

**Falsification, Robberies, and Irreverence  
in the Periphery:  
The Case of Borges and Kyriakidis**

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This article examines the influence of Jorge Luis Borges' syncretist aesthetics on the work of the contemporary Greek writer, Achilleas Kyriakidis. Borgesian aesthetics emerged as a reaction to the political, ideological, and literary debates that prevailed in Argentina in the first half of the twentieth century. Since the 1980s, Kyriakidis has employed Borgesian syncretism in order to create, as in the case of Borges, a current in the history of Modern Greek literature, which is distinct from the overtly engaged fiction of direct political and social commitment. Kyriakidean writing in fact emerges as a highly effective response to the longstanding debates on national identity, bypassing the discourse of nationalism. In particular, both Borges and Kyriakidis place hybridization and creolization at the heart of literary and cultural production within and outside the borders of Argentina and Greece, underscoring at the same time the notions of falsification, robbery, and irreverence in the countries of the so-called periphery.

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**J**orge Luis Borges' syncretist aesthetics emerged in the multicultural topography of Argentina as a reaction to the political, intellectual, and literary debates of his time. Since the 1980s, Achilleas Kyriakidis has used Borgesian syncretism in order to create, as in the case of Borges, a current in the history of Modern Greek literature, which is distinct from the politically engaged fiction of the mainstream and stands as a reaction to the longstanding debates on national identity.

Due to their encounter with modernity, the cultural and ideological practices of "peripheral" countries in general and of Argentina and Greece in particular are closely associated with those of the *nation*. The term *periphery* is a convention, which refers to those countries that do not belong

to what we call the center of political, economic, military, scientific, and technological power; yet, to paraphrase Alain de Lille, *culturally* the world is a sphere whose circumference (periphery) is everywhere and whose center is nowhere. Culture is multilateral and multitemporal; it is thus by definition illegitimate, improper, and ultimately impossible to conceive it in terms of centers and peripheries. Therefore, the terms "central" and "peripheral" will be used to indicate the current geopolitical rather than cultural status of the world and will be tinged with a certain amount of irony. In countries like Greece and Argentina, the notions of *culture* and *nation* are virtually inseparable while literature frequently undertakes the task to define, defend, or even challenge national identities such as "ελληνικότητα" ["Greekness"] and "argentinidad" ["Argentineness"]. In such countries, nationalism is blended with Western modernist, avant-gardist and postmodernist aesthetics, producing highly hybridized and syncretic narratives which mix up heterogeneous, multitemporal, and quite often conflicting discourses and traditions.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, we must stress that in these syncretic peripheral spaces the diversity of traditions, cultures, and discourses by no means ends up in a "melting pot." Instead, it is understood and practised in terms of *tensions* and *conflicts* that are inherent in what Homi K. Bhabha calls "interstices" of culture, where hybridity goes hand in hand with ambiguity, ambivalence, and contradiction. The complex and complicated modernity and postmodernity of Greece and Argentina naturally derive from the hybridity and syncretism immanent in these countries, which by definition are situated on the crossroads of cultures and are thus permeated by the most diverse traditions and ideologies.

In 1845, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento wrote his famous essay, *Facundo: civilización y barbarie*, a fundamental text on the fierce debate on the duality of "Argentineness." As the child of Enlightenment, Sarmiento saw the tension between the "European" and the "indigenous,"<sup>2</sup> the "urban" (Buenos Aires) and the "rural" (the Pampa) as a struggle between "civiliza-

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1. Here, the terms "syncretism" and "hybridity" are used interchangeably and are intended to provide a bridge between what is a standard (even orthodox) epistemological framework in Latin American studies (hybridity) and one which is more frequent in Modern Greek studies (syncretism).
  2. The opposition Sarmiento sets up in *Facundo* is between the "civilized" values of the Unitarian intellectuals, and the "barbarian" values of the Federalist-supporting populace and gauchos (who were *not* Indians). Hence, I use the term "indigenous" to refer to the *criollo gauchos* of the Pampa and *not* to the native Americans, who had been largely wiped out - a fact which evidently made Argentina one of the Latin-American countries with the fewest indigenous populations and which thus contributed to its "Europeanization."

tion" and "barbarism" - one that has since come to be considered as inherent in the logic of "Argentineness." In a similar way, during the nineteenth century and for a great part of the twentieth century, Greek intellectual (i.e. cultural, ideological, and political) debates were engaged with the discourse of nationalism and the question of identity. As in the case of Argentina, the quest for a continuous national narrative along with the introduction of European models launched Greek culture into a series of ideological antinomies: local and foreign, tradition and modernity, empire and nation-state, Byzantine and classical, East and West. These ideological issues initiated a long series of debates and oppositions, which often took the form of two polarized tendencies in literature, those of nationalist demoticism and cosmopolitanism. The Argentine and Greek avant-gardist and modernist movements of the 1920s and 1930s respectively sought to create a literary and ideological terrain within which these antagonistic lineages would coexist. This resulted in the formation of moderate, yet highly hybrid modernisms in the two countries. However, quite ironically, one of the most powerful responses to the political quest for defining "Argentineness" (and indirectly, "Greekness") has been given by a writer who has otherwise been (and by many is still) considered as one of the most "a-political" authors of the twentieth century; I am referring, of course, to the case of Borges.

I regard Borges as a Paracelsus of syncretist aesthetics who managed to construct a literary space where diverse discourses, genres, traditions, and cultures coexist *in tension*. The term *syncretist aesthetics* applies to a certain mode of writing that puts together heterogeneous forms coming from the most varied genres, texts, ideologies, and cultures.

As a writer of the *orillas* - the banks or borders, the in-between - Borges syncretizes highly academic and philosophical speculation drawing on motifs from world literature and the local culture of gauchos and knife-fighters. In his writing, Borges married the two sides of Argentine culture: European and American; civilization and barbarism; *Facundo and Martín Fierro*.<sup>3</sup> In this way, he created a literary microcosm of his contemporary Argentine macrocosm, which is traversed by diverse traditions and different civilizations. Borges' syncretism, his notion of the fictive universe (*ficción*), and his understanding of cultural formation in the periphery as an intrinsically irreverent process of falsification and appropriation emerge as highly effe-

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3. José Hernández's gauchesque poem, *Martín Fierro* (written in 1872 and 1879), celebrates the free-spirited "criollo gaucho" ["Creole cowboy"] of the Pampa in an age when the Pampean rural life is being replaced by the projects of modernization and rapid urbanization.

ctive responses to ideological debates in his contemporary Argentina, virtually dissolving the inseparable dyad "culture-nation." In other words, Borgesian literature manages to free itself from national or nationalist inquisitions, inevitably associated with notions of purity and authenticity, by capturing and accommodating the tensions and hybridity immanent in peripheral spaces. This is precisely why Borges' syncretist aesthetics have had a profound impact on Kyriakidis, who elaborates Borgesian syncretism in order to register and express the hybrid and syncretic condition of his and our contemporary Greece.

Kyriakidis' book *Ψευδομαρτυρίες* [*False Testimonies*, 1998] is an exceptional theorization of the "irreverent" writing of all those who, in his own words, "παροικ[ούν] την Ιερουσαλήμ των μπορχικών λαβυρίνθων" ["dwell in the Jerusalem of Borgesian labyrinths"] (199).<sup>4</sup> As F. D. Drakonitaidis observes, the volume, which compiles several essays and pseudo-essays written in the 1980s and 1990s, "αποδίδει φόρο τιμής στον Μπόρχες" ["offers homage to Borges"].

As I have suggested, Argentine literature and culture constitute for Borges a terrain of tensions between diverse traditions, which his literary machine creolizes - e.g. the premodern and the modern, the rural and the urban, the Argentine and the European, the local and the foreign, the oral tradition of both gauchesque poetry and the *payadas* (improvized songs of gaucho singers called "payadores") and European textual erudition. In my article "Borges and Narrative Economy," I have argued that Borgesian metafictional discourse both theorizes and accommodates these tensions by creating heterotopic spaces within which miscellaneous and heteroclit elements of Argentine tradition coexist. Borges does so in so far as he believes that "lo argentino" is "criollo" and that the Argentine writer borrows, appropriates, and creolizes elements from different literary traditions precisely because creolization and hybridization have always been the formative processes in the production of Argentine culture. Specifically, in his famous essay, "El escritor argentino y la tradición" ["The Argentine Writer and Tradition"], Borges asserts that "Argentineness" and, I would add as well, other "peripheral" identities - such as "Greekness" - are defined by the periphery's ability to appropriate (and be irreverent toward) foreign traditions. Such "peripheral" spaces are hybrid *par excellence* inasmuch as they are constructed upon heterogeneous and heteroclit identities. In effect, according to Borges, Argentines (and Greeks) can appropriate diverse cultural

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4. I provide literal translations of quotations in Greek and Spanish - except for Borges' texts, for which I principally use already existing translations.

elements because they at once participate in European culture, yet are distant from it:

Creo que los argentinos, los sudamericanos en general, ... podemos manejar todos los temas europeos, manejarlos sin supersticiones, con una irreverencia que puede tener, y ya tiene, consecuencias afortunadas. (*OC I* 273)

I believe that we Argentines, we South Americans in general, ... we can handle all European themes, handle them without superstitions, with an irreverence which can have, and already does have, fortunate consequences. (*Labyrinths* 218)

Borges further proposes that "creolization" as the natural process in the production of Argentine literature and culture applies not only to the Argentine case but also to literature, culture, and ideology in general. This is why Beatriz Sarlo argues that "Borges acriolla la tradición literaria universal y, al mismo tiempo, universaliza las orillas, todavía indecisas entre la ciudad y el campo" ["Borges creolizes the universal literary tradition and at the same time universalizes the *orillas* (edge, shore, margin), still hovering between the city and the countryside"] (*Modernidad* 181). Borges "universalizes" the hybridity of Argentine culture by suggesting that creolization is the common and natural process in every literary and cultural production and this is precisely why his discourse subverts the binary opposition between central and peripheral cultures. The periphery emerges as an "exaggerated" example of the mechanisms of cultural production insofar as the coexistence of heterogeneous traditions is often much more visible and for this reason more easily detectable here than elsewhere. Western colonialism, nationalism and modernization fostered a homogenizing discourse, whose aim was to conceal the fact that the outcomes of cultural processes in general are not syntheses of opposites but products of tension between diverse elements. It is in the name of this imaginary homogeneity that the indigenous population of Argentina was decimated throughout the nineteenth century. The cultural diversity of contemporary Argentina, however, shows that culture resists such "purifying processes" while also disclosing that peripheral countries have been overtly exposed to foreign influences, either due to colonialism or neoliberalism. In the same essay on Argentine tradition, Borges concludes:

Por eso repito que no debemos temer y que debemos pensar que nuestro patrimonio es el universo; ensayar todos los temas, y no podemos concretarnos a lo argentino para ser argentinos: porque o

ser argentino es una fatalidad, y en ese caso lo seremos de cualquier modo, o ser argentino es una mera afectación, una máscara. (*OC I* 273)

For that reason, I repeat that we should not be alarmed and that we should feel that our patrimony is the universe; we should essay all the themes, and we cannot limit ourselves to purely Argentine subjects in order to be Argentine; for either being Argentine is an inescapable act of fate - and in that case we should be so in all events - or being Argentine is a mere affectation, a mask. (*Labyrinths* 219)

Borges suggests that being Argentine is a mere affectation or a mask simply because "lo argentino" is creolized and so is culture in general. For Borges there is evidently no pure culture but hybrid products whose elements have the whole "universe" as their "patrimony." Like Argentine culture, Borgesian *écriture* thus emerges as an exaggerated example of the interstitial space where the syncretist literary and cultural processes take place and where, in Néstor García Canclini's terms, the "multitemporal heterogeneity" of countries like Argentina and Greece comes to light (86). This is why both Borges and Kyriakidis are almost obsessively engaged with the notion of writing as a series of appropriations and falsifications, as well as an act of hybridization.

Borges' syncretism is manifest as early as *Historia universal de la infamia* [*Universal History of Infamy*] (1935), where he re-elaborates a number of texts originating from a wide range of genres, literatures, and traditions. In his preface to the book, he notes:

Los ejercicios de prosa narrativa que integran este libro ... derivan, creo, de mis *relecturas* de Stevenson y de Chesterton y aun de los primeros films de von Sternberg y tal vez la biografía de Evaristo Carriego. (My emphasis; *OC I* 289)

The exercises in narrative prose that constitute this book ... derive, I think, from my rereadings of Stevenson and Chesterton, from the first films of von Sternberg, and perhaps from the biography of Evaristo Carriego. (My translation)

The texts of the collection, Sarlo mentions, are second-hand materials, which include "European versions of Oriental fictions, lives of North American bandits and gunmen, almost significant episodes concerning Chinese pirates, false Persian prophets or Japanese warlords" (*Edge* 28). With this specific collection Borges primarily and quite clearly foregrounds his view of literature as an incessant and incestuous syncretist process of assembling, appropriating,

and falsifying miscellaneous narratives originating from the most varied sources - here, for example, from literature, cinema, and biography. For Borges, fiction is a syncretist machine and it is so because writing is essentially reading. The writer/reader invents his narratives by reading (appropriating) and rereading (falsifying) the narratives of others. Borges' evaluation of the act of reading also becomes explicit in the preface of *Historia universal de la infamia* where he charmingly claims: "Leer, por lo pronto, es una actividad posterior a la de escribir: más resignada, más civil, más intelectual" (OCI 289) ["Reading, meanwhile, is an activity subsequent to writing - more resigned, more civil, more intellectual"] (*Collected Fictions* 3). And in the prologue of the 1954 edition of the book, he adds with his characteristic playfulness:

Estas páginas ... son el irresponsable juego de un tímido que no se animó a escribir cuentos y que se distrajo en *falsear y tergiversar*... ajenas historias. (My emphasis; OCI 291)

These pages are the irresponsible game of a timid man who could not find the courage to write short stories and he amused himself by *falsifying* and *distorting* ... stories of other men. (My translation)

The man who, as Sarlo observes, was "too timid, perhaps, to write his own stories, so that he used the plots from various sources to compose them - yet bold enough to publish a most atypical and original collection" (*Edge* 28) is, to use Borges' own terms, the archetypal "irreverent" writer of the periphery, who "falsifies" and "distorts" the stories of others.

In *False Testimonies*, Kyriakidis collects what he calls "αν-αισθητικά δοκίμια" ["an-aesthetic essays"] (205), language games whose ultimate objective is, as it were, the anaesthetizing aestheticization of every system of knowledge, including epistemology itself. The notion of "anaesthetization," Kyriakidis seems to suggest, is closely associated with that of aestheticization in so far as by aestheticizing everything, the literary text also anaesthetizes - and therefore undermines - the authority, validity, and canonicity of various narratives and agents of power - whether socioeconomic, political, cultural, or ideological; in this manner, Kyriakidis' anaesthetic discourse emerges as paradoxically political, though, as we shall see later on, it does so in a subtle and indirect way. With his anaesthetic essays, Kyriakidis proposes *à la* Borges that the face value of narratives is to be found in their potential to be used as literary material - i.e. in their aesthetic value. Borges has repeatedly said that during his lifetime he has been interested only in the aesthetic value of religion and philosophy: "[Estimo] las ideas religiosas o filosóficas por su valor estético y aun por lo que encierran de singular y de maravilloso" ["I esteem religious and philosophical ideas for their aes-

thetic value and also for what is unique and marvelous in them"] (*OC II* 153; my translation). And elsewhere:

J'ai surtout songé aux possibilités littéraires de la philosophie idéaliste ... Cela ne signifie pas forcément que je croie à la philosophie de Berkeley ou de Schopenhauer du fait que j'ai utilisé leurs possibilités littéraires. (Milleret, *Entretiens* 72)

I have always considered the literary possibilities of idealist philosophy ... This does not necessarily mean that I believe in the philosophy of Berkeley or Schopenhauer, but rather that I have used their literary potential. (My translation)

Kyriakidis' encounter with Borges, first as a reader and then as a translator in the 1970s and 1980s respectively, hence resulted in the gradual "de-politicization" of his previously highly political discourse - typical, for example, of *Διαφάνεια* [*Transparency*, 1973], *Στοιχεία ταυτότητας* [*Identity Data*, 1977], and *Ο πληθυντικός μονόλογος* [*The Plural Monologue*, 1984]. In the 1990s, Borges has in fact "de-politicized" Kyriakidis' writing to such a considerable degree that the latter proclaims as his major objective the "απόλαυση του πλαστού" ["pleasure of the fictitious"] (*False Testimonies* 197) - the absolute anaesthetic status of literature. This emphasis on textual pleasure carries a certain kind of historicity with it. In particular, with the rise of the "Third Hellenic Republic" and the restoration of democracy in 1974, Greece dealt with its "dirty past" by putting on trial and subsequently imprisoning the dictators. As a result, since the 1980s there has been a tendency in Modern Greek literature to move away from an overtly engaged fiction of direct political and social commitment, towards a writing which on the surface appears less political and more ludic; nonetheless, modern Greek literature in general and Kyriakidean writing in particular may and should still be understood as political in more subterranean ways. In fact, Kyriakidis' Borgesian turn in the 1980s, which was marked by a gradual disengagement from his previously direct political and social commitment, led him towards a more playful discourse, which, as I have already mentioned, is nevertheless not without political undercurrents.

One of the Borgesian principles that Kyriakidis seems to adopt soon after his encounter with Borges is that of literature as a "συνωμοτικό παιχνίδι" ["conspiratorial game"] of language. In his 1982 essay "Η Γεωμετρία της σιωπής" ["The Geometry of Silence"], he argues: "Η Τέχνη είναι πάνω απ' όλα μέθεξη, είναι ένα μικρό, όμορφο συνωμοτικό παιχνίδι που παίζεται διαρκώς ανάμεσα στο δημιουργό και στον κάθε



δέκτη χωριστά" ["Art is above all a communion, it is a small, beautiful conspiratorial game which is *continuously* played between the writer and each receptor separately"] (*To Be Continued* 31). Also, in "Η Λογοτεχνία: Οδηγίες χρήσεως" ["Literature: A User's Manual"], written in 1991, we find one of Kyriakidis' favorite phrases which comes from Robert Louis Stevenson and which "Borges often mentions - that literature is a game, yet a game which we should play with the seriousness that children attribute to their game" (*False* 18).<sup>5</sup> Six years later, Kyriakidis, along with Dimitris Kalokyris,<sup>6</sup> who is the second main translator of Borges' work in Greece, invent a remarkably "shameless" game of conspiracy when they write their pseudo-essays - "Η παρισινή άνοιξη του Arthur Geoff Arens" ["The Parisian Spring of Arthur Geoff Arens"] (1998) and "Ώρες Άρενς" ["Arens Hours"] (2001) respectively - in the framework of the "Symposium on Fantastic Literature" held in the University of Thessaloniki on the first of April 1997. Specifically, on the twenty-fifth of March of the same year, the Macedonian Press Agency announced that "Greek and foreign authors will participate in the Symposium on Fantastic literature ... organized in the context of 'Thessaloniki, Cultural Capital of Europe '97'" and "dedicated to the German author Arthur Geoff Arens."<sup>7</sup>

After Borges and like Kalokyris, Kyriakidis asserts that art is an endless game of and with language, an idea which inexorably brings us to the concept of the artist-maker, not only as *homo faber* but also as *homo ludens* and playfully challenges us with the conclusion that "αν η λογοτεχνία δεν είναι παιχνίδι, την έχουμε όλοι πολύ άσχημα ..." ["if literature is not a game, we are all in big trouble ..."] (*Marmalade* n.p).

The pseudo-essay "Φάλαινες και αναισθητικά: μια ματιά στη ζωή και το έργο του Christian Grainville (1923-1987)" ["Whales and Anaesthetics: A Look into the Life and Work of Christian Grainville (1923-1987)"], first published in 1990,<sup>8</sup> is the text with which Kyriakidis introduces and establishes the imaginary writer and scholar Christian Grainville

5. He repeats it in his essay "Η μαρμελάδα της δημιουργίας" ["The Marmalade of Creation"].

6. I refer to Kalokyris' relation to Borges in "Kalokyris and Borges" 65-96; and in "Aristotle, Borges, Kalokyris" 97-108.

7. From The Macedonian Press Agency at <http://www.hri.org/news/greek/mpa/1997/97-03-25.mpa.html>> The announcement itself, which was written by Kalokyris - who was actively involved in the events and was also the editor of the journal of the Organization - is symptomatic of this manifestly Borgesian "conspiracy" that diligently neglects to make any reference to the fictitious nature of the so-called German author, Arthur Geoff Arens.

8. *Entefktirio* 12 (1990): 54-8. Later collected in *False Testimonies*.

who later becomes a *passe-partout* figure in his fictional and critical work, virtually figuring as his *alter ego*. Through Grainville, Kyriakidis manages quite successfully "να 'περάσει' όλες τις (κατά κυριολεξίαν) κοσμοθεωρίες του μέσα σε εισαγωγικά" ["to transmit all his literal worldviews in quotation marks"] (*False* 213), in the same way as his imaginary writer Diamantopoulos allegedly did through his fictitious double, Avgoustidis, in "Το μεγάλο ταξίδι" ["The Grand Voyage"]. The fictive nature of Grainville nevertheless remained unknown to many for a long time, and to some even today, as the dedication of the text confirms: "Στην Τζένη Μαστοράκη / που τον ήξερε / και δεν έλεγε τίποτα" ["To Jenny Mastorakis / who knew him / and did not say anything"] (*False* 199).

Kyriakidis' Borgesian games quite often become serious (and seriously dangerous for scholars who do *not* "dwell in the Borgesian universe") inasmuch as he irreverently uses Grainville not only in his pseudo-essays but also in texts which would otherwise demand an objective, scholarly discourse; I am referring to the papers he gives in literary meetings on real writers such as Georges Perec<sup>9</sup> and Nikos Panayotopoulos ("Literature: A User's Manual" and "The Marmalade of Creation" respectively), or the annotations he makes in the books he publishes as a translator ("Three Docrimmentaries" in Max Aub's *Crvmenes Ejemplares* [*Exemplary Murders*]). Kyriakidis thus fully explores the deceptive and irreverent discourse of Borges, confirming his view of criticism as another game (for the pleasure) of *λόγος* ("the word"), whose fictional/non-fictional borders are indistinguishable precisely because (for writers who *do* "dwell in the Borgesian universe") they are nonexistent. Kyriakidis presumably disseminates viruses into the network of literature and that of criticism, problematizing traditional literary and cultural ideologies - both "local" and "foreign" - and questioning their cultural and intellectual authority.

Once again, the idea of deception and irreverence points back to Borges and, among others, to his short story "El tintorero enmascarado Hákim de Merv" ["Hákim, the Masked Dyer of Merv"] published in *Historia universal de la infamia*, which offers an interesting metaphor for fiction as an act of forgery. Literature, Borges suggests, is like the "oficio" ["profession"] of the dyer, which is nothing but the "arte de impíos, de falsarios y de inconstantes" ["art of infidels, impostors, and inconstant men"] (*OC* I 324; my translation).

9. Kyriakidis has so far translated five books by Perec: *La Vie mode d'emploi*, *Un Cabinet d'amateur*, *L'Augmentation*, *Quel petit vélo à guidon chromé au fond de la cour?*, *Espèces d'espaces*.

In the following quotation, Hákim de Merv confesses how he counterfeited the real colors of mankind:

Mi cara es de oro (declara en una página famosa de la *Aniquilación*) pero he macerado la púrpura y he sumergido en la segunda noche la lana preparada ... Así pequé en los años de juventud y trastorné los verdaderos colores de las criaturas. El Ángel me decía que los carneros no eran del color de los tigres, el Satán me decía que el Poderoso quería que lo fueran y se valía de mi astucia y mi púrpura. Ahora yo sé que el Ángel y el Satán erraban la verdad y que todo color es aborrecible. (*OC I* 324-5)

My face is of gold (a famous page of the *Annihilation* says) but I have steeped the purple dye and on the second night have plunged the prepared wool into it ... Thus did I sin in the years of my youth, deforming the true colors of the creatures. The Angel would tell me that lambs were not the color of tigers, while Satan would say to me that the All-Powerful One desired that they be, and in that pursuit he employed my cunning and my dye. Now I know that neither the Angel nor Satan spoke the truth, for I know that all color is abominable. (*Collected* 41)

Once the colors have been counterfeited and nobody can tell what the "real" colors are, the only viable activity is to propagate "loathsome" colors through the art of forgery, alias fiction. According to Borges, the process of writing is a process of falsification and betrayal, for fiction is essentially a *single*, total text, which incessantly changes through the deceptions of reading and writing.<sup>10</sup>

The deceptive discourse of Kyriakidis is not only irreverent toward texts, readers, and scholars but also toward Borges himself; for this reason it emerges as a Borgesian "λόγος" *par excellence*. Kyriakidis fictionalizes the Argentine who now appears no less imaginary than Grainville himself.

10. The Borgesian *topos* of the total Word and the infinite Book is epitomized, for example, by the "catálogo de catálogos" ["catalogue of catalogues"] of "La biblioteca de Babel" ["The Library of Babel"], the "ramified" and "regressive" narrative of Herbert Quain's *April March* ("Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain" ["Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain"]), the infinite book of "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" ["The Garden of Forking Paths"], the divine scripture of "La escritura del Dios" ["The Writing of God"] (*OCI*), "la palabra del universo" ["the word of the universe"] of the "Parábola del palacio" ["Parable of the Palace"] (*OC II*) as well as the "Palabra" ["Word"] of "Undr," the all-encompassing "sola línea" ["single line"] of "El espejo y la máscara" ["The Mirror and the Mask"], and the infinite book of "El libro de arena" ["The Book of Sand"] (*OC III*).

It is actually "through" (and *à la*) Borges that Kyriakidis "discovers" (and invents) the American scholar:

Διαβάζοντας, πριν ένα χρόνο περίπου, τα κείμενα των πέντε διαλέξεων που έδωσε ο Jorge Luis Borges στο Πανεπιστήμιο του Όστιν, Τέξας, σταμάτησα έκπληκτος σ' ένα όνομα που ο Borges δεν αρκέστηκε να το αναφέρει ... μόνο μία φορά. ... Το όνομα αυτό (Christian Grainville) μου ήταν εντελώς άγνωστο (καίτοι παροικώ την Ιερουσαλήμ των μπορχικών λαβυρίνθων). (*False* 199)

About a year ago, while I was reading the texts of the five lectures that Borges gave in the University of Texas, Austin, I stopped with surprise at a name that Borges mentioned ... more than once. ... This name (Christian Grainville) was totally unknown to me (even though I inhabit the Jerusalem of Borgesian labyrinths). (My translation)

The above quotation is accompanied by a footnote in which Kyriakidis cites Borges' book: "*Jorge Luis Borges in Austin*, ed. Alastair Reid (Austin University Press, 1989)" (*False* 206). The book of course is totally imaginary, even though Kyriakidis carefully contrives his fictitious reference using, first, the name of the University of Austin where Borges indeed taught in the period 1961-1962 and, secondly, the name of Alastair Reid who translated Borges into English, though of course he never edited such a book. Apparently it does not take much effort for Kyriakidis to "understand" why Borges repeatedly "refers" to Grainville: the latter is virtually his *alter ego*. He concludes:

Ο Borges θέλησε ν' αποτίσει φόρο τιμής σ' έναν άνθρωπο που είχε αναλώσει πολλά χρόνια της ζωής του διδάσκοντας στο ίδιο αυτό Πανεπιστήμιο του Όστιν. Όμως, χρειάστηκε να διαβάσω ολόκληρο το συναρπαστικό αυτό βιβλίο [*An-aesthetics*] για να διεισδύσω στην ουσία της τριπλής αναφοράς του Borges: εντελώς άγνωστος στην Ελλάδα, μερικώς γνωστός στη Δυτική Ευρώπη (ο Godard "τσιτάρει" δυο-τρεις φράσεις του στο *Detective*) και εγκληματικά παραγνωρισμένος στις ΗΠΑ, ο Grainville είναι το *alter ego* του Αργεντινού. (*False* 199; my emphasis)

Borges wanted to pay homage to a man who had spent many years of his life teaching in the same University of Austin. However, I had to read this enthralling book [*An-aesthetics*] up to the end in order

to be able to penetrate into the essence of Borges' triple reference: totally unknown in Greece, partly known in Western Europe (Godard cites two or three phrases of his in *Déetective*) and criminally overlooked in the USA, *Grainville is the alter ego of the Argentine*. (My translation)

Kyriakidis intertwines Borges in the tentacles of the labyrinths that Borges himself first created. That is, Kyriakidis does not simply invent the fictitious writer Grainville *à la* Borges but transforms (always *à la* Borges) the real Borges into a pseudo-Borges since the latter becomes Kyriakidis' hero who "discovers" Grainville and who, in turn, is Kyriakidis' invention (yet again *à la* Borges). These labyrinths of fiction construct a universe where real and imaginary writers and texts flounder and intermingle like reflections in facing mirrors and where the limits between the *real* and the *unreal* are not only bleary but also meaningless to those who "dwell in the Jerusalem of Borgesian labyrinths." For Borgesian scholars, writers, and readers like Kyriakidis and Kalokyris the difference between the infamous French author, Pierre Menard, and the American, Christian Grainville - or, I would add, between Greekness and Argentineness - is trivial; whether Borges creates his *alter ego*, Menard, or Kyriakidis invents *à la* Borges Borges' (and his) own *alter ego*, Grainville, the outcome is one and the same: real and imaginary writers and identities are interchangeable. Understandably, this literary irreverence "contaminates" notions of literary and national cultural authenticity and further problematizes the binary opposition between center and periphery.

In the Daedalus-like and vertiginous structures of the Kyriakidean universe, imaginary people (Grainville) have real people as friends (Jack Kerouac) while fictive scholars (Grainville) study the work not only of equally fictive artists (Fred Button),<sup>11</sup> but also of real ones and notably of the writers who have invented them (Kyriakidis). Here (the fictionalized) Jack Kerouac, who "met" Grainville at Harvard and "traveled through half of the West States" with him, playfully notes about the latter: "He's the only Christian I know whose faith you can count on" (*False* 201).<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, Grainville "writes" an essay entitled "Το εξωφρενικό αριστούργημα" (μια συναρπαστική ματιά στον ιδιότυπο, προσωπικό κινηματογράφο του

11. Kyriakidis establishes the figure of the "great," but nonetheless imaginary, German film director Fred Button in "Το εξωφρενικό αριστούργημα" ["The Preposterous Masterpiece"], first published in issue 9 of *Hartis* (1983) and later included in *False Testimonies*.

12. The quotation is originally in English.

Fred Button)" ["'The Preposterous Masterpiece': A Thrilling Look into the Peculiar, Personal Cinema of Fred Button"] (*False* 206) and "publishes" the text "'Η δαιμόνια αμηχανία' (μια γοητευτική ανάλυση της 'Αναγνωστικής Τέχνης')" ["'Creative Puzzlement': A Charming Analysis of the 'Art of Reading'"] (*False* 206), which Kyriakidis actually published as "Preposterous Masterpiece" and "Creative Puzzlement" in the cultural journal *Χάρτης* [*Hartis*] in 1983 and 1986 respectively. In doing so, Grainville, the *alter ego* of Borges, studies the work of the imaginary writer, Button, and presumably the work of Kyriakidis himself, who now becomes the object of speculation of his own fictive writer.

It is evident that in the "Borgesian Jerusalem of labyrinths," words, texts, and names are signs which take part in what Fredric Jameson calls "a pure random play of signifiers" (96) where the link between the signifiers and their signifieds is, in Borges' words, "a mere affectation": who writes what and what is written by whom is trivial since, as Kyriakidis asserts in "Literature: A User's Manual," in this compulsive and highly conspiratorial "circular labyrinth" (but also in postmodernity, for Jameson) nothing belongs to anybody (be it Borges, Kalokyris, or Kyriakidis) inasmuch as everybody "discovers," "remembers," and "revises" each other's words (*False* 29).

In the short story "The Plural Monologue", Kyriakidis affirms that the writer "robs the passing poets" (76) while in "Sic transit Gloria", a text which he publishes as an annotation for his translation of Jean Echenoz's *Les Grandes blondes*, he playfully, yet quite sincerely and accurately, argues that the writer does not only rob other authors but also himself: "Κλέβουμε που κλέβουμε για τα προς το γράφειν, ε, ας κλέψουμε κι απ' τον εαυτό μας" ["Since we steal anyway for the sake of writing, well, let's also steal from ourselves"] (241). This is exactly what happens in his "circular" fictional universe where people, places, themes, books and so on circulate endlessly, essentially affirming that the author is actually "robbing" himself.

The text that exemplifies the idea of literary (and cultural) "plagiarism" is "Ο Σαλλυμαρισμός δεν θα περάσει (του Καθηγητή της Κενολογίας Ακαδημαϊκού Δ.Π.Χ)" ["Sallymarism 'no pasará'<sup>13</sup> - by the Academic Professor of Quenology D.P.H"],<sup>14</sup> which was first published in 1993 as an annotation of Kyriakidis' translation of *Le Journal intime de Sally Mara*

13. Kyriakidis recommended the use of the phrase in Spanish as an allusion to the famous slogan of the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War ("no pasarán").

14. Kyriakidis plays with the name of Queneau (in Greek "Κενώ") and the adjective "κενό" which means "empty." Thus "κενολογία" (here translated as "Quenology") also means "nonentityism."

(1950). Here Kyriakidis conspicuously borrows the parodic neologism "sallymarism" from Queneau's *Journal Intime* and *Les Oeuvres complètes de Sally Mara* (1962),<sup>15</sup> both of which refer to the fictive Irish writer, Sally Mara. By "sallymarism" Kyriakidis does not merely designate writing as plagiarism but goes so far as to introduce the paradoxical, yet not at all surprising, idea that texts belong not to their real writers but to their imaginary ones. He states, employing his usual humor:

Το περίεργο είναι ότι ο σαλλυμαρισμός είναι κατά πολύ προγενέστερος της Σάλλυ Μάρα. Ούτε λίγο ούτε πολύ, πρόκειται για το φαινόμενο της ασύστολης λογοκλοπίας, που πρωτοείδε το φως στα ανήλιαγα μπουντρούμια της Μπαρμπαρίας, γύρω στα τέλη του 16ου αιώνα, όταν κάποιος Miguel de Cervantes είχε τη φαιινή ιδέα να βάλει (το καλό του) χέρι σε κάποιο αραβικό χειρόγραφο, να το μεταφράσει και να το εκδώσει ως πρωτότυπο έργο του με τον τίτλο - αν δεν απατώμαι - *Δον Κιχώτης*. (*False* 227)

Strangely, Sallymarism is much older than Sally Mara. More or less, it is a phenomenon of shameless plagiarism which first saw the light in the sunless prisons of Barbary at the end of the sixteenth century, when somebody named Miguel de Cervantes had the brilliant idea of getting his only hand on an Arabic manuscript, in order to translate and publish it as an original work with the title - if I am not mistaken - *Don Quixote*. (My translation)

Kyriakidis uses Borges' deliberately misleading "hypothesis" in his story "Un problema" ["A Problem"] (*OC* II 172) regarding the existence of an Arabic manuscript of *Don Quixote*, which Cervantes supposedly used to write his famous novel, as an evidence to accuse the latter for the first recorded act of "sallymarism;" yet a few lines later, he does not neglect to accuse Borges himself when he humorously (though quite suitably) asserts that "sallymarism" "κορυφώθηκε τον 20ο αιώνα, με το συγγραφέα που καταζητείται απ' όλες τις βιβλιογραφίες του κόσμου: τον Jorge Luis Borges" ["culminated in the twentieth century, in the hands of the writer who is wanted by all the bibliographies of the world: Jorge Luis Borges"] (*False* 227). Next to Borges, Kyriakidis understandably places Queneau:

Ένας άλλος συγγραφέας του αιώνα μας, ο Γάλλος Raymond Queneau, καταληφθείς από την κολλητική μανία της λογοκλο-

15. Kyriakidis has so far translated four books by Queneau: *Exercices de style*, *Une Histoire modèle*, *On est toujours trop bon avec les femmes*, *Le Journal intime de Sally Mara*.

πίας, δεν ουλυπήθηκε ούτε μια δυστυχισμένη ... Ιρλανδέζα νεαρής ηλικίας που ... δε φιλοδοξούσε παρά να εναποθέσει σ' ένα τετράδιο ημερολογίου το ταπεινό απόσταγμα της ψυχής της ... Το όνομα του δήθεν συγγραφέως εμφανίζεται στη θέση του πραγματικού, ενώ ο πραγματικός συγγραφέας έχει εκτοπιστεί στη θέση του φανταστικού τίτλου. (228)

Another author of our century, the French Raymond Queneau, taken by the contagious mania of plagiarism, did not even commiserate (ουλυπήθηκε)<sup>16</sup> a poor ... Irish girl of a young age who ... aspired to repose the humble essence of her soul in a notebook of a diary ... The name of the pretended author appears in the place of that of the real one, while the real author has been displaced in the place of the fictitious title. (My translation)

And he adds in a footnote:

Κάτι ανάλογο διέπραξε και ο Borges, από κοινού με τον στενό του συνεργό Adolfo Bioy Casares. Δεν έχουμε παρά να θυμηθούμε τα *Χρονικά του Μπούστος Ντομέκ* (1967). (False 229)

Borges, along with his close accomplice<sup>17</sup> Adolfo Bioy Casares, has also committed something similar. It is enough for us to remember the *Crónicas de Bustos Domecq* (1967). (My translation)

Bustos Domecq, Sally Mara, Button, Menard, Grainville ... the list is endless and naturally includes names like Borges, who robs international bibliography, and Kyriakidis, who literally plunders the Borgesian universe appropriating everything and everybody including himself. Borges and Kyriakidis ultimately are both (per)versions of a single figure: that of Hákim de Merv who irreverently and shamelessly plunders the *orillas* of culture precisely because he geographically and ideologically dwells in the periphery, the crossroads and *orillas* of cultures, ceaselessly charging his compulsive syncretist machine with the exceptionally effective power of literary and cultural irreverence.

Borges' syncretist irreverence offered Kyriakidis an alternative way of dealing with the ideological and cultural debates that prevailed in the Greek encounter with modernity and of challenging the way in which Greek literary tradition has been constructed in the course of the last two centuries.

16. Kyriakidis plays with the alliterative words OULIPO and "λυπάμαι" ["to commiserate"].

17. Kyriakidis plays with the alliterative words "συνεργάτης" ["collaborator"] and "συνεργός" ["accomplice"].



Kyriakidis used syncretism as a literary method and ideological attitude in order to overcome - by creating a space for accommodating - the antinomies, dilemmas, and contradictions accentuated by Greece's encounter with modernity and, more recently, by globalization. Borges has provided him with the means to create a discourse that is able to convey the multitemporal heterogeneity of contemporary Greece, bypassing the discourse of nationalism, which presided over the intellectual terrain of the country for the greater part of the twentieth century.

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