede ser una forma de lo invisible y aun del abstracto. Así el caso de Whitman. Su fuerza es tan avasalladora y tan evidente que sólo percibimos que es fuerte.”¹³⁴ This grandiose “I” manifests itself in Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” and Borges echoes it to some extent in “Himno”; however, the poetic “yo” of “Himno,” uncharacteristically confessional for Borges, particularly within the framework of the avant-garde, does not explicitly constitute a composite speaker. Rather, the speaker of “Himno,” befitting to the anecdotal underpinning of the poem, enables a more psychologically profound experience than the more elusive composite narrator of Whitman.

Whereas the speaker in Borges’ poetry is usually more subtle, the Whitmanesque “I” returns in Borges’ “Mi vida entera” in *Luna de Enfrente* (1925):

the external world and with others.” 177. Also see Richard Chase, “‘Song of Myself’: Comic drama of the self,” *A Century of Whitman Criticism*, ed. Edwin Haviland Miller (Bloomington and London: Indiana UP, 1969) 246-259.

¹³³ Joseph Benevento suggests that “El Zahir” illustrates Borges’ transformation from Borges into “Borges,” the composite figure, with the beginning of the story told from the point of view of Borges, the man, and, as the coin blurs the specifics of the self, the narrator evolves into a composite persona. “What Borges Learned from Whitman: The Open Road and Its Forking Paths”: 24.

¹³⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, “El Otro Whitman,” *Discusión* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1964) 51.

Aquí otra vez, los labios memorables, único y semejante a vosotros.
 He persistido en la aproximación de la dicha y en la intimidad de la pena.
 He atrevisado el mar.
 He conocido muchas tierras; he visto una mujer y dos o tres hombres.
 He querido a una niña altiva y blanca y de una hispánica quietud.
 He visto un arrabal infinito donde se cumple una insaciada inmortalidad
 de ponientes.
 He paladeado numerosas palabras.
 Creo profundamente que eso es todo y que ni veré ni ejecutaré cosas
 nuevas.
 Creo que mis jornadas y mis noches se igualan en pobreza y en riqueza a
 las de Dios y a las de todos los hombres.¹³⁵

Stylistically, “Mi Vida Entera” bears a considerable similarity to Whitman’s “Song of Myself.” Borges’ poem combines longer, compound sentences with short, emphatic ones, such as seen in lines 1-3. This structure is notable throughout “Song of Myself”:

Partaker of influx and efflux, I, extoller of hate and conciliation,
 Extoller of amies and those that sleep in each others’ arms.
 I am he attesting sympathy,¹³⁶

With the speaker’s focus on the self, Whitman’s “I” emerges as more composite in comparison to the more concrete and anecdotal speaker of “Himno del Mar.” To this end, the last line of Borges’ “Mi Vida Entera,” “Creo que mis jornadas y mis noches se igualan en pobreza y en riqueza a las de Dios y a las de todos los hombres,” resurrects Whitman’s lines from “Song of Myself”:

And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
 And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the
 women my sisters and lover,¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, “Mi Vida Entera,” *Selected Poems* (New York: Penguin, 1999) 44.

¹³⁶ Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” 22, 47.

¹³⁷ Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” 5, 30.

[...]

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,
 Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,
 Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as man,
 Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and stuff'd with the stuff
 that is fine,
 One of the Nation of many nations, the smallest the same
 and the largest the same

[...] ¹³⁸

Much like the speaker of Whitman's "Song of Myself," the "I" in "Mi Vida Entera" is in part a young poet, and in part a larger-than-life character; similar to the multiple addressees of Whitman's poem (soul, Sea, America, all men and women, etc.), the addressee of "Mi Vida Entera" initially appears to be a composite woman: her lips are simultaneously "único y semejante a vosotros" (line 1). Whitman's enumeration of antitheses appears in line 2 of "Mi Vida Entera": "He persistido en la aproximación de la dicha y en la intimidad de la pena." Borges further echoes the Whitmanesque sense of perfection universally inherent in the present moment ("I know I have the best of time and space, and was never / measured and never will be measured" (line 1, 46, "Song of Myself") in lines 9-10 of "Mi Vida Entera": "Creo profundamente que eso es todo y que ni veré ni ejecutaré cosas / nuevas." This line encapsulates, in a way, Borges' antithetical completion of Whitman's epiphanic journey; whereas Whitman's speaker foresees a limitless future ("Shoulder your duds dear son, and I will mine, and let us / hasten forth, / Wonderful cities and free nations we shall fetch as we go" (lines 19-21, 46, "Song of Myself")), Borges' composite "I" surveys all that has been accomplished in the past ("He atrevisado el mar" (line 3), "He paladeado numerosas palabras" (line 8)).

¹³⁸ Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," 16, 41.

In Borges' initial encounter with Whitman, some influences emerge patently, yet appear transitory, such as the bardic grandiloquence of Borges' "Himno del Mar," the poem's narrative structure, use of anaphora and flowing rhythms; however, certain other influences persist—the evolving relationship with the Sea as a source of Life and eternal plenitude, visual perspective, and composite speaker, as well as an awareness of universality in the search for the self. Borges' "Himno del Mar" has at its core the reading of Whitman, and yet Borges imbues the poem with a more concrete psychological voice, rendering the "moment of splendid plenitude" profoundly experienced by the hymn's reader. Whereas the Sea of Whitman forms part of many landscapes and experiences, it takes a central, expanded role in "Himno," as the poem's rhythmic form successfully conveys the speaker's oneness with the waters. As Borges' poetry continues to dialogue with that of Whitman, Borges resurrects Whitman's stylistic voice, exaltation of anthropomorphized nature, as well as, in part, the speaker's journey in "Song of Myself." Furthermore, Whitman—the man, the character, and the composite speaker—influences Borges' work in a subtly multifaceted way; "Borges and I," for instance, explores the theme of the Whitmanesque composite character/speaker, lamenting the internal conflict between the man and the character: "I live, I allow myself to live, so that Borges can spin out his literature, and that literature is my justification."¹³⁹ Commenting on the composite Walt Whitman, Borges writes of "the eternal Whitman, the friend who is an old American poet of the eighteen hundreds and also his legend and

¹³⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, "Borges and I," *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1999) 324.

also each one of us and also happiness.”¹⁴⁰ Borges’ early encounter with Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* plays a profound—if understated—role in the development of Borges’ poetic voice, its evolution commencing with his first published poem in Spain. In “Himno del mar,” as well as in his later poems, Borges engages in a rich dialogue with Whitman’s work, in some cases adapting Whitman’s intention to his own thematic interests, and in others, rendering complete the precursor-poem’s shared quest. Particularly significant in the context of the present study, “Himno del Mar” purports to showcase Borges’ decidedly un-Ultraist poetic approach; in his ‘novecentista’ emulation of Whitman, Borges underscores his initial skepticism toward the avant-garde—and, in particular, the Ultraist doctrine of linguistic reduction and innovation. Framing the examination of Borges’ subsequent espousal of Ultraism as the movement’s poet and theorizer, Borges’ misreading of Whitman—insofar as it builds upon, as well as illuminates, his nuanced (mis)interpretation of German Expressionist texts—serves to elucidate the fundamental aspects of Borges’ poetic evolution.

¹⁴⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, “Note on Walt Whitman,” *Other Inquisitions 1937-1952*, trans. Ruth L. C. Simms (Austin: U of Texas P, 2000) 72.

CHAPTER 2

Borges and Spanish Ultraism

Arriving in Spain in late 1919, Borges—“ebrio de Whitman, pertrechado de Stirner, secuento de Romain Rolland, habiendo visto de cerca el impulse de los expresionistas germanicos, especialmente de Ludwig Rubiner y de Wilhelm Klemm”¹⁴¹—engages in the poetic and intellectual discourse of Ultraism. Borges’ early poetic (mis)reading of Whitman and the German Expressionists frames and pre-empts Borges’ profound integration into the Spanish avant-garde, which, in turn, redirects his poetic conception. Making the acquaintance of Jacobo Sureda, Rafael Cansinos-Assens, and Guillermo de Torre, among others, Borges emerges as one of the movement’s leaders and main theorists. Ultraism—as postulated by De Torre in *Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia*—espouses “la reintegración lírica, [...] la rehabilitación genuina del poema. Esto es, a la captura de sus más puros e imperecederos elementos—la imagen, la metáfora—y a la supresión de su cualidades ajenas o parasitarias—la anecdotia, el tema narrativo, la efusión retórica.”¹⁴² Borges’ poetry of this time period encapsulates, to some extent, the doctrine he sets forth in the Ultraist manifestos—primacy of metaphor, simplification of expression, suppression of confessionalism; moreover, Borges amalgamates his earlier influences—including the theme of suffering and human solidarity poeticized by the German Expressionist poets—to imbue his poems, in the

¹⁴¹ Guillermo de Torre, *Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia* (1925. Sevilla: Renacimiento, 2001) 89.

¹⁴² Ibid. 86.

words of De Torre, with “cierta intención social o de comunión cósmica, peculiar de los poetas centro-europeos,” lending “una fuerte tensión a sus versos.”¹⁴³ The first part of this chapter, then, places Borges’ poetry of this period in dialogue with his contemporaries, taking into account the framework of his theoretical contribution to the movement. In the second subchapter, we examine Borges’ treatment of the urban theme in his Ultraist poetry, focusing on the ways in which his poetic rendering of modernization assimilates him into the vanguardist discourse. Poeticizing the movement’s “estado de espíritu común”¹⁴⁴ and a sense of euphoric velocity and change, another set of Borges’ poems engages with the Ultraist depiction of the advent of a new era; this dialogue, discussed in section 2.3, extols the benefits of modernity and technological advances. Finally, in the fourth section of the chapter, we consider Borges’ use of first person speaker—the artificial “yo”—in his early poems, engaging them side by side with germane examples by other Ultraist poets. In this chapter, we aim to establish and illuminate the rich dialogue between Borges’ Ultraist poetry and that of his Spanish avant-garde contemporaries, in particular seeking to underscore the elements of the vanguardist aesthetic that fundamentally shape Borges’ poetics.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 89.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 109.

2.1 Borges in dialogue with the Ultraists: a theoretical framework

Borges arrived in Spain to find the spirit of poetic renovation to be aligned with his own views and aspirations. Furthermore, his previous avid study and translation of the German Expressionists enabled Borges to introduce a distinct set of concepts and themes into the maelstrom of the vanguardist poetic discourse, finding, as noted by Carlos Meneses, “en esta vibrante corriente poética, la emoción que precisa su espíritu.”¹⁴⁵ In fact, Borges, who, according to Gloria Videla was “uno de los pocos que intentó sistematizar el confuso haz de direcciones ultraístas,”¹⁴⁶ became a prolific Ultraist theorizer, signing four out of the eight Ultraist manifestos and authoring two such publications: “Al margen de la moderna estética,” published in the January 31, 1920 edition of *Grecia*, and “Anatomía de mi Ultra,” published in *Nosotros* in 1921. The other two manifestos Borges co-signed with his Ultraist colleagues: “Manifiesto del Ultra” (co-signed with Sureda, Alomar and Bonanova, published in *Baleares* in 1921) and “Proclama” (co-signed with De Torre, Guillermo Juan, and Eduardo Gonzalez Lanuza, published in *Ultra* on January 1, 1922). In “Al margen de la moderna estética,” Borges begins by entreating the modern poet to view reality from an ultra-new perspective, thereby delineating the quest of Ultraism:

¹⁴⁵ Carlos Meneses, *Poesía juvenil de Jorge Luis Borges* (Barcelona: Olañeta, 1978) 25.

¹⁴⁶ Gloria Videla, “Presencia Americana en el Ultraísmo Español,” *Revista de Literatura Argentina e Iberoamericana* 3 (1961): 25.

El ultraísmo es la expresión recién redimida del transformismo en la literatura. Esa floración brusca de metáforas que en muchas obras creacionistas abruma a los profanos, se justifica así plenamente y representa el esfuerzo del poeta para expresar la milenaria juventud de la vida que, como él, se devora, surge y renace, en cada segundo. [...] Y nosotros queremos descubrir la vida. Queremos ver con ojos nuevos.¹⁴⁷

This new poetic vision leaves behind the “fastuosa fantasmagoría mitológica” and posits the *word* as art in and of itself, rather than a mere “puente para las ideas.” However, this campaign for linguistic renovation is not intended as a deliberate rupture with tradition, in the vein of the other European avant-garde movements; rather, *ultraísmo* aims to synthesize past art into an ‘active aesthetic.’ “Manifiesto del Ultra,” signed by Borges and his Mallorcan contemporaries, succinctly sets forth this vision of poetic innovation:

Existen dos estéticas: la estética pasiva de los espejos y la estética activa de los prismas. Guiado por la primera, el arte se transforma en una copia de la objetividad del medio ambiente o de la historia psíquica del individuo. Guiado por la segunda, el arte se redime, hace del mundo su instrumento, y forja—más allá de las cárceles espaciales y temporales—su visión personal.¹⁴⁸

The Ultraist aesthetic, then, is not a mere reflection of what *is*; rather, it constitutes a vision of art liberated from the constraints of the “jaula absurda” of traditional versification and classic form. The aim of *ultraístas*, as outlined in “Manifiesto del Ultra,” is to transcend established paradigms and to effect a new prism of expression by means of “facetas insospechadas.” Notably, this aesthetic does not seek to impose restraints on a poet’s imagination: “La sensibilidad, la sentimentalidad son eternamente las mismas. No pretendemos rectificar el alma, ni siquiera la naturaleza. Lo que

¹⁴⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, “Al margen de la moderna estética,” *Grecia* 31 Jan. 1920, in *Textos Recobrados* 38.

¹⁴⁸ Jacobo Sureda, Fortunio Bonanova, Juan Alomar and Jorge Luis Borges, “Manifiesto del Ultra,” *Baleares* 15 Feb. 1921.

renovamos son los medios de expresión.”¹⁴⁹ This Ultraist postulation of eternal poetic beauty embedded in the renovation of expression, which calls for brevity and precision, profoundly resonates with Borges, further serving as a platform for the contemplation and refinement of his own aesthetic.

In “Anatomía de mi Ultra,” Borges elucidates the premise of the ‘active aesthetic’: the Ultraist poetic vision seeks to evoke “*sensación en sí, y no la descripción de las premisas espaciales o temporales que la rodean.*”¹⁵⁰ To produce such a sensation in the reader of Ultraist poetry, complete immersion is necessary to enable the reader’s purity of experience, prompted by—“el elemento acústico y el elemento luminoso”—rhythm and metaphor:

El ritmo: no encarcelado en los pentagramas de la métrica, sino ondulante, suelto, redimido, bruscamente truncado.
La metáfora: esa curva verbal que traza casi siempre entre dos puntos—espirituales—el camino más breve.¹⁵¹

Repudiating anecdotalism and confessionalism, Ultraist vision seeks a higher understanding of beauty through a renovated mode of expression. In “Ultraísmo,” Borges’ in-depth manifesto published in *Nosotros* in December of 1921, he outlines what he sees to be the common ‘pitfalls’ of traditional poetics: maneuvering of “palabras crepusculares, apuntaciones de colores y evocaciones versallescas o helénicas, se logran determinados efectos, y es porfía desatinada e inútil seguir haciendo eternamente la

¹⁴⁹ “Manifiesto del Ultra,” *Baleares* 131 (1921).

¹⁵⁰ Emphasis in the original.

¹⁵¹ Jorge Luis Borges, “Anatomía de mi Ultra,” *Ultra* 20 May 1921.

prueba.”¹⁵² Advocating for a rejection of these *modernista* influences, Borges further contends that the use of “lenguaje cotidiano,” the antithesis of the excessively ornate, also constitutes an error, as, in his view, the avoidance of “palabra prestigiosa” does not redeem overwrought poetics: “El miedo a la retórica—miedo justificado y legítimo—empuja los sencillistas a otra clase de retórica vergonzante, tan postiza y deliberada como la jerigonza académica [...]” Therefore, the simplification of expression set forth by the Ultraists seeks to renovate poetic expression, rather than merely resort to indiscriminate minimalism. “¿Qué hacer entonces?”—asks Borges in “Ultraísmo,”—“El prestigio literario está en baja; los intelectuales temen que los socalinen con palabras bonitas e inhiben su emotividad ante el menor alarde oratorio; las enumeraciones de Whitman y su compañerismo vehemente nos parecen lejanos, legendarios; los más acérrimos partidarios del susto vocean en balde derrumbamientos y apotheosis. ¿Hacia qué norte emproar la Lírca?” Borges proposes Ultraism as the answer to this quest for a new poetic discourse, citing Rafael Cansinos-Assens’ delineation of the movement: “El Ultraísmo es una voluntad caudalosa que rebase todo límite escolástico. Es una orientación hacia continuas y reiteradas evoluciones, un propósito de perenne juventud literaria, una anticipada aceptación de todo módulo y de toda idea nuevos. Representa el compromiso de ir avanzando con el tiempo.” Systemizing the methods set forth in “Anatomía de mi ultra,” Borges proposes the following core principles of Ultraist verse in “Ultraísmo”:

1. Reducción de la lírica a su elemento primordial: la metáfora.
2. Tachadura de las frases medianeras, los nexos, y los adjetivos inútiles.
3. Abolición de los trebejos ornamentales, el confesionalismo, la circunstanciación, las prédicas y la nebulosidad rebuscada.

¹⁵² In *Textos Recobrados* 154-61.

4. Síntesis de dos o más imágenes en una, que ensancha de ese modo su facultad de sugerencia.¹⁵³

The resulting Ultraist poem is a concise, visual lyric, rejecting autobiographical themes or confessionalist tone, and, rather, focusing on rendering sensory imagery in surprising—and often shocking or jarring—metaphors. The poet’s intent, then, is to create a parallel reality, studiously avoiding, in the words of Videla, “las semejanzas entre la obra poética y el mundo externo.”¹⁵⁴ This vision aims to distance poetry from human passion—dehumanize it in the vein of Ortega y Gasset’s proposed thesis; further synthesizing the salient characteristics of avant-garde verse, Gloria Videla posits Ultraism as eschewing

el tema, la anécdota, la narración de un asunto y toda intención didáctica y confesional. Desaparece o tiende a desaparecer el ‘yo’ autobiográfico, se lo reemplaza por un ‘yo’ artificial. [...] Se crean ultra-objetos, mundos nuevos, autónomos, distintos a los reales. Surge un ultra-realismo para el cual no son válidos el tiempo y el espacio [...]. Se destruyen relaciones causales o se crean entre cosas completamente dispares. Se equipara lo concreto con lo abstracto y se llega así a una enigmática no-realidad.¹⁵⁵

The creation of such an enigmatic poetic space through strength of image and precision of metaphor initially resonated with Borges in his contact with German Expressionism; subsequently, as he furthers the rhetoric of the Ultraist movement, Borges underscores the primacy of metaphor and the rejection of anecdotal narrative elements as pivotal to the Ultraist conception of detached artificiality and sensorial purpose. In his “Ultraísmo,” Borges includes several poems, which exemplify the Ultraist precepts; we will examine two of them—Gerardo Diego’s “Rosa Mística” and Juan Las’ “Primavera”—as they

¹⁵³ Jorge Luis Borges, “Ultraismo,” *Nosotros* 39 (1921).

¹⁵⁴ Videla, *Ultraísmo* 93.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 93-94.

dialogue with Borges' own poems from this period. For the purpose of this discussion, the examples will be organized insofar as they elucidate the principles of Ultraist verse set forth by Borges, i.e., synthesis of two disparate realities forming a third cohesive reality or image, suppression of connectives, and aversion to anecdote, rendering the poem a string of successive metaphors.

While systemizing Ultraist theory, Borges begins to refine his concept of metaphor; two of his four principles set forth in "Ultraísmo" deal with metaphor: first positing it as an "elemento primordial" and further proposing that two or more images, or distant terms, coincide into one reality—a poetic space which had not existed prior to the conception of that metaphor. To this end, in "Ejecución de tres palabras" (*Inquisiciones*), Borges writes: "Las cosas sólo existen en cuanto las advierte nuestra conciencia y no tienen residuo autónomo alguno. La actividad metafórica es, pues, definable como la inquisición de cualidades comunes a los dos términos de la imagen, cualidades que son de todos conocidas, pero cuya coincidencia en dos conceptos lejanos no ha sido vislumbrada hasta el instante de hacerse la metáfora."¹⁵⁶ In his own Ultraist poetry Borges encapsulates this postulation; in "Catedral," for example, Borges joins two distant realities to evoke a cohesive image: "La catedral que es una inmensa parva" (line 5), and then, likening the cathedral to another image, "La catedral es un avión de piedra" (line 12). In both cases, the synthesis of the two images evokes a third dimension, an ultra-reality, in which these two distant realities meet. Taking the images a step further, in what Cansinos-Assens calls "síntesis abreviativa," the *imagen múltiple* amalgamates several realities into one, producing a dynamic *ultra-realidad*:

¹⁵⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, "Ejecución de tres palabras," *Inquisiciones* (Madrid: Alianza, 1998):170-1.

Los modernos poetas cuya lírica evoluciona paralelamente al cubismo pictórico, pretenden extremar la posibilidad de sugestión, haciéndola múltiple. Obtienen la imagen duple o triple, como flores polipétalas, mediante una más alta presión en sus invernaderos. Dan así imágenes desdoblables que desorientan a primera vista; pero sólo se trata de una forma de ecuación más compleja, un poco más difícil porque resume dos o más analogías, pero obtenible siempre por diálisis separadas.¹⁵⁷

To illustrate this concept of metaphor, Cansinos-Assens proffers the example of Vicente Huidobro's line "Los pájaros beben el agua de los espejos," which, according to Cansinos, may be deconstructed into two separate images: "El cristal de los espejos es como un agua," and "Los pájaros sedientos picotean el cristal de los espejos, semejante a un agua." Such an amalgamation of realities yields what Gerardo Diego, in his essay "Posibilidades creacionistas" (1919), calls "imagen múltiple": "Es la Poesía, en el más puro sentido de la palabra. Es también, y exactamente, la Música, que es substancialmente el arte de las imágenes múltiples: todo valor disuasivo, escolástico, filosófico, anecdótico, es esencialmente ajeno a ella."¹⁵⁸ The resulting metaphor is a dynamic one, distancing itself from the 'static' metaphor of the Romantics; in a letter to Jacobo Sureda, Borges explains: "¿Sabes por qué resulta mejor *literaturizar* la luna como un brick-barca que como un plátano? Sencillamente porque la primera metáfora tiene movimiento. La metáfora clásica fue ante todo romántica o meramente visual [...]. La metáfora expresionista debe ser dinámica, en consonancia con el supuesto ritmo occidentalista o *yankee* que nos empuja."¹⁵⁹ These images, then, are not meant to be deconstructed, as they are mere flashes of synthesized realities; rather, we are to glimpse

¹⁵⁷ Rafael Cansinos Assens, "Como leer a los poetas ultraístas," *Grecia* 29 Feb 1920.

¹⁵⁸ Gerardo Diego, "Posibilidades creacionistas," *Cervantes* (1919): 27.

¹⁵⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, *Cartas del fervor. Correspondencia con Maurice Abramowicz y Jacobo Sureda (1919-1928)*, ed. Cristóbal Pera (Barcelona: Emecé, 1999):184. Emphasis in the original.

the poet's intended nuances for that particular poetic image. For instance, Borges opens "Tranvías" with an *imagen múltiple*: "Con el fusil al hombro los tranvías / patrullan las avenidas" (lines 1-2).¹⁶⁰ Applying Cansinos' proposed formula to this image, it comprises two realities, such as "Streetcars go around the city on their rigid route, bringing order to the city," and "Soldiers patrol the city, carrying rifles on their shoulders." In this *imagen múltiple*, the poet's intent is an evocation of a sense of order and routine, as well as the visual parallels of the streetcar's antenna and the soldier's rifle. Borges often employs this Ultraist technique in his other poetry of this time period; for instance: "la tarde mutilada / rezó un Avemaría de colores" ("Atardecer," lines 8-9)¹⁶¹ or "Las esquilas recogen la tristeza / dispersa de las tardes"¹⁶² ("Aldea," lines 5-6)¹⁶³, "el sol toca la diana sobre las azoteas" ("Mañana," line 5), "el sol con sus espuelas desgarrar los espejos" ("Mañana," line 6), "Alguien / junto al farol decapitado / ha de cenirnos un collar de estepas" ("Señal," lines 10-12), "He pulsado el violín de un horizonte" ("Cingladura," line 1)¹⁶⁴. In these lines, Borges synthesizes multiple realities, thereby evoking a visual image imbued with sensorial detail and activating the images' "facultad de sugerencia," discussed in one of his core principles of Ultraist poetry.

As stressed by Gerardo Diego, *imagen múltiple* need not necessarily be logical, its ambiguity constituting one of its principal strengths, thereby allowing the image to be

¹⁶⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, "Tranvías," *Ultra* 30 March 1921.

¹⁶¹ Jorge Luis Borges, "Atardecer," *Ultra* 20 June 1921.

¹⁶² These exact lines also appear in Borges' "Prismas," lines 11-12. Borges often repeated himself in these early poems, honing and refining a specific image.

¹⁶³ For a detailed discussion of "Aldea," see Thorpe Running, *Borges' Ultraist Movement and its Poets*, p. 39.

¹⁶⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, "Cingladura," *Ultra* 20 April 1921.

imbued with individual emotion: “Cada uno pone su letra interior a la Música, y esta letra imprecisa, varia según nuestro estado emocional.”¹⁶⁵ An example of a poem wherein the amalgamated images predominate is José Rivas Panedas’ “Pueblo”:

El pueblo
 Una lancha caída
 en el fondo del mar

Un gallo ensarta en su garganta
 momentos que dormían

El vellón del silencio
 contra el alma
 se poblaba de mis colores

La hora cae desmayada
 en la campana de la torre.¹⁶⁶

The opening image of “Pueblo” synthesizes two disparate realities: the town and a capsized boat at the bottom of the sea; the union of these images glimpses a third reality—a space occupied by this image alone. Whereas lines 1 through 3 synthesize two images, lines 4 and 5 are an example of a multiple image amalgamation: the rooster strings together moments which are asleep; this metaphor evokes the sound of the rooster, in contrast to the sleeping town at dawn. Lines 9 and 10 parallel the sound image evoked by the rooster; however, instead of sleeping moments, it is now the hour, which falls in a faint spell from the bell tower. These evocative images, united in a third dimension *ultra-realidad*, enable what Borges refers to as “adentramiento espiritual”¹⁶⁷ of poetry. A quintessential element of the Ultraist poem, the technique was popular with many of

¹⁶⁵ Gerardo Diego, “Posibilidades creacionistas”: 27.

¹⁶⁶ José Rivas Panedas, “Pueblo,” *Ultra* Apr. 1921, in *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 258.

¹⁶⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, “Ejecución de tres palabras,” *Inquisiciones* 170.

Borges' Ultraist contemporaries; for instance: "En el paracaídas de una canción / Ha descendido el silencio" (Jacobo Sureda, "Hora Ligera," lines 6-7)¹⁶⁸, "LOS ARCO IRIS / SALTAN HIPICAMENTE EL DESIERTO" (Guillermo de Torre, "Resol (A Norah Borges)," lines 12-13)¹⁶⁹, "El aeroplano en su pico te traera / la banda del arco iris" (Isaac del Vando Villar, "Sonia Delaunay," lines 1-2)¹⁷⁰, "El Poeta / tiene los dedos llenos de miel de los / poemas" (Adriano del Valle, "Tarde en el litoral (A Jorge Luis Borges que ha venido de la espolonca Norte para contemplar el sol de mediodía)," lines 12-14)¹⁷¹, "El cielo se ha quedado sin hojas" (Pedro Iglesias Caballero, "Recoletos," lines 3-4)¹⁷², "El pueblo detenido en su vuelo / de noche es una sonrisa" (Eugenio Montes, "Pueblo," lines 12-13)¹⁷³.

Free of superfluous connectors, visual metaphors—synthesizing two or more images into one poetic reality—often compose the poem in fragmented succession. Underscoring the importance of metaphor in an Ultraist poem, Borges writes in "Ultraísmo": "Los poemas ultraicos constan pues de una serie de metáforas, cada una de la cuales tiene sugestividad propia y compendiza una visión inédita de algún fragmento de la vida."¹⁷⁴ An example of such a kaleidoscopic vision is Rivas Panedas' "Pueblo" discussed earlier; comprising thirteen lines, the poem is a concise string of sensorial

¹⁶⁸ Jacobo Sureda, "Hora Ligera," *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 297.

¹⁶⁹ Guillermo de Torre, "Resol (A Norah Borges)," *Grecia* Nov. 1920, in *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 313.

¹⁷⁰ Isaac del Vando Villar, "Sonia Delaunay," *Grecia* Sept. 1920, in *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 319.

¹⁷¹ Adriano del Valle y Rossi, "Tarde en el litoral (A Jorge Luis Borges que ha venido de la espolonca Norte para contemplar el sol de mediodía)," *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 326.

¹⁷² Pedro Iglesias Caballero, "Recoletos," *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 345.

¹⁷³ Eugenio Montes, "Pueblo," *Grecia* June 1920, *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 236.

¹⁷⁴ Borges, "Ultraísmo," in *Textos Recobrados* 157.

images. Juan Las¹⁷⁵ “Primavera,” which appears in Borges’ manifesto, constitutes another example of this Ultraist structure:

La última nieve sobre tus hombros
 ¡oh, amada vestida de claro!
 El último arco-iris
 hecho abanico entre tus manos.

Mira:

El hombre que mueve el manubrio
 enseña a cantar a los pájaros nuevos
 La primavera es el poema
 de nuestro hermano el jardinero.¹⁷⁶

The poem’s imagery, in accordance with the Ultraist aesthetic, is condensed into four clear metaphors: the snow, falling on the shoulders of the speaker’s beloved, the rainbow fanning out in her hands, the man teaching new birds to sing, and spring as a poem of a gardener. The first two metaphors are manifestations of Nature upon man, while the last two are impositions of man upon Nature—an action necessary for the creation of art. Spring, much like the song of the birds brought forth by man, is a work of art by a gardener, who brings order and beauty to Nature, and vitality to life that lies dormant. Borges’ “Mañana”—also a clear string of visual metaphors—enters into dialogue with Las’ “Primavera”:

Las banderas cantaron sus colores
 y el viento es una vara de bambú entre las manos
 El mundo crece como un árbol claro
 Ebrio como una hélice
 el sol toca la diana sobre las azoteas
 el sol con sus espuelas desgarró los espejos
 Como un naipe mi sombra

¹⁷⁵ Pseudonym of Rafael Cansinos-Assens.

¹⁷⁶ Juan Las, “Primavera,” *Textos Recobrados* 158-9.

ha caído de bruces sobre la carretera
 Arriba el cielo vuela
 y lo surcan los pájaros como noches errantes
 La mañana viene a posarse fresco en mi espalda.¹⁷⁷

The imagery in Borges' "Mañana" parallels that of "Primavera": in the latter, Las opens with snow falling on the addressee's shoulders (line 1), while Borges closes "Mañana" with the morning settling on the speaker's back (line 11). The image of the rainbow turning into a fan in the hands of the beloved in "Primavera" (lines 3-4) is echoed in Borges' "viento es una vara de bambú entre las manos" (line 2); the birds from Las' poem reappear in Borges' "Mañana"—"pájaros como noches errantes" (line 10). Both poems depict a moment in Nature's cycle that represents renewal and vitality—spring and morning—and both poets choose condensed imagery to depict the interrelationship of Nature and man.

The interaction of anthropomorphized landscape and human characters, synthesized into a succession of metaphors, is a central element of Gerardo Diego's "Rosa Mística," also part of Borges' "Ultraísmo":

Era ella
 Y nadie lo sabía
 Pero cuando pasaba
 Los árboles se arrodillaban
 Y en su cabellera
 Se trenzaban las letanías.
 Era ella,
 Era ella.
 Me desmayé en sus manos
 Como una hoja muerta.
 Sus manos ojivales
 Que daban de comer a las estrellas
 Por el aire volaban

¹⁷⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, "Mañana," *Ultra* 27 Jan. 1921.

Romanzas sin sonido
 Y en su almohada de pasos
 Yo me quedé dormido.¹⁷⁸

In this poem, Diego encapsulates the four pillars of Ultraism proposed by Borges; pared down to bare metaphors, the poem succeeds in its synthesis of several images into one overarching idea, conveying its elements of movement through a unifying rhythm. Much like the beloved in Las' "Primavera," interacting with Nature to highlight her own beauty (lines 1-4), "Rosa Mística" brings trees to their knees (line 4) and her hands feed the stars (lines 11-12); in contrast to the natural vitality and infinite mysticism of the girl's interplay with Nature's movement, the speaker underscores his own position of stasis by comparing himself to "una hoja muerta" (line 10). In particular, line 16 ("Y en su almohada de pasos") joins movement and stasis in one final image: the speaker falls asleep on the pillow, a static image, of steps, which convey forward motion. We see this synthesis of stasis and motion in Borges' "Escaparate Porcelana"; paralleling Diego's "Rosa," the fairy-tale-like female personage in whose hair "se trenzaban las letanías" (line 6), the main characters of Borges' poem are a mystical Chinese warrior "encima de las / olas espumosas y malvas" (lines 1-2)¹⁷⁹ and his wife, towards whom—"gracias al dragón monstruoso y pueril"—the warrior reaches as she hands him "el cuerpito radioso y vivo del niño" (line 6-7). This motion, however, is in a paradoxical state of permanent stasis: the warrior is made of porcelain and thus cannot reach his wife and child—"siempre el espacio dorado los separa, siempre / el héroe venera los suyos sin lograr abrazarlos" (lines 8-9). Borges' "Escaparate Porcelana" could be seen as an antithetical

¹⁷⁸ Gerardo Diego, "Rosa Mística," *Textos Recobrados* 157-8.

¹⁷⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, "Escaparate Porcelana," *Tableros* 15 Jan. 1922.

reading of Diego's "Rosa Mística," wherein the forward motion resolves, closing the space between the speaker and the magical girl; the movement of the first fourteen lines ("pasaba," "me desmayé," "volaban") ends with line 16—"Yo me quedé dormido." In "Escaparate Porcelana," conversely, the speaker likens the permanent space between the warrior and his family to the distance that separates him from his loves. "Rosa Mística," then, serves as a possible precursor-poem for Borges' "Escaparate Porcelana," with the porcelain figurine embodying the perpetual motion which must remain static, such as we see inherent in Diego's image of "almohada de pasos" (line 15). "Escaparate Porcelana," in turn, responds to the satisfied consummation of the speaker in "Rosa Mística" by underscoring the distance which cannot be bridged: "Así yo ignoraré mis amores. / Así yo deberé desconocerte" (lines 10-11).

These Ultraist poems—those of Borges and of the other Ultraists—share several commonalities; besides adhering closely to the rules of the Ultraist aesthetic, they are also a condensed snapshot, as proposed by Borges, of a fragment of life. Although in some cases the poem is a mere string of images, the inherent unity of each helps to achieve emotional resonance. In "Ultraísmo," Borges discusses this unity—a confluence of elements, each with its "sugestividad propia"—which, then, lends the poem its theme "sobre el cual versan las imágenes definidoras de sus aspectos parciales."¹⁸⁰ Rhythm, strength of metaphor, and the intensely visual elements of the poems' imagery compound to create a whole, which—as is the Ultraist intention—suggests the ultra-reality of the poem's poetic space. Here we also note the continuous exploration of Nature's role in the creation of art: Nature interacts with the human world in a synergy which highlights human capacity for beauty, as in the case of "Rosa Mística" and "Primavera." Other

¹⁸⁰ Borges, "Ultraísmo," *Textos Recobrados* 135.

times, man imposes himself on Nature to generate art; lines 6-9 in Las' "Primavera" (El hombre que mueve el manubrio / enseña a cantar a los pájaros nuevos") are echoed in Borges' metaphor in "Señal": "El piano late como un torrente enyugado / Tus manos arden en la luz de los sonos." In these examples, Borges' contact with Ultraism takes shape, as his own poetry of this period enters into mutually fruitful dialogue with his contemporaries. Further in this chapter we investigate this interaction, specifically by examining the Ultraist treatment of the nuanced interrelationship—and conflict—among Nature, Modernity, and Man.

2.2 Borges in dialogue with the Ultraist conception of Modernity

As noted by Gloria Videla, “la post-guerra europea originó un enervamiento, un afán dinámico y renovador.”¹⁸¹ The advent of this new era brought with it a sense of intensity, underscored by the acute awareness of urbanization: “la prisa, la ansiedad, las preocupaciones, la vida agitada y anhelante de las grandes ciudades, las anónimas muchedumbres de las calles, la industrialización, el maquinismo.”¹⁸² Fascinated with urban elements, Ultraists explore modernity in poetry, focusing on technological advances, such as electricity, the telephone, the automobile, and the airplane. Illuminating this interrelationship, Cano Ballesta points out that “[l]a ciudad es el gran símbolo de una burguesía laboriosa y eficaz, en plena euforia después de superada la crisis de la primera guerra mundial, que ha creado los recientes inventos como cine, radio, automóvil, teléfono, etc.”¹⁸³ Ultraist poetry seeks to encapsulate this surge in urbanization, as well as to highlight the overwhelming assault to human eyes caused by the amalgamation of planes and fragmentation of perspective. Projecting the energy of the times and the whirlwind conjured up by the onslaught of innovation, the Ultraist vision captures the resulting sense of garbled anxiety, underscored by the fragmented point of view and rapid—and oftentimes incoherent—juxtaposition of visual messages. In these poems, the

¹⁸¹ Videla, *Ultraísmo* 12.

¹⁸² Ibid. 12.

¹⁸³ Cano Ballesta, *Literatura y Tecnología* 130.

complex conflict between Man and Modernity, and, in turn, Modernity and Nature, emerges.

Borges' active participation in this vanguardist discourse elucidates his profound assimilation of the Ultraist vision. One such example of Borges' thematic dialogue with the Ultraist poets is his depiction of urban asphyxiation¹⁸⁴, focusing on the alienation of the speaker within the confines of the cityscape's maelstrom of jarring imagery. In his three explicitly 'urban' poems of this period, Borges casts the city as inherently negative space, encapsulated by the poems' anxious night time settings and imbued with the speaker's psychological and physical claustrophobia. Fragmentation and superimposition constitute the core elements of the urban visual experience in Borges' "Insomnio":

Resulta legendariamente chica y lejana aquella etapa donde
 los relojes vertieron la media noche absoluta.
 Estos seis muros estrechos llenos de eternidad estrecha me
 ahogan.
 Y en el cráneo sigue vibrando esta lamentable llama de
 alcohol que no quiere apagarse.
 Que no puede apagarse.
 Reducción al absurdo del problema de la inmortalidad del
 espíritu.
 Me he desangrado en demasiados ponientes.
 La ventana sintetiza el gesto solitario del farol.
 Apergaminado y plausible film cinemático.
 La ventana imanta todas las ojeadas inquietas.
 Como me ahorcan las cueras del horizonte.
 ¿Llueve? ¿Qué morfina inyectarán a las calles esas agujas?
 No.
 Son girones [sic] vagos de siglos que gotean isócronos del cielo
 raso.
 Es la letanía lenta de la sangre.
 Son los dientes de la obscuridad que roen las paredes.
 Bajo los párpados ondean y se apagan nuevamente las

¹⁸⁴ See Cano Ballesta, "El Himno a la Máquina: Poética del Futurismo," in *Literatura y Tecnología* 61-91. In reference to Futurism taking root in Spain, Cano Ballesta contends that "[l]as teorías futuristas se perciben como concepciones de gran actualidad y tienen honda repercusión en el renacer de la poesía de la gran década de los veinte y de toda la creación literaria." 79.

tempestades rotas.
 Los días son todos de papel azul bien cortaditos por la misma
 tijera sobre el agujero inexistente del Cosmos.
 El recuerdo enciende una lámpara:
*Otra vez arrastramos con nosotros esa calle que la ropa tendida
 embanderó tan jubilosamente.*
Muy lejos se hundió el frondoso piano del tupí.
El sol ventilador vertiginoso tumba los caserones.
Al vernos navegar tan espirales se ríen a carcajadas las puertas.
Pedro-Luis me confía: --Yo soy un hombre bueno, Jorge.
*Tu eres un hombre bueno, Jorge... Ya se nos pasara tomando una
 tacita de café.*
Los ojos estallan cuando los golpean las aspas del sol.

¿Qué hangar cobijará definitivamente las emociones?
 Sin duda existe un plano ultra-espacial donde todas ellas son
 formas de una fuerza utilizable y sujeta.
 Como el agua y la electricidad en este plano.
 Ira. Anarquismo. Hambre sexual.
 Artificio para hacernos vibrar mágicamente.
 Ninguna piedra rompe la noche.
 Ninguna mano aviva las cenizas del incendio de todos los
 estandartes.¹⁸⁵

In “Insomnio,” a semi-autobiographical first-person speaker conveys his sense of vertiginous claustrophobia, as he is suffocated by the “seis muros estrechos llenos de eternidad estrecha” (line 2). Although the speaker is inside his room, the ominous elements of the nocturnal city permeate the interior space: “La ventana sintetiza el gesto solitario del farol” (line 11), and then again, “La ventana imanta todas las ojeadas inquietas” (line 13). The window, then, in the avant-garde vein, serves as a prism between the speaker’s point of view inside the “seis muros,” and the equally terrifying outside realm of the nocturnal city, further imposing itself on the speaker: “Como me ahorcan las cueras del horizonte” (line 14). The insomniac’s anxiety finds no relief in the potentially soothing sound of the rhythmic rain; rather than producing a soporific effect,

¹⁸⁵ Borges, “Insomnio,” *Grecia* 15 Sept. 1920.

the rain exacerbates the alcohol-induced psychosis: “¿Llueve? ¿Qué morfina inyectarán a las calles esas agujas? / No. / Son girones [sic] vagos de siglos que gotean isócronos del cielo / raso” (lines 15-18). The overwhelming cityscape appears in conflict with the interior space in which the speaker dwells, objectifying his psychological state of internal turmoil and unrest: “Son los dientes de la obscuridad que roen las paredes” (line 20). In line 29, the speaker ponders the possibility of a parallel reality, which would harness and channel these wayward emotions into a productive state: “¿Qué hangar cobijará definitivamente las emociones? / Sin duda existe un plano ultra- especial donde todas ellas son / formas de una fuerza utilizable y sujeta. / Como el agua y la electricidad en este plano”; like uncontained water and electricity, the powerful conflicting anxieties have the potential to be transformed into positive forces by an “ultra-spatial plane,” which exists outside the dichotomies of the speaker’s current physical being.

The poem’s cinematic influence emerges in its use of flashback and emphasis on camera-eye. In line 21, the speaker switches to an abrupt flashback, taking the reader out of the nocturnal cityscape and into a daytime memory; “El recuerdo enciende una lámpara” acts as a cue to the flashback, which is then set in italics, as the image of the lamp also brings light to the sinister darkness depicted in the first half of the poem. The speaker’s daytime inebriation in the memory projects a sense of chaos onto the cityscape, now illuminated by the sun: “El sol ventilador vertiginoso tumba los caserones” (line 24). No longer an anxious and lonely insomniac, a victim of night time delusions, the speaker shares his daytime carousing with a companion, Pedro-Luis; as the two meander around, the city seems to be in pursuit, encroaching upon them: “Otra vez arrastramos con nosotros esa calle que la ropa tendida / embanderó tan jubilosamente” (lines 26-27), “Al

vernos navegar tan espirales se ríen a carcajadas las puertas” (line 25). Whereas the speaker’s nocturnal loneliness is objectified by the gesture of the streetlamp (line 9), which he observes through the window of his room, the city in the daytime takes on more jubilant qualities; nevertheless, the vertigo does not dissipate, and the personified elements of the city, such as the laughing doors (line 25), acquire menacing undertones. The poem places an avant-garde emphasis on the eye and the act of seeing; in the dark, the speaker surveys the cityscape through his window and, unable to sleep, internalizes his apprehension with his eyes closed (“Bajo los párpados ondean y se apagan nuevamente las / tempestades rotas” (lines 21-22); in the presence of the sun, the city’s chaos overwhelms him and the eyes lose their ability to see: “Los ojos estallan cuando los golpean las aspas del sol” (line 28). This dichotomy positions the speaker doubly in conflict with his environment, underscoring his psychological turmoil exacerbated by the nocturnal city, as well as the tension with the city’s frenetic multiplicity in the daytime.

Borges’ “Insomnio” portrays the city as jarring and chaotic, with the speaker tormented by alienation and the overwhelming impact of modernity. Cano Ballesta posits the image of the vanguardist city as monstrous, “aprisionada en una red de pesados cables eléctricos, [as it] respira suciedad por sus negras chimeneas y atemoriza con vagos presentimientos a unos seres humanos sensible y asustados.”¹⁸⁶ This depiction serves to conjure up a sense of asphyxiation spurred by the industrial revolution, as it is encapsulated by the fragmented disorientation of the speaker —“sensible y asustado”—in “Insomnio”; this sentiment is echoed in Rafael Cansinos-Assens’ “La Glorieta Incitante,” wherein the traffic circle appears as a microcosm for the city:

¹⁸⁶ Cano Ballesta 45.

Atravesada por cuatro calles
 como por cuatro aspas que vibran
 se abre la glorieta
 por la que todo pasa...
 Los grandes ómnibus,
 los bueyes del mediodía,
 el sol que incendia los balcones
 y los viste de visillos rosados,
 y hombres, hombres y mujeres,
 lo más dramático...
 Todo pasa por la gran glorieta
 que vibra y parece girar
 como una gran roseta
 con sus paredes ladeadas,
 ávidas de ver por mil resquicios
 inesperados...
 Lo que pasa y no se detiene;
 Lo que parece llegar y se aleja;
 las mil cosas, el raudo torbellino,
 La Vida múltiple... Los ojos
 que quieren seguirlo todo, se dilatan
 y se rompen en luces innúmeras...
 las luces que irradian en su noche
 eléctrica, hasa las nubes
 acribilladas.¹⁸⁷

Here the speaker observes the traffic circle throughout the day, transitioning into night time; all of the city's activity is encapsulated, caught in the cross section of four streets, which are likened to vibrating blades (line 2). The sun sets the balconies on fire (line 7), but unlike the destructive forces of the sun in "Insomnio," here the energy is positive and beautifying, as the sun dresses the balconies in pink curtains (line 8). The speaker populates the city's circle with a variety of *dramatis personae*: buses (line 5), oxen (line 6), men and women (line 9) coexist in the cityscape, gyrating continuously "como una gran roseta" (line 13). This interrelationship—among technology, natural world, and human characters—develops in an accelerated revolving dance, arriving and departing in

¹⁸⁷ Rafael Cansinos-Assens, "La Glorieta Incitante," *Grecia* Dec. 1918, in *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 92.

an incessant stream; the constant motion blurs and entangles the specific elements, yielding an encapsulation of “las mil cosas” (line 19). As the night settles, this multiplicity of life (line 20) becomes “el raudo torbellino” (line 19), and the speaker’s eyes are unable to “seguirlo todo” (line 21), dilate and break into myriad lights which pepper the city at night time. The electric lights, like millions of eyes, extend all the way to the “nubes acribilladas” (lines 24-25), thereby rendering the aerial view of the multitude of city lights—a mirror image of the dark sky riddled with stars. As the speaker stands in the middle of the traffic circle, surrounded by rapidly moving cars, he is in the epicenter of the dust storm; his point of view undergoes fragmentation, as he views the city through “mil resquicios inesperados” (lines 15-16). This image evokes a sense of vertiginous simultaneity, which parallels the disorientation experienced by the speaker in “Insomnio.”

Similar in setting and imagery to “Glorieta incitante,” Cansinos-Assens’ “Crepúsculo” depicts a hot afternoon in the cityscape, wherein Modernity and Nature entwine as the day turns to night:

Cúpulas dirigibles...
 Columnas humeantes...
 Relojes elásticos miden
 la fiebre de la tarde.
 Por todas partes días nuevos
 rompen los cascarones eléctricos,
 y gallos de cresta dorada
 saludan las auroras voltaicas.
 El crepúsculo es tan sólo una pausa.
 Las calles ruedan sobre sus bastidores
 para la mutación nocturna,
 y la flecha de luz clavada en el paisaje
 marca el cambio de rumbo
 de los expresos siderales...
 La ciudad vertiginosa gira
 en el centro de los planetas,

y los policemens? alzando los brazos
 en las glorietas soñadoras,
 por entre los autos sinfónicos,
 abren camino a las estrellas.¹⁸⁸

A horizon riddled with smokestacks—"columnas humeantes" (line 2)—sets an industrialized frame for the "auroras voltaicas" (line 8), as the city lights up with a multitude of "cascarones eléctricos" (line 6). Between "la fiebre de la tarde" (line 4), chock-full of daily activity, and the mystical coming of night, as the streets "ruedan sobre sus bastidores" (line 10), there is a pause—a point of inflection—when all these elements interlace in simultaneity; that moment is the twilight—a poetic moment, to which Borges refers as one of the "horas huérfanas que viven como asustadas por los demás y en las cuales nadie se fija."¹⁸⁹ As the afternoon winds down in its "mutación nocturna" (line 11), the final light of the sunset stabs the landscape to signal the coming of night, heralding the flight of the "astral express trains" (line 14). The speaker conceives the city as a vertiginous microcosm, spinning in the center of the planets; similar to the paradoxical sense of systematic chaos evoked in "Glorieta incitante," where myriad urban components revolve intermittently in a cyclical whirlwind around the speaker, in "Crepúsculo" the dizzy city twirls amidst the orbiting planets. Mediating the coexistence of Nature and the incessant motion of the city, the policemen patrol traffic, so that the stars may find their way "entre los autos sinfónicos" (line 19).

The highly personal, psychologically intense depiction of the city rendered in Borges' "Insomnio" is in contrast with Cansinos' detached, metaphysical treatment of the theme in "Glorieta Incitante" and "Crepúsculo"; all three pieces, however, deal with the

¹⁸⁸ Rafael Cansinos Assens, "Crepúsculo," *Cervantes* Sept. 1920, in *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 105.

¹⁸⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, "Buenos Aires," *Cosmópolis* Oct. 1921, in *Textos Recobrados* 127.

two-fold fundamental conflict of Man vs. City and City vs. Nature. “Insomnio” betrays a deep antipathy between the speaker and his urban surroundings; this conflict—especially pronounced at night time—parallels the inner tension, as the speaker feels suffocated by his own stream-of-consciousness thoughts, the vertiginous six walls of his spinning quarters, and the nocturnal abyss of the rainy city night. The rain infuses a sense of doom (line 15) into the streets after midnight, while in the daytime the sun is at odds with the buildings (line 24). By contrast, Cansinos-Assens’ “Glorieta incitante” and “Crepúsculo” proffer a more positive take on the City’s relationship with both Man and Nature: in “Glorieta incitante,” technology, animals, and people (lines 5-9) intermingle as they fuse to form the cyclical swirl around the city’s focal point, while the stars and the cars in “Crepúsculo” coexist in the landscape, if only tentatively, with the help of a patrolman (lines 17-20). Finally, the image of a city peppered with lights, mirroring the sky on a starry night in “Glorieta incitante,” underscores the harmonious dialogue taking place between the City and Nature.

With two seemingly opposing perspectives on the Modern City, a common thread unites these three poems: the sense of vertiginous disorientation which the City induces. The speaker in “Insomnio” grapples with a nocturnal state of anxiety, exacerbated by his inebriation, as he also internalizes the inherent conflict at play between the City and Nature: the teeth-bearing darkness (line 17), the menacing rain (line 15), the streets in his pursuit (line 22), and the sun’s blades (line 28). Adding to the sense of disorientation is the poem’s tone and structure; in thirty-six lines of free verse, the poem comprises many stream-of-consciousness one-liners, rapidly juxtaposed with the surrounding ideas. Furthermore, the flashback to daytime revelry, as the speaker and his companion navigate

jilguero” (line 5), the night moans in the distance (line 9). As in “La Glorieta Incitante,” the speaker’s point of view is objectified in the image of the eye, which, like a camera, establishes the speaker’s perspective; in the case of “Ciudad,” point of view leaps from glass to glass (line 7-8), conjuring up a jumbled and disorienting impression. Whereas in “Ciudad” this intermittent perspective does not have a vertiginous effect on the speaker, the continuous gyrations of amalgamated cityscapes in “Glorieta,” viewed from the “mil resquicios inesperados” (line 15- 16), evoke a fragmented intensity.

Borges’ “Insomnio” constitutes, in some respects, an antithetical reading of Garfias’ “Ciudad.” While both speakers’ perspectives come from within an enclosed space, anxiety and loneliness afflict the speaker in “Insomnio,” in stark contrast to the buzz of enjoyment and music filling the tavern in “Ciudad.” The speaker in “Ciudad” experiences the City through acoustic elements, as the exterior and interior spaces interact: he hears the streetlamps as they “levantan su voz trémula” (line 1) and the distant moan of the night (line 9), while the inside space “canta como un jilguero” (line 5). In this depiction, the nocturnal city is gentle, and perhaps even fragile and meek, harmoniously coexisting with the social festivities. Conversely, the speaker of “Insomnio” ascribes visually sensorial qualities to the night; the window synthesizes “el gesto solitario del farol” (line 11) and the “ojeadas inquietas” (line 13) of passers-by; the sun’s conflict with the City is similarly visual, as it—vertiginous and fanlike—knocks over the buildings (line 24). Whereas the City in “Insomnio” is formidable and terrifying, the night in “Ciudad” is quite the opposite: tender and mild. The latter speaker’s muted view of the night through a series of “vasos” in the bar (line 8) renders the images soothing and subdued, while in “Insomnio,” the speaker’s vertigo and anxiety produce a

the speaker, but also the physical buildings and walls (lines 5-6), leaving little room for the rioting crowds which surround him. The assault is, then, two-fold: the belligerent projection of visual information is likened to the physical claustrophobia of falling buildings (line 5) and the brutal fists of the crowd (line 8). The external elements of the city's chaos closing in on the speaker elicit a sense of inner psychological unrest and impending delusion.

Borges' "Tranvías," a stylized Ultra exercise depicting the Modern City, may be seen as an extension of "Norte," insofar as both poems treat the theme of visual overstimulation in the urban environment:

Con el fusil al hombro los tranvías
patrullan las avenidas
Prora del imperial bajo el velámen
De cielos de balcones y fachadas

verticales cual gritos

Carteles clamatorios ejecutan
su prestigioso salto mortal desde arriba
Dos estelas estiran el asfalto
y el trolley violinista

va pulsando el pentagrama en la noche
y los flancos desgranán
paletas momentáneas y sonoras.¹⁹²

In "Tranvías," the speaker personifies the streetcar and casts it first as a soldier "con el fusil al hombro" (line 1)¹⁹³, then a ship ("Prora del imperial," line 3) and finally a violinist (line 9). In the urban landscape of the setting, where loud signs dominate and overwhelm the visual plane, the trolley becomes an integral part, merging the City with

¹⁹² Jorge Luis Borges, "Tranvías," *Ultra* 30 March 1921.

¹⁹³ Zunilda Gertel notes that this metaphor "logra el efecto irónico y osado por el choque de coincidencias formales." *Borges y su retorno a la poesía* 55.

military and nautical imagery and music. The visual emphasis is on movement: the streetcar patrols the avenues (line 2) like a soldier, underscoring the steady and repetitive path, as it also glides slowly, like a “prora del imperial bajo el velámen / de cielos de balcones y fachadas” (lines 3-4). Line 5 of the poem—“verticales cual gritos”—is placed apart from the rest of the verses, indented to highlight the suddenness of the piercing sound; the vertical positioning —also evoking the image of the antennae—physically disrupts the horizontal movement of the streetcar. The superimposition of imagery through movement is central to the speaker’s perception of visual information: in lines 6 and 7, “Carteles clamatorios ejecutan / su prestigioso salto mortal desde arriba”—the clamoring messages dominate the static visual plane; as the streetcar passes, its flanks carry “paletas momentáneas y sonoras” (line 12), which, superimposed with the static messages, overwhelm the speaker. The “skies of balconies and façades” (line 4) become a backdrop to the ephemeral presence of the colorful streetcar.

The overwhelming amalgamation of City elements has a more acute effect on the speaker in “Norte”: whereas the signs are clamoring in “Tranvías” (line 6), they are “borrachos” in “Norte” (line 1), suggesting a sense of belligerence in the speaker’s interaction with the city. Similar to the visual messages in “Tranvías,” the signs in “Norte” leap out from the façades of buildings (line 2), assaulting the speaker in their multitude. “Tranvías,” however, casts the nocturnal City in a more positive light than “Norte”: despite the dizzying superimposition of sensorial elements, the trolley peters out into the quiet night—momentary and resonant (line 12) in its lyrical presence. While “Tranvías” focuses on visual and acoustic representation of a streetcar in the city scene, the first-person speaker’s psychologically intense perspective is integral to both “Norte”

and “Insomnio,” as the anxiety of the speaker manifests in the physical portrayal of urban elements.

Borges’ overtly Ultraist “Tranvías” and “Norte,” avant-garde in their theme, structure, and imagery, enter into discourse with contemporary Ultraist poems, a significant number of which depict the complex relationship between Man and Modernity, as well as Modernity and Nature. In particular, the streetcar in “Tranvías” dialogues with the image of the train in E. González Lanuza’s “El Tren”:

El tren de carga
es un pedazo de suburbia
patinando sobre la llanura

La chimenea eternal
como un dedo
imponiendo silencio a la miseria

El silbido rígido
cual látigo de acero
taladrando las nubes

Los vagones como casas sonámbulas
corriendo de la mano
sueñan con dar la vuelta al horizonte¹⁹⁴

Like Borges’ “Tranvías,” “El Tren” is a series of metaphors, recasting the image of the freight train; foregoing punctuation, “El Tren” comprises four tercets, each one focusing on an element of the train, as it glides through “la llanura” (line 3). The first and last metaphors conjure up the overarching image of the train’s physical presence; the second image underscores the partial evocation of the smokestack and the third set of lines calls attention to the sound of the train. The four metaphors work in synergy to depict a domineering and even hostile interaction of the train with Nature: in the second

¹⁹⁴ E. González Lanuza, “El Tren,” *Ultra* 1 Jan 1922.

metaphor, “[l]a chimenea eternal” (line 4) is likened to a finger, silencing the misery of the plain. Here the image is both visual in the imposing depiction of the smokestack, and aural, in the hissing sound of the train moving in its tracks, as the two senses entwine to create the illusion of silencing. The third metaphor focuses on sound more directly: the synesthetic rigid whistle drills into the clouds, like a steel whip (lines 7-9). Whereas the first two metaphors deal with the train’s impact on the plain through which it travels, the latter two images cast the train in an interaction with first the clouds, and then the horizon, thus shifting the visual planes from horizontal to vertical.

González Lanuza’s train is anthropomorphized in its relationship with Nature; in particular, the closing metaphor likens the train cars to sleepwalking houses holding hands (lines 10-11). In this *imagen múltiple*, the train’s personification is a two-step process, as it is first recast as another man-made feature of the cityscape, and only then imbued with the ability to dream “con dar la vuelta al horizonte” (line 12). As this freight train imposes itself on the horizontal and vertical planes of the countryside backdrop, it may also, then, be cast as a moving city, with its connected houses gliding through static plains. This image is a reversal of the scene depicted in Borges’ “Tranvías,” wherein the speaker perceives the superimposition of the moving streetcar against the stasis of the city’s façades. Furthermore, in “Tranvías,” the juxtaposition of modern technology of the streetcar, bearing visual messages on its flanks, against the landscape of “clamoring signs” (line 6) already in place produces a paradoxically harmonious relationship; albeit resulting in psychologically disorienting reactions in the speaker, the superimposition of technology and the Modern City simultaneously yields a jarring image overload and the peaceful sound of a violin resonating in the night time. In “El Tren,” however,

technology in the form of the train—or the “mobile city”—is an unwelcome imposition on Nature, underscored by the sound of the steely whistle piercing through the clouds.

González Lanuza’s “El Tren” and Borges’ “Tranvías” share visual similarities in how the speaker depicts the train and streetcar, respectively; both horizontal planes feature a vertical element integral to the train’s image: in “Tranvías,” the speaker opens with the image of the rifle at the shoulder (line 1), and further develops the vertical aspect in line 9, when visualizing the antennae of the streetcar as a violinist, while “El Tren” focuses on the smokestack as its central vertical feature. However, in contrast to the streetcar’s ability to generate art—the sound of the violin—when the vertical and horizontal visual planes interact, this intersection in “El Tren” produces the opposite effect of silencing Nature (line 6). Furthermore, both poems place an emphasis on sound: line 5 in “Tranvías”—“verticales cual gritos”—synthesizes the visual image of the antennae with the sound of the streetcar, juxtaposing the metaphor with another synthesis of sound and imagery in the following line—“Carteles clamatorios” (line 6); whereas vertical cries depict a physical image with a sound, “El Tren” reverses the metaphor by casting the harsh sound of the train’s whistle as a “látigo de acero” (line 8).

In a thematic similarity, the train and the streetcar—personified in both poems—are moving on a set of tracks, gliding through their setting, unable to swerve off a predestined path. In “Tranvías,” line 8 -- “[d]os estelas estiran el asfalto”—connects the streetcar to its path on the ground, subsequently juxtaposing the image with the streetcar’s relationship to the electric wire, to which its vertical antennae are attached (line 9-10). Here the streetcar’s depiction evokes a sense of inevitability; while its route is as inflexible as that of a soldier on duty, the streetcar moves proudly, like a “prora del

imperial” (line 3), creating music as a trolley violinist (line 9). “El Tren” conjures up a similar sense of predestination; although the train, unlike the streetcar, is only bound by its railway, it is nevertheless unable to break free from its intended path. To the train, the horizon remains out of reach; like a string of sleepwalking houses (line 10), it progresses forward on its rigid route, dreaming of the possibility to “dar la vuelta al horizonte” (line 12). The sense of permanence in the route of the streetcar in “Tranvías” stands in contrast with its ephemeral sensorial impact on the speaker: the sides of the trolley rapidly reel off a stream of visual information—“paletas momentáneas y sonoras” (line 12). By contrast, the point of view of the speaker of “El Tren” is absent from the depiction of the scene, with the train, then, doomed to its boundless, yet paradoxically limited, path.

Borges’ “Tranvías” and “Norte,” and in a more complex way “Insomnio,” focus on the negative portrayal of the interrelationship among Man, City, and Nature. Particularly overwhelmed by simultaneity in movement and jarring superimposition of information, the speakers of these three poems convey an anxiety induced by the City’s terrorizing multiplicity. Conversely, Guillermo de Torre’s “Auriculares” underscores the inherently positive aspects of modernity, as the telephone lines channel the fragmented messages in such a way as to benefit—and even enlighten—mankind and the Modern City:

A través del mundo
 yo persigo
 la trayectoria estelar
 de hilos telefónicos
 Oídos errantes
 nervios de las palabras
 corazones del sonido
 Sobre la antena de mi cráneo
 se abaten los despachos del Zodíaco
 Las vibraciones auriculares

regulan mis latidos emocionales
 El avión del verbo riza el rizo
 Trayectorias
 Ondulaciones
 El pulso de las olas
 vibra en los cables aéreos
 venas de glóbulos nunistas
 Nuestro planeta ambulante
 se espasma en un grito jubiloso
 de interpenetración espiritual
 Sobre las
 torres aviones transatlánticos
 Se tejen las redes arácnas de los circuitos
 Sobre las cumbres
 Todos los oídos humanos en los auriculares
 En la apotheosis
 desfilan las ciudades redivivas
 Se oyen resonancias multánimes
 Desde las melodías astrales
 y los ruidos dinámicos de hoy
 hasta los vientos sincrónicos
 de nuestro ritmo¹⁹⁵

The speaker of “Auriculares” expresses his awe at the infinite body of human language transmitted through the air via the telephone lines; “nervios de las palabras” (line 6) reach the speaker through the telephone receiver, depicted as an antenna (line 8), stirring and drawing in the messages from the stars—“los despachos del Zodíaco” (line 9). Language and technology merge in a powerful synthesis; in line 12—“[e]l avión del verbo riza el rizo”—the verb’s capacity to propel action in a part of speech is likened to an airplane, flying through the telephone line and complicating the trajectory of human thought. The planet is ecstatic (lines 18-20) at its sense of spiritual interconnectedness, enabled by the network of telephone lines, which, like transoceanic airplanes, are in constant motion, weaving “las redes arácnas de los circuitos” (line 23). These almost mystical networks,

¹⁹⁵ Guillermo de Torre, “Auriculares,” *Prisma* March 1922.

connecting the continents with the stars, imbue humanity with a renewed sense of spirituality, as the cities are in a state of revival (line 27). The human sounds in the telephone receivers have resuscitated the planet and established interconnectedness among people, merging the Modern City with a spiritual awareness. In particular, in the closing four lines of the poem, technology is cast as a catalyst to the interrelationship of mystical “melodías astrales” (line 29) and the “ruidos dinámicos de hoy” (line 30), yielding a uniquely avant-garde rhythm of the moment—“nuestro ritmo” (line 32).

The theme of superimposition of messages and imagery, leading to an overwhelming sensorial experience, is central to “Auriculares,” as well as Borges’ “Tranvías” and “Norte.” De Torre praises modern technology, as the “vibraciones auriculares” (line 10) jumble human expression inside the telephone lines, and yet this rapid exchange of language has the capacity to revive humanity, connecting it with Nature. In “Tranvías,” the streetcar delivers visual imagery, moving in a straight line, similar to the network of aural messages in “Auriculares.” The superimposition of the temporal palettes with the static visual imagery of the “carteles clamatorios” (line 6) evokes an image of the Modern City, wherein technology is an integral catalyst to the speaker’s experience. Whereas “Auriculares” is exalting in its tone, “Tranvías” sees modernity in a more neutral light, casting the streetcar as an anthropomorphized character, roaming the City at night while carrying passengers, much like the telephone lines carry words. Finally, in “Norte,” the antithetical depiction of a cityscape emerges; overwhelmed with the juxtaposition of sensorial imagery and physical claustrophobia, the speaker is not liberated by the jumbled information exchange, like that of “Auriculares,” but instead feels imprisoned physically and psychologically.

An examination of Borges' treatment of the avant-garde metropolis in the context of Ultraist imagery and themes illuminates the extent of the integration of Borges' Ultraist aesthetic into the Spanish avant-garde poetic vision, generating a dialogue with contemporary poetics. All three of Borges' Ultraist poems on the cityscape—"Tranvías," "Norte," "Insomnio"—, to a varying degree, deal with the negative aspects of the urban hodgepodge—the overwhelming superimposition, anxiety and loneliness, the impending doom and darkness. Borges' 'urban' poems of this period strive to be fervent and radical, but, as in the case of "Norte," result in stylized efforts and fail to resonate with emotional impact. "Insomnio" proffers a more personal account of the city, while "Norte" and "Tranvías" are detached Ultraist snapshots of city life; all three, however, are in contrast with Cansinos-Assens' metaphysically complex portrayal of the Modern City wrestling with dusk and Nature or De Torre's exhilarated portrayal of modernity. Seeking to assimilate the Ultraist trends into his poetics, Borges imbues his 'urban' works with a sense of overwrought intensity, focusing on superimposition of visual planes, multiplicity of images, cacophonous sounds, and vertiginous anxiety. Coming under the influence of Cansinos-Assens' poetry, however, Borges' treatment of the City changes dramatically, evolving to depict mythical themes and metaphysical concerns, while eschewing the Ultraist kaleidoscopic juxtaposition of visual metaphors that characterizes Borges' 'avant-garde' poetics.

2.3 Borges in dialogue with the dawn of a new era

Similar to the sense of liberated exhilaration and renewal captured in De Torre's "Auriculares," a subset of Ultraist poems concentrates on the portrayal of euphoria inherent in the Man-Nature relationship, as well as the poetic depiction of dawn as a symbol of a new era. Unlike the Futurism-based depictions of the metropolis and the claustrophobia of rapid modernization, the poems treating themes of natural landscape exude a sense of harmony. Focusing on the positive manifestations of speed, enabled by the innovations in technology, such as the automobile and the airplane, this set of Ultraist poems celebrates the advent of a new period in human history; as proposed by Cano Ballesta, the poets, "fascinados por el nuevo ritmo de la existencia, comienzan a sentirse solidarios de su mundo y se convierten en cantores de la máquina, entonando eufóricos himnos a la velocidad y el dinamismo de la vida moderna."¹⁹⁶ Borges participates in the spirit of this exploration, publishing poems, such as "Mañana" and "Fiesta," which focus on wind and velocity, exalting the arrival of morning. Characterizing the interrelationship between daily points of inflection and a landscape's poetic potential, Borges writes that "[p]ara apresar íntegramente el alma—imaginaria—del paisaje, hay que elegir una de aquellas horas huérfanas que viven como asustadas por los demás y en las cuales nadie se fija."¹⁹⁷ In this set of Ultraist poems, then, Borges begins to interrogate the poetic

¹⁹⁶ Cano Ballesta, *Literatura y Tecnología* 79.

¹⁹⁷ "Buenos Aires," *Cosmópolis* 34, Oct. 1921, in *Textos Recobrados* 127.

interaction of landscape and time, in particular, focusing on the sensorial effects of velocity and superimposition.

Concentrating on visual metaphor, *imagen múltiple*, and rhythm, Borges' "Mañana (A Antonio Cubero)," in its visual-sensory approach, celebrates the hours of dawn:

Las banderas cantaron sus colores
 y el viento es una vara de bambú entre las manos
 El mundo crece como un árbol claro
 Ebrio como una hélice
 el sol toca la diana sobre las azoteas
 el sol con sus espuelas desgarrar los espejos
 Como un naipe mi sombra
 ha caído de bruces sobre la carretera
 Arriba el cielo vuela
 y lo surcan los pájaros como noches errantes
 La mañana viene a posarse fresco en
 mi espalda.¹⁹⁸

Line 1 amalgamates personification and synesthesia, as the flags sing colors, heralding the morning; to represent the wind, Borges chooses the image of a bamboo shoot (line 2) between the speaker's hands, underscoring the multifaceted interrelationship between Man and Nature by this Ultraist metaphor. The world is cast as "un árbol claro" (line 3), as the morning opens up its branches and sets the day into motion; this fertility of life inherent in the hours of dawn intoxicates the setting with its whirlwind activity, as morning spins like a tipsy propeller (line 4). The poem—in and of itself like a propeller—rapidly shifts perspective, juxtaposing imagery of the horizon (flags), the sun (lines 5-6), the road (lines 7-8), the flying sky (lines 9-10); completing the vertiginous trip, the focus is on the speaker in the last line. Although the varicolored morning in its sensory

¹⁹⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, "Mañana (A Antonio Cubero)," *Ultra* 27 Jan. 1921.

multiplicity may appear overwhelming, the overall representation is gentle and harmonious. For instance, line 5 casts the sun in a positive light, as it “toca la diana sobre las azoteas,” suggesting a robust certainty and, at the same time, a peaceful greeting, while line 6 immediately recasts the sun as semi-violent, as it infiltrates the inside space and “con sus espuelas desgarrar los espejos.” Nevertheless, the frame of the poem conjures up a mild, yet invigorating image of the coming morning: line 1 depicts a revitalizing breeze and the last line synthesizes all the imagery as it relates to the speaker, gently placing the soothing sounds and sensations of the morning on the speaker’s back.

Similarly, Borges’ “Fiesta” is a sensorial celebration of dawn:

Por la mañana suelta
se despiertan miles de banderas
La luz
como una enredadera
pende de las paredes
El viento late
Los edificios enhiestos son estandartes de piedra
Una canción sin música ni versos
de pie sobre mi pecho
ha sacudido el corazón del cielo.¹⁹⁹

As in “Mañana,” the morning awakens with flags unfurling freely in the wind (lines 1-2); in fact, the wind is central to the depiction of morning in “Fiesta,” appearing again in line 6. This emphasis on wind in both poems imbues the imagery with a sense of rapid change and energy, with the rich visual elements of Nature at dawn injected into this fusion. Movement becomes the focus of the poem, linking together the rapid superimposition of images. The flags and the early morning light, caught in the throbbing wind (line 6), all contribute to the speaker’s feeling of liberation, with which the poem closes: in lines 8-

¹⁹⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, “Fiesta (A Tomás Luque),” *Ultra* 30 June 1921.

10, the speaker's inner song—one without music or lyrics—resonates in the heart of the sky (line 10). In “Mañana,” the visual plane of the sky is in constant motion (line 9), and the dark birds, in superimposed movement, furrow it; in “Fiesta,” the speaker interjects a static image into the propeller-like motion of the morning—in line 7, the towering buildings, like stationary birds, rest against the moving sky. This image of “banners of stone” (line 7) is unlike the disorienting presence of urban landscape in Borges’ “Norte” or “Tranvías”; in “Fiesta,” the celebration of a new day takes center stage in setting a tone of catharsis and positive energy.

Ultraist metaphor and *imagen múltiple* render the effect of visual superimposition of planes and shifts in perspective. In “Fiesta,” the light, like a creeping vine (line 4), “prende en las paredes” (line 5), suggesting that the speaker, as he awakens in his bedroom, experiences the morning from within the interior space. The percolating light “hangs” on the walls, as would a work of art, underscoring Nature’s artistic capacity, specifically at moments of inflection throughout the day. A parallel image in Borges’ “Mañana” depicts the birds furrowing the moving sky (line 10), as though painting on canvas; César Comet’s “Mañana” echoes this visual superimposition in its opening lines:

Un lienzo blanco extendido
regado de pájaros.
Abajo el vientecillo agita
los flecos de las aceras
Una casa perezosa
continúa en el lecho mientras
los otros saborean el desayuno
y reflejan en sus ojos abiertos y limpios,
la viva inteligencia de día.
Pero la noche se ha escapado
Y la Luna sutil se ha caído hacia arriba.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ César Comet, “Mañana,” *Cosmópolis* 11 1920, *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 117.

Besides the likeness in the depiction of myriad birds against the morning sky, Comet's visual-sensory metaphors are akin to those of Borges in "Fiesta" and "Mañana"; similarly also, the tone of all three poems is inherently positive, as they celebrate the start of a new day. Whereas in Borges' "Mañana" the wind is likened to a bamboo shoot, in Comet's poem, the wind's interaction with tall grass (lines 3-4) underscores the wind's gentle yet palpable presence. Like the towering buildings, juxtaposed with the throbbing wind in lines 6-7 of Borges' "Fiesta," Comet's "Mañana" highlights the movement of Nature—birds and wind—in the opening lines and then segues into an image of stasis—"una casa perezosa" (line 5). In Comet's poem, those who arise to meet the morning, their eyes reflecting "la viva inteligencia de día" (line 9), are in some respect akin to the speaker in "Fiesta"; they are celebrating Nature's cyclical beauty, as it brings forth another dawn. This very sentiment of renewal and invigoration in the present moment prompts the speaker's powerful emotions in "Fiesta," generating "una canción sin música ni versos" (line 8), which connects the speaker further to Nature. In fact, the emotive relationship of the first-person speaker with Nature figures prominently in Borges' "Fiesta" and "Mañana." Whereas Comet's depiction of morning is a detached observation, Borges' two poems convey a sensorial first-hand intensity; Borges' focus in "Fiesta" and "Mañana" zooms in at the end of both poems, with the last lines evoking the psychological impact of dawn on the speaker; Comet's speaker, in contrast, zooms out, shifting the perspective away from concrete imagery and toward the paradoxical depiction of a subtle moon, which has fallen upward (line 11).

Borges' "Mañana" and "Fiesta" both feature a play on light—the sun's rays penetrate, interacting with the walls of the room. In "Mañana" the relationship between the light and the interior space is aggressive: a ferocious sun rips mirrors with its spurs (line 6). Conversely, the light in "Fiesta" infiltrates the space and manifests a gentle and meek presence, hanging on the walls like a creeping vine (lines 4-5). A similar emphasis on the ethereal prismatic effect, which the light undergoes in the hours of morning, appears in Pedro Garfías' "Domingo":

Los campanarios
con las alas abiertas
bajo el cielo combado

En los cristales
hay bandadas de luz

Y coplas anidadas en los árboles
Las veinticuatro horas
cogidas de la mano
bailan en medio de la plaza

Y el sol alborozado voltea la mañana.²⁰¹

Similar to Borges' Ultraist portrayal of the morning hours, the tone of "Domingo" is celebratory and exhilarated. Whereas Borges' "Fiesta" and "Mañana" focus primarily on visual and tactile elements, Garfías opens with the sound of church bells on a Sunday morning, likening the bell towers to birds flying with their wings open (lines 1-3). The invigorating freedom embedded in the image of a bird in flight is present in Borges' "Mañana," with birds furrowing the canvas of the moving sky (line 10), while in Comet's "Mañana" the sky appears irrigated by birds (lines 1-3). In Garfías' "Domingo," the opening lines conjure up the image of the church against the cloudy sky; like the

²⁰¹ Pedro Garfías, "Domingo," in *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 168.

towering banners of stone (line 7) in Borges' "Fiesta," the church's cupola is superimposed against the horizon, the sound of the bells filling the air. Shifting the focus to the impact of the sun's rays on the church's windows, the speaker introduces "bandadas de luz" (line 5), which radiate from the iridescent glass. Inherent in this image is the multiplicity of Nature in its interaction with man-made landscape, underscoring the expansive, propeller-like world of the early morning. The verses, like birds creating art on the substrate of the sky, nest in the trees (line 6). Lines 7 through 9 in "Domingo" encapsulate the speaker's further emphasis on movement and celebration; twenty-four hours of the day, holding hands, dance in the middle of the plaza. Whether paralleling a visual representation of a Spanish *fiesta*, taking place on a Sunday morning, or seeking to underscore the speaker's psychological state of elation, the visual image contributes to the euphoric tone of the poem. The sun, portrayed in Borges' "Mañana" as sounding reveille above the terrace roofs (line 5), in "Domingo" playfully tosses the morning in the closing line, imbuing the final image with light and jubilant merriment.

Borges' "Catedral," first published in *Baleares* on February 15, 1921, parallels Garfias' celebratory "Domingo," depicting a church in its interplay with the natural elements of its surroundings:

Las olas de rodillas
 los músculos del viento
 las torres verticales como goitos [sic]
 la catedral colgada de un lucero
 la catedral que es una inmensa parva
 con espigas de rezos
 Lejos
 Lejos
 los mástiles hilvanan horizontes
 y en las playas ingénues
 las olas nuevas cantan los maitines

La catedral es un avión de piedra
 que puja por romper las mil amarras
 que lo encarcelan
 la catedral sonora como un aplauso
 o como un beso.²⁰²

Like the bell towers against the sky in Garfias' "Domingo," Borges "Catedral" opens with the vertical towers of the cathedral in interaction with Nature: waves on their knees (line 1), as though in prayer, and the muscular wind (line 2), echoing the throbbing wind in "Fiesta." In line 4 the cathedral undergoes a visual inversion: the tower is hanging from a star, rather than starting at ground-level and reaching upward toward the sky. The speaker then likens the cathedral to a large haystack (line 5), a symmetrical and well-balanced shape, comprising a multitude of stalks; when united through man's work to assume the form of a haystack, each stalk is akin to each individual prayer of those who worship in the cathedral. This image conveys the speaker's sense of solidarity with mankind, as well as harmonious alignment of man's work and Nature's resources.

Lines 7 and 8 of "Catedral"—"Lejos / Lejos"—mark the arrival of morning; the rhythmic repetition and the deliberate positioning of the words within the line appropriately serve to shift the perspective from the star-filled sky of the cathedral's evening backdrop to Borges' favored image of the coming of dawn—the colorful flags of sunrise against the horizon (line 9). The lines "Lejos / Lejos" synthesize the sounds of the night time, mimicking the waves and wind, as well as the reiterative nature of prayer. José Rivas Panedas borrows these lines in his poem "Lejos," published more than a year following the publication of Borges' "Catedral":

²⁰² Jorge Luis Borges, "Catedral," *Baleares* 15 Feb. 1921.

Lejos Lejos
 Cómo se me revela ahora nunca oído
 este sonido
 Lejos Lejos
 Al producirlo apago las estrellas
 (Que ya es toda una noche decir: lejos).
 Al producirlo apago las estrellas
 y parece que lo acaricio entre los dedos
 ahora que he andado por los caminos del tiempo
 Lejos Lejos
 [...] ²⁰³

In Rivas Panedas' "Lejos" the emphasis is on the repetitive acoustics conjuring up the quiet rhythm of the waves in the distant night; as the speaker utters this sound, he turns off the stars, heralding the end of the night and the arrival of clarity and light. Likewise, in Borges' "Catedral," the words "Lejos / Lejos" mark the moment of dawn, just before sunrise; with Nature's cyclical permanence, new waves, singing their "maintines" (line 11), come to take the place of yesterday's waves kneeling in the night. Celebrating the coming of light, the cathedral is no longer a static image, descending from a star; rather, spurred by the surge in energy associated with morning hours, the cathedral seeks to break free from its imprisonment on the ground, and to rise into the sky, like a stone airplane (line 12). The impression here is one of renewed possibility: dawn brings with it a desire for freedom and flight. Evoking the image of an airplane, rather than one of simply a bird, the speaker synthesizes in this paradoxical allusion the high-speed flight suggested by the airplane and the inherent stasis of the towering cathedral.

Borges' depiction of the cathedral as a "stone airplane" (line 12), aspiring to the divine, seeking to extricate itself from the "thousand bonds" (line 13) and rise up, encapsulates a sentiment of rapid influx in modernity, arriving at the dawn of the century.

²⁰³ José Rivas Panedas, "Lejos," *Ultra* 24 1922, in *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 254.

The airplane constitutes a popular focus for the Ultraists, as it enables a visual depiction of the synergistic relationship between Nature and technology. In one such example—Elidoro Puche Felice’s “Cruza un Aeroplano”—the airplane is cast as a shark, swimming in the waters of the sky:

El tiburón del aire
que cruzó esta mañana
por el azul, traía de otros cielos
en sus aletas, luminosas algas.

Como un ruiseñor joven,
el tiburón mecánico, cantaba
sus canciones de hoy,
con trinos de mañana.

Acaso, el tiburón de acero,
dormiría en las aguas
de la luna
esta noche pasada!

Ha cruzado, como una lanzadera,
el tiburón sonoro...

De sus alas
metálicas pendía
zumo de sol en luminosas algas.²⁰⁴

Whereas the cathedral in Borges’ “Catedral” is a static man-made object cast as an airplane, in “Cruza un Aeroplano” the airplane is likened to an element of Nature, namely a shark. At night time, the cathedral is in motionless sleep, descending from a star, while the airplane sleeps “en las aguas de la luna” (lines 10-11). At dawn, awakened Nature propels the cathedral—a “stone airplane”—into the air, thrusting it into interplay with various elements of Nature—water, wind, earth, and the sky. In “Cruza un Aeroplano”

²⁰⁴ Elidoro Puche Felices, “Cruza un Aeroplano,” *La Tarde de Lorca* 21 Dec. 1926.

the airplane, a man-made object, is likened to living things: primarily to a shark, but also to a “joven ruseñor” (line 5)—two forms which allow the airplane a broad range of motion. Unlike the cathedral, which “puja por romper las mil amarras” (line 13) but does not explicitly succeed in breaking free, the “tiburón mecánico” (line 6, “Cruza un Aeroplano”) is an omnipotent being, able to fly and sing like a bird, in its mastery of the sky, and also navigate the waters, as would a fish. The tone of Puche Felice’s sensorial portrayal of an airplane is similar to that of “Catedral”; both speakers focus on the exhilarating sense of liberation and renewal. On the doorstep of a new era, the emphasis is on what is current and exciting: in its sonorous flight, the airplane sings “sus canciones de hoy, / con trinos de mañana” (lines 7-8).

The relationship between Man and Nature for the Ultraists appears to be one in which tension and harmony coexist; ultimately, however, the interaction is positive, yielding beneficial developments of modernity and uniting mankind in a liberating interconnectedness. The haystack of prayers in Borges’ “Catedral” embodies this bond, as Man’s work reaches out to Nature and simultaneously aspires to the divine. The airplane in Puche Felice’s “Cruza un Aeroplano” further encapsulates this notion: a man-made mechanical superpower, it enables man to experience the flight of a bird and to see “las aguas de la luna” (lines 10-11). The image of the airplane as a lyrical bird of steel, profoundly grounded in Nature and the present moment, yet bearing all the possibilities of the future, appears in Lucía Sánchez Saornil’s “Cuatro Vientos”:

Mi balcón:
rosa de cristal frente al ocaso.

En el río del horizonte
naufraga Cuatro Vientos,
nido de águilas de acero,

de alas inmóviles
y vientos sonoros.

Tarde de Domingo,
cuando se ahoga el sol en el río fantástico.
He aquí los grandes pájaros sonoros,
rondel de gaviotas,
sobre un mar lejano.
En la costa ilusoria
hay un faro:
la torre radiográfica.
He aquí los grandes pájaros sonoros,
que se elevan, se persiguen y se abaten,
sobre las lejanas olas imaginarias.
[...]²⁰⁵

Sánchez Saornil's poem takes place on a Sunday, yet unlike Garfías' "Domingo," which centers on the sound of the bells announcing morning mass, the speaker of "Cuatro Vientos" depicts a sunset. Akin to Borges' "Fiesta," the speaker of "Cuatro Vientos" observes the scene of the landscape at sunset from the interior space of his room; the glass of the balcony (lines 1-2) is a crystal rose, which separates him from the outside landscape. In the vein of other Ultraist poems, which focus on the prism-like distortion of reality viewed through glass, "Cuatro Vientos" is a meditation on a late afternoon sky as seen from behind the glass. Riddling the horizon, much like the birds in Borges' "Mañana," are eagles made of steel with immobile wings (lines 5-6); this image is a reverse parallel of the "stone airplane" in Borges' "Catedral": whereas the cathedral is a static image, seeking to become mobile, the airplane in "Cuatro Vientos" is grounded in the image of an eagle's nest of steel. Continuing to develop the airplane/bird metaphor, the speaker portrays airplanes against the horizon as "rondel de gaviotas" (line 11). The image conveys a visual intensity: above this flock of airplanes is a sky at sunset, with the

²⁰⁵ Lucía Sánchez Saornil, "Cuatro Vientos," *Cervantes* June 1919.

sun drowning in the “río fantástico” (line 9) of the horizon, and below is the distant sea (line 12). Central to this setting is the lighthouse (line 14), a telegraph tower guiding the path of the night’s steel birds. Although the tone of “Cuatro Vientos” is not as celebratory as that of the other poems treating the theme of flight and the liberating freedom of modernity, the lyrical image of the airplane and the positive role of the man-constructed tower amidst a sea of Nature suggest a harmonious, mutually beneficial relationship between Nature and the future of technology.

This inherent accord between Man’s work and Nature emphasized by the Ultraists is perhaps most vividly rendered in Ernesto López Parra’s “Amanecer”:

El martillo del péndulo
repica sobre el yunque de la campana.

Las herrerías de las torres
despiertan con su canto a la mañana.

Los hornos de la fundición
se encienden con paletadas de sol.

Por las calles dormidas
el día abre sus alas como una mariposa.

Las nubes precursoras
Pasan igual que un bando de palomas.

--Las intenciones rasgan el velo de las sombras—

En los lienzos del alba
como en limpios pañuelos
los ojos al abrirse
han secado su sueño.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Ernesto López Parra, “Amanecer,” *Ultra* Apr. 1921

“Amanecer” portrays the alignment of Nature and Man’s work at dawn. As the sleeping streets awaken and unravel, like butterflies (lines 7-8), the sounds of Man’s work reverberate through the landscape. The mutual harmony of Man’s labor and Nature is evident in lines 5-6: the cast iron ovens are powered by the sun. The focus here is specifically on the manual work of a blacksmith, emphasizing the shaping of natural resources, which brings forth light and eradicates “el velo de las sombras” (line 11). The poem’s speaker, similar to that of Borges’ “Mañana” and “Fiesta,” revels in the exhilaration of the morning’s energy; a new dawn is hopeful and free, like a flock of doves (line 10). The canvas of the dawn in line 12 echoes Garfias’ image in the opening lines of “Mañana”: it is a clean slate upon which to generate art of Man’s constructing. Such creation, like the haystack of prayers in Borges’ “Catedral,” unites Man and Nature in a harmonious relationship, underscoring Man’s role in effecting powerful events when in collaboration with Nature’s intrinsic wonder.

Upon initial examination, these poems appear to be the quintessential Ultraist ‘kaleidoscopes’ of metaphors, synthesizing visual images into one overarching theme. However, they could also be construed as largely devoid of the deliberate intellectualism, with which Ultraist poetry purports to be imbued. Rather, these poems are remarkably sensorial in nature, conveying the illusion of rapid movement, the invigorating flight of birds against the backdrop of moving clouds, the positive interaction of Man’s work embedded in the inflection of Nature’s cyclical time. Borges’ poems dialogue with Ultraists’ euphoric spirit of celebration, as the poetic focus shifts to a sense of boundless experimentation and unprecedented velocity; the imagery of “la vida dinámica y las velocidades vertiginosas” in these poems seeks to underscore that “el hombre ha

superado por fin sus humillantes limitaciones igualándose al menos con las aves en la conquista y dominio absoluto del espacio.”²⁰⁷ As Ultraists poeticize technology in interaction with Nature’s awakening in the morning hours, a sense of infinite possibility emerges. Microcosms of the moment’s exhilarating times, these poems encapsulate the uplifting sentiments of change and ultra-newness espoused by the avant-garde campaign for innovation; an examination of Borges’ relationship with these elements of the Ultraist aesthetic serves to illuminate the integration of his poetics into the avant-garde model.

²⁰⁷ Cano Ballesta 82.

2.4 Borges in dialogue with the artificial “yo”

In his espousal of Ultraist poetics, Borges forges a prismatic first-person speaker, which adheres to the avant-garde demand for dehumanization. In *Borges and the European Avant-garde*, Maier identifies sixteen instances of the use of the first-person speaker in Borges’ Ultraist poems, contending that “despite his repeated attacks on literary confessionalism, Borges’ Spanish poetry is unabashedly self-centered.”²⁰⁸ However, it appears that the vast majority of Borges’ first-person speakers are, in fact, examples of what Gloria Videla calls the “artificial I,”²⁰⁹ prevalent in the dehumanized Ultraist poetry, with its emphasis on visual metaphor and rhythm, rather than on the confessional or anecdotal narrative elements. Borges, in his manifesto “Ultraísmo,” decries the presence of confessionalism in verse, citing the “[a]bolición de los trebejos ornamentales, el confesionalismo, la circunstanciación, las predicas y la nebulosidad rebuscada” as one of the core principles of Ultraism. Ultraist poetry, according to Borges, moves away from the autobiographical paradigm: “[El ultraísmo] no es individualista. Es un arte aquilatado, sobrio, esquemático [...]”.²¹⁰ This type of art requires the suppression of what Ortega y Gasset calls “human fauna and flora,” underscoring the definitive borderlines which separate poetry and human form: “Life is one thing, art is another—

²⁰⁸ Linda S. Maier, *Borges and the European Avant-garde* 71. According to Maier, Borges’ use of the first person speaker is largely autobiographical, with the speaker recounting personal experiences. The following 16 poems feature a first-person speaker: “Aldea,” “Alejamiento,” “Arrabal,” “Cingladura,” “Distancia,” “Fiesta,” “Himno del Mar,” “Insomnio,” “Mallorca,” “Montaña,” “Norte,” “Las Palmas,” “Prismas,” “Prismas: Sala vacía,” “Señal,” “Siesta.”

²⁰⁹ Gloria Videla, *El Ultraísmo* 93.

²¹⁰ Borges, “Ultraísmo,” *Textos Recobrados* 135.

thus the young set think or at least feel—let us keep the two apart. The poet begins where the man ends. The man's lot is to live his human life, the poet's to invent what is nonexistent."²¹¹ With the confessional first person strictly banned, the Ultraist "yo" constitutes a detached, artificial first-person speaker, which, unlike the autobiographical "I," in the words of Hugo Friedrich, is imbued with a "multivoiced dissonance, [and is a] product of operative self-transformation."²¹² In the case of the Ultraist artificial "I," two particular forms are prevalent: a passive, prismatic first-person speaker, whose role is to synthesize and validate visual information, and an active, depersonalized "yo," which comes into contact with poetic scenarios and quintessentially Ultraist settings. An examination of Borges' multifunctional Ultraist "I" elucidates his poetics within the framework of the avant-garde, as well as informs the subsequent evolution of his first-person speaker.

Many Ultraist poems underscore the camera-eye of the speaker, validating the visual imagery yet remaining a passive observer; for instance, such a prismatic speaker appears in Gerardo Diego's "Los Astros Ciegos":

Yo los vi.
Yo los vi.
En verdad os digo
que existen.
Son unos de aromas
--fragancias inéditas,
perfumes nuevos y enervantes—
se arbren como crisantemos
y menean sus pistilos
como niños en la cuna
boca arriba.

²¹¹ Ortega y Gasset, "The Dehumanization of Art" 31.

²¹² Friedrich, *The Structure of Modern Poetry* 47-48.

[...] ²¹³

The presence of the depersonalized prismatic “I” in the opening lines of the poem establishes the visual perspective of the speaker. Lines 3 and 4 assert the existence of the blind stars; the camera-eye then records the sensorial imagery: the aromas (lines 5-8), the stars’ visual likeness to chrysanthemums (lines 8-11); in lines 22-23, the speaker focuses on the musicality of the nocturnal imagery: “Son los astros que suenan / las músicas nocturnas.” The speaker sets the scene, depicting the sensorial images but remaining detached in the portrayal. A similar artificial first-person speaker narrates César Comet’s “Paisaje Húmedo”:

[...]
 Desde aquí nada se ve
 Pero yo veo más que si viese
 VEO VEO
 Las grandes cafeteras de los tejados
 deslilan el oscuro líquido
 en las cocinas ²¹⁴

The speaker’s focus is on the act of seeing, underscored by the capitalization of the first person of the verb “ver,” and the typographical emphasis achieved by the repetition of the verb within the same line; separated by a caesura, this repetition of “I see” creates the illusion of an echo. The resulting effect is a poetic invocation of the subconscious, similar to the camera-like visual narrative of the artificial “I” in Adriano del Valle’s “Canción lejana”:

²¹³ Gerardo Diego, “Los Astros Ciegos,” *Cervantes* May 1919, in *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 126.

²¹⁴ César Comet, “Paisaje Húmedo,” *Grecia* 1919, in *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 112.

Yo quiero
 columpiar mis miradas de un lucero
 Y ante mis ojos cuántas
 luces de filamento
 y la luna
 pantalla cinemática
 boya para los náufragos
 [...] ²¹⁵

In line 2, the speaker positions the camera-eye from the perspective of “un lucero,” evoking a dream-like trance; further building on the cinematic effect of the poem, the moon is likened to a film screen in line 6. The shift of visual perspective, juxtaposed in montage, also emerges in Garfías’ “Cinematógrafo”: “Desde una estrella / vemos el mundo por un telescopio. / Estamos asomados a la vida / por el ojo de la cerradura” (lines 4-7).²¹⁶ The telescope in line 5 appears as a camera, inverted in its perspective, similar to the speaker’s view in Del Valle’s “Canción lejana.” In “Cinematógrafo,” the speaker superimposes the two antithetical perspectives—one surveying the world from a star and the other viewing the world through a keyhole. This self-conscious awareness of the poet as the camera-eye figures most patently in Larrea’s “Otoño”:

Persiguiendo sus manos
 esta noche
 pasaba un ciego
 Tras sus huellas
 sus muñones ardiendo.
 Por las carreteras cinemáticas
 En aquel automóvil
 IBAMOS FILMANDO
 A nuestro paso
 de la selva enmohecida
 a bandadas aventábamos cenizas.

²¹⁵ Adriano del Valle, “Canción lejana,” *Grecia* Sept. 1920, in *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 325.

²¹⁶ Pedro Garfías, “Cinematógrafo,” *Grecia* June 1919, in *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 165.

[...] ²¹⁷

The opening lines contrast blindness (line 3) with the conversion of the speaker into a traveling camera-eye in line 8. The emphasis is on motion, as the speaker captures a continuous succession of images from the perspective of a moving automobile (line 7). Enveloped in a state of a dream-like trance, the prismatic artificial “yo” underscores the compatibility of cinema, insofar as it functions as an instrument of oneiric projection; in “El cine, instrumento de poesía,” Luis Buñuel elaborates: “El mecanismo productor de imágenes cinematográficas, por su manera de funcionar, es, entre todos los medios de expresión humana, el que más se parece al de la mente del hombre, o mejor aún, el que mejor imita el funcionamiento de la mente en estado de sueño.”²¹⁸ The camera-like artificial “yo,” then, serves as a prism enabling a continuity among the fragmented images, capturing the subconscious mind, akin to lyrical cinema.²¹⁹

Unlike the prismatic-inactive “yo,” which remains detached, the sensorial-interactive artificial “I” thrusts the speaker into discourse with the poem’s imagery. For instance, such artificial “yo” appears in José de Ciria y Escalante’s “Jornada”: the opening line, “Mis ojos se han manchado de Sol,”²²⁰ depicts a typical Ultraist interaction of the human eye and the sun. Whereas a prismatic speaker is a mere observer, a sensorial-interactive “yo” synthesizes the aesthetic experience, enabling the speaker’s

²¹⁷ Juan Larrea, “Otoño” *Grecia* Sept. 1919.

²¹⁸ Luis Buñuel, “El cine, instrumento de poesía,” *Escritos de Luis Buñuel*, ed. Manuel López Villegas (Madrid: Páginas de Espuma, 2000) 67.

²¹⁹ See Guillermo de Torre, “El cinema y la novísima literatura: sus conexiones,” *Cosmópolis* 33 (1921): 403-4; and Carmen Peña, “Poesía y cine,” *Como leer un poema: estudios interdisciplinarios*, ed. Antonio Anson (Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2006) 163-211.

²²⁰ José de Ciria y Escalante, “Jornada,” *Grecia* 1920, in *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 110.

active participation in the poem. Notably, this interactive speaker, at times, may approximate a confessional speaker, such as in lines 10-12 of “Jornada”: “Y todos los recuerdos / se han vestido de blanco / en mi corazón.” However, this sensorial “yo” functions only insofar as it synthesizes the aesthetic imagery of the poem, thereby rendering the speaker’s presence artificial, rather than confessional. For instance, such a sensorial-interactive speaker narrates Pedro Garfías’ “Azul”: “De un soplo apagué el Sol”²²¹ (line 1); rather than simply announcing the coming of night and darkness, the speaker actively engages with the sensorial elements—in this case, the sun. In lines 16 through 20, the artificial “I” continues the oneiric exploration of the nocturnal setting: “Tantos árboles / negros / sobre mi frente. / Me encaramé a la estrella / trepando por las ramas” (lines 16-20).

Borges’ prismatic speaker parallels the first-person artificial speakers of José de Ciria y Escalante and Pedro Garfías. In Borges’ “Cingladura,” the “I” interacts with the visual elements of Nature: “He pulsado el violín de un horizonte” (line 1); this artificial “yo” serves as an integral part of the *imagen múltiple*, effecting the dream-like reality of the poem. In lines 6 through 8, the speaker engages with the sea: “En mis manos / el mar / viene a apagarse.” This detached “yo” amalgamates the visual capacity of the camera-eye speaker and a tone approximating confessionalism, focusing on the sensory experience, rather than on the personal or autobiographical. A similar first-person speaker anchors Borges’ “Fiesta”; moved by the arrival of morning, rendered by the unfurling flags (line 2), the light (line 3), the wind (line 6), the artificial “yo” appears to be confessing to an emotion brought on by the aesthetic experience: “Una canción sin música ni versos / de pie sobre mi pecho / ha sacudido el corazón del cielo” (lines 8-10).

²²¹ Pedro Garfías, “Azul,” *Cervantes* June 1919, in *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 167.

Rather than confessional, however, this sensorial-active speaker renders an emotion in terms of music, which, in turn, engages with the natural environment—the heart of the sky. Refining the idea of depicting emotion with interactive sensory imagery, Borges opens “Prismas” with an artificial first-person speaker (“Amanecen temblando las guitarras / mi alma pajaros oscura ante su cielo”), and then recasts this image in “Montaña,” replicating these two lines verbatim. In “Montaña,” moreover, the dehumanized “yo” lies at the core of the sensory *imagen múltiple*: “De espaldas a la tierra / yo recojo la sombra vendimiaria / que se derrama desnudo oleaje en las orbitas.” Echoing these lines, the first-person sensorial-active speaker of Borges’ “Mañana” synthesizes the poem’s visual imagery in the last line: “La mañana viene a posarse fresco en mi espalda” (line 11). Borges’ artificial prismatic-interactive speakers adhere to the Ultraist quest of eliminating personal and autobiographical elements from verse; rather, the “I” of these poems functions as a catalyst to the reader’s visual experience.

In addition to the experimentation with the sensorial “yo,” which dialogues with other Ultraist poetry, several of Borges’ poems feature a collective first-person speaker. Influenced by the German Expressionists and the sense of solidarity with which its poets imbued their work, Borges adopts two types of collective first person: political and personal. “Hermanos,” a war-themed poem in the vein of the German Expressionists, conveys camaraderie with its collective speaker: “Crucificados en el tiempo / callábamos a lo largo de los ponientes gastados / que nos miraban con sus viejos ojos de ofidio, / y nuestros labios eran cicatrices” (lines 1-4).²²² Similarly, political collective first person narrates Borges’ “Rusia”: “En el cuerno salvaje de un arco iris / clamaremos su gesta”

²²² Jorge Luis Borges, “Hermanos,” *Grecia* 1 June 1920.

(lines 11-12).²²³ In “Señal,” the collective “we” takes on less ideological connotations and evolves into a more personal, albeit nevertheless artificial, first-person speaker:

“Cuántas noches maduras / se desgajaron sobre nuestras frentes hermano / Fuimos
abriendo como ramas las calles / Nuestras risas rodando se rompieron” (lines 1-4)²²⁴;

Borges then recycles the image of the branching streets in “Prismas”: “Por la noche blindada / vamos abriendo como ramas las calles” (lines 7-8).²²⁵ Borges’ proclivity for the first-person plural speaker derives its influence from several factors: in part, the artificial “we” may be attributed to the influences of the German Expressionist poems, certainly palpable in “Hermanos” and “Rusia”; conversely, the collective speaker in “Señal” and “Prismas” points to a sense of belonging, on one level, to the Ultraist movement, and on another, to humanity at large. This sense of solidarity among poets in the Ultraist movement, stemming from a common vision of rebellion against a past aesthetic, manifests itself in Joaquín de la Escosura’s “Ofrenda (A todos los ultraístas)”:

Hermanos: sobre vuestros pasos
se van desgranando todos los collares.
Las líricas campanas tienen sonrisas cristalinas.
Entonan un alegre cantar los sistros de nuestras almas
y en nuestras cabezas se posan las místicas palomas.
[...]
Yo veo sobre el viejo jardín la prodigiosa flora
en el triunfo de sus pétalos;
aureas abejas trazan nombres amados:
ADRIANO, que tiene en su alma un nido de alondras;
EUGENIO, cuyo recuerdo bate sus alas sobre mi corazón;
GARFIAS, que ha purificado sus oros en las fraguas del Sol,
DIEGO, que ha abierto la jaula a los ruiseñores
que cantan mis horas azules;

²²³ Jorge Luis Borges, “Rusia,” *Grecia* 1 Sept 1920.

²²⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, “Señal,” *Grecia* 15 July 1920.

²²⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, “Prismas (Acordes—Mendicantes – Ciudad –Pueblo),” *Ultra* 1 March 1921.

y PANEDAS, que porta en sus manos
 las diademas de las vírgenes;
 e ISAAC, cuya alma grande nos cobija a todos
 mientras hace sonar el lírico teclado,
 [...]
 Hermanos, la alegría de vuestras canciones
 arranca destellos a mis espejos interiores.
 [...]
 La hora en que celebraremos nuestra fiesta.
 Ebrios de alegría
 nos mostraremos sobre los caballos de Sol
 [...]²²⁶

The plural speaker addresses the Ultraist brotherhood, and specifically salutes poets Adriano del Valle, Eugenio Montes, Pedro Garfias, Gerardo Diego, José Rivas Panedas, and Isaac del Vando Villar. The spirit of camaraderie reflects in the artificial first-person plural speaker, underscoring the exhilaration of the times and the poets' sense of inebriation with the Ultraist aesthetic: "la alegría de vuestras canciones," "ebrios de alegría." The inclusive "we" establishes a tone of social interaction among the members of the Ultraist movement—a sentiment which likely influenced Borges' use of the collective speaker. For instance, in "Insomnio," a semi-autobiographical first-person plural speaker echoes the spirit of companionship and solidarity conveyed in De la Escosura's "Ofrenda": "Otra vez arrastramos con nosotros esa calle que la ropa tendida / embanderó tan jubilosamente" (lines 26-27), "Al vernos navegar tan espirales se ríen a carcajadas las puertas" (line 30). Borges' collective speaker, however, quickly evolves from a "we" which comprises the Ultraist "brotherhood," to one which is inclusive of all mankind. Whereas in "Insomnio" the plural speaker interacts with the streets of the city

²²⁶ Joaquín de la Escosura, "Ofrenda," *Grecia* Feb. 1920, in *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 143.

on a physical level, the streets of “Prismas” take on philosophical and introspective undertones.

Although in his manifestos Borges advocates the elimination of confessionalism from poetry, he appears not to adhere to his own theoretical precepts, subverting the Ultraist paradigm in publishing several overtly confessional poems. The first of these is Borges’ Whitmanesque “Himno del Mar”: “Yo estoy contigo, Mar. Y mi cuerpo tendido como un arco / lucha contra tus músculos raudos. Solo tú existes” (lines 28-29).

Published on December 31, 1919, “Himno” precedes Borges’ apogee period of Ultraist involvement. While most of his poems published in 1920 and 1921 employ an artificial “yo,” ranging in function, Borges’ “Escapate Porcelana,” published on January 15, 1922, at the end of his stay in Spain, features an openly confessional speaker: “Pero siempre el espacio dorado los separa, siempre / el heroe venera los suyos sin lograr abrazarlos. / Asi yo ignoraré mis amores. / Asi yo deberé desconocerte” (lines 8-11).²²⁷

In contrast to the exhilarated collective first-person or the dehumanized sensorial speaker of Borges’ early poems, a sense of isolation begins to emerge in “Escapate Porcelana”; unlike the exalting speaker in “Himno del Mar,” here Borges’ confessional “yo” grows more introspective, meditating on the speaker’s separation from a loved one. A similar sense of alienation appears in Jacobo Sureda’s confessional “Poema,” which the poet sent to Borges in a letter around the time of the poem’s publication:

El incensario de la nada
consumía un gran holocausto
sin ídolo y sin rito
Me dejaron tan sólo
y con todas las horas en las manos

²²⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, “Escapate Porcelana,” *Tableros* 15 Jan. 1922.

como juguetes rotos
 Sin encontrar un nido
 mis gritos retornaron ateridos
 y fue tras el silencio.²²⁸

Published in *Grecia*, in November of 1920, “Poema” is uncharacteristically confessional for the Ultraist aesthetic, thereby rebelling against the dehumanized vanguardist paradigm. The speaker experiences profound turmoil and abandonment, conveying a sense of hopeless resignation; in lines 4 through 6, the hours are likened to broken toys²²⁹; the speaker’s cries go unanswered in lines 7 through 9. Much like the “yo” in “Escaparate Porcelana,” the speaker in Sureda’s “Poema” occupies a solitary space, separated from the world by “el espacio dorado.” Furthermore, the anti-Ultraist approach and the speakers’ shared solipsism underscore a psychic affinity between Borges and Sureda.²³⁰ To some extent, Sureda’s influence may be credited with Borges’ shift to a more confessional first-person speaker we see in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*—a speaker reveling in his aloneness and introspective tone. As Borges’ poetic voice evolves, the collective, depersonalized speaker of “Rusia” and “Hermanos,” and the collective first person encapsulating a sense of Ultraist camaraderie, morph into a poetic self-awareness of the speaker’s place in humanity in “Final del año”: “es el asombro ante el milagro / de que a despecho de infinitos azares, /de que a despecho de que somos / las gotas del río de

²²⁸ Jacobo Sureda, “Poema,” *Grecia* Nov 1920, in *Poesías y Poéticas del Ultraísmo* 298.

²²⁹ Borges cites Sureda’s “Poema” in French in a letter to Maurice Abramowicz, dated “Palma de Mallorca, Segunda mitad de septiembre de 1920.” Borges specifically comments favorably on the strength of lines 5 and 6. *Cartas del Fervor* 101.

²³⁰ See Carlos Meneses, “Jacobo Sureda, el amigo mallorquín de Borges,” *Diario* 16 (7 Nov. 1987): 4-5. Also see, by the same author, *Borges en Mallorca (1919-1921)* (Altea: Aitana, 1996).

Heráclito, / perdure algo en nosotros: / inmóvil.”²³¹ Having largely rejected the confessional “yo” in his Spanish Ultraist poems, subscribing to the tenets of Ultraism, Borges nevertheless subverts his own theoretical principles by experimenting with first-person speakers which serve a variety of functions, from a sensorial, depersonalized camera-eye speaker favored by Ultraists, to a collective “we” and, albeit only occasionally, a more traditional confessional voice. While serving as a principal poetic mechanism in Borges’ early Spanish poems, the first-person speaker then anchors his *Fervor de Buenos Aires*.

²³¹ Jorge Luis Borges, “Final del año,” *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1923, in *Selected Poems* 18.

CHAPTER 3

The Transatlantic Borges

Borges returned to Buenos Aires at the end of March, 1921, re-discovering the native city he had left as a teenager.²³² Placing this re-acquaintanceship at the core of his rapidly evolving poetics, Borges forges a personal narrative of Buenos Aires with the publication of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923); the compilation's confessionalism—a quest for a national re-contextualization embedded—serves to distance Borges abruptly from his Spanish avant-garde publications. In “El anacrónico Borges en *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923),” Rodolfo A. Borello establishes four aspects accomplished by the publication of *FBA*: 1) absolute rejection of and distancing from the Ultraist formulas, 2) a furthering of the primary themes, on which Borges would elaborate in his future poetry and prose, 3) valuable biographical content of several of the poems, and 4) the anecdotal structure of some poems²³³ that would lend itself to the gestation of Borges' famous short stories.²³⁴ The scope of this chapter, then, is to examine the transitional shift in the poetic discourse Borges espouses; specifically, we seek to identify the influences of his Spanish period, insofar as they figure within Borges' poetic voice in *FBA*. The first section concentrates on Borges' re-conceptualization of Buenos Aires as a mythical city,

²³² See Borges, “An Autobiographical Essay” 223.

²³³ Also see Donald L. Shaw, “Borges's Tinkerings: Concerning the Evolution of ‘Calle desconocida’ (‘Fervor de Buenos Aires’),” *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 56 (2003): 327-40, for a discussion of Borges' use of climactic sequences, which lend themselves to the structure of his later short stories. 332.

²³⁴ Rodolfo Borello, “El anacrónico Borges en *Fervor de Buenos Aires*,” *Río de la Plata* 4-6 (1987): 118.

focusing on two poems previously published in Spain—“Sala vacía” and “Arrabal”—which Borges includes in the compilation. This investigation 1) positions these poems in dialogue with Borges’ Spanish Ultraist contemporaries so as to establish points of influence, and 2) examines the poems’ germane variants, as Borges re-writes the texts in subsequent editions of *FBA*. The second subchapter proposes the influence of Rafael Cansinos-Assens as pivotal to the patent shift in Borges’ poetic voice; as Borges re-invents his native city, he appropriates Cansinos-Assens’ narrative structure, visual imagery, and themes, fashioning the nostalgic, intimate voice that characterizes *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. This chapter, then, serves to frame the discussion of Borges’ espousal of Ultraist tenets, proposing his rejection—or ‘self-purgation’—of the avant-garde precepts as central to effecting a shift in aesthetic.

3.1 Evolution of Borges' poetic voice: from Spanish Ultraism to *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923)

Returning to Argentina after seven years in Europe, Borges discovered a new Buenos Aires, which had undergone considerable changes through modernization and influx of immigration. Initially, upon his return from Spain, Borges writes, he “came bearing the banners of ultraism.”²³⁵ However, seeking to refashion himself as an Argentine poet, Borges redirected his efforts, finding the Spanish Ultraist poetic conception limiting, furthermore concluding that “Spanish ultraism was overburdened [...] with modernity and gadgets.”²³⁶ Still upholding the primacy of metaphor and a vision of poetry free of ornamentation, Borges espouses this aesthetic in his publication of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (*FBA*) in 1923—a collection of poems that, in many ways, represents a clean break with his involvement in Spain. In its style and subject matter, *FBA* enters into the contemporary Argentine discourse of *criollismo*, and, moreover, sets out on a “quest for a cognitive redrafting of cultural nationalism,”²³⁷ which at the time was influenced by rapid modernization and immigration. In his search to internalize and appropriate the Argentine landscape, Borges focuses on the outskirts of Buenos Aires in his poems. Specifically, according to Kefala, Borges pioneers a reconceptualization of the periphery, underscoring the liminal space between the center and the pampa, thus

²³⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, “An Autobiographical Essay” 225.

²³⁶ Ibid. 225.

²³⁷ Eleni Kefala, “Borges and nationalism: urban myth and nation-dreaming in the 1920s,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 17 (April 2011): 37.

building an essentialist myth for Buenos Aires.²³⁸ In “An Autobiographical Essay,” Borges writes that his return to Argentina “was more than a homecoming; it was a rediscovery. I was able to see Buenos Aires keenly and eagerly because I had been away from it for a long time. Had I never gone abroad, I wonder whether I would ever have seen it with the peculiar shock and glow that it now gave me.”²³⁹ *FBA*, then, represents a new beginning, an examination of which not only prefigures the subsequent evolution of Borges’ aesthetic, but also elucidates Borges’ views of his vanguardist involvement and establishes the influences which encourage his transition.

Underscoring the importance of *FBA* as his first publication, as well as its success at encapsulating themes developed in his later poetry, Borges writes “looking back on it now, I think I have never strayed beyond that book [*Fervor de Buenos Aires*]. I feel that all my subsequent writing has only developed themes first taken up there; I feel that all during my lifetime I have been rewriting that one book.”²⁴⁰ This statement proves to be true not only in that Borges’ prevalent themes, such as immortality, temporality, death, the world’s oneness, Berkeleyan metaphysics,²⁴¹ continuity among generations, appear interwoven into the poems of *FBA*, in what Borges calls “a plum pudding” of a book; in another sense, Borges spent his life literally rewriting *FBA*, redrafting verses, omitting words or whole stanzas, adding new poems and dropping many of the ones he felt no

²³⁸Ibid. 43-56.

²³⁹ “An Autobiographical Essay” 224.

²⁴⁰ Ibid. 225.

²⁴¹ Also see Cervera Salinas’ discussion of Borges’ treatment of themes in his transition from his Ultraist period to *FBA* in *Poesía de Jorge Luis Borges: Historia de una Eternidad* 59-67.

longer served him.²⁴² This constant re-reading of *FBA* on the part of its poet resulted in the existence of eight subsequent versions of this compilation, only one of which—the first Serantes edition of 1923—was actually published as a separate compilation.²⁴³ The remaining versions saw the light of publication as parts of anthologies, with poems from *FBA* perpetually decreasing in number. This evolution of *FBA* occurs through the re-publication of the work in the following editions: Losada 1943, Emecé 1954, Emecé 1958, Emecé 1964, Emecé 1966, Emecé 1972, Emecé 1974, Emecé 1977. For the purpose of this study, we will examine the Emecé 54²⁴⁴, Emecé 64²⁴⁵, and Emecé 77²⁴⁶ editions, alongside the 1923 Serantes publication.

²⁴² For detailed discussions of the evolution of *FBA*, see Tommaso Scarano's "Intertextualidad y sistema en las variantes de Borges," *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica* 2 (1993): 505-537, and Gloria Videla's "El Sentido de las variantes textuales en dos ediciones de 'Fervor de Buenos Aires' de Jorge Luis Borges," *Revista Chilena de Literatura* 23 (1984): 67-78. In the latter, Videla includes an analysis of the variants among the editions of *FBA* in a footnote on p. 68. Also of interest in this discussion is Donald Shaw's "Borges's Tinkering Concerning the Evolution of 'Calle Desconocida' ('Fervor de Buenos Aires')," *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 2 (2003): 327-340. For further references to Borges' recasting of *Fervor*, see María Contreras Bustamante "La escritura de Borges en *Fervor de Buenos Aires* y *El hacedor*," *Acta Literaria* 25 (2000): 17-26, and Rodrigo Zuleta "Fervor de Buenos Aires o la poética de la humildad," *Romanische Forschungen* 106.1-4 (1994): 260-67.

²⁴³ The following 45 poems comprise the 1923 edition of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*: "Las Calles," "La Recoleta," "Calle Desconocida," "El Jardín Botánico," "Música Patria," "La Plaza San Martín (A Macedonio Fernández, espectador apasionado de Buenos Aires)," "El Truco," "Final del Año," "Ciudad," "Hallazgo," "Un Patio," "Barrio Reconquistado," "Vanilocuencia," "Villa Urquiza," "Sala Vacía," "Inscripción Sepulcral," "Rosas," "Arrabal (A Guillermo de Torre)," "Remordimiento por cualquier defunción," "Jardín," "Inscripción en cualquier sepulcro," "Dictamen," "La Vuelta," "La Guitarra," "Resplandor," "Amanecer," "El Sur," "Carnicería," "Alquimia," "Benarés," "Alba Desdibujada," "Judería," "Ausencia," "Llaneza," "Llamarada," "Caminata," "La Noche de San Juan," "Sábados (Para mi novia, Concepción Guerrero)," "Cercanías," "Caña de ámbar," "Inscripción Sepulcral (Para el coronel don Francisco Borges, mi abuelo)," "Trofeo," "Forjadura," "Atardeceres," "Despedida."

²⁴⁴ Thirty-four poems included in the 1954 edition of the anthology are: "Las Calles," "La Recoleta," "Calle Desconocida," "El Jardín Botánico," "El Truco," "Inscripción Sepulcral (Para el coronel don Isidoro Suárez, mi bisabuelo)," "Un Patio," "Barrio Reconquistado," "Vanilocuencia," "Sala vacía," "Final del año," "Rosas," "Arrabal," "Inscripción en cualquier sepulcro," "La vuelta," "La Guitarra," "Último Resplandor," "Amanecer," "El Sur," "Carnicería," "Alquimia," "Benarés," "Judengasse," "Ausencia," "Llaneza (A Haydee Lange)," "Caminata," "La noche de San Juan," "Sábados," "Cercanías," "Trofeo," "Forjadura," "Atardeceres," "Campos Atardecidos," "Despedida."

²⁴⁵ The following 32 poems are part of the 1964 republication of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*: "Las Calles," "La Recoleta," "Calle desconocida," "El Jardín Botánico," "La Plaza San Martín," "El Truco," "Inscripción Sepulcral," "Un Patio," "Barrio Reconquistado," "Vanilocuencia," "Sala vacía," "Final de año," "Rosas,"

The original 1923 edition of *FBA* is now an out-of-print relic, not easily accessible, with only 300 copies in existence.²⁴⁷ In “An Autobiographical Essay,” Borges recalls the writing process and publication of *FBA*: “I wrote these poems in 1921 and 1922, and the volume came out early in 1923. The book was actually printed in five days, the printing had to be rushed, because it was necessary for us to return to Europe. [...] I had bargained for sixty-four pages, but the manuscript ran too long and at the last minute five poems had to be left out—mercifully.”²⁴⁸ In his *El Joven Borges, Poeta*, Carlos García disputes the ‘official version’ of the circumstances surrounding the publication of *FBA*, including the date of its original appearance, stating that the compilation actually appeared not “early in 1923,” as Borges writes, but in July of 1923, a few days before the Borges family’s departure to Europe on July 21, 1923.²⁴⁹ As for the distribution of *FBA*, Borges writes: “Most of them I just gave away... Having noticed that many people who went to the offices of *Nosotros* [...] left their overcoats hanging in the cloak room, I brought fifty or a hundred copies to Alfredo Bianchi, one of the editors,”²⁵⁰ who, in turn,

“Arrabal,” “Remordimiento por cualquier defunción,” “Jardín,” “Último resplandor,” “Amanecer,” “Sur,” “Carnicería,” “Benarés,” “Ausencia,” “Llaneza (A Haydee Lange),” “Caminata,” “La noche de San Juan,” “Sábados,” “Cercanías,” “Trofeo,” “Forjadura,” “Atardeceres,” “Campos Atardecidos,” “Despedida.”

²⁴⁶ Poems part of the 1977 edition of *FBA*: “La Recoleta,” “El Sur,” “Calle Desconocida,” “La Plaza San Martín,” “El truco,” “Un Patio,” “Inscripción Sepulcral,” “La Rosa,” “Barrio Recuperado,” “Sala Vacía,” “Rosas,” “Final del Año,” “Carnicería,” “Arrabal,” “Remordimiento por cualquier muerte,” “Jardín,” “Inscripción en cualquier sepulcro,” “La vuelta,” “Afterglow,” “Amanecer,” “Benarés,” “Ausencia,” “Llaneza,” “Caminata,” “La noche de San Juan,” “Cercanías,” “Sábados,” “Trofeo,” “Atardeceres,” “Campos Atardecidos,” “Despedida,” “Líneas que pude haber escrito y perdido hacia 1922.” (Notably, “Las Calles” disappears as the first poem, and instead the new last poem is the anachronistic “Líneas.”)

²⁴⁷ I was able to locate a copy of the 1923 Serantes edition of *FBA* in the personal archives of Miguel de Unamuno, currently held by Casa Museo Miguel de Unamuno in Salamanca. This first edition original lacks pagination and bears a small inscription, in Borges’ early handwriting, “a don Miguel de Unamuno estas metafisiquerías líricas, Jorge Luis Borges.”

²⁴⁸ “An Autobiographical Essay” 224.

²⁴⁹ Carlos García, *El Joven Borges, Poeta*, (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2000) 3.

²⁵⁰ “An Autobiographical Essay” 225.

according to Borges' account, placed copies of *FBA* into these very coats, an act which eventually brought Borges "a small reputation as a poet" upon his return from Europe. García, however, disputes this version of the account, as well. It is true that Borges gave away many copies of *FBA* to his friends and acquaintances, inscribing the compilations to Concepción Guerrero, Jacobo Sureda, Gerardo Diego, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Rafael Cansinos-Assens, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, among a few others, including the copy made out to Miguel de Unamuno, which we examine in the present study. According to García, however, the original edition of *FBA* was also promoted and sold; one such advertisement appeared in *Inicial*, introducing *Fervor de Buenos Aires* as "[e]l primer libro ultraísta publicado en la Argentina. Si Ud. siente curiosidad por la nuevas tendencias literarias, lea este libro. La nueva lírica se basa en la imagen intuitiva. Borges es el que mejor la ha obtenido."²⁵¹ This *aviso* concludes with the price of the book: one dollar per volume.

The slight discrepancies surrounding the circumstances of *FBA*'s publication are characteristic of Borges' autobiographical distortions. In "An Autobiographical Essay," he recalls the "mercifully" omitted five poems, which were not included in the final manuscript of *FBA*, due to length constraints. By the same token, however, he fails to mention the vast body of Ultraist poetry, published concurrently with his writing of the poems included in *FBA*. In fact, 23 of Borges' poems from the European period prior to the publication of *FBA* did not make it into the poet's first compilation. Of the 45 poems in the first edition of *FBA*, only two—"Sala vacía" and "Arrabal"—are poems previously published in Spain. Interestingly also, these two poems survive Borges' re-writing of the texts in the subsequent editions, and remain intact through the Emecé 1977 final revision

²⁵¹ García 33.

of *FBA*. What about these two poems makes Borges choose them over the remaining body of his Ultraist poetry, which he discarded upon his return from Europe, and, further, what makes these two poems survive Borges' numerous renovations of *FBA*, appearing half a century later safely in the final edition?

Let us begin to answer these questions by first examining the 1923 edition of *FBA*. The 45 poems of this edition are preceded by a lengthy "A Quien Leyere," a meditation on the poetics in this compilation—a text removed entirely from subsequent editions. In a sense, Borges seeks to justify his decision to reject the European vanguard poetics abruptly²⁵², as he does in *FBA*: "Entiendo que tales intenciones sonarán forasteras a esta época, cuya lírica suele desleirse en casi- músicas de ritmo o rebajarse a pila de baratijas vistosas. No hay odio en los que asevero, sino rencor justificado."²⁵³ In this essay, Borges also capitalizes on his patriotic and profound connection to the landscape of Buenos Aires²⁵⁴: "no es el dilatado mito geográfico que esas dos palabras señalan; es mi casa, los barrios amigables, y juntamente con esas calles y retiros, que son querida devoción de mi tiempo, lo que en ellas supe de amor, de pena, y de dudas."²⁵⁵ The poems of *FBA*, that is to say, do not seek to encompass Buenos Aires exhaustively, nor do they focus on the cultural center *per se*; rather, the landscapes chosen are of personal interest to Borges, as he contemplates the outskirts of his native city.

²⁵² For a general discussion of Borges' poetics and rejection of the avant-garde in conjunction with the publication of *FBA*, see Thorpe Running, *Borges' Ultraist Movement and Its Poets* (Lathrup Village, Michigan: International Book Publishers, 1981), and Paul Cheselka, *The Poetry and Poetics of Jorge Luis Borges* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987).

²⁵³ Jorge Luis Borges, "A Quien Leyere," *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, (N.p.: Serantes, 1923) n.pag.

²⁵⁴ For further discussion on this topic, see Humberto Rasi, "Borges en busca de la patria," *Cuadernos Americanos* 207 (1976): 202-208.

²⁵⁵ Borges, "A Quien Leyere" n. pag.

Before a discussion of “Sala vacía” and “Arrabal,” it is necessary to establish a general trajectory of *FBA*’s evolution through a succession of variants. The original 1923 Serantes edition of *FBA* contains 45 poems, the longest of all the versions, opening with “Las Calles” and closing with “Despedida.” Only 34 of these poems survive Borges’ editing for the 1954 version, and editions of 1964 and 1977 each contains 32 poems, albeit not necessarily selected from the 1954 edition or even the original; several poems, such as “Afterglow” and “Líneas que pude haber escrito y perdido hacia 1922,” surface in the final version but never appear in the preceding editions.²⁵⁶ Gloria Videla, in her study of the evolution of *FBA*, proposes the following four maxims, according to which Borges’ editing of *FBA* over the years may be catalogued: “1) a depurarlos de sus rasgos ultraístas prescindibles; 2) a depurarlos de un ‘criollismo’ intencional; 3) a reemplazar expresiones que denotan una captación juvenil de la realidad por otra mas madura y decantada, y 4) a perfeccionarlos poéticamente en orden a una mayor concentración lírica y de acuerdo con la evolución de la teorías estéticas del autor.”²⁵⁷ In “Borges’ Tinkerings: Concerning the Evolution of ‘Calle Desconocida’,” Donald L. Shaw discusses “Calle Desconocida,” as a representative poem in the evolution of *FBA*, working with the manuscript version as a starting point for the analysis; Shaw then focuses on the implications and repercussions of changing parts of the “organic whole” of a poem. In Shaw’s analysis of the re-writings of “Calle Desconocida,” which tenaciously remains in all the subsequent editions of *FBA*, we note Borges’ “rapidly fading” adherence to Ultraist principles and to the idea that “the essence of poetry is metaphor

²⁵⁶ On this point of disappearance and resurfacing of poems among the editions of *FBA*, see Gloria Videla’s “El Sentido de las variantes textuales en dos ediciones de ‘Fervor de Buenos Aires’ de Jorge Luis Borges.”

²⁵⁷ Gloria Videla, “El Sentido de las variantes textuales en dos ediciones de ‘Fervor de Buenos Aires’ de Jorge Luis Borges,” *Revista Chilena de Literatura* 23 (April 1984): 68.

and that the ideal metaphor should be new and striking.”²⁵⁸ In a study which informs Borges’ search for perfectibility, “Intertextualidad y sistema en las variantes de Borges,” Tommaso Scarano executes a detailed analysis of Borges’ liberal redrafting of *FBA* over the course of eight editions, resulting in a final edition in 1977, which bears only a scant resemblance to the first edition of 1923.²⁵⁹ Scarano interprets Borges’ insistence to change and perfect his earlier work as “una imperiosa exigencia de reapropiarse continuamente del propio producto,”²⁶⁰ further posing the question of how such work—a constant re-reading of the original—is to be construed; according to Scarano, Borges’ mechanisms for revision compound in an “interrelación dinámica y productiva,”²⁶¹ which may be studied in three categories: 1) omissions, 2) additions, or 3) both. Moreover, the revisions constitute a Borgesian systematic whole: “la labor de corrección se presenta fraccionada a lo largo del tiempo, pero las sustituciones elegidas presentan, pese a la longitud temporal del proceso de revisión, una coherencia fortísima.”²⁶² Thus Borges’ variants in *FBA*, as posited by Borello, Shaw, Videla, and Scarano, underscore a confluence of factors in the poet’s evolving aesthetic, and, furthermore, should be regarded as a coherent whole, representative of Borges’ intentional re-reading of his early work.

²⁵⁸ “Borges’s Tinkerings: Concerning the Evolution of ‘Calle Desconocida’”: 335.

²⁵⁹ For additional reference on the variants in *FBA*, see Tommaso Scarano, *Varianti a stampa nella poesia del primo Borges* (Pisa: Giardini, 1987).

²⁶⁰ Tommaso Scarano, “Intertextualidad y sistema en las variantes de Borges,” *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica* 41 (1993): 505.

²⁶¹ Ibid. 506.

²⁶² Ibid. 508.

It is no accident, then, that Borges chooses “Sala vacía” and “Arrabal” as the two poems from his early set of Ultraist work, and, moreover, continues to include them in subsequent editions of *FBA*. Representative of Borges’ quest to reinvent Buenos Aires by fashioning a mythical national narrative,²⁶³ the two poems constitute an antithetical whole: on the one hand, “Sala vacía” contemplates the interior space, as well as the intimate and the familial, and on the other, “Arrabal” proposes a narrative of the marginal Buenos Aires. First published on January 15, 1922, “Prismas: Sala Vacía” is set in Borges’ family home in Buenos Aires:

Los muebles de caoba perpetúan
entre la indecisión del brocado
su tertulia de siempre
Los daguerrotipos
mienten su falsa cercanía
de vejez encerrada en un espejo
y ante nuestro examen se escurren
como fechas inútiles
de aniversarios borrosos
Con ademán desdibujado
su casi-voz angustiosa
corre detrás de nuestras almas
con más de medio siglo de atraso
y apenas si estará ahora
en las mañanas iniciales de nuestra infancia
La actualidad constante
convinciente y sanguínea
aplaude en el trajín de la calle
su plenitud irrecusable
de apoteosis presente
mientras la luz a puñetazos
abre un boquete en los cristales
y humilla las seniles butacas
y arrincona y ahorca
la voz lacia

²⁶³ See Homi K. Bhabha, “DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of modern nation,” *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990) 291-322.

de los antepasados²⁶⁴

The empty room is filled with personified mahogany furnishings, engaged in “their endless teatime chat” (line 3); the daguerreotypes depict the faces of Borges’ ancestors, and appear as though they were images “locked in a mirror” (line 6). The speaker laments the distortion which time imposes on these faces, as they “slip away beneath our gaze / like useless dates / or blurred birthdays” (lines 7-9). Their souls reach through the distance of a half a century, with their “anguished almost-voice,” calling to the speaker “of the present apotheosis” (line 20). In the second half, the focus shifts to the present moment, the speaker’s surroundings, the empty room, filled with “light in fisticuffs” (line 21) as it falls on the furnishings, imbuing the moment with lucidity and life.²⁶⁵ Evident in these lines is what Linda Maier calls Borges’ “dread obsession” in his mature work: the experience of looking into a mirror, seeing one’s distorted image.²⁶⁶ The theme of one’s relation to one’s ancestors and the past is clearly beginning to take shape in “Sala vacía”; to this thematic category of “ámbito familiar” present in *FBA*, Rodolfo Borello also adds “La vuelta,” “Llaneza,” and the poems dedicated to Borges’ ancestors, Isodoro Suarez and Francisco Borges. Borello proposes that this subset of poems in *FBA* “señalan la conciencia de pertenecer a un orden, a un mundo heredado por la sangre, [y] documentan también un extraño temor frente a la invasión del ámbito subjetivo y del entorno familiar,

²⁶⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, “Prismas: Sala vacía,” *Ultra* 15 Jan. 1922, in *Textos Recobrados* 177-8.

²⁶⁵ For a detailed analysis of “Sala vacía,” see Linda S. Maier, *Borges and the European avant-garde* 85-86.

²⁶⁶ In her analysis of “Sala vacía,” Linda Maier proposes that “looking at the daguerreotypes produces almost the same sensation as gazing into a mirror, a dread obsession of the mature Borges, and seeing one’s own distorted image.” *Borges and the European avant-garde* 86.

por el mundo exterior [...].”²⁶⁷ This conflict between the interior and familial spaces of the “casa cerrada,” is evident in line 17, for instance, when the “constant present” (line 16) is “bloody and convincing” (line 17), as it invades the locked timelessness of the room and the daguerreotypes of the past contained within.

Borges uses the depiction of the conflict between tradition and modernity to fashion his own personal narrative of Buenos Aires; however, the roots of “Sala vacía” may be found in the work of Borges’ Spanish Ultraist contemporaries. The theme of a glorified past and atemporal space appears in Ernesto López- Parra’s “Casa Vacía”; published in *Ultra* in April of 1921, “Casa Vacía” likely constitutes a parent-poem to Borges’ “Sala vacía”:

Toda la casa está llena de ausencia
La telaraña del recuerdo
pende de todos los techos.

En la urna de las vitrinas
están presos los ruseñores del silencio.

Hay preludios dormidos
que esperan la hora del regreso.

El polvo de la sombra
se pega a los vestidos de los muros.

En el reloj parado
se suicidaron los minutos.²⁶⁸

In an Ultraist string of metaphors, Lopez-Parra establishes the poem’s unity through theme: the past has left only a trace of what is now conspicuously absent and is

²⁶⁷ Rodolfo A. Borello, “El anacrónico Borges en *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923)” 118.

²⁶⁸ Ernesto Lopez-Parra, “Casa Vacía,” *Ultra* 8 (April 1921), *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 202.

conversing with the present moment in a series of images. Echoing Gerardo Diego's "romanzas sin sonido" (line 14) in "Rosa Mística" are the "ruiseñores del silencio" (line 5) in the house filled with absence and a lack of humanity (line 1). The interplay with Nature in "Casa Vacía" underscores the passage of time: the past has left a residue in the form of "[l]a telaraña del recuerdo" (line 2). Borges' "Sala vacía" dialogues with "Casa vacía" in its theme, interior setting, and metaphors; similar to Borges' poem, "Casa vacía" evokes the past, reviving it in the moment of "actualidad constante" ("Sala vacía," line 16). This constant present of Borges' "Sala vacía" is synthesized in the final image of López-Parra's "Casa Vacía": "En el reloj parado / se suicidaron los minutos" (lines 10-11). Whereas in "Casa Vacía" the memories are locked in place by cobwebs, a natural phenomenon, the faces of the ancestors in Borges' "Sala vacía" are captured in a daguerreotype; both representations enable a dialogue between a glorified past and the space of the present moment. The invasion of the atemporal, quasi-mythical, intimate space by the "bustle of the street" (line 18, "Sala vacía") also echoes Cansinos-Assens' "El Nuevo Arte," whose speaker, arising from a life of "la gran soledad" (line 12), likened to the speaker's "sueño en el sepulcro" (line 18), confronts the present moment—"para buscar en ella las antorchas" (line 20)—yet finds the present to be a space of chaos rather than renewal: "Y llegó a la glorieta, / atravesó el viaducto, se vio envuelto / por la vida terrible, tórrida como un mediodía..." (lines 27-29). Borges' "Sala vacía," then, dialogues with Spanish Ultraist poems, deriving an influence in theme, as well as tone and the poem's strong reliance on metaphor; synthesizing these influences, Borges "swerves"²⁶⁹ to effect his own conceptualization of a mythical Buenos Aires.

²⁶⁹ As defined by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence*, in the context of a *clinamen* poetic misreading. 14.

Whereas “Sala vacía” depicts interior space and ancestral narrative, “Arrabal” re-invents the poetic space of the urban landscape; originally published in Madrid’s *Cosmópolis* in August of 1921, “Arrabal” appears unchanged in the 1923 version of *FBA*:

El arrabal es el reflejo
de la fatiga del viandante.

Mis pasos claudicaron
cuando iban a pisar el horizonte
y caí entre las casas
miedosas y humilladas
juiciosas como ovejas en manadas
encarceladas en manzanas
diferentes e iguales
como si fuesen todas ellas
recuerdos superpuestos barajados
de una sola manzana.
El pastito precario
desesperadamente esperansado
salpicabalas piedras de la calle
y mis miradas constataron
gesticulante y vano
el cartel del poniente
en su fracaso cotidiano.
Y sentí *Buenos Aires*
y literaturicé en el fondo del alma
la viacrucis inmóvil
de la calle sufrida
y el caserío sosegado.²⁷⁰

“Arrabal” is set in Buenos Aires and constitutes one of Borges’ first depictions of his homecoming. Focusing on the outskirts, rather than on the landscape of the countryside, Borges justifies his choice in “Crítica del Paisaje” (1921): “El paisaje de campo es la mentira. Por eso he vuelto la espalda a sus alcores, a sus tablados y a los colorines

²⁷⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, “Arrabal,” *Cosmópolis* 32 (Aug. 1921), *Textos Recobrados* 122.

gesticulantes de sus ponientes. [...] Lo marginal es lo mas bello.”²⁷¹ Surveying these marginalized cityscapes in *FBA*, Borges calls attention to elements of the “very large, sprawling, and almost endless city of low buildings with flat roofs, stretching toward what geographers and literary hands call the pampa,”²⁷² which impressed him upon his return to Argentina. Line 6 of “Arrabal” depicts the speaker falling among these “fearful and humiliated houses,” which, according to Borges, “constituyen lo mas conmovedor que existe en Buenos Aires,” embodying “el fatalismo vergonzante del criollo.”²⁷³ Borges likens the houses he passes to “sheep in herds” (line 7), which are held together by the iron fencing and “imprisoned in apples” (line 8). “Arrabal” can be divided into two parts: first, a heavily metaphorical Ultraist exercise, segueing in the second portion into a search for authenticity, of feeling the mystical Buenos Aires “down to the bottom of the soul” (line 21). This poem, then, is an early indication of Borges’ quest for poetic authenticity, as well as an encapsulation of his impressions of Buenos Aires, as he perceives it after a period of absence and expounds upon in other poems of *FBA*, such as “Las Calles” and “Calle desconocida.”

According to Kefala, the *arrabal* was an ideal space for Borges’ “ideological quest to discursively refashion the (criollo) nation,” enabling him to “outwit the tensions between immigration and a dated nationalism, and conjure up an urban utopia that could function as a founding myth of the city.”²⁷⁴ It is probable that Borges’ choice of the *arrabal* as a poetic space proceeds to some extent, as affirmed by Mora Valcárcel, from

²⁷¹ Jorge Luis Borges, “Crítica del paisaje,” *Cosmópolis* 24 (Oct. 1921), *Textos Recobrados* 124.

²⁷² “An Autobiographical Essay” 224.

²⁷³ Jorge Luis Borges, “Buenos Aires,” *Textos Recobrados* 127.

²⁷⁴ Kefala 40.

the influence of Cansinos-Assens, and, although his essay “El arrabal en la literatura” was not published until 1926, it is likely that the subject came to the fore during Cansinos’ tertulias in Madrid.²⁷⁵ In this essay, Cansinos likens the *arrabal* as a literary space to the sea: “Como el mundo marino, el arrabal representa líricamente una efusión indeterminada. En él, en sus vagos campos sin urbanizar, se sumen y se desfiguran, se hacen imprecisos e incoherentes todos los lineamentos arquitectónicos y mentales de la ciudad. Las ideologías urbanas, las artes y conceptos urbanos, terminan y se enmarañan en la arbitraria libertad del arrabal.”²⁷⁶ This liminality of cityscape appears in Borges’ “Aldea,” published in *Ultra* on January 1, 1922, and later republished in the first edition of *FBA* as part of “Campos Atardecidos”:

El poniente de pie como un Arcángel
 tiranizó el sendero
 La soledad repleta como un sueño
 se ha remansado al derredor del pueblo
 Las esquilas recogen la tristeza
 dispersa de las tardes La luna nueva
 es una voccecita bajo el cielo
 Según va anocheciendo
 vuelve a ser campo el pueblo.²⁷⁷

With twilight enveloping the village, the landscape is rendered shapeless and tranquil, thereby marginalized by darkness. In “Aldea,” the *arrabal* is a space of transition, effecting a conflict between city and country, as well as day and night. To this end, Thorpe Running underscores the “dehumanized structural purity” of “Aldea,” while at the

²⁷⁵ Carmen de Mora Valcárcel, “El criollismo vanguardista de Borges y la estética del arrabal,” *Nacionalismo y vanguardias en las literaturas hispánicas*, eds. Rosa García Gutiérrez and Eloy Navarro Domínguez (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2002) 41-42.

²⁷⁶ Rafael Cansinos-Assens, “El arrabal en la literatura,” *Variaciones Borges* 8 (1999): 30.

²⁷⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, “Aldea,” *Ultra* 1 Jan 1922.

same time praising its “emotional unity,” which is unexpected given the quintessentially Ultraist nature of the poem.²⁷⁸

On the whole, Borges’ rather conspicuous rejection of Spanish Ultraism patently embedded in *FBA* received varied reactions from his colleagues in Europe. Guillermo De Torre expressed his surprise at the compilation’s contents, which included a number of new poems with a noticeably distinct tone and subject matter from Borges’ earlier work: “De ahí mi asombro, y el de otros compañeros de aquellos días, al recibir tal libro, y no tanto por lo que incluía como por lo que omitía.”²⁷⁹ De Torre further attributes this rapid change in Borges’ aesthetic to “el choque psíquico recibido por el reencuentro con su ciudad nativa, Buenos Aires, tras varios años de permanencia en Europa [...] Vuelve a su infancia, y casi a la de su país, idealizando nostálgicamente lo entrevisto.”²⁸⁰ Originally publishing his lukewarm review of *FBA* in *Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia* (1925), De Torre points out the “unfortunate” absence of Borges’ early poems from his Spanish Ultraist period, instead “recogiendo otros inéditos que responden a una más reciente y discutible evolución de su espíritu. Son poemas meditados, forjados sobre un insospechado ambiente porteño o en torno a motivos filosóficos: poemas escuetos y severos, exentos de suntuosidad y de aire deliberadamente opaco.”²⁸¹ Conversely, Ramón Gómez de la Serna’s early review of Borges’ *FBA* has a different tone from that of De Torre’s “asombro”:

²⁷⁸ Running 40.

²⁷⁹ Guillermo de Torre, “Para la Prehistoria Ultraísta de Borges,” *Hispania* 47 (1964): 458.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 458.

²⁸¹ Guillermo de Torre, *Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia*, ed. José María Barrera López (Sevilla: Renacimiento, 2001) 91.

Ahora por fin ha publicado un libro, que es ya jardín y bandada de pájaros, y en el que, por lo tanto, la personalidad del poeta se explaya a gusto. [...] Un Góngora más situado en las cosas que en la retórica retiembla en la copa de Borges. El mundo extraño, que trepida un poco, se refleja en ese fino cristal removido en el aparador de noble alerce. [...] Todo en este libro, escrito cuando el descendiente y asumidor de todo lo clásico ha bogado por los mares nuevos, vuelve a ser normativo, y normativo con una dignidad y un aplomo que me han hecho quitarme el sombrero ante Borges con este saludo hasta los pies.²⁸²

Gómez de la Serna's reaction to Borges' *FBA* underscores the compilation's strengths, primarily in that Borges' new aesthetic rejects the vanguardist "mares nuevos," and, rather, is "normalized" and imbued with "aire sutil y poético." Similarly, Cansinos-Assens praises *FBA* for its subtlety of vision and expression and Borges' "espiritual aventura"; the collection showcases a "sabor modernísimo, en que grana la imagen múltiple cultivada por Huidobro, con ejemplar espontaneidad y lozanía," as well as including poems "perfectamente clásicos, sin alarde alguno de virtuosismo técnico, sentidos y expresados con una sencillez y un vigor que recuerdan a los modelos de nuestro siglo áureo."²⁸³ These reactions highlight the diversity of poetics inherent in *FBA*, as Borges transcends the constraints of the Spanish Ultraist poetic model.

Borges' changing aesthetic drives him to revise *FBA* significantly throughout half a century of revisions. This search for authenticity in Borges yields certain edits of "Arrabal," as it appears in the Emecé 1954 edition. The poem undergoes several minor changes in its first half—or the 'Ultraist' portion—but proceeds to eliminate the last quatrain in its entirety, substituting it with a manifesto of sorts, which meditates on the European period and Borges' emotional re-acquaintance with his native city. In the first

²⁸² Ramón Gómez de la Serna, "Jorge Luis Borges: *El fervor de Buenos Aires*": 123-127.

²⁸³ Rafael Cansinos-Assens, "Jorge Luis Borges," *La nueva literatura (1917-1927)*, Vol 3 (Madrid: Páez, 1927) 286-287.

section of the poem, Borges changes the verb “caí” to the static “estuve.” In line 7, “como” is substituted by “cual,” and line 10 sees another minor stylistic change: “como si fuesen todas ellas” (line 10, *Cosmópolis* edition) becomes “como si fueran todas ellas” (line 10, *FBA* 1923 *Serantes*). In line 16, “constataron” becomes “comprobaron,” and finally, in line 22, “el fondo del alma” is substituted by “la hondura del alma.” In the 1954 version of “Arrabal,” Borges further replaces the verb in line 5: “estuve” (*FBA* 1923 *Serantes*) becomes “quedé” (Emece 1954). The last four lines of “Arrabal” (*FBA* 1923 *Serantes*) disappear with the republication of the anthology in 1954:

y literaturicé en la hondura del alma
la viacrucis inmóvil
de la calle sufrida
y el caserío sosegado.

Borges eliminates this ending of “Arrabal,” and adds the following quatrain in its place:

esta ciudad que yo creí mi pasado
es mi porvenir, mi presente;
los años que he vivido en Europa son ilusorios,
yo he estado siempre (y estaré) en Buenos Aires.

Notably, also, line 7 of the *Serantes* edition, “juiciosas cual ovejas en manada,” is eliminated in the 1954 reprint of the poem. This change persists in the subsequent editions of the anthology, and the 1964 version of the poem appears without any further variations. The 1923 version in the first edition of *FBA* normalizes the punctuation of “Sala vacía,” adding three periods, and undergoes several other minor changes. In line 6, the word “encerrada” is replaced with the more poetic “enclaustrada.” Moreover, the word “Prismas” in the version of the poem printed in *FBA* is dropped, as a vestige of the poet’s Ultraist belonging. The inscription, “A Humberto Rivas,” also disappears as the

poem is transferred into the 1923 compilation. The version of “Sala vacía” printed in 1923 remains unchanged in the 1954 edition of *FBA*. In the 1964 reprint of this poem, Borges makes the following changes: in line 18, “aplaude” becomes “festeja,” while line 21 eliminates “a puñetazos,” becoming simply “la luz.” Besides these fairly minor variants, “Sala vacía” remains intact not only for its first republication in *FBA*, but also through the subsequent revisions of *FBA*. In this sense, “Sala vacía” is a unique poem in the Borges arsenal, as it is one poem that survives Borges’ re-reading of himself. “Sala vacía” and “Arrabal,” as is the case in the other revisions found throughout the evolution of *FBA*, are “purified,” to use Videla’s term, of what Borges considered to be puerile imagery or poetics, produced under the influence of the Ultraist aesthetic campaign of renovation and the conception of poetry’s chief purpose as that of shocking the reader. In the case of the revisions in “Sala vacía” and “Arrabal,” notable are the clear simplification and maturation of tone; for instance, Borges’ favored early-Ultraist “applause” is redacted, “falling” becomes the more static “being.” The significant change in the *FBA* version of “Arrabal” in the 1954 edition is perhaps most indicative of Borges’ evolution: he imbues the new verses with his newly re-discovered sense of belonging in Buenos Aires, adopting a confessional first-person speaker and referring to the European period, by then several decades behind him, as “illusory.”

Although his early Ultraist poems are largely absent in *FBA*, Borges nevertheless plucks “Sala vacía,” “Arrabal” and, in part, “Aldea” from the Ultraist period, deeming them publishable in the poetic canon. The central commonality of “Sala vacía” and “Arrabal” is their setting of Buenos Aires; however, they also encapsulate key themes in Borges’ later work: the connection to ancestors and family in the case of “Sala vacía” and

oneness of the world in “Arrabal.” These two poems are also of interest in that they constitute an antithetical pair: the enclosed space of “Sala vacía,” a resistance against the invasion of the present moment, juxtaposed with the exterior setting of “Arrabal,” wherein the speaker feels at home, almost elated and “hopelessly hopeful” (line 14), linking the past and the present harmoniously in the last line of its edited quatrain: “yo he estado siempre (y estaré) en Buenos Aires.” In their strongly Borgesian themes and Buenos Aires setting, “Sala vacía” and “Arrabal” complement the remaining material in the 1923 Serantes publication of *FBA*; furthermore, these two poems are significant in that they survive years of revisions and, with a maturation of tone and minor changes, remain a part of Borges’ systematically re-envisioned poetic canon.

3.2 Borges in dialogue with Rafael Cansinos-Assens

Central to the discussion of the seemingly abrupt shift in Borges' poetics evidenced by the publication of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (*FBA*) is the influence of Rafael Cansinos-Assens, with whom Borges came into contact during his time in Madrid. *FBA* showcases an unprecedented maturity in tone for Borges, as well as introduces anecdotal poetic narrative and structure and a host of new themes; in this respect, Cansinos-Assens may be credited with steering Borges' writing toward the metaphysical concerns, shaping his writing structurally and lending him a mature tone, perhaps inconsistent with a poet of 21 or 22 years of age. Notably, a first-person speaker characterizes the poems in *FBA*, imbuing the collection with a sense of intimate, confessionalist nostalgia. This choice also distances Borges further from the dehumanized poetry of the avant-garde, while he refashions himself as a young Argentine poet and reinvents Buenos Aires.²⁸⁴ As asserted by Kefala,

[r]etrospection, idealization, nostalgia and confessionalism, at least for the ultraists, were signs pointing towards past rather than present or future aesthetics. Like his ideologeme of the orillas, at a formal level Borges' poetry was placed somewhere between tradition (confessionalism, versification) and the avant-garde (metaphor, free verse initially).²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ Also see Carmen de Mora Valcárcel, "El criollismo vanguardista de Borges y la estética del arrabal," *Nacionalismo y vanguardias en las literaturas hispánicas* (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2002): 39-51, on Borges' re-creating of a nostalgic Buenos Aires; also see José Ramón Navarro Vera, "El Buenos Aires de Borges: Paisaje interior versus paisaje construido," *Escrituras de la ciudad*, (Madrid: Palas Atenea, 1999): 129-141.

²⁸⁵ Kefala 42.

In his own early Ultraist poems published in Spain, Borges employs the first-person speaker occasionally, underscoring the sensory impact in stylized Ultraist tropes such as “La mañana viene a posarse fresco en mi espalda” (“Mañana,” line 11) or “mi alma pájaro oscuro ante su cielo” (“Prismas,” line 2). Segueing into a more traditional narrative structure and imbuing *FBA* with a nostalgically intimate tone, Borges opens the collection with “Las Calles,” which begins: “Las calles de Buenos Aires / ya son mi entraña.”²⁸⁶ The first-person speaker remains integral throughout *FBA*, rendering the poems more personal, retrospective, and anecdotal than anything Borges had published in Spain.

The influence of Cansinos’ writing emerges as pivotal in the metamorphosis of Borges’ poetic voice in *FBA*, as the latter greatly admired the former, synthesizing and integrating elements of Cansinos’ poetics to negotiate his own voice. In “An Autobiographical Essay,” Borges discusses his partnership and friendship with Cansinos-Assens with much admiration: “[t]he great event to me was my friendship with Rafael Cansinos-Asséns. I still like to think of myself as his disciple.”²⁸⁷ Every Saturday, Borges attended Cansinos-Assens’ *tertulias*, where the latter would propose discussion topics, such as “The Metaphor, Free Verse, The Traditional Forms of Poetry, Narrative Poetry, The Adjective, The Verb. In his own quiet way, [Cansinos-Asséns] was a dictator, allowing no unfriendly allusions to contemporary writers and trying to keep the talk on a high plane.”²⁸⁸ Of the actual conception of ‘Ultraism’ as a movement, Borges writes: “Oddly, it was Cansinos who, in 1919, invented the term ‘ultraism.’ He thought Spanish

²⁸⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, “Las Calles,” *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1923, *Selected Poems* 5.

²⁸⁷ Borges, “An Autobiographical Essay” 221.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 221-222.

literature had always been behind the times. Under the pen name of Juan Las, he wrote some short, laconic ultraist pieces.²⁸⁹ The whole thing—I see now—was done in a spirit of mockery. But the youngsters took it very seriously.”²⁹⁰ In his article “Jorge Luis Borges,” Cansinos-Assens describes the young Borges attending these Saturday *tertulias* as “un nuevo Grimm, lleno de serenidad discreta y sonriente”:

Fino, ecuánime, con ardor de poeta sofrenado por una venturosa frigidez intelectual, con una cultura clásica de filósofos griegos y trovadores orientales que le aficionaba al pasado, haciéndole amar calepinos e infolios, sin menoscabo de las modernas maravillas, Jorge Luis Borges observaba, discutía cortésmente con sus camaradas juveniles y tomaba de la nueva lírica [...] la nueva lección de fuga y contrapunto con que al través de las edades se van remozando los eternos temas.
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Borges’ admiration for Cansinos was reciprocated, as the latter praises the young poet’s “visión de luz,” and “el don de producir la maravilla, con la científica curiosidad por alumbrar su origen e inquirir sus resortes.”²⁹²

Despite a fourteen-year age difference, Borges and Cansinos-Assens forged a close friendship, which made a significant impact on the young Borges’ writing. Of his admiration for Cansinos-Assens, Borges writes in “An Autobiographical Essay”:

Cansinos seemed to me as if he were all the past of that Europe I was leaving behind—something like a symbol of all culture, Western and Eastern. [...] Also, I was stimulated by him to far-flung reading. In writing, I began aping him. He

²⁸⁹ Rafael Cansinos-Assens used the pseudonym Juan Las to publish several Ultraist poems. However, as noted by Glorinda Videla, Cansinos’ influence on the young Ultraists was largely personal, rather than on the basis of his works. *Ultraísmo* 38.

²⁹⁰ Borges, “An Autobiographical Essay” 222.

²⁹¹ Cansinos-Assens, “Jorge Luis Borges” 280-281.

²⁹² *Ibid.* 287.

wrote long and flowing sentences with an un-Spanish and strongly Hebrew flavor to them.²⁹³

The influence of Cansinos' multicultural approach to writing proved to be decisive for Borges. Edna Aizenberg proposes that in his imitation of Cansinos, Borges adopts a Jewish identity, which serves to strengthen the parallels between the two authors. Aizenberg links "Cansinos y Borges, ambos gentiles, ambos descubridores de (posibles) ascendientes conversos (Cansinos/ Acevedo), ambos conscientes, orgullosos portadores de esta (probable) herencia judaica en ambientes no siempre favorable a tal postura." Aizenberg further highlights the similarities between the 35-year-old Cansinos, who had never left Madrid, and the twenty-year-old Argentine, passing through Spain on vacation; both were "omnívoros lectores, sensibles poetas, penetrantes ensayistas, hábiles traductores, fervientes 'judíos'."²⁹⁴ Borges admired Cansinos' universalized aesthetic, which would exert a considerable influence on the Borges' writing: "Cansinos es judeo-español. Ese su conocerse judío lo universaliza, lo extraña de lo provinciano europeo, lo suelta como un viaje—ese viaje que no hizo nunca--, lo hace generoso en metáforas."²⁹⁵ It is clear that Cansinos' "otra manera de elogiar"²⁹⁶ appealed to Borges. Furthermore, Borges integrates into *FBA* the themes raised in Cansinos' poetry; having never left Madrid, Cansinos' work focused less on the everyday and the atmospheric elements

²⁹³ Borges, "An Autobiographical Essay" 221-222.

²⁹⁴ Edna Aizenberg, "Cansinos-Asséns y Borges: En Busca del Vínculo Judaico" *Revista Iberoamericana* 46.112-13 (1980): 543.

²⁹⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, "R. Cansinos Assens," *Síntesis* 1 (Jun. 1927), *Textos Recobrados* 367.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 367.

avored by the avant-garde poets, instead projecting the meditations into a universal realm and treating themes of metaphysical interest.

Whereas his early Ultraist poems synthesize Borges' earlier influences—Whitman, German Expressionists, Futurists—and, in many cases, seek to embody Ultraist poetic theory in his writing, *FBA* serves to distance Borges from the Spanish Ultraists, but, at the same time, betrays the profound influence of Cansinos-Assens. In “Definición de Cansinos Assens,” published in *Inquisiciones* (1925), Borges underscores the specific elements of Cansinos' aesthetic, which differentiate him from his contemporaries in the Spanish Ultraist movement:

Quiero señalarlo [...] como el más admirable anudador de metáforas de cuantos manejan nuestra prosodia. La metáfora de Cansinos no es áspera y arrojada como en el pretérito Villarroel y en el actual Lugones; es espaciosa y amplia y su paradigma menos dudoso está en los narradores árabes o en los grandes latinistas del mil seiscientos. Imágenes que no solicitan nunca su objeto con la derecha urgencia del dardo, pero que a fuer de inevitable lazos abarcan la señal, trazando curvas y rodeos en el despejo fácil del aire. Imágenes que manifiestan un sentido agudo del tiempo y que son alusivas de las cosas que lo atestiguan—reloj, sombra alargada, latido, ocaso, luna infiel—y de la esación vernal y la noche que son costumbre generosa de su decurso cíclico. Imágenes preclaras que van de lejanía a lejanía como esas líneas alucinadoras que organizan el espacio estelar en semejanzas de caballos y héroes.²⁹⁷

When examined in the context of a stream of Spanish Ultraist poetry published in the late 1910s and early 1920s, Cansinos-Assens' poetry proffers a substantially divergent perspective. In “Definición de Cansinos Assens,” Borges particularly admires Cansinos' turn of phrase, the “easy grace of air” with which the latter's metaphors affect the reader. Contrary to the jarring metaphors and minimalist style—“the direct urgency of a dart”—of the Spanish Ultraists, Borges identifies Cansinos' writing as “more spacious and

²⁹⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, “Definición de Cansinos Assens,” *Inquisiciones*, 1925 (Madrid: Alianza, 1998) 52-3.

broad,” an almost impalpable characteristic, which Borges successfully integrates into his own voice in *FBA*.

As an older poet in his 30s, Cansinos-Assens, contrary to the Ultraist mainstream aesthetic, interrogated metaphysical concerns, while imbuing his poetry with a mature, contemplative tone. Much of the Ultraist poetry in Spain concentrated on the merits of shocking metaphors, acoustic elements and rapid visual superimposition of imagery. Xavier Bóveda’s “Tranvia,” for instance, exemplifies the atmospheric approach to the treatment of the urban theme:

Ro-ro-ro-ro-ro...
 Muerden los frenos
 ro-ro-ro-ro-ro
 las ruedas del tranvia
 que rueda cuesta abajo.
 Hay una curva
 y el carruaje rechina,
 iiiiiiiii;
 hasta que, luego,
 vuelve a coger su linea recta y corre
 úúúúú
 tan, tan, tan, tan,
 veloz en la mañana,
 El revisor anuncia la parada:
 tin.
 [...] ²⁹⁸

Bóveda’s depiction of the streetcar—a popular image for the Ultraists—is superficially sensorial and light. Grounded in onomatopoeia, the poem portrays a routine snapshot of the urban landscape—a streetcar finding its way around a curb in the daytime—with the emphasis on sound. With no physical description of the setting or the streetcar itself, the poem nevertheless succeeds in painting a vivid scene with onomatopoeia alone. Although

²⁹⁸ Xavier Bóveda, “El Tranvia,” *Grecia* 13 (Apr. 1919), *Poesías y Poéticas del Ultraísmo* 77.

Bóveda's "El Tranvia" does not closely adhere to the four basic Ultraist principles, it nevertheless encapsulates the Ultraists' quest for rendering imagery with visual and sound effects alone, eschewing confessionalism, introspective meditation or humanized perspective. Whereas other Ultraists largely reject the anecdotal narrative and metaphysical contemplation, Cansinos' poems thrive on these two elements. In particular, representative of these techniques are Cansinos' three linked poems discussed in this chapter: "Glorieta Incitante," which depicts a city traffic circle and meditates on the chaos of fragmentation and the multiplicity of life; "El Viaducto Avido y Quieto" continues the urban theme by focusing on the image of the viaduct as a bridge of two cities, synthesizing antitheses of life and death and connecting lives; and finally, "El Nuevo Arte" narrates the solipsistic quest of a poet, who, disillusioned by the chaotic life depicted in "Glorieta Incitante" finds solace in the art of Ultra. In an examination of these three poems, several traits and themes emerge—such as antithetical multiplicity of life, meditation on death and immortality, anecdotal narrative of the city—all of which, then, in some form, find their way into Borges' *FBA*.

Complementing the thematic significance of Cansinos' work is a considerable visual element; in this respect, Cansinos' poems are quintessentially Ultraist, as they depict common Ultraist imagery of electric light grappling with Nature or the vertiginous impressions of a speaker in the middle of a traffic circle at midday. To this end, Adriano del Valle's "Luces de la ciudad bajo la noche" dialogues with Cansinos' poetic approach:

Luces.
 Rosas de luces que se encienden
 en explosiones silenciosas
 hasta irrumpir en las retinas
 en mil fracasos,
 multiplicados por los horizontes

y por el inmenso estuario
 azul
 del mar.
 [...] ²⁹⁹

Dedicated “A Rafael Cansinos Assens, gran Maestro del ‘Ultra’,” the poem underscores the image of city lights, which figures prominently in Cansinos’ urban poetry.

Furthermore, Del Valle’s “Luces de la ciudad bajo la noche” closely parallels the light’s multitude depicted in Cansinos’ “Glorieta Incitante”:

[...]
 La Vida múltiple... Los ojos
 que quiren seguirlo todo, se dilatan
 y se rompen en luces innúmeras...
 las luces que irradian en su noche
 eléctrica, hasta las altas nubes
 acribilladas. ³⁰⁰

Yet while Del Valle’s “Luces” comprises a series of visual impressions and Ultraist metaphors, Cansinos’ “Glorieta” introduces visual multiplicity, synthesizing the images insofar as they illustrate and question broader conceptual underpinnings. The first poem in a sequential series of three works, “Glorieta” serves to lay the visual groundwork for “El Viaducto Avido y Quieto,” wherein Cansinos further dissects the philosophical component inherent in the image of a viaduct:

Suspendido y vibrante
 lanzado en un gran vuelo, el Viaducto,
 que quiere coger los ciudades
 desdeñoso de los grandes ríos,

²⁹⁹ Adriano del Valle y Rossi, “Luces de la ciudad bajo la noche,” *Grecia* Feb. 1919, *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 323.

³⁰⁰ Rafael Cansinos-Assens, “La Glorieta Incitante,” *Grecia* Dec. 1918, *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 92.

puente sobre los aires,
 estremecido como un cuerpo
 que se lanza en escorzo,
 atónito, incitado por la grande glorieta,
 ávido de coger las luces
 que irradian por allá,
 el Viaducto, trémulo,
 soñador de sueños que andan,
 es la gran hamaca
 para los hombres osados,
 resueltos e indecisos,
 por la misma vehemencia
 de su gran ambición: de los hombres audaces
 que en su rostro reflejan
 como en una ventana
 de cristales desnudos,
 la rosa de la vida, las mil luces
 de arriba y de abajo;
 las mujeres que pasan,
 lejanas, todo eso,
 el porvenir maravilloso inabarcable
 que por igual incita
 a vivir y a morir en un prodigo salto...³⁰¹

A thematic continuation of Cansinos' "La Glorieta incitante," "El Viaducto Avido y Quieto" depicts a viaduct, rich in antitheses, in its attempt to connect two cities. This bridge, interconnecting earth, water, and air, is a living being, "estremecido como un cuerpo" (line 6), "trémulo" (line 12). As suggested by the title, the viaduct synthesizes movement and stasis: it is a "soñador de sueños que andan" (line 12). A metonymy for the city, anthropomorphized and imbued with the capacity to dream (line 12), the viaduct is likened to a "gran hamaca" (line 13). Light emerges as a central complement to the image: in line 9, the viaduct seeks to encapsulate light into one point, while in line 21, light disperses into "las mil luces," echoing a similar image of multiplicity from "Glorieta

³⁰¹ Rafael Cansinos-Assens, "El Viaducto Avido y Quieto," *Grecia* Dec. 1918, *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 93.

incitante.” On the level of imagery, Borges’ “El Sur” from *FBA* parallels Cansinos’ “Viaducto”:

Desde uno de tus patios haber mirado
 las antiguas estrellas,
 desde el banco de
 la sombra haber mirado
 esas luces dispersas
 que mi ignorancia no ha aprendido a nombrar
 ni a ordenar en constelaciones,
 haber sentido el círculo del agua
 en el secreto aljibe,
 el olor del jazmin y la madre selva,
 el silencio del pájaro dormido,
 el arco del zanguán, la humedad
 --esas cosas, acaso, son el poema.³⁰²

Sensorial in the vein of his own early Ultraist work, Borges’ “El Sur” showcases Cansinos’ signature image of “luces dispersas” (line 5), which visually interconnect the three Cansinos poems. Borges’ thirteen lines of free verse in “El Sur” also reveal a significant structural similarity to Cansinos’ “Viaducto”: initially reveling in variegated sensory images—stars in line 2, the sound of water in the cistern in lines 8 and 9, the scent of jasmine and honeysuckle in line 10—the speaker then shifts his focus in the last line, as he questions whether those images—“esas cosas”—are, in and of themselves, a poem. Cansinos’ “Viaducto” embodies this structural narrative progression, as the speaker begins with a focused, concrete image of the viaduct in its surroundings, defining and recasting it several times before zooming out toward a metaphysical ending of the last three lines: “todo eso, / el porvenir maravilloso inabarcable / que por igual incita / a vivir y a morir en un prodigo salto...”

³⁰² Jorge Luis Borges, “El Sur,” *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1923, *Selected Poems* 8.

Structural juxtaposition of the city's sensory impact on the speaker with a metaphysical meditation as the concluding portion of the poem emerges most patently in Borges' "Calle desconocida"; the first person speaker documents the impressions of his evening walk "a la iniciación de la tarde / cuando la sombra no entorpece los pasos" (lines 2-3),³⁰³ echoing the twilight setting of "Glorieta Incitante" and "Viaducto." In the first half of the poem, the intimate narrative takes the reader through "una calle ignorada / abierta en noble anchura de terraza, cuyas cornisas y paredes mostraban / colores blandos como el mismo cielo" (lines 9-12). In lines 14 through 16, Borges invokes Ultraist enumeration ("Todos—la medianía de las casas, / las modestas balaustradas y llamadores, / tal vez una esperanza de niña en los balcones"), as the speaker ponders the city's multiplicity and the intrinsic individuality of each isolated image. Line 23, then, marks the beginning of the second part of "Calle desconocida," wherein the speaker adds a retrospective reflection on his earlier experience: "Sólo después reflexioné / que aquella calle de la tarde era ajena, / que toda casa es un candelabro / donde las vidas de los hombres arden / como velas aisladas, / que todo inmeditado paso nuestro / camina sobre Gólgotas" (lines 23-29). In a way, "Calle desconocida" coins what was to become a quintessentially Borgesian narrative structure, both in poetry and prose: an intimate first-person narration rich in focused imagery, segueing toward a meditation on the universal condition; the influence of Cansinos-Assens is likely crucial to Borges' experimentation with this narrative pattern in *FBA*.

In addition to exhibiting the structural influences of Cansinos' writing, *FBA* marks Borges' patent move toward a more mature, pensive, at times melancholy, tone. In

³⁰³ Jorge Luis Borges, "Calle Desconocida," *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1923, *Selected Poems* 10.

this respect, Cansinos' influence also emerges; in a letter to Julio Cejador, Cansinos-Assens discusses the themes which shaped his own writing:

Tendría entonces trece años. [...] Empecé a escribir a esa edad, para desahogar mis sentimientos, cosas tristes—la orfandad, la nostalgia de la tierra, quizá la melancolía ancestral, si es cierto el origen judaico de mi familia--.³⁰⁴

This melancholy contemplation of “cosas tristes” characterizes the tone of many of Cansinos' poems from the late 1910s; specifically, in “Nuevo Arte”—the third poem in the *trifecta*—the speaker contemplates the passing of time, aging, and mortality:

El poeta de cuarenta años,
estaba sentado, al borde de la mesa
y tenía el codo hundido,
doblado, roto en un largo gasto.
En su mano apoyaba la mejilla
y lo miraba todo, definitivamente,
con la ternura del último adios:
y sus ojos abrían hoyos en las cosas
para enterrarse en ellas...
En su cara se reflejaban las mil luces
y las mil sonrisas inquietas
como se reflejaba la vida en la gran soledad...
Estaba así sentado para siempre,
tendido como una laguna: mas de pronto,
de pronto se levantó... Y fue terrible
sentir crujir sus huesos...
Parecía ir a dormir ya
su sueño en el sepulcro... que no tornaría mas...
Pero él se erguía para ir hacia la vida,
para buscar en ella las antorchas
que brillaban en los espejos y sacarlas
de estas sus aguas frías;
para ver nacer la aurora
que alboreaba en los espejos
y lavarse de toda antigüedad
con el rocío del alba...
Y llegó a la glorieta,

³⁰⁴ Julio Cejador, *Historia de la Lengua y Literatura Castellana*, Vol. 13, (Madrid: N.p., 1920) 202. Qtd. in Ramón Oteo Sans, *Cansinos-Assens: Entre el Modernismo y la Vanguardia* 19.

atravesó el viaducto, se vio envuelto
 por la vida terrible, tórrida como un mediodía...
 Mujeres pasaban... y sus tristes
 cuarenta años eran pocos para seguirlos...
 Su corazón temblaba en una gran congoja;
 sentía la inquietud de las adúlteras:
 y la gravidez de un canto nuevo.
 Dijo: “Ultra,” éste será mi arte,
 cantar este deslumbramiento,
 que me torna atónito y ávido,
 me encadena y me lanza,
 como a una gran casa que vibra;
 cantar el más allá, que yo presiento
 en mi pecho que angustia el porvenir;
 cantarlo todo esto, irradiarme,
 multiplicar mis cuarenta años,
 cantar esto tan solo,
 esta inquietud estática,
 las sonrisas que me laceran,
 las miradas que me arrastran,
 cual si yo fuese el tiempo,
 irradiarme como la gran glorieta
 traspasada,
 aunque deba caer
 para siempre,
 desde el alto Viaducto, con los miembros
 abiertos en pétalos maravillosos.³⁰⁵

“Nuevo Arte” epitomizes Cansinos’ anti-Ultra anecdotal narrative style. The poem comprises three parts, the first two of which feature a third-person speaker, with the third part switching into first person direct speech of “el poeta de cuarenta años.” The first section—lines 1 through 18—begins with the poet in a state of perpetual melancholy and stasis—“tendido como una laguna” (line 14). Antithetical to the whirlwind action in “Glorieta Incitante,” wherein myriad city elements and crowds of people surround the speaker, in “Nuevo Arte” this vertiginous multitude is but a memory; the speaker’s face has synthesized “las mil luces” (line 10), echoing the same image in both “Glorieta” and

³⁰⁵ Rafael Cansinos-Assens, “El Nuevo Arte,” *Grecia* Dec. 1918, *Poesías y Poética del Ultraísmo* 93-4.

“Viaducto,” and yet the speaker finds himself in a state of great loneliness (line 12). The poet is then on the brink of death (lines 17-18), ushering in the second part of the poem, as he lifts himself up toward movement and renewal. The image of dawn encapsulated by mirrors in line 24 likely resonated with Borges in particular; as the speaker undergoes a metamorphosis, standing on the doorstep of a new artistic era, he washes away the old and the outdated with the morning dew. Lines 27 through 34 are a flashback to the chaotic midday depiction in “Glorieta Incitante.” As the speaker arrives at the traffic circle and crosses the viaduct—images treated at length in “Glorieta” and “Viaducto”—he finds himself enveloped by “la vida terrible” (line 29). Overwhelmed with distress and sorrow, the poet begins an apostrophe in line 35, thereby marking the beginning of the third part of the poem. He speaks of a new art —“Ultra”—which invigorates and inspires him; despite his anxiety as he faces the future, the speaker vehemently extols the intrinsic revelations of his new-found mode of expression. Liberated, the poet foresees a state of immortality—a perpetual weightlessness and exhilaration evoked by the closing image of the speaker’s falling off the viaduct “con los miembros / abiertos en pétalos maravillosos” (line 54).

Cansinos’ treatment of the theme of time and a longing for immortality likely had a profound impact on the young Borges. Veering away from the sensorial exercises in metaphor, Borges—rather suddenly—adopts a deep preoccupation with death and a concerted hyperawareness of temporality in *FBA*. Seemingly, Borges appropriates many of Cansinos’ “cosas tristes”; in *FBA*, these influences translate into several emerging themes: a general meditation on death and mortality, the mystery of time and an underlying existential anxiety evident in the impossibility of foretelling the future, and

immortality as achieved by interrelation among generations. “Remordimiento por cualquier muerte,” for example, contemplates the metaphysics of death: “el muerto no es un muerto: es la muerte. / Como el Dios de los místicos, / de Quien deben negarse todos los predicados, / el muerto ubicuamente ajeno / no es sino la perdición y ausencia del mundo” (lines 3-7)³⁰⁶; the tone and theme of the poem are rather morbid for a poet in his early 20s, departing abruptly from the sensorial explorations and neutral themes of Borges’ earlier works. “La Recoleta” further betrays Borges’ preoccupation with death and passage of time; like “Nuevo Arte,” “La Recoleta” interweaves the visual elements—“Bellos son los sepulcros, / el desnudo latín y las trabadas fechas fatales, / la conjunción del mármol y de la flor / y las plazuelas con frescura de patio” (lines 8-11)³⁰⁷—with contemplations of time—“y los muchos ayeres de la historia / hoy detenida y única” (lines 12-13). In a similar vein, “Nuevo Arte” thrives on visual imagery, such as the closing image of the poet’s fall from the viaduct, arms akimbo, which underscores the speaker’s sense of immortality: “cual si yo fuese el tiempo” (line 48). In an intimate anecdotal narrative, the speaker of “La Recoleta” conveys his awe, confessing a certain sense of modesty as he admits it is impossible to understand fully life’s “milagro incomprensible” (line 31). This sentiment echoes the contemplative, modest tone of Cansinos’ trifecta of poems; “Viaducto” closes with a declaration of a “porvenir maravilloso inabarcable” (line 25), while “Nuevo Arte” parallels this line with poet’s anxiety regarding the future (lines 40-41). Cansinos’ sense of wonder and contemplation of the future emerge clearly in Borges’ “Final de año,” wherein the speaker hypothesizes

³⁰⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, “Remordimiento por cualquier muerte,” *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1923, *Selected Poems* 20.

³⁰⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, “La Recoleta,” *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1923, *Selected Poems* 6.

that one's sense of awe is derived from "la sospecha general y borrosa / del enigma del Tiempo; / es el asombro ante el milagro / de que a despecho de infinitos azares, / de que a despecho de que somos / las gotas del río de Heráclito, perdure algo en nosotros: inmóvil" (lines 11-18).³⁰⁸ In "Nuevo Arte" this intrinsic stasis, despite time's perpetual forward motion, is "la inquietud estática" (line 45), in contrast to the cyclical movement of the *glorieta*, and the speaker's downward motion of the fall—"para siempre" (line 52)—into timelessness.

The concept of immortality—so poignantly rendered in "Nuevo Arte"—takes center stage thematically in Borges' *FBA*, as well as in his subsequent poetry. Yet, while Cansinos' poet-protagonist finds immortality through the "canto" of the Ultra art, Borges contemplates the theme in terms of continuity among generations—or "la melancolía ancestral," which Cansinos credits as a definitive influence on his own beginnings as a writer. As asserted by Kefala, "[t]he immortalization of the *orillas* goes hand in hand with the immortalization of the (founding) fathers"³⁰⁹ in *FBA*; insofar as poems like "Calle Desconocida" and "La Recoleta" meditate on the immortality of the landscape of the outskirts, another set of poems in *FBA* proposes an exploration of immortality by invoking past generations in their dialogue with the temporality of the present. In the closing lines of "Inscripción en cualquier sepulcro," Borges proffers the following definition of immortality: "Ciegamente reclama duración el alma arbitraria / cuando la tiene asegurada en vidas ajenas, / cuando tú mismo eres el espejo y la réplica / de quienes no alcanzaron tu tiempo / y otros serán (y son) tu inmortalidad en la tierra" (lines 11-

³⁰⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, "Final del año," *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1923, *Selected Poems* 18.

³⁰⁹ Kefala 46.

15).³¹⁰ Borges had begun this contemplation of immortality and the theme of ancestral continuity in his “Sala vacía,” discussed in the previous chapter as one of only two full poems republished in *FBA* from Borges’ Ultraist set of works. The delicate conflict between a faintly rendered past and the vertigo of the present emerges in “Sala vacía”:

Desde hace largo tiempo
sus angustiadas voces nos buscan
y ahora apenas están
en las mañanas iniciales de nuestra infancia.
La luz del día de hoy
exalta los cristales de la ventana
desde la calle de clamor y de vértigo
y arrincona y apaga la voz lacia
de los antepasados.³¹¹

Cansinos’ “El Nuevo Arte” similarly associates the present moment with the chaos of a busy street, as the speaker, “para ver nacer la aurora” (line 23), rises out of the stasis of the past and comes into contact with the vertiginous present—“la vida terrible, tórrida como un mediodía” (line 29). In “Sala vacía,” the dawn of a new day, along with elements of the city cast in a negative light, is in contrast with the stasis of a time stopped in a mirror (line 6), reflecting the positive serenity of the interior space and the speaker’s own anxiety and hesitation before the future. An early treatment of “la melancolía ancestral,” “Sala vacía” prefigures what would become a quintessentially Borgesian theme, which he develops further in “Inscripción en cualquier sepulcro,” “Inscripción

³¹⁰ In her analysis of “Inscripción en cualquier sepulcro,” Kefala further explores the distinctions in Borges’ quest to define immortality in *FBA*: “In the poem, Borges indicates that the connection link between the founding fathers and the community is to be found not in the particularities that governed the former’s lives (‘nombre,’ ‘opinión,’ ‘acontecimientos,’ ‘patria’), which are left in the dark, but in what they could have in common with the rest of the community (‘—la tremula esperanza, / el milagro implacable del dolor y el asombroso del goce’), thus yoking together the nation both vertically and horizontally.” 47.

³¹¹ Jorge Luis Borges, “Sala vacía,” *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1923, *Selected Poems* 16.

sepulchral (Para mi bisabuelo, el coronel Isidoro Suarez),” among many others of his later poetic career.³¹² In contrast to the speaker in “El Nuevo Arte,” who bridges the past and the future with the “deslumbramiento” (line 56) of new art and renewal, Borges’ speaker in poems such as “Sala vacía” and “Inscripción en cualquier sepulcro” conveys a sense of deep longing and nostalgia for the timeless past; this early sentiment appears as an underlying theme in Borges’ later work, oftentimes grounding it in explorations of the past, rather than the present or the future.

A hesitant participant in the extremist Ultraist aesthetic from the outset, Borges appropriated various influences to forge his own poetic voice, which would stand apart from the rigid Ultraist agenda. To this end, Cansinos-Assens provided a distinctive parent-voice for Borges, applying vanguardist concepts to a more universalized aesthetic and combined—in poems like “El Nuevo Arte”—avant-garde poetic principles with a narrative element. Borges views the experience of reading Cansinos-Assens as “la más intensa y asombrosa de las emociones estéticas.”³¹³ Further expressing this admiration, Borges writes “A Rafael Cansinos Asséns,” which evidences the deep friendship between the two poets. The opening line of the poem pays homage to Cansinos’ image of the viaduct: “Larga y final andanza sobre la exaltación arrebatada del ala del viaducto.”

Borges also laments the transatlantic separation:

[...]
 Es trágica la entraña del adiós como de todo acontecer en que
 es notorio el Tiempo.
 Es duro realizar que ni tendremos en común las estrellas.
 Cuando la tarde sea quietud en mi patio, de tus cuartillas

³¹² For a discussion of Borges’ sepulchral inscriptions in the context of nation-building and immortality, see Kefala 47.

³¹³ Borges, “Definición de Cansinos Asséns,” *Inquisiciones* 54.

surgirá la mañana.
 Será la sombra de mi verano tu invierno y tu luz será gloria de
 mi sombra.
 Aún persistimos juntos.
 Aún las dos voces logran convener, como la intensidad y la
 ternura en las puestas del sol.³¹⁴

In a discussion of Borges' admiration for Cansinos-Asséns, Guillermo de Torre contends that their affinity "desborda límites y se mantuvo intacta a través de los años. Se explica que sea así puesto que probablemente tal devoción se cimenta, más que en lecturas y confrontaciones, en reminiscencias personales agrandadas, embellecidas por la distancia de 'años y leguas'." ³¹⁵ The voices of the two poets, as Borges writes in the closing lines of "A Cansinos Assens," transcend the physical separation and manage to come together "like intensity and like tenderness in sunsets," insofar as Cansinos' voice remains an enduring part of Borges' poetic project.

³¹⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, "A Rafael Cansinos Assens," *Proa* Aug. 1924, *Textos Recobrados* 239-40.

³¹⁵ De Torre, "Para la Prehistoria Ultraísta de Borges" 460.

CONCLUSION

An examination of Borges' dialogue with the European avant-garde illuminates the fundamental components of the unique Borgesian aesthetic. Despite Borges' omission of his earliest poetry from his *Personal Anthology*, and his view of Ultraism as bearing the basic flaw of impoverishing literature, rather than enriching it, Borges' contact with Spain serves to form and define his poetic trajectory. The relationship which Borges forges with the European vanguard is mutually beneficial; in his search to systemize the vision of poetic innovation, Borges becomes an Ultraist theorizer, while the poetry he publishes provides a platform for experimentation. In his rejection of *modernismo*, Borges seeks to integrate the Ultraist doctrine—with a focus on veering away from confessionalism and toward an aesthetic grounded in metaphor—into his own writing, as evidenced by the relatively extensive body of work Borges publishes while in Spain. And yet, as Borges transitions toward the synthesis of his own intimately universal aesthetic grounded in nationalist discourse and *criollismo*, he rejects the vanguard in a similar manner to the repudiation of 'ancestral voices' carried out by the Ultraists. As proposed by Hugo Monte, "Borges invirtió la fórmula vanguardista y dio preferencia a la perfección sobre la originalidad, a la emoción—a menudo tocada de intelectualidad y hasta de abstracción—sobre la sorpresa, a un curioso localismo universal por encima de la beligerancia."³¹⁶ This 'inversion' of the avant-garde paradigm is most apparent in Borges' transition from the early set of twenty-eight poems discussed in the present study

³¹⁶ Hugo Montes, "Borges y la Poesía de Vanguardia," *Estudios Filológicos* 14 (1979):143.

to his publication of *FBA* in 1923. This shift in poetics constitutes a defining moment in Borges' career, as he consciously fashions himself as an Argentine poet, rather than emphasizing the transatlantic vanguardist element of his previous publications. The question, then, becomes—to what extent, despite the overt repudiation of the doctrine's most patent characteristics, is Borges' aesthetic influenced, if not defined, by the avant-garde?

Borges' evolving poetic voice of his post-vanguard period is, at least in part, guided by the very rejection of his own 'precursor' self. Undergoing "self-purgation which intends the attainment of a state of solitude,"³¹⁷ Borges rejects his own poetry of the Ultraist period, insisting on this act of separation from the 'precursor' influence. Borges' own early poetry, however, constitutes a synthesis of aesthetic concerns, thematic elements, and images which continue to remain on the forefront of his subsequent poetry, as well as to shape—whether overtly or with profound subtlety—the aesthetic of Borges as poet and writer. As proposed by Zunilda Gertel, Borges' fundamental literary aesthetic is grounded in "[e]l ejercicio consciente de la literatura como una disciplina perfectible, es decir, una constante búsqueda en la que no es posible hallar la perfección absoluta, pero sí la posibilidad de lo perfeccionable," as well as a quest for "[l]a autenticidad para con sus principios y la fidelidad a éstos, aunque ello signifique la contradicción de anteriores afirmaciones."³¹⁸ Borges begins the contemplation of these two basic elements of literature during his involvement in Ultraism—a reactionary movement based on a rejection of the limiting, 'inauthentic'

³¹⁷ Bloom 15. Bloom proposes that in the process of *askesis*, the poet "yields up part of his own human and imaginative endowment, so as to separate himself from others, including the precursor, [...]." 15.

³¹⁸ Gertel 44.

expression afforded by *modernista* poetics and a search for a poetic language which would enable the attainment of ‘absolute perfection.’ Meditation on this quest appears in Borges’ theoretical publications delineating Ultraist precepts, wherein Borges proposes the necessary linguistic changes—precision in expression, rejection of superfluous connectors and adjectives, reliance on visual-sensory metaphor—which purport to effect a poetic aesthetic capable of ‘authenticity.’ Furthermore, Borges treats these concerns thematically in his early poems, such as “Poema,” which addresses the futility of a poet’s destiny, or “Himno del Mar,” whose speaker grapples with the impossibility of mimetic encapsulation of the Sea’s vastness. In an examination of this early material, it is evident that Borges’ mature aesthetic is a reiterative quest grounded in elements and themes raised by the avant-garde.

Borges’ rejection of his Ultraist period may be attributed to a multifaceted set of reasons; primarily, however, it appears that Borges viewed these poems as exercises in experimentation, derivative in their ‘excessive’ precursor influence or otherwise limited by Ultraist ideology. This proves to be the case with “Himno del Mar,” which Borges deems “third-rate grandiose” on account of its larger-than-life Whitmanesque speaker and ambitious length and scope of the poem—traits which no longer resonate with the mature Borges aesthetic following its post-Ultraism metamorphosis. Similarly, Borges’ war-themed poems recast the profound influence of German Expressionism, which had appealed to Borges in its aesthetic of renovation and, more importantly, in its theme of suffering and solidarity of mankind. Applying these themes and images of military conflict to depict the Russian Revolution, Borges produces a set of poems which fail to resonate with emotional impact. Carlos Meneses sees this set of poems—“Poemas en

rojo”—as the central reason for Borges’ rejection of his avant-garde beginnings: “el error de juventud de haber escrito algunos poemas cantando o simplemente mencionando a la revolución rusa, había que evitar que trascendiera, que despertara comentarios y para ello nada mejor que cortar con ese pasado.”³¹⁹ Borges’ poems from the Ultraist period—those treating the theme of the Bolshevik revolution and others, which adhere to the themes and methods of Ultraism—betray a certain stylized cautiousness of expression, attributable, in the words of Carlos Meneses, not to “superficialidad, sino inmadurez.”³²⁰ In part, these stylistic and thematic issues account for Borges’ omission of these texts from his canon.

Borges’ profound integration into the Spanish avant-garde—as underscored by the rich dialogue with his Ultraist contemporaries—constitutes both the cause for his subsequently adamant rejection of the movement and a springboard for experimentation, which serves as the point of departure in Borges’ search for authenticity. Representing Ultraism on the pages of theoretical manifestos, Borges then applies the principles of linguistic reduction and shocking juxtaposition of imagery lauded by the poetics of the European avant-garde. Furthermore, Borges espouses the Ultraist demand for innovative typography and suppressed punctuation. As noted by Gloria Videla, Ultraists promulgated “una disposición tipográfica moderada, que consiste en reemplazar la puntuación (suprimida casi siempre en sus poemas), por blancos y espacios o por versos escalonados”; this deliberate positioning of words within a poem, Videla points out, “tiene casi siempre una función expresiva.”³²¹ Although Borges’ espousal of innovation in typography in his Ultraist poems is not as extreme as that of most of his

³¹⁹ Carlos Meneses, *Poesía Juvenil de Jorge Luis Borges* 26.

³²⁰ Ibid. 26.

³²¹ Videla 112.

contemporaries—such as Guillermo de Torre, Adriano del Valle y Rossi or Pedro Ralda Ysmaya—this particular element of the avant-garde campaign for linguistic renovation constitutes perhaps one of the most compelling reasons for Borges’ rejection of the movement. In an interview with Fernando Sorrentino in 1972, Borges states: “I don’t believe in any school which starts by impoverishing things. And I believe Ultraism’s error—except that Ultraism is of no importance—was that of not having enriched, of having simply forbidden. For example: we, almost all of us, were writing without punctuation marks. It would have been much more interesting to invent new punctuation marks, that is, to enrich literature.”³²² Avant-garde typography and suppression of punctuation, then, epitomize for Borges the superficiality of Ultraism’s attempt at innovation, and, consequently, cause Borges to repudiate completely these ‘failed’ constraints of poetic expression.

While adhering to the mechanics of expression proposed by the Ultraists, Borges’ poems also interrogate the predominant themes of the avant-garde—urbanization and cityscape in the context of post-war industrialization, as well as the urgency of flight and velocity spurred by the onslaught of technological innovation. Borges’ “Insomnio,” for example, encapsulates the avant-garde theme of urban asphyxiation, as the speaker comes into psychological and physical conflict with the urban space. Borges renders the speaker’s experience with particular intensity, imbuing the tone with a sense of anxiety characteristic of vanguardist poetics. Furthermore, “Insomnio” is quintessentially avant-garde in its emphasis on juxtaposition of shocking metaphors and seemingly unrelated images, forging a tone of radical innovation and urgency of purpose. Similarly, Borges’

³²² Jorge Luis Borges, *Seven Conversations with Fernando Sorrentino*, tr. Clark M. Zlotchew (Troy, NY: Whitson Publishing Company, 1982) 11.

other explicitly ‘urban’ poems, such as “Norte” and “Tranvia,” depict the inherent conflict between speaker and metropolis, yielding a sense of claustrophobia and a disorienting fragmentation of perspective. This portrayal of the cityscape differs markedly from Borges’ intimate meditations on a mythical Buenos Aires, contemplating metaphysical concerns in a controlled, personal narrative. With the publication of *FBA*, Borges permanently segues away from Spanish Ultraist themes of conflict and radical intensity, in favor of a voice grounded in nostalgia and metaphysics.

This substantial shift in tone and theme evident in *FBA*, as I have argued, may be attributed to Borges’ coming under the literary influence of Rafael Cansinos-Assens, whose writing Borges greatly admired while in Spain. Specifically, Cansinos-Assens’ treatment of the city as a multi-layered, mythical space, capable of evoking in the speaker an introspective meditation on themes such as life’s multiplicity and immortality, resonates with Borges’ search for authenticity during the transitional period in his poetics. Thus, while rejecting the quintessentially avant-garde themes of the Futurist metropolis or the celebration of flight and velocity, Borges’ aesthetic adopts another ‘Ultraist’ influence in the form of Cansinos-Assens. This point of transatlantic contact emerges as crucial in the discussion of Borges’ early influences and the aesthetic evolution of his poetic voice. Cansinos-Assens’ poetry—enriched by his ideological essays and prominence within the Spanish Ultraist movement—constitutes a foundational ‘precursor’ voice for Borges’ poetics. Although Borges’ (mis)reading of Cansinos-Assens and the interrelationship inherent in the works of these two poets have inspired relatively limited critical attention, an examination of this affinity and the influence it yields elucidates the evolution of Borges’ poetic voice.

The attainment of an ‘ultra-reality’—a poetic space which enables the purity of art through visual-sensory experience—emerges as another prominent influence of vanguardist poetics on Borges’ earliest works, as well as on his later writing. As proposed by Ortega y Gasset, the purpose of ‘new’ art is to “conjure up imaginary worlds,”³²³ eschewing the duplication of reality and the “human drama” of confessionality. For Borges, this tenet of the vanguardist campaign for ‘pure’ art resonates profoundly, as his earliest Ultraist poetry shifts away from “lived” reality and, rather, succeeds in effecting a poetic space which evokes “secondary passions,” or aesthetic sentiments. Borges attains this ultra-reality in his early poems, such as “Mañana,” “Catedral,” “Fiesta,” or “Prismas (Acordes—Mendicantes—Ciudad—Pueblo),” through emphasis on the primacy of image—or a series of images—juxtaposed in relation to one another so as to achieve an Ultraist aesthetic space. In this respect, Borges’ earliest poetry dialogues with that of his Ultraist contemporaries—the works of Pedro Garfias, José Rivas Panedas, Gerardo Diego, Rafael Cansinos-Assens, and others examined in this study—whose poetics espouse the avant-garde paradigm, seeking to conjure up a visual-sensory purity of poetic experience. The ‘imaginary worlds’ of Borges’ early poems hinge, in part, upon the use of the vanguardist *imagen múltiple*—a composite metaphor comprising two or more disparate images, coinciding into one ‘reality’—to effect a third dimension akin to music; such an amalgamated image unlocks one of the core principles of Ultraist poetics proposed by Borges: a poem’s power of suggestion. Borges’ poetic ‘ultra-reality’ further derives its visual-sensory impact from the Ultraist “yo”—a camera-eye which enables the continuous succession of images in the vein of lyrical cinema. This prismatic, depersonalized speaker serves to effect a dream-like trance, conjuring up the aesthetic

³²³ Ortega y Gasset 48.

space of Borges' 'Ultraist' poems. In his mature poetry and, perhaps more so, in Borges' short stories, the artificial "yo" emerges to narrate such a visual-sensory perspective. Borges' first-person speaker in stories such as "The Aleph" echoes the cinematic "yo" of his Ultraist poetry; furthermore, in the vast majority of the short stories—as is the case in "The Circular Ruins," for instance—Borges forges an ultra-reality—a space, which, in essence, eludes reality entirely—through juxtaposition of purely visual images, following the template of an Ultraist poem. As Borges' aesthetic evolves, the visual poetic experience inherent in the Ultraist campaign for art's purity anchors Borges' 'imaginary worlds.'

A surface examination of Borges' mature poetry—with the initial shift marked by the publication of *FBA*—yields the elements which characterize Borges' overt rejection of the European avant-garde: absence of the vanguardist typographical innovation, normalized punctuation, autobiographical first-person speaker, introspection and confessionalism, a perspective grounded in memory and nostalgia. And yet, the fundamentals of Ultraism—and, furthermore, paradoxically Borges' rejection thereof—subtly shape Borges' aesthetic and define the evolution of his voice. Moreover, the prominent themes of Borges' career—metaphysical speculation, poverty of language, interconnectedness among generations, author-reader dialectic, literary and poetic sensibility—all arise in Borges' Ultraist poetry and prose publications, only to be refined throughout Borges' lifelong search for perfectibility. Hence, the vanguardist elements that Borges rejects outright comprise the rather superficial notions of linguistic innovation through typography or jarring imagery; however, the fundamental spirit of the avant-garde—and, in particular, of Spanish Ultraism—remains an indelible part of

Borges' aesthetic. "Los verdaderos adictos a nuestra tendencia amanecen un día ultraístas y se duermen al siguiente antiultraístas,"³²⁴ states an Ultraist mantra; and so, in rejecting its basic premise, Borges purifies his poetics of the constraints imposed by the avant-garde, yet, nevertheless, remains Ultraism's true adherent.

³²⁴ *Ultra* 30 May 1921.

APPENDIX

Poems contributed by Borges to Spanish journals: 1919-1923

This study collects Borges' early poetry published in Spanish Ultraist magazines: *Ultra*, *Grecia*, *Baleares*, *Tableros*, *Gran Guignol*, and *Cosmópolis*. The original Spanish versions of these poems have been compiled as part of *Textos Recobrados: 1919-1929*, ed. Sara Luisa del Carril (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1997). To my knowledge, none of these poems has ever been published in English translation; the lack of availability of these texts in English limits the scope of scholarly examination of this understudied period in Borges' poetics. The aim of the present compilation, then, is to enable further critical dialogue on Borges' involvement in the avant-garde by collecting, systemizing, and translating all of Borges' published poems in Spain from 1919 to 1923.

The following twenty-nine Borges poems—each accompanied by my English translation— appear in this study:

1. "Himno del mar" (*Grecia*, no. 37, Dec. 31, 1919)
2. "Motivos del espacio y del tiempo" (*Gran Guignol*, no. 3, Apr. 24, 1920)
3. "Trinchera" (*Grecia*, no. 43, June 1, 1920)
4. "Hermanos" (*Grecia*, no. 45, July 1, 1920)
5. "Señal" (*Grecia*, no. 46, July 15, 1920)
6. "Rusia" (Manuscript poem, a prose version of which appears in *Grecia*, no. 48, Sept. 1, 1920; *poema autógrafa* version published in *Metrópolis*, no. 3, June 1931)
7. "Insomnio" (*Grecia*, no. 49, Sept. 15, 1920)
8. "Poema" (*Baleares*, no. 121, Sept. 15, 1920)
9. "Mañana" (*Ultra*, no. 1, Jan. 27, 1921)

10. "Aldea" (*Ultra*, no. 3, Feb. 10, 1921)
11. "Catedral" (*Baleares*, no. 131, Feb. 15, 1921, later reprinted in *Ultra*)
12. "Gesta maximalista" (*Ultra*, no. 3, Feb. 20, 1921)
13. "Prismas (Acordes—Mendicates—Ciudad—Pueblo)" (*Ultra*, no. 4, March 1, 1921)
14. "Guardia roja" (*Ultra*, no. 5, March 17, 1921, later reprinted in *Tableros*)
15. "Tranvías" (*Ultra*, no. 6, March 30, 1921)
16. "Norte" (*Ultra*, no. 7, April 10, 1921)
17. "Cingladura" (*Ultra*, no. 8, April 20, 1921)
18. "Distancia" (*Ultra*, no. 9, April 30, 1921)
19. "Atardecer" (*Ultra*, no. 14, June 20, 1921, reprinted in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* as part of "Atardeceres")
20. "Fiesta" (*Ultra*, no. 15, June 30, 1921)
21. "Arrabal" (*Cosmópolis*, no. 32, Aug. 1921, reprinted in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* with variations)
22. "Catedral" (*Ultra*, no. 19, Dec. 1, 1921, previously published in *Baleares* with minor variations)
23. "Último rojo sol" (*Ultra*, no. 20, Dec. 15, 1921)
24. "Montaña" (*Tableros*, no. 2, Dec. 15, 1921)
25. "Aldea" (*Ultra*, no. 21, Jan. 1, 1922)
26. "Escaparate Porcelana" (*Tableros*, no. 3, Jan. 15, 1922)
27. "Prismas: Sala vacía" (*Ultra*, no. 22, Jan. 15, 1922, republished in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* as "Sala vacía")
28. "Tarde Lacia" (*Tableros*, no. 4, Feb. 28, 1922)
29. "Siesta" (*Ultra*, no. 24, March 15, 1922)

Himno del mar

Para Adriano del Valle

Yo he ansiado un himno del Mar con ritmos amplios como las
 olas que gritan;
 Del Mar cuando el sol en sus aguas cual bandera escarlata
 flamea;
 Del Mar cuando besa los pechos dorados de vírgenes playas
 que aguardan sedientas;
 Del Mar al aullar sus mesnadas, al lanzar sus blasfemias los
 vientos,
 Cuando brilla en las aguas de acero la luna bruñida y sangrienta;
 Del Mar cuando vierte sobre él su tristeza sin fondo
 La Copa de Estrellas.

Hoy he bajado de la montaña al valle
 y del valle hasta el mar.

El camino fue largo como un beso.
 Los almendros lanzaban madejas azuladas de sombra sobre la
 carretera
 y, al terminar el valle, el sol
 gritó rubios Golcondas sobre tu glauca selva: ¡Mar!
 ¡Hermano, Padre, Amado...!
 Entro al jardín enorme de tus aguas y nado lejos de la tierra.
 Las olas vienen con cimera frágil de espuma,
 En fuga hacia el fracaso. Hacia la costa,
 Con sus picachos rojos,
 Con sus casa geométricas,
 Con sus palmeras de juguete,
 Que ahora se han vuelto lívidos y absurdos como recuerdos
 yertos!
 Yo estoy contigo, Mar. Y mi cuerpo tendido como un arco
 lucha contra tus músculos raudos. Solo tú existes.
 Mi alma desecha todo su pasado
 Como en nórdico cielo que se deshoja en copos
 errantes!

Oh instante de plenitud magnífica;
 Antes de conocerte, Mar hermano,
 Largamente he vagado por errantes calles azules con oriflamas
 de faroles

Y en la sagrada media noche yo he tejido guirnaldas
 De besos sobre carnes y labios que se ofrendaban,
 Solemnes de silencio,
 En una floración
 Sangrienta...
 Pero ahora yo hago don a los vientos
 De todas esas cosas pretéritas,
 pretéritas... Sólo tú existes.
 Atlético y desnudo. Sólo este fresco aliento y estas olas,
 y las Copas Azules, y el milagro de las Copas Azules.
 (Yo he soñado un himno del Mar con ritmos amplios como
 las olas jadeantes.)

Ansío aún crearte un poema
 Con la cadencia adámica de tu oleaje,
 Con tu salino y primeral aliento,
 Con el trueno de las anclas sonoras ante Thulés ebrias de luz y
 lepra,
 Con voces marineras, luces y ecos
 De grietas abismales
 Donde tus raudas manos monjiles acarician constantemente
 a los muertos...
 Un himno
 Constelado de imágenes rojas, lumínicas.

Oh mar! oh mito! oh sol! oh largo lecho!
 Y sé por qué te amo. Sé que somos muy viejos.
 Que ambos nos conocemos desde siglos.
 Sé que en tus aguas venerandas y rientes ardió la aurora de la
 Vida.
 (En la ceniza de una tarde terciaria vibré por vez primera en
 tu seno).
 Oh proteico, yo he salido de ti.
 Ambos encadenados y nómadas;
 Ambos con una sed intensa de estrellas;
 Ambos con esperanza y desengaños;
 Ambos, aire, luz, fuerza, obscuridades;
 Ambos con nuestro vasto deseo y ambos con nuestra grande
 miseria!

Hymn to the Sea

For Adriano del Valle

I have longed for a hymn to the Sea with rhythms broad like the
 waves that cry out;
 To the Sea when the sun's scarlet flag flutters in its waters;
 To the Sea when it kisses the golden breasts of virgin beaches which thirstily await it;
 To the Sea when its men-at-arms wail, when the wind hurls its blasphemies,
 When the bloody polished moon shines in the steely waters;
 To the Sea when the Goblet of Stars
 Spills out its bottomless sadness on it.

Today I've come down from the mountain to the valley
 and from the valley to the sea.

The path was long like a kiss.
 The almond trees threw bluish skeins of shadow over the
 road
 and, at the end of the valley, the sun
 shouted blond Golcondas over your sea-green forest: Sea!
 Brother, Father, Beloved...!
 I enter the enormous garden of your waters and swim far away from land.
 The waves come in with a fragile crest of foam,
 In flight toward failure. Towards the coast,
 with its sharp red point,
 with its geometric houses,
 with its toylike palm trees,
 that now have become livid and absurd like stiffened
 memories!
 I am with you, Sea. And my body stretched like an arc
 struggles against your fleet muscles. Only you exist.
 My soul ignores its past
 Like in Nordic sky that unpetals in errant snowflakes!

Oh moment of splendid plentitude,
 Before I met you, brother Sea,
 Long did I roam the wandering streets blue with flames
 of streetlamps
 And in the sacred midnight I have woven garlands
 Of kisses over flesh and offerings of lips,
 Solemn with silence,
 In bloom,
 Bleeding...

But now I give thanks to the winds
 of all these things past,
 past... Only you exist.
 Athletic and naked. Only this fresh breath and these waves,
 and the Blue Cups, and the miracle of the Blue Cups.
 (I have dreamed a hymn of the Sea with rhythms broad like
 the breathless waves.)

I long yet to create for you a poem
 With the adamantine rhythm of your swell,
 With your saline and primeval breath,
 With the thunder of the sonorous anchors before Thules drunk with light and
 leprosy,
 With sailors' voices, lights and echoes
 With abysmal cracks
 Where your swift and nunlike hands constantly caress
 the dead...
 A hymn
 Made of red, luminous images.

Oh sea! Oh myth! Oh sun! Oh long resting place!
 And I know why I love you. I know that we are very old.
 That we have known each other for centuries.
 I know that in your worshiping and laughing waters there burned the dawn of
 Life.
 In the ash of a tertiary afternoon I quivered for the first time in
 your bosom.)
 Oh Protean, I have been born of you.
 Both of us chained and nomadic;
 Both of us with an intense thirst for the stars;
 Both of us with hope and disappointments;
 Both, air, light, strength, darknesses;
 Both with our vast desire and both with our great
 misery!

Motivos del espacio y del tiempo (1916-19)

Soñé

La gran nave de hierro atravesaba el mar. Vivía el viento.
Desde la proa yo veía la crucifixión del sol y el oleaje
púrpura...

Y al soñar yo pensé:--Este es un sueño
Y este gran mar y este cielo de doloroso azul y este viento viril
y cada matiz y cada contraste de la luz y de la sombra
Ya los sentí una vez, años ha
--Al surcar el Atlántico—
Y desfilaron ante mí y fueron un trozo de mí y hoy por un instante:
retornan a mí.

Yo le dije adiós a mi amigo
(quién sabe si otra vez lo veré o si nunca se encontrarán nuestras
sendas).

Fuimos por la lenta ciudad
Y nos sentamos en un banco, bajo la susurrada bendición de los
árboles

... Era pesado el cielo de la siesta
y las casas burguesas dormían ciegas, con cicatrizadas persianas,
y un perro nómada pasó y unos chicos jugaban
y era pesada la espera...

Todo era tan pueril! En una casa, algún mal piano
rezongaba melodías sentimentales y plebeyas.
La próxima separación tendía, como un cristal entre nosotros,
y a lo lejos un tranvía quejumbroso y chirriante parecía irrisorio
Y eso que era amarillo como el sol!

Y aunque yo quería sinceramente a mi compañero
y proclamaban nuestros labios sus falsedades afectuosas,
en verdad el uno para el otro ya éramos extraños
y a veces nos mirábamos casi hostiles.

...y las escasas noches que estuvieron llenas de auroras.

Le vi tuberculoso, deshojado,
el alma llena de suicidio,
el alma oscura como la cicatriz de una herida.
Le vi pronto a morir
y sentí envidia.

Anoche
cuando salí con esos dos amigos a la calleja desigual e indecisa que

salpica jirones de luz azulada o amarillenta
 sentí en mí una gran calma y un gran goce
 y una verdad que era hartó alta
 para encerrarla en cárcel de palabras.
 Y durmió esa noche a mi lado,
 y al despertarme la encontré conmigo y me acompaña desde
 entonces;
 (hoy no he sentido envidia alguna
 ante una carta que es clarín de una felicidad vedada y ajena)
 Está tan grande en mi alma
 tal el instante en que brilló como un fastuoso y estival mediodía
 en la noche humilde y desnuda.
 E ignore aún si es el lictor de mi victoria
 o de mi definitiva derrota.

A mi retorno,
 no iré enseguida hacia las gentes que amo.
 Caminaré a la sombra de los rugosos muros altos y antiguos
 y saciaré mis manos en la taza colmada de la fuente
 y arrancaré una brizna de hierba y sentiré su gusto primaveral
 En mis labios
 y aspiraré la noche, plena de
 familiares fragancias...
 y sabrán las cosas que he vuelto
 y habrá en la noche como una fiesta escondida entre las
 viejas casas y mi alma.

Motifs of space and time (1916-19)

I dreamed

The great iron ship was crossing the sea. The wind was alive.

From the prow I saw the sun's crucifixion and the purple swell...

And as I dreamed I thought: This is a dream

and this vast sea and this sky of painful blue and this manly wind

and every shade and every contrast of the light and the shadow

I have felt them one time, years ago

--As I crossed the Atlantic—

And they marched before me and were a part of me and today for an instant:

They come back to me.

I said good-bye to a friend

(who knows if I will see him again or if our paths will never cross).

We walked through the slow city

And sat on a bench, under the rustling blessing of the trees

...The sky was heavy with the siesta

And the bourgeois houses slept blindly, with scarred shades on the windows

And a stray dog passed by and some boys were playing

And the waiting weighed on us...

Everything was so puerile! In a house, an out of tune piano

grumbled sentimental and plebeian melodies.

The looming separation spread out, like a crystal between us,

And far away a whining and screeching streetcar seemed laughable

Especially since it was yellow like the sun!

And even though I sincerely loved my companion

And our lips proclaimed their affectionate lies

In reality we were already strangers

And at times we gazed at one another almost hatefully.

...and the scarce nights which were full of dawns.

I saw him tubercular, stripped of leaves

Soul filled with suicide,

Soul dark like a wound's scar

I saw that he would die soon

And I envied him.

Last night

When I went out with these two friends to the choppy indecisive street that

Splashes shreds of bluish or yellowish light

I felt a great calm and pleasure

And a truth that rose above things

To be locked up in the prison of words.
 And that truth slept with me that night
 and when I awoke I found it with me and it stays with me still;
 (today I feel no envy at all
 Toward a letter that signals a strange forbidden happiness)
 It is so vast in my soul
 The instant in which it shines like a magnificent summer midday
 In the humble and naked night.
 And I still don't know if it bespeaks my victory
 Or my definitive defeat.

Upon my return,
 I will not rush at once to those I love.
 I will walk in the shadow of the rough high and ancient walls
 And quench my hands in the heaping basin of the fountain
 And pick a blade of grass and feel its spring-like taste
 upon my lips
 and inhale the night, full of familiar fragrances...

and things will know that I've come back
 and in the night there'll be something like a secret celebration among the old houses and
 my soul.

Trinchera

Angustia
 En lo altísimo una montaña camina
 Hombres color de tierra naufragan en la grieta mas baja
 El fatalismo unce las almas de aquellos
 que bañaron su pequeña esperanza en las piletas de la noche
 Las bayonetas sueñan con los entreveros nupciales
 El mundo se ha perdido y los ojos de los muertos lo buscan
 El silencio aúlla en los horizontes hundidos.

Trench

Anguish
 In the lofty sky a mountain walks
 Earth-toned men shipwreck in the lowest of cracks
 Destiny yokes the souls of those
 Who bathed their tiny hope in ponds of night
 Bayonets dream of nuptial quarrels
 The world is lost and the eyes of the dead are seeking it
 Silence howls in the sunken horizons.

Hermanos

Crucificados en el tiempo
 callábamos a lo largo de los ponientes gastados
 que nos miraban con sus viejos ojos de ofidio,
 y nuestros labios eran cicatrices.
 Quién desgarró el conjuro.

Asombrada de azul
 el alma destechó a los astros de casa
 y nuestros corazones fueron guitarras de mil cuerdas
 que se desangran hoy
 en la otra herida
 de sombras y planetas.

Brothers

Crucified in time
 we stayed silent throughout the worn-out sunsets
 that looked at us with their old reptilian eyes
 and our lips were scars.
 Who broke the spell.

Astounded by blue
 the soul unroofed the home stars
 and our hearts were thousand-string guitars
 that bleed to death today
 in the other wound
 of shadows and planets.

Señal*A Maurice Claude*

Cuántas noches maduras
 se desgajaron sobre nuestras frentes hermano
 Fuimos abriendo como ramas las calles
 Nuestras risas rodando se rompieron
 Frescos juguetes en los cristales del fondo
 Tus manos beben el cercano silencio
 Las melopeas
 El piano late como un torrente enyugado
 Tus manos arden en la luz de los sonos
 Alguien
 junto al farol decapitado
 ha de ceñirnos un collar de estepas.

The Sign*To Maurice Claude*

How many ripened nights
 snapped off upon our brows, brother
 We went along opening streets like branches
 Our rolling laughter broke
 Fresh toys in the bottom crystals
 Your hands drink the nearby silence
 The benders
 The piano pulses like a harnessed torrent
 Your hands blaze in the light of the sounds
 Someone
 next to the beheaded streetlamp
 must tighten a necklace of steppes around us

Insomnio

Resulta legendariamente chica y lejana aquella etapa donde
los relojes vertieron la media noche absoluta.

Estos seis muros estrechos llenos de eternidad estrecha me
ahogan.

Y en el cráneo sigue vibrando esta lamentable llama de
alcohol que no quiere apagarse.

Que no puede apagarse.

Reducción al absurdo del problema de la inmortalidad del
espíritu.

Me he desangrado en demasiados ponientes.

La ventana sintetiza el gesto solitario del farol.

Apergaminado y plausible film cinemático.

La ventana imanta todas las ojeadas inquietas.

Como me ahorcan las cueras del horizonte.

¿Llueve? ¿Qué morfina inyectarán a las calles esas agujas?

No.

Son girones [sic] vagos de siglos que gotean isócronos del cielo
raso.

Es la letanía lenta de la sangre.

Son los dientes de la obscuridad que roen las paredes.

Bajo los párpados ondean y se apagan nuevamente las
tempestades rotas.

Los días son todos de papel azul bien cortaditos por la misma
tijera sobre el agujero inexistente del Cosmos.

El recuerdo enciende una lámpara:

*Otra vez arrastramos con nosotros esa calle que la ropa tendida
embanderó tan jubilosamente.*

Muy lejos se hundió el frondoso piano del tupí.

El sol ventilador vertiginoso tumba los caserones.

Al vernos navegar tan espirales se ríen a carcajadas las puertas.

Pedro-Luis me confía: --Yo soy un hombre bueno, Jorge.

*Tu eres un hombre bueno, Jorge... Ya se nos pasara tomando una
tacita de café.*

Los ojos estallan cuando los golpean las aspas del sol.

¿Qué hangar cobijará definitivamente las emociones?

Sin duda existe un plano ultra-espacial donde todas ellas son
formas de una fuerza utilizable y sujeta.

Como el agua y la electricidad en este plano.

Ira. Anarquismo. Hambre sexual.

Artificio para hacernos vibrar mágicamente.

Ninguna piedra rompe la noche.

Ninguna mano aviva las cenizas del incendio de todos los
estandartes.

Insomnia

That point when clocks spill out absolute midnight turns out to be legendarily
 small and distant.
 These six tight walls filled with tight eternity are suffocating me.
 And that lamentable flame of alcohol which refuses to go out and continues to vibrate in
 my brain.
 Which cannot go out.
 Reductio ad absurdum of the problem of the soul's immortality.
 I've bled to death in too many western winds.
 The window synthesizes the streetlamp's lonely gesture.
 Parchment-like and plausible cinematic film.
 The window, like a magnet, draws all the worried glances to it.
 How the strings of the horizon strangle me.
 Is it raining? What morphine will these needles inject into the street?
 No.
 They are vague twistings of the centuries leaking isochrones from the open sky.
 It is the slow litany of blood.
 It is the teeth of darkness that gnaw at the walls.
 Broken storms flutter and once again exhaust themselves beneath the eyelids.
 Every day is like blue paper cut into small pieces by the same pair of scissors above the
 nonexistent hole of the cosmos.
 Memory lights a lamp:
*Once again we drag the street behind us which the hanging clothes beflagged so
 jubilantly.*
Far away the tupi's leafy piano sank away.
The vertiginous fanlike sun knocks over the big houses.
Doors burst out laughing to see us navigate so spirally.
Pedro-Luis confides in me: I am a good man, Jorge.
You are a good man, Jorge. . . All this will pass if we just have a cup of coffee.
Eyes explode when struck by the sun's blades.
 What hangar will definitively shelter emotions?
 Surely there exists an ultra-spatial plane when all of them are forms of a useful and
 controlled power.
 Like water and electricity on this plane of space.
 Anger. Anarchy. Sexual hunger.
 An artifice to make us magically vibrate.
 No stone breaks the night.
 No hand stirs up the ashes of all those banners.

Poema

La estrella
 que huyó de tu garganta madura
 no es más que un eco del formidable poema.
 Alguien lo ritma
 en la orquesta monstruosa de tus nervios.
 Alguien lo escribe
 sobre la tela gris de tus días
 y en el sopor de las alcobas pesadas
 dolorosa, pueril, absurdamente.
 Apenas dibujado el último rasgo
 hace jirones de la obra
 y su desnuda noche
 en el obaje del silencio reposa.
 Cajita negra para el violín que se ha roto.

Poem

The star
 which fled from your ripened throat
 Is just an echo of the imposing poem.
 Someone marks the time of it
 in the monstrous orchestra of your nerves.
 Someone writes it
 on the gray fabric of your days
 and in the drowsiness of the dull rooms
 painfully, childishly, pointlessly.
 Hardly has the last stroke been drawn
 he tears the work to shreds
 and his unclothed night
 rests in the workshop of silence.
 Little black box for the broken violin.

Catedral

Las olas de rodillas
 los músculos del viento
 las torres verticales como goitos [sic]
 la catedral colgada de un lucero
 la catedral que es una inmensa parva
 con espigas de rezos
 Lejos

Lejos

los mástiles hilvanan horizontes
 y en las playas ingenuas
 las olas nuevas cantan los maitines

La catedral es un avión de piedra
 que puja por romper las mil amarras
 que lo encarcelan
 la catedral sonora como un aplauso
 o como un beso.

Cathedral

Kneeling waves
 wind muscles
 towers upright like cries
 the cathedral hanging from a bright star
 the cathedral which is an immense haystack
 with seedlings of prayers
 Far away

Far away

flagpoles baste horizons
 and on the innocent beaches
 new waves sing morning prayers

The cathedral is a stone airplane
 that struggles to break the thousand bonds
 which imprison it
 Cathedral as sweet-sounding as applause
 or as a kiss.

Mañana*A Antonio M. Cubero*

Las banderas cantaron sus colores
 y el viento es una vara de bambú entre las manos
 El mundo crece como un árbol claro
 Ebrio como una hélice
 el sol toca la diana sobre las azoteas
 el sol con sus espuelas desgarró los espejos
 Como un naípe mi sombra
 ha caído de bruces sobre la carretera
 Arriba el cielo vuela
 y lo surcan los pájaros como noches errantes
 La mañana viene a posarse fresca en mi espalda.

Morning*To Antonio M. Cubero*

The flags sang their colors
 and the wind is a bamboo shoot between the hands
 The world grows like a bright tree
 Tipsy as a propeller
 the sun sounds reveille above the terrace roofs
 the sun rips mirrors with its spurs
 Like a playing card my shadow
 has fallen flat on its face on the road
 Up above the sky flies
 and birds furrow it like wandering nights
 The morning comes to settle fresh on my back.

Aldea

Las esquilas reúnen la tristeza dispersa de los crepúsculos. El cielo está vacío.

Lápida de un silencio serio sobre el nihilismo ecuánime
De la jornada.

Las fluviales lenguas frescas del viento lamen mis manos y mejillas.

En la barbería el reloj—sexagenario sistemático—sigue
jugando al solitario con los minutos.

Ante la hipnosis rectilínea del caserío y curvilínea del camino y los montes, Sureda y yo somos las dos pirámides del pueblo. Culminantes sobre la democracia geométrica y encarrilada.

Apoyadas en la baranda nuestras manos tocan el piano
de colores del paisaje.

En la caja del piano está enterrado Wagner. A veces se
despierta y canta en la tumba. En la caja del cráneo
saltan entonces crímenes crucifixiones golpes de estado
pronunciamientos piras fornicios y pluralizados
suicidios.

Hasta que nos estruja un flaco silencio sin entorchados
ni estandartes.

Los acordes histrionizan las acumuladas angustias.

El acueducto tiende su espinazo polvoriento de sol.

El trasnochador dejó dos palanganas llenas de sueño.

Los badajos ultiman otra jornada.

Los párpados picotean la madeja de viento y polvo.

El Sol que talaron los leñadores rueda a ras de los campos.

Las noches náufragas han tapado el aljibe.

Aguijoneando nuestro insomnio vuelan aureolas de nerviosos insectos.

Los árboles donde se diluye la fiebre del farol son árboles de teatro.

Durante la misa un perro meneas la cola.

Incensario cuyo optimismo biológico asciende—único—
a esa altitud azul donde reposa Dios y cantan los pajaritos.

Village

The shears assemble twilights' scattered sadness.
 The sky is empty.
 Monument to a serious silence above the tranquil chaos
 of the day.
 The fresh fluvial tongues of wind lick my hands
 and cheeks.
 At the barber's the clock—the systematic sexagenerian—keeps on playing solitaire with
 the minutes.
 In the face of the hamlet's rectilinear hypnosis, and the mountain path's curvilinear
 hypnosis Surenda and I are the town's two pyramids.
 High points above the geometric and channelled democracy.
 Supported by the banister our hands touch the piano
 of landscape colors.
 Inside the piano box Wagner is buried. Sometimes he awakens and sings
 in the tomb. Then the skull box spills out crimes crucifixions
 coups d'état military uprisings pyres fornications and generalized
 suicides.
 Until we are crushed by a flaccid silence lacking torchlight
 and lacking flags.
 The chords make histrionic the accumulated distress.
 The aqueduct hangs its dusty spine of the sun.
 The night owl left two washbasins full of sleep.
 The bells mark the end of another day.
 The eyelids peck the skein of wind and dust.
 The Sun chopped down by the woodcutters rolls at ground level on the fields.
 The shipwrecked nights have clogged the cistern.
 Spurring on our insomnia fly halos of nervous insects.
 The trees in which the streetlamps' fever fades are trees of theater.
 During mass a dog wags his tail.
 An incense holder whose biological optimism rises—alone—
 to that blue height where God lies in repose and small birds sing.

Gesta Maximalista

Desde los hombres curvos
 se arrojaron los rifles como viaductos
 Las barricadas que cicatrizan las plazas
 vibran nervios desnudos
 El cielo se ha crinado de gritos y disparos
 Solsticios interiores han quemado los cráneos
 Uncida por el largo aterrizaje
 la catedral avión de multitudes quiere romper las amarras
 y el ejército fresca arboladura
 de surtidores-bayonetas pasa
 el candelabro de los mil y un falos
 Pájaro rojo vuela un estandarte
 Sobre la hirsuta muchedumbre extática.

Maximalist deed

From the curved shoulders
 Rifles flung themselves like viaducts
 The barricades that scar the plazas
 Quiver naked nerves
 The sky brushed out with cries and shots
 Interior solstices have burned the skulls
 Yoked by the lengthy landing
 The cathedral airplane of multitudes wants to break the restraints
 And the cool copse army
 Of jet-bayonets passes by
 The candelabra of a thousand and one phalluses
 The red bird flies a banner
 Above the hairy ecstatic crowd.

Prismas

(Acordes—Mendicates—Ciudad—Pueblo)

Amanecen temblando las guitarras
mi alma pajarito oscuro ante su cielo

Ya se murió la lámpara en la urna
más todavía
clama el silencio de las manos
como una herida abierta

Por la noche blindada
 vamos abriendo como ramas las calles
En los ciegos aljibes
se habían colmado de suicidio las manos
Las esquilas recogen la tristeza
dispersa de las tardes La luna nueva
es una vocecita allá en el cielo

Prisms

Guitars break daylight trembling
my soul dark bird against its sky

The lamp has died already in the urn
still more
clamors the silence of the hands
like an open wound

In the armored night
 we go along opening streets like branches opening out
In the blind well
the hands have filled it up to the brim with suicide
the shears harvest the dispersed
sadness of the afternoons The new moon
is a small voice up there in the sky

Guardia Roja

El viento es la bandera que se enreda en las lanzas
 La estepa es una inútil copia del alma
 De las colas de los caballos cuelga el villorrio incendiado,
 La planicie rendida
 no acaba de morir

Durante los combates
 el milagro terrible del dolor estiró los instantes
 Ya grita el sol
 Por el espacio trepan hordas de luces.
 En la ciudad lejana
 Donde los mediodías tañen los tensos viaductos
 y de las cruces pende Jesús-Cristo
 como un cartel sobre los mundos
 se embozarán los hombres en los torsos desnudos.

como un cartel sobre los mundos
 se embozaran los hombres
 en los cuerpos desnudos.

Red Guard

The wind is the flag that tangles in the spears
 The steppe is a useless copy of the soul
 The burning village hangs from horses' tails
 and the exhausted steppe
 has not yet finished dying
 During the fight
 the terrible miracle of pain stretched the instants
 the sun already shouts
 Through space climb hordes of lights
 In the distant city
 where the noons ring out the taut viaducts
 and from the crosses dangles Jesus Christ
 like a sign above the worlds
 Men will hide themselves in the naked torsos

Like a sign above the worlds
 Men will hide themselves
 In the naked bodies.

Tranvías

Con el fusil al hombro los tranvías
 patrullan las avenidas
 Prora del imperial bajo el velámen
 de cielos de balcones y fachadas

verticales cual gritos

Carteles clamatorios ejecutan
 su prestigioso salto mortal desde arriba
 Dos estelas estiran el asfalto
 y el trolley violinista

va pulsando el pentagrama en la noche
 y los flancos desgranar
 paletas momentáneas y sonoras.

Streetcars

With rifle at the shoulder the streetcars
 Patrol the avenues
 Prow of empire beneath the canvas
 Of skies of balconies and façades

vertical cries

Clamoring signs execute
 their prestigious mortal leap from up above
 Two trails run over the asphalt
 and the trolley violinist

goes plucking the stave of the night
 and the flanks pass by
 momentary and resonant palettes.

Norte

Los carteles borrachos
 saltan de las fachadas
 y las proras enhiestas de las casas
 van talando los años
 Los edificios caen sobre mis ojos
 Me lapidan los muros
 Arrecian muchedumbres
 Con un motín en los brutales puños
 Yo he de romper en mi rodilla
 El yugo de la noche que me unce

North

The drunken signs
 leap out from the façades
 and the upright prows of the houses
 go felling the years
 The buildings fall upon my eyes
 The walls stone me
 The crowds worsen
 With a riot of brutal fists
 I must break in my knee
 The yoke of the night that imprisons me

Cingladura

A Rivas Panedas

He pulsado el violín de un horizonte
 brocal del mundo donde el Sol se macera
 El viento esculpe oleaje
 La neblina sosiega los ponientes
 La noche rueda como un pájaro herido
 En mis manos
 el mar
 viene a apagarse
 el mar catedralicio
 que iba empotrando agujas y vitrales
 La media luna se ha enroscado a un mástil.

A Day's Run

To Rivas Panedas

I've plucked the violin of the horizon
 The rim of the world where the sun macerates
 The wind sculpts a swell
 The mist calms the west winds
 The night spins like a wounded bird
 In my hands
 the sea
 comes to extinguish itself
 the cathedralic sea
 that was coming crashing needles and stain-glass windows
 the half-moon has coiled into a mast.

Distancia

Yo he quemado en mi lámpara el sándalo
 de tu haz de palabras
 Otra mañana tiembla
 en tus manos
 Tendidos de rodillas los violines
 rezan sus incensarios
 Jadeantes lejanías
 se disputan
 el aduar de un ocaso
 La caravana lanza un ebrio lazo
 horizonte de hierro
 que derriba de bruces las ciudades
 y en el prado relinchan los luceros.

Distance

I have burned in my lamp the sandalwood
 of your beam of words
 Another morning trembles
 in your hands
 On their knees the violins
 pray their swaying incense
 Breathless distances
 Fight over
 the trousseau of a sunset
 The caravan throws a drunk lasso
 horizon of iron
 that levels cities to the ground
 and bright stars whinny in the meadow.

Atardecer

La vihuela
dormida como un niño en tu regazo

El silencio que vive en los espejos
ha forzado su cárcel

La oscuridad es la sangre
de las cosas heridas

En el poniente pobre
la tarde mutilada
rezó un Avemaría de colores

Dusk

The guitar
sleeping like a child in your lap

The silence that lives in the mirrors
has escaped its chains

Darkness is the blood
of wounded things

In the poor sunset
the mutilated dusk
prayed a Hail Mary of colors

Fiesta*A Tomás Luque*

Por la mañana suelta
 se desperezan miles de banderas
 La luz
 como una enredadera
 pende de las paredes
 El viento late
 Los edificios enhiestos son estandartes de piedra
 Una canción sin música ni versos
 de pie sobre mi pecho
 ha sacudido el corazón del cielo.

Celebration*To Tomás Luque*

In the loose morning
 thousands of flags stretch out
 The Light
 like a creeping vine
 hangs on the walls
 The wind throbs
 The towering buildings are banners of stone
 A song without music or lyrics
 standing over my chest
 has shaken the heart of the sky.

Arrabal

A Guillermo de Torre, por contraste

El arrabal es el reflejo
De la fatiga del viandante.

Mis pasos claudicaron
cuando iban a pisar el horizonte
y caí entre las casas
miedosas y humilladas
juiciosas como ovejas en manadas
encarceladas en manzanas
diferentes e iguales
como si fuesen todas ellas
recuerdos superpuestos barajados
de una sola manzana.

El pastito precario
desesperadamente esperanzado
salpicaba las piedras de la calle
y mis miradas constataron
gesticulante y vano
el cartel del poniente
en su fracaso cotidiano.

Y sentí *Buenos Aires*
y literaturicé en el fondo del alma
la vía crucis inmóvil
de la calle sufrida
y el caserío sosegado.

The slums

To Guillermo de Torre, by way of contrast

The slums are a mirror image
of the weariness of the passer-by.

My steps surrendered
just when they were stepping on the horizon
and I fell among
the fearful and humiliated houses
wise like sheep in herds
imprisoned in apples
different and the same
as if they all were
memories superimposed shuffled
of one single apple.

The meager pasture
hopelessly hopeful
I was splashing the stones of the street
and my glances verified
futile and gesturing
the west wind's sign
in its daily failure.

And I felt *Buenos Aires*
and I literated down to the bottom of the soul
the motionless Way of the Cross
of the long-suffering street
and the quiet farmhouse.

Catedral

Las olas de rodillas
 los músculos del viento
 las torres verticales como gritos
 la catedral colgada de un lucero
 la catedral que es una parva
 con espigas de rezos
 Lejos

Lejos
 los mástiles hilvanan horizontes
 y en las playas ingenuas
 las olas nuevas cantan los maitines

La catedral es un avión de piedra
 que puja por romper las mil amarras
 que lo encarcelan
 la catedral sonora como un aplauso
 que ondea

Cathedral

Kneeling waves
 wind muscles
 towers upright like cries
 the cathedral hanging from a bright star
 the cathedral which is a haystack
 with seedlings of prayers
 Far away

Far away
 flagpoles baste horizons
 and on the innocent beaches
 new waves sing morning prayers

The cathedral is a stone airplane
 that struggles to break the thousand bonds
 which imprison it
 Cathedral as sweet-sounding as applause
 that undulates

Último Rojo Sol

La casa a media asta
casi a ras de la calle
y un poniente monstruoso
que tiene abiertas todas sus alas

(dolorida y desnuda
una guitarra brusca se desangra)

El poniente de pie como un Arcángel
tiraniza la calle

Recién cuando el ocaso
es ya cosa legendaria
se imponen los acordes del paisaje

The Last Red Sun

The house at half mast
almost at street level
and a monstrous west wind
with all its wings opened

(aching and naked
a brusque guitar is bleeding)

The west wind standing up like an Archangel
tyrannizes the street

Just as the sunset
is already a legendary thing
the landscape's chords assert themselves

Montaña

De espaldas a la tierra
 yo recojo la sombra vendimiaria
 que se derrama desnudo oleaje en las órbitas
 abajo se hunden las ciudades
 empedradas de puños y de injurias
 la noche es vertical
 Amanecen temblando las guitarras
 mi alma
 pájaro oscuro ante su cielo
 Frescas eternidades resbalaron
 por las montañas
 que prolongan un gesto fatalista
 la luna nueva fue una vocecita en la tarde.

Mountain

Flat on my back on the ground
 I pick up the harvest shadow
 that spills out a naked swell in the orbits
 below the cities collapse
 paved with fists and insults
 the night is vertical
 Guitars awaken trembling
 my soul
 dark bird against its sky
 Fresh eternities trickled down
 through the mountains
 which prolong a fatalistic gesture
 the new moon was a small voice in the afternoon.

Aldea³²⁶

El poniente de pie como un Arcángel
 tiranizó el sendero
 La soledad repleta como un sueño
 se ha remansado al derredor del pueblo
 Las esquilas recogen la tristeza
 dispersa de las tardes La luna nueva
 es una vocecita bajo el cielo
 Según va anocheciendo
 vuelve a ser campo el pueblo.

Village

The west wind standing up like an Archangel
 tyrannized the path
 The replete solitude like a dream
 has calmed the town's environs
 The shears collect the dispersed
 sadness of the afternoons The new moon
 is a small voice beneath the sky
 As it gets dark
 the town reverts to countryside again.

³²⁶ The version published in *Ultra*, no. 21, Jan. 1, 1922.

Escaparate**Porcelana**

Semejante a ese guerrero chino que encima de las
olas espumosas y malvas saluda la mansión donde los ges-
tos de su hijito florecen.

Semejante al guerrero chino que se dirige, gracias al
dragón monstruoso y pueril, hacia la costa adorable.

Y su esposa le tiende el cuerpito radioso y vivo del
niño.

Pero siempre el espacio dorado los separa, siempre
el héroe venera los suyos sin lograr abrazarlos.

Así yo ignoraré mis amores.

Así yo deberé desconocerte.

Porcelain**Showcase**

Like that Chinese warrior who atop the
mauve and frothy waves greets the mansion where his son's gestures bloom.

Like that Chinese warrior who is moving, thanks to the
monstrous and childish dragon, towards the lovely coast.

And his wife hands him the radiant and living body of
the child.

But always the golden space separates them, always
the hero reveres his loved ones without embracing them.

And so shall I not know my loves.

And so must I disown you.

Prismas: “Sala Vacía”*A Humberto Rivas*

Los muebles de caoba perpetúan
entre la indecisión del brocado
su tertulia de siempre
Los daguerrotipos
mienten su falsa cercanía
de vejez encerrada en un espejo
y ante nuestro examen se escurren
como fechas inútiles
de aniversarios borrosos
Con ademán desdibujado
su casi-voz angustiosa
Corre detrás de nuestras almas
con mas de medio siglo de atraso
y apenas si estará ahora
en las mañanas iniciales de nuestra infancia
La actualidad constante
convinciente y sanguínea
aplaude en el trajín de la calle
su plenitud irrecusable
de apoteosis presente
mientras la luz a puñetazos
abre un boquete en los cristales
y humilla las seniles butacas
y arrincona y ahorca
la voz lacia
de los antepasados

Prisms: “Empty Room”*To Humberto Rivas*

The mahogany furnishings perpetuate
between the indecision of the brocade
their endless teatime chat
The daguerrotypes
betray their false immanence
of old age locked in a mirror
and slip away beneath our gaze
like useless dates
of blurred birthdays
With a vague gesture
their anguished almost-voice
runs after our souls
with half a century's delay, or more
and if it hardly will be now
In the first mornings of our infancy
the constant present
bloody and convincing
applauds in the bustle of the street
its irrevocable plentitude
of the present apotheosis
while the light in fisticuffs
opens a bouquet in the crystals
and humbles the senile armchairs
and corners and hangs
the wilting voice
of the ancestors

Tarde Lacia

No hay más que una sola tarde
la única tarde de siempre

Aquí esta su remanso

Las palabras
no logran arraigarse en el paisaje

Y se escurren como agua

El corazón refleja
Tus labios que una noche serán besos
Y mis ojos abiertos como heridas

aún sostendrán ciudades

El último jardín será el poniente

Languid afternoon

There is but a single afternoon
the only afternoon of always

Its hermitage is here

Words
cannot take root in the landscape

and they slip away like water

The heart reflects
your lips which one night will be kisses
and my open eyes like wounds

will even hold up cities

The last garden will be the sunset

Siesta

Muchedumbres del sol
 bloquean la casa
 y el tiempo acobardado se remansa
 detrás de las persianas
 verdes como cañaverales
 Margenándolo todo
 hallamos nuestro cuerpo
 como una misma acotación inútil
 hasta que las campanas rebosantes
 vierten la tarde
 y se arrodilla el humillado cielo
 y nos vestimos de previstos paisajes

Siesta

Crowds of the sun
 block the house
 and the frightened time takes refuge
 behind the blinds
 green like reedbeds
 Marginalizing everything
 we find our body
 like a useless annotation
 until the brimming bells
 spill the afternoon
 and the humbled sky falls to its knees
 and we dress in foreseen landscapes

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