

## Joyce, Sollers and the Infinite Text

I have tried to write *Paradis*  
(Round, Canto CXX)

The idea of infinity has haunted the human imagination over the centuries. Poets, like mystics and mathematicians, have desired to come to terms with this concept, which of necessity eludes human, finite categorization. Poets have tried to embody or write infinity within the finite bounds of the poetic text. The idea of writing an infinite book which might somehow transcend its own limits especially haunted the Romantics and Mallarmé,<sup>1</sup> and continues, today, to inspire writers of novels, long poems, and expansive texts of poetic prose defying generic classification. This paper will take up two such indeterminate texts: James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and Philippe Sollers' *Paradis*.<sup>2</sup>

In this study I will explore the ways in which infinity is both an elusive idea or poetic theme and a formal principle by which the poetic text seeks to evade or transcend its own finitude. I will move from initial definitions to Romantic contributions to the theory of the infinite text, and then on to modern formulations of literary infinity in some stories by Jorge Luis

Borges. The remainder of the paper will look at ways in which infinity functions as theme and formal principle in *Finnegans Wake* and *Paradis*.

### PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

What is an infinite text? And what (since infinity implies finitude) is a finite text? The term 'infinite text' seems somewhat contradictory: how can a text, a piece of writing determined in space and time, be infinite? Obviously, the term 'infinite text' must be a metaphor, a name given to a particular type of text. Through certain formal innovations and thematic obsessions, such a text shows itself to be aware of its own finitude, its own nature as a book with a beginning and an end, a book coming from particular literary sources and historical or ideological constraints. Self-reflexive, working *within* its own limits, such a text nonetheless at the same time works *against* its own finitude. It counters finitude by highlighting and exploiting the resources of its own textuality, its status as a system of semiotic functioning extending beyond the bounds of the book and into continuing intertextual and interpretive dimensions. An infinite text is thus physically finite, bounded, and ironically aware of being so; but within its bounds it opens up a vista of infinite speculation, infinite interpretive and intertextual resonance. An infinite text also compulsively returns to the theme of infinity, a concern with divine states, with prophecy and eschatology; it may seek to attain the status of a sacred book, "an eternally developing book...[in which] the gospel of humanity and culture will be revealed."<sup>3</sup>

Infinity and finitude are two poles of a dialectical tension within any literary text, a tension between its textuality, its status as open-ended writing connecting with other writing, and its status as a closed literary work. Thus the infinite text cannot be precisely located as a genre with an origin at a particular point in time (unless we locate its origin in the Bible and other fundamental sacred texts). In the history of literature, there have been certain texts which have been more self-reflexive, more attuned to the dialectic of infinity and finitude animating them and indeed all texts; these texts have striven against their own limited nature, reflecting upon it while striving to transcend it. The *Divine Comedy*, *Faust* and *Moby-Dick* are three such texts. A concern with the theme of infinity (infinite love in the first, infinite knowledge in the second, infinite evil in the third) especially marks such texts as they seek to embody infinity by overcoming formal limitations,

1 See Stéphane Mallarmé, "Le Livre, instrument spirituel," *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard 1945) 378-382. For twentieth-century formulations of the problem of the infinite Book, see Maurice Blanchot, *Le Livre à Venir* (Paris: Gallimard 1959) and Philippe Sollers, "Littérature et totalité," *L'Écriture et l'expérience des limites* (Paris: Seuil 1968) 67-87. See also Gilbert Sorrentino, "Fictional Infinities," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 4 (Fall 1984): 145-150.

2 *Paradis* was published in regular installments over the 1970s in *Tel Quel*, a Paris journal of literary and cultural theory edited by Sollers. In the early 1980s, *Tel Quel* ceased publication, and Sollers raised a new journal, *L'Infini*, from the ashes of the old. He continued to publish installments of *Paradis*, although more sporadically than previously, right up to 1985. The major part of *Paradis* was published as a volume by Seuil in 1981; a second volume was published by Gallimard in 1986.

3 F. Schlegel, Fragment #95, "Ideas" in Kathleen Wheeler, ed. *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1984) 57.

emphasizing yet transcending finite contradictions of genre and narrative line.

As already suggested, the idea of an infinite text must be defined in opposition to the idea of a finite text, and vice-versa. As an infinite text both recognizes and seeks to escape its own limitations, so we might expect that a finite text would neither recognize its own limitations nor seek to evade them. In the finite text, there is no general ironic turn into self-consciousness (consciousness of textual limits); correspondingly, there is no impulse to exploit the resources of textuality by extensive intertextual and interpretive play. Further, the finite text is not centrally organized around the idea of infinity; rather, it develops a world untouched by an infinite perspective. However, we must recognize that the finite text and the infinite text are limits only, tendencies within any particular literary work. There are no purely infinite or finite texts. The distinction is a relative one; it is, for example, the difference (in form and preoccupation with the infinite, as in levels of irony) that we sense between Goethe's *Faust* and Austen's *Emma*, between Pound's *Cantos* and his *Mauberry* sequence.

A further distinction on which this study is implicitly based is a distinction between totality and infinity. A work measuring its own finitude against infinity and seeking, via a multiplication of genres, languages and perspectives, to enact infinity, the infinite text may envision infinity in two ways: as the totality of all things, the perfect sum and fullness of knowledge; or as something beyond totality, undermining its fullness and making the sum of knowledge an impossible illusion. Totality implies control; infinity implies loss of control. Totality is what Faust wants; infinity is what he gets. When the Romantics speak of infinity, they seem to have totality in mind. As we look at *Finegans Wake* and *Paradis*, however, we will be emphasizing the other side of infinity: in these texts, a totalizing drive is continually being subverted; the reader's desire for control, for perfect memory and knowledge, is undermined as he or she is lost in their burgeoning, labyrinthine structure.

## ROMANTIC BACKGROUNDS

Romantic theories of poetry, irony and the novel can contribute to a theory of the infinite text. Romantic poetry is infinite, Friedrich Schlegel says, because it subsumes all poetic 'kinds' and moves toward a totality of vision:

Romantic poetry can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age...[It] should forever be becoming and never be perfected.

It can be exhausted by no theory and only a divinatory criticism would dare try to characterize its ideal. It alone is infinite...more than a kind...[It] is, as it were, poetry itself...<sup>4</sup>

Like the encyclopedia, the Romantic poem as infinite 'gospel of humanity and culture' is endlessly becoming. The infinite text is always open to revision and addition: yearning toward totality, it is nonetheless never complete or full but follows the world in all its changes.

Perhaps the most suggestive of F. Schlegel's points, above, is his notion that only a "divinatory criticism" may approach Romantic poetry as the infinite, endlessly becoming mirror of the age and the world. Here we are back at the sacred origins of the infinite text. Divination (the indirect insight into the invisible forces that shape our lives) is perhaps the best way of characterizing a necessarily indirect critical approach to a text which eludes interpretive totalization and is always restlessly becoming, always skirting the unknown. Romantic poetry is animated by an infinite perspective because its mimesis is an infinite transformation, not a literal imitation of nature. Friedrich Schlegel speaks of a "magic" mimesis, "the higher transformation of things in a magic mirror..."<sup>5</sup> Through the medium of the imagination, the poet makes nature poetic, "transform[ing] it as the day of judgement does the living, for hell or heaven."<sup>6</sup> The forms of nature are marked with the infinite, with a divine, no longer natural, order. Jean Paul Richter sees the transforming or special mimetic power of Romantic poetry to be its power to effect a spiritual "transubstantiation" of nature: "External nature becomes something different in every inner nature, and this transubstantiation into the divine gives the spiritual poetic matter, which...builds its own body (the form)..."<sup>7</sup> The infinite text, in this view, would be an endlessly becoming or developing body or form in which finite nature is subsumed and transformed. The text is based in, but rises above, the contradictions of outer and inner nature, matter and spirit.

Just as Romantic mimesis transforms nature through the power of the imagination, so Romantic irony performs a transcendent gesture based in,

4 F. Schlegel, "Altenäum" Fragment #116 in Wheeler 46-47.

5 Schlegel *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler (Munich: Schönigh, n.d.) VI, 276. Cited by Eric Blackall in *The Novels of the German Romantics* (New York: Cornell UP 1983) 36.

6 Jean Paul Richter, "School for Aesthetics," trans. Margaret Hale, in A. Leslie Wilson, ed., *German Romantic Criticism* (New York: Continuum 1982) 36.

7 Richter, in Wilson 42.

but rising above, the contradictions of a finite world. Friedrich Schlegel's concept of Romantic irony can help illuminate the nature of the infinite text. In distinguishing between a lower (rhetorical) irony and a higher (metaphysical) irony, Schlegel emphasizes that true irony is a state of serious consciousness of the contradictions of the finite world. The ironist rises above these contradictions, annihilates and transcends them in an "ascending momentum,"<sup>8</sup> yearning to attain an infinite perspective. As F. Schlegel puts it, "In true irony not only striving for the infinite but possession of the infinite must be present"; in Romantic irony as in the infinite text, there must be a struggle within and rising out of finitude; at the same time, however, there must be (at least moments of) serenely detached contemplation, an infinite perspective on finitude. Closely linked with Romantic theory of irony, the Romantic idea of an absolute or ideal novel similarly valorizes self-reflexivity, transcendence of finitude and attainment of an infinite perspective. The absolute novel, for F. Schlegel and Novalis, should embrace and mingle all genres. It should fuse matter and spirit, the natural and the supernatural, in a transfiguring, totalizing gesture intending to realize that infinity "anterior to the... fragmentation of modern life but also transcendently present as a reality to which all the seeming... contradictions of finite experience are mysteriously attuned and into which they will all ultimately be resolved."<sup>9</sup> The absolute novel as Romantic Book should have a strong mystical character, attaining to an infinite perspective. Such a Book, F. Schlegel notes, is "elliptical" in form, having two centers of attraction — finite and infinite — in fundamental tension. In the conflict of absolute or perfect novel with imperfect novel, higher irony with lower irony, infinite poetic mimesis with prosaic imitation, the dialectical thrust of Romantic theory can help us to appreciate the dialectical nature of the infinite text, a text in creative conflict with its own limitations. Further, the infinite perspective desired, achieved out of and because of finite contradictions, is similar to the state Keats calls "negative capability," "when [one] is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."<sup>11</sup> The reader of the infinite text is well served if he or she has such a 'capability,' the

ability to move in the midst of the contradictions of the text, the multiplicity of its genres, forms, voices, at times attaining an infinite perspective, what Keats identifies as a "sense of Beauty...[which] overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration."<sup>12</sup>

'Mysteries' and 'half-knowledge' greet the reader of the infinite text, the reader who does not impatiently attempt to totalize or appropriate knowledge but rather, passive, lets the text blow him or her where it will. In reward for this patience, the reader occasionally gains what Schiller terms a sense of the "sublime":

... the sublime affords us an egress from the sensuous world in which the beautiful would gladly hold us forever captive. Not gradually (for there is no transition from dependence to freedom), but suddenly and with a shock it tears the independent spirit out of the net in which refined sensuousness has entolled it...<sup>13</sup>

A knowledge of the sublime, the infinite, is absolutely removed from a knowledge of the finite beautiful. The beautiful is 'entolled' within the finite world of the senses. But the sublime, a sudden understanding of one's moral freedom, involves an 'egress' or step out of sensuous finitude into an infinity of understanding. Schiller's idea of an egress, a sudden, 'shocking' liberation from bondage, an abrupt lift out of finitude, characterizes the reader's experience amid the discontinuities of the infinite text. The psychic shock accompanying the egress suggests a more disturbing view of infinity than do Romantic dreams of totalization and unification. In the latter view, infinity is something potential, unrealized and nostalgically desired; in the former view, on the other hand, infinity always already exists in the text, requiring only a slight adjustment of perception in order to suddenly leap into focus, seize the reader without 'transition.'

#### THE INFINITE TEXT AS LABYRINTH

The idea of an infinite text can be further elaborated through the metaphor of the labyrinth. Jorge Luis Borges' stories about labyrinthine texts suggest what an infinite text might look like, how it might function.

In Borges' story "The Book of Sand" ("El Libro de arena"), the narrator acquires a 'holy book' from a stranger in exchange for a valuable old Bible. The new book is called the "... Book of Sand, because neither the book nor

8 Lilian R. Furst, *Fictions of Romantic Irony* (New Haven: Harvard UP 1984) 28.

9 F. Schlegel, *Literary Notebooks 1707-1801*, ed. Hans Eichner (Toronto: U of Toronto P 1957) 64. Cited in Furst 26.

10 Blackall 18.

11 John Keats, "Letter to George and Thomas Keats 21 Dec. 1817," *Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. Robert Pack (New York: New American Library 1974) 55.

12 Keats 55.

13 Friedrich von Schiller, "On the Sublime" in *Naive and Sentimental Poetry* and "On the Sublime," trans. Julius Elias (New York: Frederick Ungar 1966) 201-202.

the sand has any beginning or end."<sup>14</sup> As the new owner examines his treasure, he discovers, to his profound "dismay," that the Book has odd characteristics: its pages are numbered erratically, non-consecutively ("one left-hand page bore the number... 40,514 and the facing right-hand page 999"); illustrations, once found, can never be found again after the book is closed and reopened; most disturbingly of all, the first and last pages cannot be located ("Every time I tried, a number of pages came between the cover and my thumb. It was as if they kept growing from the book"). In the stranger's paradoxical words, "It can't be, but it *is*. The number of pages in this book is no more or less than infinite."<sup>15</sup>

The new owner is haunted by the Book of Sand. "A prisoner of the book," he studies it, goes over it with a magnifying glass; he even dreams of it. As time passes, he comes to see the Book as "an obscene thing that affront[s] and taint[s] reality itself."<sup>16</sup> To finally rid himself of this burden, he deliberately "loses" it on a basement shelf in the Argentine National Library. Ironically, this book which disorients its reader with its infinite inner structure, its lack of a beginning and end, fits nicely on a library shelf, being on the outside, at least, a finite book among other finite books.

Borges' "The Book of Sand" sets out an important paradox of the infinite text — that it is both finite and infinite. In a sense, the difficulties the narrator has in turning its pages and following its pagination represent the interpretive perplexities the reader encounters in the infinite text. And the fearful disorientation the Book's owner feels is a version (exaggerated, of course) of the distress the reader feels in coming to terms with the discontinuity and multiplicity of the infinite text. Borges' story "The Library asked to imagine the universe as a Library, "an indefinite, perhaps an infinite, number of hexagonal galleries"<sup>17</sup> — a species of labyrinth, "limitless and periodic" (Borges' italics, 87). We imagine, within the Library, a perfect Book assuming and enclosing the infinite nature of the Library itself. "In and perfect compendium of *all the rest*... To me, it does not seem unlikely that on some shelf of the universe there lies a total book" (85). As the

Library is infinitely large and endlessly repeating, so the Book summing up the Library is a structure of infinitesimally small divisions. It consists of "an infinite number of infinitely thin pages... each apparent leaf of the book...divid[ing] into other analogous leaves." The center of such a Book is "inconceivable" (88). The endlessly subdividing structure of the labyrinthine text precludes centering; meaning in the infinite text is endlessly divisible, never referring to a privileged or indivisible center of origin.

Finally, in "The Garden of Forking Paths," Borges explores the labyrinth as a metaphor for temporal infinity. In this story, the writer Ts'ui Pen has created a book which is a "chaotic" labyrinth. "In all fiction, when a man is faced with alternatives, he chooses one at the expense of the others. In the almost unfathomable Ts'ui Pen, he chooses — simultaneously — all of them" (98). In the infinite text as labyrinth, normal principles of selection are suspended. At each step, the reader sees innumerable pathways branch out and beckon. There is *no* road not taken. In offering, as *Finegan's Wake* does, many paths of interpretation at once, the text becomes the site of infinite possibility, infinite play. The reader becomes the co-creator of the text; he or she is afforded a glimpse of an expanding network of language or significance which is normally hidden. The "divinatory criticism" hinted at by F. Schlegel — a criticism which repeats the text's meanderings and does not attempt to impose a single schema upon it — is the only means by which the reader can truly gain access to the infinite network of textuality.<sup>18</sup>

#### MATHEMATICAL INFINITY AND LITERARY INFINITY

Through our definitions and survey of writings on the infinite text, we have seen that literary infinity is only meaningful in relation to literary finitude. No work can be literally infinite (Borges in "The Book of Sand" suggests the problems with that idea); however, a text can gain an infinite and ironic perspective on its own finitude. Such a text is quite distinct from one with no such perspective, one "entwined" (as Schiller puts it) in the "net" of finitude. In a similar tension, mathematical infinity is meaningful only in its relation to the familiar, finite numbers with which we count, one after the other. It is only when we try to imagine, all at once, the set of *all* real numbers — the set of all points along the number line — that the idea of infinity comes into play. To jump above all the numbers, to see them all at

14 Jorge Luis Borges, *The Book of Sand*, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (New York: E.P. Dutton 1987) 119.

15 Borges 118-119.

16 Borges 122.

17 Borges, *Ficciones* (New York: Grove Press 1962) 79. All further references to *Ficciones* ("The Library of Babel" and "The Garden of Forking Paths") will be included in the text.

18 In Wakan studies, the writings of Fritz Senn come close to being such a "divinatory criticism" capable of elucidating the infinite text of *Finegan's Wake* via interpretive multiplication, not reduction. See Fritz Senn, *Joyce's Dislocations*, ed. John Paul Riquelme (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1984).

once, as a set, is to imagine actual infinity. Jean-Louis Houdebine, in an article establishing the importance of Georg Cantor's work on mathematical infinity for a theory of literary infinity,<sup>19</sup> emphasizes the distinction to be drawn between potential and actual infinity: infinity ( $\infty$ ) may be seen as the potential limit to the set of all numbers, a limit always receding and never grasped; or infinity may be seen as a last number,  $\omega$  (omega), a number ending and transcending all the other numbers. As an actual number,  $\omega$  can be subjected to mathematical operations; it is neither unthinkable nor the object of vague yearning, but may be grasped and manipulated, becoming the first number in the set of infinite numbers. Further, Houdebine stresses the notion of a radical "coupure" between  $\omega$  and the line of finite numbers. To imagine infinity, one must cut away from the finite, leap above it, although each takes its meaning from the other, infinity and finitude belong to entirely different orders of being.

Cantor's and Houdebine's ideas on mathematical infinity bear upon a theory of the infinite literary text. The interplay between finitude and infinity is the same in both mathematical and literary domains: just as the set of infinite numbers makes sense only with respect to the set of finite numbers, so an infinite perspective in a literary text requires a finite "ground" of meaning. Further, the cut or absolute change between mathematical finitude and infinity is analogous to the reader's dizzying experience of generic and interpretive discontinuity and multiplicity in the 'infinite' literary text, an experience measured against his or her expectations for decorum and closure.

#### RESISTANCE TO INFINITY

As suggested by the "nightmarish" experience of textual infinity in "The Book of Sand," an experience of the leap from finitude to infinity will cause psychic disturbances of various kinds. The subject or reader may feel fear or awe (attitudes associated with the divine). But a resistance or blindness to the infinite is also possible (and common); Cantor called this a "form of myopia that destroys the possibility of seeing the actual infinite... [which] has created and sustains us..."<sup>20</sup> The infinite text threatens to break down this myopic resistance, threatens a destruction of personality, a dissolution

provoking both fear and desire. In *Gravity's Rainbow* (which is itself such a text), Thomas Pynchon explores the psychic effects accompanying the experience of infinity; he envisions an erotic dissolution or "detonation" occurring in the passage between finitude and infinity, between what he calls "point" and "no-point." (He is literally meditating on the passage from the "point" of a woman's stocking-tops to the "no-point" of her flesh.)

Consider cathedral spires, holy minarets.... mountain peaks rising sharply to heaven... the edges of steel razors, always holding potent mystery... rose thorns that prick us by surprise... even, according to the Russian mathematician Friedmann, the infinitely dense point from which the present Universe expanded... In each case, the change from point to no-point carries a luminosity and enigma at which something in us must leap and sing, or withdraw in fright... Do all these points imply... an annihilation? What is that, detonating in the sky above the cathedral? beneath the edge of the razor, under the rose?<sup>21</sup>

Pynchon's 'change' from point to no-point recalls the shock of the sublime in which, Schiller says, one is torn out of finite dependence and into infinite freedom. This freedom under the 'rose' (recalling the rose in Dante's *Paradiso*) is not for tremulous hearts; the pilgrim-reader faces a death of finite expectations under the 'razor' of altered perception.

In the literary text, the passage from finite point (desire for full, closed meaning) to infinite no-point (acceptance of interpretive mystery or multiplicity) has profound and extensive effects. The subject or reader is opened, divided, traversed by other voices. Vocally plural, the infinite text is also formally and thematically heterogeneous, incorporating all the modes and genres of discourse, all the topics under the sun. The infinite text is the site of a passage or dialectic between traditional textual practice emphasizing linear narrative and generic decorum, and a new practice opening up the narrative line, overcoming generic boundaries and fragmenting the speaking voice into a multitude of (often inhuman) voices.

Philippe Sollers has speculated on the experience of the infinite in literature in an interview-article entitled "L'Analyse infinie."<sup>22</sup> For Sollers, the experience of literary infinity in texts such as Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Joyce's *Finegan's Wake* involves a "poudrolement corpusculaire," a radical detonation (to use Pynchon's term) and consumption of the speaking subject within language. A "division du sujet à vif, qui n'est autre que ce qu'on pourrait appeler sa blessure d'infini, dessine la possibilité — ou non — pour

19 Jean-Louis Houdebine, "L'Expérience de Cantor (Pour la détermination d'un 'principe d'infinité' en littérature)" *L'Infini* 4 (1983): 87-110. *L'Infini* has published articles on Dante, and appears to be interested in formulations of the infinite in literature and in other systems of thought.

20 Cited by Rudy Rucker in *Infinity and the Mind* (New York: Bantam Books 1982) 46.

21 Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Bantam Books 1973) 462.

22 *L'Infini* 2 (1983): 16-25. All further references to "L'Analyse" will be included in the text.

un sujet de passer à travers toutes les langues..." (18). Sollers' idea that the experience of infinity entails a *wounding* picks up on the theme of danger, of resistance to the infinite, already articulated by Cantor and Houdebine. The wounding and division of the subject opens the way for a poetic exploitation of the Babel of languages, a 'speaking in tongues'; a single word in *Finnegans Wake* (and, to a much lesser extent, in Sollers' own *Paradis*) can be the node into which many languages converge. Finally, Sollers suggests in "L'Analyse infinie" that for the reading as for the writing subject, the experience of infinity must involve a passage through a sacrificial "holocaust," an "anéantissement sans reste" (19). The subject changes, loses some of his or her literary past. Ideally, infinity in a literary text is a passage out, a division with no remainder, an exile burning the bridges of finitude. However, in actuality this literary holocaust can never be total and without memory. As we have seen, the infinite text plays infinity against finitude; the memory and hence the expectation of unified meaning haunts the subject and intensifies the experience of actual textual and linguistic dislocation and multiplication.

#### FINNEGANS WAKE AS INFINITE TEXT

Many quote from *Finnegans Wake*, but few read it in its entirety. It is a text that elicits extreme reactions: some devote their scholarly lives to it, approaching it with the reverence traditionally accorded to the Bible; however, others dismiss it without even reading it. The latter response seems to be a form of the fearful resistance we noted in Borges' "The Book of Sand," a discomfort commonly felt before a manifestation of the infinite in finite form.

*Finnegans Wake* inscribes infinity in its very language. Each composite word, each pun, is crossed by many voices and tongues. The speaking subject proliferates into a multiplicity of speaking instances, encouraging in turn a multiplicity of interpretations. As in a labyrinth, the reader faces, with each new word and phrase, a number of alternative interpretive pathways, holding these simultaneously in mind. Just as the text is formally affected by an infinite perspective, so, in particular, the word 'infinity' and the mathematical symbol for infinity ( $\infty$ ) themselves emerge as objects for linguistic play.

In one transformation of the word 'infinity,' the term 'infinibility' evokes the infinitesimal subdivision or proliferation of meaning. The context is the "Mime of Mick, Nick and the Maggies" (Book II, Chapter 1), one of a number of retellings and representations of the family myth (and of the narrative of the *Wake* itself):

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And now with robbly brevifox's fishy fable lissaned out, the threads simwath toran and knots in its antargumends, the pecciolines in Liffeyetta's bowl have stopped squiggling about Junoh and the whalk and ferialquintiasm and pebble infinibility and the poission of the hoghy course.<sup>23</sup>

The fishy 'fable' of the *Wake* is like a net which is with some difficulty "lissaned out" (listened to or smoothed out) by the listener/reader. The text as net draws up some strange semantic catches: "pebble infinibility," for example, ironically both puns upon "papal (absolute) authority" and suggests infinite difference, the infinity of "pebbles" (topics, tongues) tossed in the stream of the text. "Infinibility" foregrounds multiplicity, controversy. The structure of controversy (a tangled net of agreements and disagreements, a labyrinth of bifurcating paths and "knots in its antargumends") indeed characterizes the process of reading the *Wake*, in which the reader interprets by working backward and forward, by "attempting to rectify the errors of assertive simplification at once, or to improve on one mistake by interlacing another."<sup>24</sup> Reading the *Wake* is a process of 'interlacing' because the narrative never stops "squiggling about"; "toran" and full of "knots," it frustrates the reader's expectations, inviting new interpretive syntheses, new understanding of "infinibility," infinite ability.

The word 'infinity' is thus played upon to yield meanings suggestive of structural characteristics of the *Wake* as an interlacing or labyrinthine text. In addition, the sign or "chiffre" ( $\infty$ ) of infinity is seeded throughout the text and undergoes significant transformations. The symbol  $\infty$  is recast as "O.O." or the "O"s in the following Babel of tongues:

Epi alo, ecou, Baiste, tuvavrn dans Lpuit boing going. Ismeme de bumbac e meias de portocaille. O.O. Os pipos mios es demasiada gruanso por O piccolo pocchino. Wee fee? Ung duro. Kocshis, szabad? Mercy, and you? Gomagh, thak. (54.15-19)

From the opening "Epi alo, ecou" ("Et puis allo, écoute") to the closing "thak" ('thank you'), the reader overhears a phone conversation in which many different tongues compete with one another. This oral 'party line' is, in miniature, the *Wake* itself, the book which, speaking in tongues, counters the linear logic of traditional literacy. Orality is one aspect of infinity in the literary text. In speech, meaning is opened, made as evanescent and tenuous as the breath; in the turns and returns, the interjections and silences of oral

<sup>23</sup> *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber and Faber 1975) 245.09-13. All further references to the *Wake* will be included in the text.

<sup>24</sup> Seem 70.

dialogue, the participants must continually make and unmake interpretive decisions. "O.O." as oral exclamation is a farcical version of  $\infty$  ("O.O." apparently designates toilets in southeastern Europe<sup>25</sup>). This 'detonation' of surprise, like the equally oral "Ppi!" found throughout the *Wake*, unsettles the totalizing ideal of a written compendium of human knowledge; it opens the subject to a multiplicity of voices and interpretive directions.

In the labyrinthine proliferation of *Finnegans Wake*, as in its oral subversions already discussed, the infinite is manifested in finitude. The text is an endlessly spreading tree of knowledge, a "Mimosa Multimimetica": "lead us seek, lote us see, light us find... Mimosa Multimimetica, the maymeanining of mainoomeneing!" (267.01-.03). The endlessly branching network is an important motif all through *Finnegans Wake*. As a figure of indecidability, of the proliferation of meaning, ALP is a watery network and is also characterized as a maze, "Annah the Allmaziful, the Everliving, the Bringer of Plurabilities" (104.01-.02). The similarly indeterminate HCE — he who dies, lives again, dies and so on endlessly — is sometimes a burrowing mole whose underground proliferation absorbs both death and life. In the earth he is both buried and renewed:

This wastohavebeen underground heaven, or mole's paradise which was probably also an inversion of a phallopharos... our misterbilder, Castlewillamious, openly damned and blasted by means of a hydromine, system, ... exploded from a reinvented T.N.T. bombingpost... (76.33-77.05)

The "misterbilder" or Master Builder of towers is also paradoxically a miner 'blasting' his way underground. The mine is "an inversion of a phallopharos, a phallus and "pharos" (lighthouse); in the gender ambiguity of HCE we read the proliferation of interpretive pathways in the *Wake*, a multiplicity which must eventually undermine a phallic or singular order of meaning. The "point" in all its senses is "openly damned and blasted" by a "reinvented T.N.T." writing opening new passages for meaning. The reader enters a labyrinth or "garden of forking paths" (to recall Borges' story), nosing through an "underground heaven" where a number of semantic possibilities can be entertained at once.

"[A]nd may his hundred thousand welcome stewed letters, relayed wand postchased, multiply, ayfaith, and plituply" (404.36-405.01): the labyrinthine "plutification" of meaning in *Finnegans Wake* is also figured in the transformations and divagations of a Letter which is at one point excavated

from a midden heap by a hen (a version of ALP). In Book I, Chapter 5, the hen recovers a "proteiform graph" (107.08) whose physical condition (holes, smudges, decay) figures the evasion of decorum and correctness that marks the infinite text, "all those red raddled obeli cayennepepercast over the text... calling unnecessary attention to errors, omissions, repetitions and misalignments" (120.14-.16). The infinite text, like the hen's Letter, is open to the whims of chance. The writer does not will the fruition and termination of meaning, and neither should the reader: "The end? Say it with missiles then and thus arabesque the page. You have your cup of scalding Souchong, your taper's waxen drop, your cat's paw..." (115.02-.05). Any accident may begin or end the infinite text; it has no natural or inevitable beginning or ending. In the *Wake*, each word and phrase is a site of new deparature.

The Letter as erring text is appropriately dug up from a dump, a layered palimpsest of distorted fragments. This structure is a

... fatal midden or chip factory or comicalbottomed copsjute (dump for short) ...[I]n the course of deeper demolition unexpectedly one bushman's holiday its limon threw up a few spontaneous fragments of orangepeel, the last remains of an outdoor meal by some unknown sunseeker or placeholder *illico* way back in his misridded past. (110.25-31)

Significantly, the midden is a "comicalbottomed copsjute," a humorous site; humour (like erotica, or chance, or anything else giving the slip to common sense) is an important expression of the infinite in literature. The layering and juxtaposition of the most ill-assorted fragments, in a midden as in a palimpsest, provokes astonished laughter. Such laughter both celebrates and annihilates the contradictions of finitude. Humour in *Finnegans Wake* likewise destabilizes the reader's common-sense expectations, juxtaposing the sacred and the profane, the high-literary and the popular, often within a single pun or portmanteau word. Wakean language is a midden-language composed of the rubbish layers and treasures of human tongues; in experiencing this language, the reader loses his or her bearings in laughter, slipping into the exile of meaning.

The hen's Letter (a figure for the *Wake* itself) is at one point characterized as a chain letter, unlike most chain letters, however, it attests to its own status as a big joke on its readers. It is

... a huge chain envelope, written in seven divers stages of ink ... superscribed and subpencilled by yours A Laughable Party, with afterwrite, S.A.G., to Hyde and Cheek, Edenberry, Dubbienn, WC ... (66.13-.18)

25 Roland McHugh, *Annotations to Finnegans Wake* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1980) 54.

Anonymous scribes ("A Laughable Party") write the layers and the humorous juxtapositions of the palimpsestic Letter, like the labyrinth, a figure for the infinite text. The Letter is "superscribed and subpencilled" by everyone and no-one. One reads within the "seven divers stages" of the Letter the intertextual and interlingual layering of the *Wake*. This book may indeed seem to some to be an "impassable tissue of improbable layers" (499, 19); whatever the reader's attitude or level of resistance, however, it is certain that beneath the words of the *Wake* there opens a dizzying perspective of indecidability, an infinite regress of interpretations.

The layer and the tunnel, the palimpsest-midden and the labyrinth, are linked in the union of ALP and HCE. The hen as a scavenging "pelfalittle gnarlybird" (10, 34) pecks through layers of treasures in the "filthdump" (80, 06), while HCE as a mole is "buried burrowing in Gehinnon, to proliferate through all his Underwealth, seam by seam, sheol om sheol..." (78, 09-10). The earthy activities of ALP and HCE thus link the palimpsestic layer and the labyrinthine seam. In *Finnegans Wake*, a celebration of the layers within and multiple connections between languages and cultures is the very basis for a regeneration and accession to an infinite perspective.

The phoenix is a final motif of infinity in *Finnegans Wake*. The reader returns again and again to Phoenix Park, a version of Eden, as the site of HCE's and man's "foenix culpri," the original, happy, ever-regenerating sin. The phoenix, like the pilgrim Dante in the *Purgatorio*, is consumed in a holocaust, a pure fire marking the infinitization of being. Balanced against the hen's delight in filth and debris, the "litter" of writing, the *Wake* finally offers a vision of purification and renewal. The *ricorso* of Book IV enacts this ecstatic phoenix-vision: "Sandhyas! Sandhyas! Sandhyas!...Phlenxy, O rally! To what lifelike thyme of the bird can be" (593, 01-05). *Finnegans Wake* as infinite text thus celebrates the possibility of rapturous renewal at the same time as it affirms the sedimented detritus of everyday life and language, and the network of connections ramifying throughout it.

#### PARADIS AS INFINITE TEXT

In working out his own infinitizing project in *Paradis*, Sollers has been profoundly influenced by Joyce's earlier project in *Finnegans Wake*. Sollers

has published articles on Joyce and the *Wake*<sup>26</sup>, and a translation of an excerpt from *Paradis* has appeared in an anthology of *Wake*-influenced texts.<sup>27</sup>

*Finnegans Wake* is at the base of a postmodern tradition which foregrounds writing in its autonomous nature, in its status as a machine demanding regular use, drawing the writer into regular production. Such writing, which is always already beginning and which the writer enters and 'picks up,' is multivocal and offers multiple interpretive possibilities. Referring to Sollers' novel *H* (similar in form and project to *Paradis*), Roland Barthes characterizes the text as being

... un *discontinuu continu* (ou l'inverse); les 'sujets' ('topics', 'questions') courent, voltigent, passent, c'est la striture incessante... Ces sautes de textes... sont cependant emportés, roulés dans une vague unique (un chant) qui ne peut être que la langue, dans sa matérialité pure... Ce continu de la langue... c'est... celui d'un moteur musical, à la Bach...<sup>28</sup>

These remarks recall the treatment of a multitude of languages and topics in *Finnegans Wake*, each 'saute' or individual fragment swept along in the 'riverrun' of a language inexorably unfolding, producing its own connections. Again, Barthes remarks of Sollers: "Le régime général du projet sollersien est fait d'une tension entre les *traces* du sujet (brisé) et l'importement d'une piste qui va (c'est tout)..."<sup>29</sup> The infinite text, whether of Joyce or Sollers, is neither the work of a single author nor the construction of a single reader; rather, the subject — "brisé," marked by the "blessure de l'infini" — surrenders to language, to the accumulated knowledge of a culture which largely "va," writes itself.

Philippe Sollers' theoretical and fictional writings, his theory and practice, have always been intertwined. He has drawn on his fictional experiments to fuel his theoretical debates and distinctions; likewise, his speculations on language and texts have often found their way into his "novels."<sup>30</sup> This

26 "Joyce et cie," *Tel Quel* 64 (1975): 15-24. Translated by Stephen Heath as "Joyce and Co." in the same issue. Heath's translation has been reprinted in David Hayman and Elliott Anderson, eds. *In the Wake of the Wake* (Madison: U of Wisconsin Press 1978) 107-121.

27 Hayman and Anderson 101-106.

28 Roland Barthes, *Sollers écrit vain* (Paris: Seuil 1979) 83.

29 Barthes 84.

30 Besides *Paradis*, Sollers' 'fictions' include the following: *Drame* (Seuil, 1965), *Nombres* (Paris: Seuil 1968), *Lois* (Seuil 1972), *H* (Seuil 1973), and *Femmes* (Gallimard 1983).

interpenetration of theory and practice is strikingly evident in *Paradis*, Sollers' 'novel,' originally published in serial, open-ended form (see note #2). Initially serialized, *Paradis* was a work-in-progress, an ongoing practice or engagement with the materiality of language and the encyclopaedic knowledge of a culture; and even in its final 'book' form, the text retains an open-ended or uncomposed quality.

*Paradis* is an encyclopaedic Book treating many topics of knowledge. Further, Sollers does not discriminate between traditional literary forms (narratives of various kinds, letters, lyrical meditations, quotations, puns and other wordplay) and non-literary forms (statistical listings, newspaper reports, political analyses, and so on). Topic follows topic, form follows form, all woven together via subtle and not-so-subtle techniques of repetition and of semantic and aural association. As an 'encyclopaedia,' *Paradis* is continually testing, straining the limits of its growing mass of knowledge. However, unlike an encyclopaedist Sollers seeks not a totality of knowledge but rather an infinite perspective, an "egress" out of the contradictions of his finite materials. Sollers has said that *Paradis* is "a rewriting of Dante's *Paradiso*... [of] a sentence from Sade, who says, 'Everything is paradise in this hell.'<sup>31</sup> The text is riddled with paradisaical "hélices," little spirals subverting finitude, creating moments of digression, moments of ecstasy and fear caught up in the ongoing flow of the text.

Besides seeking an infinite perspective within a practice of digression and fragmentation, Sollers often returns to the theme of infinity as an escape from finitude. A fascination with infinity would seem to signal that, in *Paradis*, Sollers is seeking ways of 'knowing it all' (and more), gathering up the finite world in a gesture liberated from temporal constraints: "L'expérience de l'infini, c'est cela qui rassemble toutes les subordonnées..."<sup>32</sup> Infinity is thematized in a number of different ways, but always derives its energy and allure from a negative treatment of human finitude. The latter is associated with closure, the finite circle of life and death; infinity, on the other hand, is a vital, ever-opening excess:

... jamais un coup d'ovule n'abolira le besoin d'organe chez elles est une faim bloquée... d'où leur intérêt pour cadavre elles espèrent la fermeture la clôturé marché crémation... quant à eux ils montent l'épingle se palpant le truc travaillant le truc pour empêcher systémiques l'irruption de l'unique excès du lui-seul dénommant-

31 Hayman and Anderson 123.

32 Sollers "L'Analyse infinie" 17.

nommé qui ferait sauter leur crampette...<sup>33</sup>

Blocking, closure: in a punning reference to Mallarmé's "jamais un coup de dés...", Sollers emphasizes the finitude of human life, the circle from "ovule" to "convoi" and "crémation." Infinity is the "excès" liberated when this biological circle is violently blown open. Paradise itself is this opening onto a state beyond the biological circle: "ici lecteur lis bien écoute bien... tu peux si tu veux passer à travers la voile je t'ai assoupli la toile... le ver chassé à coup d'anges verts épées feu sans tranchant ni pointe têtes blondes plein vol fendant l'air purgatoire chant 8..." (211). Dante's *Purgatorio*, referred to here, is built on a series of openings "à travers," the pilgrim progressing from one level to the next, higher level in an overall spiralling movement towards paradise. In *Paradis*, as well, the figure for the passage to infinity is the spiral, in whose widening turns the reader, like Dante's pilgrim, passes beyond his or her human limits, overcoming the closure of finitude. The infinite text, straining against the accumulation of past knowledge, attempts to write the radically new, the 'irruption' out of nothing. In the text's negation of the eternal return of biology and history, "sous le ciel tout est nouveau..." (15).

In *Paradis* the idea of infinity is also linked with that of *exile*: "et ainsi l'aventure du fini et de l'infini est celle de l'exil de chacun en soi-même" (142). This might mean that we sense our finitude to involve an exile, a loss of infinity as a state of grace nonetheless retaining its potency, putting the point on the disappearing line of our lives. Such nostalgia for a lost paradise, Pynchon suggests, is a "comforting — religious, if you want — paranoia."<sup>34</sup> However, Sollers' phrase, above, might also suggest that exile is the experience of infinity itself, the sudden cut out of finitude. In this view ("exile" literally meaning a "leap out"), infinity is the hole or lapsus in a narrative (a text or a life) through which, surprised and passive, the subject slips; such exile is a state of "antiparanoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long..."<sup>35</sup>

Sollers sees infinity as breaking not only the biological circle but also the narrative line. In *Paradis*, the flow of traditional narrative breaks into innumerable "hélices": one thought does not lead smoothly to another, but ends in a rift, jostling with the next. These rifts afford the reader a dizzying perspective on human knowledge, an infinite 'gathering' looking back to the

33 Sollers, *Paradis* (Paris: Seuil 1981) 217. All further references to *Paradis* will be included in the discussion.

34 Pynchon 434.

35 Pynchon 434.

perfection of paradise and its loss:

... je traverse les mères pour connaître la mère entrant chez son pere vivant brulant sur son flanc vierge mère fille de son triefant de fils trinuitant rose-mère tournoyant au père avec ses myriades d'anges d'arlanges procession immobile immobilité s'engendrant comme ici dans les lignes apparemment rectilignes pointillés d'hélice accablant... (218)

Escaping from the narrative line, perceiving infinity at every point of the finite line, is an "accablant," a potentially fearful experience. The "hélice" opening up the line is neither eternity nor time, but a synthesis of these; it is neither paradise, nor the fallen world, but finitude as illuminated by infinity, as revealed in "épiphanies... révélations instantanées, obliques" seen by "une sorte d'oeil diagonal..."<sup>36</sup> In other words, "il y a des moments... contes de fées tout s'ouvre de biais se découvre ..." (82). Epiphanies, peripheral glances out of human finitude: these are consequences of reading the infinite, spiralling text of *Paradis*.

Sollers works with infinity as a formal principle in structuring *Paradis* as a series of visionary digressions, and further as a "briographie," a stream of "bribes," snippets, fragments of information. The reader encounters a flat, unpunctuated succession of phrases, each phrase a "bribe" from a particular discourse — historical, technological, erotic, biblical and so on. While struggling to process often contradictory fragments, attempting to overcome their divergence and make them cohere in the light of expectations for finite closure, the reader at points gains an infinite perspective, seeing the multitude of competing voices at once, as pointing to an undifferentiated, paradisaic speech or silence, "son-silence" (62): "le voilà mauna le silence et encore plus de silence gonflant en silence..." (151).

The following passage from *Paradis* should give us an idea of how a "briographie" functions:

... sweet georgia brown mood indigo ça change des opérètes sifflées par le vieux veuve joyeuse rigoleto rip le trouvère poussez poussez la balançoire deci-dela cahin-caha 78 tous aristocrate d'épinal et maintenant bleu monk histoire toboggan spirale poussée pistonnée roulée où est-ce que tout ça va nulle part fin du hot débuts du cool horloge emballée cosmique tiens encore le foot et voici kukuf qui passe à popof qui descend la balle collée au pied dribble feinte revient attention shoote il y est non corner drop essai transformé douzième round swing uppercuit knock down... (38)

From jazz to opera to soccer to boxing, the reader must process a number of discourses. Sometimes these succeed one another (as in the sporting

"bribes"); sometimes they alternate or interpenetrate (as in the jazz and opera references). Paradoxically, these different discourses are conveyed in an undifferentiated, unpunctuated medium, an onrush of the breath (when read aloud), establishing continuity in discontinuity, suggesting connections where few, or none at first, seem to exist. Holding fragments in mind, dropping and forgetting them, proceeding on to new ones, attempting tenuous syntheses of contradictory materials, the reader at points gains a wider perspective on the text at hand. "Histoire toboggan spirale... où est-ce que tout ça va nulle part": self-referential fragments seed the text, inviting the reader to rise above local, finite contradictions and contemplate the whole — here, as a spiralling, tobogganning 'story' going nowhere, to no final closure on meaning. The "briographie" thus invites glimpses of infinity within its own contradictions, little spirals of vision, insight into the true shape and nature of the text.

There are great problems, then, in reading the infinite text as "briographie." In *Paradis*, the act of reading leaves behind it a wake of fragments; oblivion, like the ocean, closes over. As in *Finnegans Wake*, the reader cannot remember anything more than what he or she has just read. Information is discarded or lost, becoming the residue of the reader's attempt to gain an infinite perspective, escape his or her conceptual limitations, become all-remembering. The holocaust or self-sacrifice involved in reading and writing infinity is aptly figured by a scene of a suicide's hanging:

... que reste-t-il une simple briographie des débris d'explosion toute une flotille on le retrouve le matin la tête sanglante sur le draps visage tuméfié violet c'était drôle cette chambre avec dehors la campagne le bruit des vendanges le soleil filtré sousmarin il était seul depuis des jours boîtes de conserves bouteilles à la fin il chait directement sur le parquet comme pour se forcer à sauter se voulant déchirer parmi les déchets... (56).

Infinity as an exile or leap out may only be thought of against the familiar debris or "merde" left behind. The infinite text as "briographie," in juxtaposing snippets of diverse discourses, includes the "déchets" of its own self-consuming exile. Struggling in the midst of the dregs of culture, the reader slips out — "beneath the edge of the razor" — into silence.

## CONCLUSION

We have been looking at some of the ways in which *Paradis* imagines and practises infinity, approaching the condition of the infinite text. Pushing at the limits of knowledge, inviting the reader into a journey or exile beyond

36 Sollers with David Hayman, *Vision à New York* (Paris: Grasset 1981) 137.

the pale of his or her textual and cultural expectations, *Paradis* nonetheless collects and celebrates the detritus of human, finite experience. *Finnegans Wake* is much like *Paradis* in its ambivalence towards its own finitude: Joyce lovingly fingers over the fragments of culture, while at the same time providing such a wide-ranging scope of inclusion (literary and non-literary forms, diverse languages), that his reader is drawn into an infinite perspective on culture.

Infinity is the idea of paradise haunting *Finnegans Wake* and *Paradis*; it is also the formal principle responsible for the difficulty of these texts — their digressive structure, their mixing of genres, their fragmentation of discourse. In these postmodern literary texts, infinity is not a desired totality of meaning so much as an actual and sudden "egress" through which the reader passes, moving into exile, a freedom to contemplate multiple semantic pathways. The infinite text is riddled with seams, gaps, tunnels, layers (however we want to characterize its discontinuities) which obstruct the progress of reading and frustrate linear expectations, opening the mind instead onto perspectives that are simultaneous and (almost) divine.

In our reading, then, we should recognize that there are and always have been texts that write paradise, just as we have always recognized, among us, certain persons — prophets, priests, lovers and lunatics — who contemplate that state. Julia Kristeva has written of the postmodern text as a "borderline writing which in other civilizations and times had analogies in the mystical tradition," a writing "venturing into the darkest regions where fear, anguish, and a defiance of verbal clarity originate."<sup>37</sup> "Everything is paradise in this hell": the experience of the infinite text is one of pleasure and pain, affirmation and deep resistance. Whatever the difficulty and 'anguish' involved, it is nonetheless true that texts which imagine and enact infinity help the reader to gain a wider perspective on the possibilities of art — and life — in general.

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37 Julia Kristeva, "Postmodernism?" in *Romanticism, Modernism, Postmodernism*, ed. Harry R. Garvin (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP 1980) 139-141.

## La Poétique de J.L. Borges et un autre roman historique

### 1. LA QUÊTE DE BORGES

"La quête d'Almotasim" (une note à l'*Historia de la eternidad* de Borges qui fut incorporée en qualité de conte à *Ficciones*) raconte un roman écrit par un certain Mir Bahadur Ali, où un étudiant découvre chez un homme les traces d'un autre. Mais le contact entre ces deux n'a pas été direct: il s'est imposé à travers plusieurs rencontres, plusieurs hommes, plusieurs influences intermédiaires. Ainsi commence, pour le protagoniste, "la insaciable busca de un alma a través de los delicados reflejos que ésta ha dejado en otras."<sup>1</sup>

Celle-ci pourrait être la description d'une situation qui a hanté nos recherches à Louvain pendant les dernières années. Nous avons entrepris l'étude des modèles narratifs reconnus comme propres par un groupe d'écrivains et critiques latino-américains des années 60, dont les chefs de file s'appelaient Carlos Fuentes et Emir Rodríguez Monegal. Il s'agit de ceux qui nommaient leur production "la nueva novela," ceux dont le succès commercial international fut appelé "le boom," ceux, enfin, qui étaient considérés amèrement par le reste du discours littéraire de l'époque "la mafia," l'olympisme machiavélique et inaccessible, communiste pour les uns et pro-impérialiste pour les autres. Le long de notre travail, nous avons dû nous rendre à une évidence: la confrontation des techniques et des

1 Jorge Luis Borges, "El acercamiento a Almotasim," *Historia de la eternidad*, 6ème éd. (1958; Madrid/Buenos Aires: Alianza Emecé 1984).

2 Les polémiques des années 60-70 sur un ensemble de romans latino-américains qui connurent un fulgurant succès dans ce continent, en Europe et aux États-Unis, se sont développées dans les revues et dans des discussions publiques. Les heureux romanciers et leurs partisans appelaient leur production "la nueva novela," leurs détracteurs appuyaient la dénomination de "boom," terme du marketing qui faisait allusion au succès commercial (avec la connotation, bien sûr, de qualité discutabile). Le terme de "mafia" fut utilisé par Luis Guillermo Piazza dans un petit livre satirique, *La Mafia* (Mexico: Joaquín Mortiz 1967). En préparation: Luz Rodríguez-Carranza, "Las polémicas de la 'nueva novela.'"