"BORGES AND I" AND "I"

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THE AMHERST LECTURE IN PHILOSOPHY

LECTURE 2, 2007

http://www.amherstlecture.org/

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PREFERRED CITATION

Perry, John. "'Borges and I' and 'I'." *The Amherst Lecture in Philosophy* 2 (2007): 1–16. <http://www.amherstlecture.org/perry2007/>.

ABSTRACT

In Jorge Luis Borges' (very) short story, "Borges and I," one character, referred to in the first person, complains about his strained and complex relation with another character, called "Borges." But the characters are both presumably the author of the short story. I try to use ideas from the philosophy of language to explain how Borges uses language to express complex thoughts, and then I discuss two interpretations of the story.

The Amherst Lecture in Philosophy (ISSN: 1559-7199) is a free on-line journal, published by the Department of Philosophy, Amherst College, Amherst, MA 01002. Phone: (413) 542-5805. E-mail: alp@amherst.edu. Website: http://www.amherstlecture.org/.

"Borges and I" and "I"

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BORGES' STORY, "Borges and I," although less than a page long, is full of philosophical riches.[1] In this essay I approach the elegant little story with the dry and boring tools of the analytical philosopher. I think trying to understand in some detail the thoughts Borges expresses and how the language he uses allows him to express those thoughts is worth the risk of obscuring, temporarily, the charm of the story.

An Author and Two Characters

JORGE LUIS BORGES IS the author of this short story, the one who wrote it, presumably edited it over a period of time, published it and who is similarly responsible for all of the other works we know by Borges. I'll call him "the author." Then there are two characters in it. There is the one the author calls, and I will call, "Borges." The other, whom I'll call "the writer," is referred to in the first person.

In the story, the writer and Borges are presented as the same person. The writer is a famous author, named "Borges," although he is curiously alienated from this aspect of himself, and so writes as if Borges were someone else. But the point of the story would be lost if the writer were not Borges. Borges could have written a story like this about some other

1 Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1964), 246–47.

author, real or fictional. And I suppose a possible interpretation is that he is doing so, but the fictional author also happens to be named "Borges." I'll assume the more straightforward interpretation. So we have two identities: the author is the writer, and the writer is Borges.

In the story, the writer tells us of a number of relationships that he has to Borges, and compares himself to Borges in various ways. These relationships are perfectly reasonable and familiar ones to have to people other than oneself. But some are a bit odd to have to oneself, and others seem impossible to have to oneself.

The writer says he "know[s] of Borges from the mail and see[s] his name on a list of professors or in a biographical dictionary." There is nothing mysterious about one person knowing about another in such ways. I know of George Bush through seeing him on television and reading about him in the newspapers. That's a reasonable and familiar way to learn about someone else. How about George Bush? Can he know about himself through seeing himself on television and reading about himself in the newspapers? Presumably he does learn *some* things about himself in that way. He might learn about a funny expression he makes by seeing himself on the evening news; he might learn what his exact words were at a press conference by reading the transcript in the next day's *New York Times*. But the writer makes it sound as if he is only aware of Borges' very existence through these "third person" ways. And that would be quite odd.

It would not only be odd, but quite impossible, for Borges to survive the writer. Even if all that is meant by "survival" is living on as a literary figure, if Borges lives on in that way, so will the writer. Other contradictions are only implied; as that the writer likes hourglasses, Stevenson, and the taste of coffee in a less vain and artificial way than Borges does.

In following the writer's thoughts, we must to a certain extent pretend that the writer is not Borges. But if we just think of it as a story about two people, one of whom reads about the other, shares some of his tastes, finds him pompous and annoying, and yet somehow supports him, it loses its point. The interest of the story is the thoughts that the writer has about himself, thoughts that are most naturally expressed in a form of words usually reserved for talking about someone else. The writer is driven to those words not because of some fugue state in which he has forgotten that he is Borges, but in order to express a certain alienation he feels about certain aspects of himself and certain achievements of his, aspects and achievements

he can convey by use of the name "Borges." Still, a digression to contemplate a case of full-blown amnesia may help us fix some ideas.

Castañeda's War Hero

HECTOR-NERI CASTAÑEDA TOLD a story about a amnesiac war hero.[2] This man, call him "George H.," performed heroic deeds during a battle, but then fell down into a gully and hit his head. While falling he lost his dog tags. When he awoke he had amnesia. He wandered off, came across another regiment, and ended up in an Army hospital. No one could identify him, but he was obviously a GI, so he was treated and received GI benefits, which he used to go to graduate school to study history. For his thesis he wrote a biography of the famous war hero George H., a man who was involved in the very same battle as he was, a man who performed heroic deeds, was never found, was taken for dead, and was given many posthumous honors. In spite of his considerable research, he doesn't figure out that he is George H. for quite a while.

Before he figures this out, it is quite natural for George H. to refer to himself in two different ways, as "I" and as "George H."; for he doesn't know that he is George H. He can sincerely say that he knows of George H. only through what he has read in libraries and in letters from George H.'s comrades. He can say it sincerely, but of course it is not really true. When he notices that he has a headache, he is learning something about George H.; for he *is* George H. And when he reads that George H. was born in Brooklyn, although we wouldn't say he learns something about himself, he does in the sense that he learns something about a certain person, and that person is he.

Consider George H. in the hospital just after the battle. He knows very little about himself. But he does know some things about himself, for he can discover things about himself just by noticing his own feelings and thoughts, by looking at himself, and in the other ordinary ways we find out about ourselves. In one clear sense he knows who he is. Hungry, he sees a peanut butter sandwich in front of him. He knows whom the sandwich is in front of.

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2 Hector-Neri Castañeda, "'He': A Study in the Logic of Self-Consciousness," *Ratio* 7 (1966): 130–157. I've added some details to his story.

He picks up the sandwich. He knows whose mouth he must put it in to relieve his hunger. There are certain "self-informative" ways of picking up information about people; in normal conditions, the person one picks up information about in these ways is oneself. The things one sees are normally in front of the very person who is doing the seeing. There are also normally self-effecting ways of acting. Performing the movement George H. performed is a way of getting a sandwich in front of one into one's own mouth. George H.'s amnesia does not prevent him from knowing about himself in these ways.

But there are ways of learning about himself that his amnesia does prevent. There are ways of learning about oneself that are just applications of general methods of finding out about people, and these are not open to George H. If you ask me my telephone number, and I can't remember it, I can look it up; the same method I would use if I could not remember your telephone number. As long as I remember my name, I can find out all sorts of things about myself. I can find out when I am supposed to give a lecture by checking the bulletin board. I can find out my telephone number and address in the phonebook. These days, if I can't remember the name of an article I wrote, I can look it up on the web by going to my own homepage. In these cases I find out information about myself using exactly the same methods someone else can use to find out the same information about me, using my name for the search, and I can use to find out the same sort of information about someone else, using her name.

The George H. case illustrates some points that are useful in thinking about Borges' story. We basically have two systems for getting information about, and having effects on, ourselves. The most basic system involves self-informative ways of getting information, and self-effecting ways of acting. I see a glass in front of me, I move my hand in a certain way, bring it to my lips and take a drink. This is a way *anyone* can get information about what is in front of her, and use that information to get herself a drink. Since the same method works for everyone, using it doesn't require one to know anything special about oneself, like one's name, social security number, user name, or password. We can also remember *doing* and *experiencing things*, in such a way that there can be no doubt that it is the rememberer who was the agent or the subject of the experiences. George H. can't remember his more distant past, but he can remember the experiences of waking up in a gully, wandering until he found some other friendly soldiers, and coming to the hospital. He does not know his own name, but he

does not need to, to realize that these are *his* actions and experiences.[3] This is the system that George H. uses in the hospital. And it is the system the writer mainly relies on, for the information that he expresses in the first person.

Now if we use our philosophical training, we can look at this system in a rather awkward, but useful, way. We can say that each person has a special relation to himself or herself, identity. By "identity" here I don't mean being of the same *type* or having a great resemblance. I mean the relation that *A* and *B* have when there is just one thing that is both *A* and *B*. It is the relation that Tully has to Cicero, the evening star has to the morning star, Mark Twain has to Samuel Clemens, Bill Blythe has to Bill Clinton, and so on. Identity is the relation that each thing has to itself and no other. In this sense, identical twins are not identical. If they were, there would be only one person, not twins.

Looking at things in this way allows us to generalize the phenomenon we have noticed. There are many relations that, like identity, are connected with special ways of getting information about things and special ways of acting upon things. There is a special way of getting information about the person in front of me: I open my eyes and look. It works no matter who the person is. And there are special ways of affecting this person. There is a way of shaking the hand of the person in front of you, of hitting him, of smiling at him, and so forth. The knowledge we get about people and things in this way we naturally express using terms whose reference depends on the role they play in our lives: "you," "that desk," "the building over there," and so forth. I'll call this "role-based knowledge." Knowledge of ourselves, gained in normally self-informative ways, is a special case of role-based knowledge. The role is *being identical with*, for which we use the word "self."

The second system of getting information about ourselves seems less basic, in the sense of depending on the first, and doubtless having evolved long after the first; it seems mainly relevant to humans with their vast system of employing language to convey and store information. Information is collected about persons (and places, things, and everything else

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3 This fact is the basis for attempts to analyze personal identity in terms of memory. Various attempts of this sort, and discussion of them, can be found in John Perry, ed., *Personal Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). For a sophisticated modern version of this approach, see the writings of Sydney Shoemaker, especially "Persons and Their Pasts," in his *Identity, Cause, and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 19–48.

imaginable) and conveyed in conversations, newsletters, newspapers, posters, magazines, books, computer accessible data-bases, and so forth. The information is encoded by a name of the person, or a number, like a social security number or a credit card number, that is assigned to the person (or thing, or building, or place). In the case of George H., such pools of information, labeled with the name "George H.," enable *anyone* to get information about George H. And this includes George H. himself. A person can use these pools of information to get information about *the person he happens to be*, if he knows his own name, social security number, or whatever. But anyone else can use the same method to get information about him. One can get access to information about people and things without standing in any special relation to them, that would permit reference to them with terms like "you" or "that building." I'll call such information "detached." Such detached knowledge is most useful to us when we can "attach" it, by recognizing the person or object as one that is playing some role in our lives. For example, I read in a guidebook about Amherst College and Robert Frost Library; the information is detached. When I arrive here, I see a large brick building and recognize it as the library. Now the detached information has been made useful; I know where to go, which way to walk, to find a book, or the cornerstone that President Kennedy helped to install.

Most of us get information about ourselves in both ways. We differ from George H., however, in that we integrate it, for we know who we are. When I look up my name at Amazon.com, having forgotten a date of publication I need to fill out a form, I get information about John Perry, the person I happen to be, knowing that the information is about me. In this normal case, unlike that of George H., the information that I get in self-informative ways, and the information I get about the person I happen to be, end up in the same mental file. When I see on the web that the date when John Perry published his *Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality* was 1978, that information goes into the same mental file where information about what is in front of me, whether I am hungry or not, and the like, is kept. I get the information "John Perry published the dialogue in 1978" and this leads to the thought, "I published the dialogue in 1978." With George H., however, the information remains detached. He learns that George H. was born in Brooklyn, but this doesn't lead him to think "I was born in Brooklyn." Compare being in the Robert Frost Library, reading a brochure about the Robert Frost Library, but not knowing you are in it. You know the Robert Frost Library

was built in 1963, and that President Kennedy attended the laying of the cornerstone, but you don't think, "This building was built in 1963, and President Kennedy attended the laying of this building's cornerstone."

I call the mental file where we keep facts we pick up in self-informative ways our "self-notion." For most of us, but not for George H., our self-notion is also the depository for information we pick up about ourselves in third-person ways. Normally, we express all the thoughts based on information in this file in the first person, that is, in English, with the words "I" and "me." When the writer uses the third-person, and says, for example, "he has achieved some valid pages," referring to himself with a third person pronoun, the initial suggestion is that he is not thinking about himself but some other person. But we know that Borges and the writer are the same person. We see that the writer, when he speaker of Borges, is holding much of what he knows about himself, the sorts of things that are publicly accessible, in a sort of separate temporary file, leaving out information he gets in self-informative ways. He is thinking of himself, as best he can, in the way that anyone else who has thought about Borges might think of him. He is thinking of himself, as best he can, in the way that he might think of Borges if he were not Borges. In so doing he can examine a character, or persona, that he has created, not only with his writing, but with what he discloses about himself in interviews and the like.

"Borges" and "I"

THE WRITER REFERS TO HIMSELF in two ways, in the third person and in the first, with "Borges" and with "I." He manages thereby to convey somewhat different thoughts. With "Borges" he conveys thoughts about himself tied to his public persona, and information that he has, or could, pick up in "third-personal" ways. With the first person, he manages to convey thoughts about himself tied to information he gets in self-informative, or "first-personal" ways.

The connection between the grammatical categories of the first and third persons, and the epistemological distinction between self-informative ways of acquiring knowledge and other ways that may merely be applied to oneself, is so natural that we co-opt the grammatical labels for the epistemological distinction. Still, it is worth asking why this is so natural.

Why do the writer's two different ways of referring to himself express different thoughts, and have the different effects on us that they do?

The two ways of referring to himself allow the writer to say things like,

> I know of Borges from the mail
> I tried to free myself from him.

without seeming to imply the rather odd,

> I know of myself from the mail
> I tried to free myself from myself

although the last two are consequences of the first two, *given* the fact that we know, and without which the story would have no point, that Borges is the writer.

The first statement means and conveys something quite different than "I know of myself from the mail," or "Borges knows of himself through the mail," or "Borges knows of me through the mail," even though these sentences, from the author's pen, seem to have, in some sense, the same truth-conditions. Since Borges is the writer, the first statement is true if Borges knows of Borges through the mail, and the writer knows of the writer through the mail. The second is true if Borges tries to free Borges from Borges, and if the writer tries to free the writer from the writer. But we do not draw these implications, but find some less wooden meaning, that conveys something about the writer's thoughts, and how he is alienated from aspects of himself.

A familiar concept of the truth-conditions of a statement is simply what has to hold of the things referred to in the statement – the *subject-matter* – for the statement to be true. I'll call this the *subject-matter truth-conditions*. Since the truth-conditions are the same, but what is conveyed is different, what is conveyed cannot depend on, or depend only on, the subject-matter truth-conditions. Clearly there is some difference that is made by the difference between "I" and "Borges," even though they both refer to Borges. We can borrow Frege's term for the difference between the two co-referring expressions; they are associated with different "modes of presentation"; the terms "Borges" and "I" (written by Borges) both refer to Borges,

but the way they do so, and so the way they present Borges to us, is different.[4] This allows the sentences to convey quite different thoughts, even though the only difference between them is which co-referring term is used. What is this difference?

Those of us old enough to remember General de Gaulle will recall his curious habit of referring to himself in the third person. I suppose he didn't do this all the time, but let's imagine that he did. Imagine you are eating dinner with de Gaulle (whom we will suppose is speaking English, much as we ignore the fact that Borges wrote in Spanish). De Gaulle says, "De Gaulle would like some salt." So you pass him the salt. Why does this sound so pompous, as opposed to "I would like the salt"?

The reason, I suggest, lies in the difference between the way names work and the way pronouns like "I" work. There are simple conventions that allow us to refer to persons with names. Usually the most important conventions are established at or near the time of birth. In America, most children have two or three parts to their name. The family name (from the father, mother, or both), a first name, and a middle name. I'll ignore middle names. So we have, to use my favorite example, the name "David Kaplan," which is a way of referring to the famous logician David Kaplan. The same name is also a way of referring to a professor in Stanford's Medical School. Two conventions, established at different times and places, which allow us to refer to two people with the name "David Kaplan." And of course there are lots of other David Kaplans in the world. Still, we can usually figure out which conventions are being exploited – which David Kaplan is being talked about.

Suppose that you are at a dinner with David Kaplan. He is too far from the salt to reach it, and so are you, but you are next to someone who can, and you have discerned that Kaplan would like some salt because of his baleful look in the direction of the salt cellar after his first bite of steak. "David Kaplan would like the salt," you say to the fellow next to you.

This doesn't sound pompous. But note that it presumes that the person you are talking to knows which of the individuals around the table is named "David Kaplan." You had an alternative way of getting the salt passed to Kaplan; you could have pointed to Kaplan and said, "He would like the salt." Which way you said it would depend on what you felt you

4 See Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Reference," in *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, ed. P. T. Geach and M. Black (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), 56–78.

could assume about your addressee's knowledge; that is, the two ways of referring to Kaplan make different cognitive demands on the listener. Using Kaplan's name doesn't sound pompous, because you aren't assuming everyone knows *your* name. This is what de Gaulle did, and this accounts, I suggest, for its sounding pompous – although in his case, the assumption was no doubt almost always correct.

So when we plan our utterances and assess the effect they will have, what people might learn from them, and what they need to know to understand them, it is not just the subject-matter truth-conditions that we exploit and need to worry about. The effect of our utterances, and the thoughts they express, depend on how we refer to things, not just on the things we refer to.

When Borges refers to himself with "I," we think of him in one way, as the writer of the words we are reading. To think of Borges as the writer is to think of him as the one whose thoughts are being expressed in the words we read; that is, his current thoughts, the ones that guided the pen as he wrote or the fingers as he typed.

The name "Borges," written by Borges or anyone else, refers to him in virtue of conventions known by all who know him or know of him.

So, in using the first person, and using his own name, Borges makes different cognitive demands on the reader, and we react to those different demands by interpreting the thoughts he wishes to convey differently. He in effect asks us to bracket the knowledge we don't literally need to understand the reference of his words. When he uses the first person, we bracket the facts we know through information we have accessed via the name "Borges." When he uses "Borges," we bracket the facts we know in virtue of the user of the name being the referent of the name. So we have two characters. One is the writer, who is telling us about his relation to the other, Borges, a well-known author.

These facts about language, about the difference between names and pronouns, and especially "I," are a special case of the more general differences between role-based and detached systems of information and action we considered in the last section. "I" is a self-effecting way of referring to a person; it is a way anyone has of referring to oneself, that does not depend on knowledge of one's own name, any more than eating the sandwich in front of one does. "Borges" is a detached way of referring to Borges; anyone can refer to Borges in that way, whatever role he plays in their lives and whether or not they know of that role.

A First Interpretation

WE NOW HAVE ENOUGH MATERIALS for a first pass at an interpretation of the story. The author is the writer and has the thoughts the writer is depicted as having. The writer and the author both like maps, hourglasses, typography and Stevenson in the way the writer is depicted as liking them. The characteristics attributed to Borges by the writer – liking these things in a vain way, for example – are not ones the author actually has. They are ones he would have, if the things attributed to him by the press, critics, publicists were correct. The works of the author, together with writings of critics and the like, have created a public concept, a persona, of the author that is not accurate. And yet the author is constantly exposed to it, in the same ways that everyone else is, and cannot avoid it. The key to this pool of accurate, semi-accurate, and inaccurate depictions of the author is his name, "Borges." Thus the author can use this name to create a character in the story, so we can pretend that the concept correctly describes someone real, towards whom the writer feels considerable annoyance. When the writer tries to do things and write things that don't conform to the public persona, these things are simply absorbed into it, interpreted in its light, changing it, but not making it accurate. He appreciates that this concept of himself, the inaccurate one, is what will live on, along with his literature. Only as the person that this concept inaccurately portrays, will he continue to be known, to survive. Thus the penultimate sentences:

> Years ago I tried to free myself from him and went from the mythologies of the suburbs to the games with time and infinity, but those games belong to Borges now and I shall have to imagine other things. Thus my life is a flight and I lose everything and everything belongs to oblivion, or to him.

But the end of the story, if taken seriously, belies this interpretation:

> I do not know which of us has written this page.

If the character Borges is simply the writer's personification, for literary effect, of an inaccurate concept of the writer, how could there be any possibility of Borges having written the page, that didn't involve the writer writing the page? How are we to interpret this last sentence? It seems to open the door for a somewhat different interpretation of the story. On this interpretation the writer and Borges are different aspects or *selves* of the author; so it makes

some sense to attribute agency to one and not the other. But what sense can we make of such multiple selves and bifurcated agency within a single person?

Borges' Selves

I THINK SELVES are basically just people, seen as playing the role of being the same person as the subject of some verb, the agent of some activity, the thinker of some thought, the possessor of some emotion, and so forth. My neighbor is just a person, thought of as playing the role of one who lives next to, relative to me. My father is just the person who plays the role of being the male parent of, relative to me. "Neighbor" and "father" are role-words, and so is "self." On this conception of selves, there is only one self per person, the person himself or herself.

Still, we often use phrases like "the true self" or "the authentic self." Earlier this year Mel Gibson, arrested for drunk driving, made a number of anti-semitic remarks. People debate: was that Gibson's true self emerging, in the uninhibited state produced by drunkenness? Or is his true self the one that emerged when he sobered up, and with all of his cognitive faculties functioning, was ashamed at what he had said? Without taking sides on the real Mel Gibson, or even committing myself to the idea that some selves are uniquely true and authentic, I want to see what sense we can make of this idea of one person having multiple selves.

What I will suggest uses the concept of a *motivating cognitive complex*. We begin with the familiar idea that actions are motivated by beliefs and desires. If I intentionally do *A*, there will be some combination of beliefs and desires that plays two important roles in my doing *A*. First, the beliefs and desires are what *cause* me to do *A*. Second, the contents of the beliefs and desires *rationalize* (in a relatively weak sense of "rationalize") my doing *A*.

Let's return for a moment to George H. (His amnesia isn't relevant here, but it seems economical to make use of a character already in play.) In the hospital, George H. is hungry; that is, he has the desire to get some nourishment. He sees a (rather uninspired) peanut butter sandwich in front of him, and so believes that there is such a sandwich there. So he performs a certain action, grabbing the sandwich bringing it to his mouth, biting, chewing and swallowing. Why did he do this? What was his motivation? That he wanted some food,

believed there was a sandwich in front him, believed that by bringing it to his mouth, and so forth he would get some food.

Two things seem to be implied in saying these desires and beliefs motivated George H.'s act. First, that these beliefs and desires caused his act. Second, that if his beliefs are true, an act of this type will (or at least will be likely to) promote the satisfaction of his desire. We could improve this picture in a variety of ways. We could trade in "desire" for the more general "pro-attitude"; we could trade in belief for something like "positive doxastic state"; we could distinguish between basic actions (roughly, movements one can make at will) and the various things one brings about by performing basic actions. But for our purposes, we can just stick with the simple picture.

The motivating cognitive complex includes all and only the beliefs and desires that motivate an act. We might move to a more robust and normative concept of rationality, by saying that a truly rational person's motivating complex should include *all* relevant beliefs and desires. George H. was not rational, in this more robust sense, if he had some other relevant beliefs and desires, relative to which his act would not have been rational, in the more minimal sense, which he just left out of his deliberation. Suppose, for example, that George H. believes that if he refuses to eat the rather unappetizing sandwiches the nurse periodically places before him, she will give up and bring something more appetizing, perhaps ham and eggs, and that he has a strong desire to get something better to eat. But when the time comes, these additional considerations play no role. It's not that he deliberated, and decided it was more important to him to eat now than to follow his longer range plan. It was not that he forgot all about his longer range plan. He just ignored it.

Hungry and faced with the sandwich, there are two cognitive complexes that are potentially motivating; that is, each provides considerations that could motivate an available action. Each could be the basis for a bit of practical reasoning:

> I want to eat something;
> Grabbing the peanut butter sandwich in front of me is a way of eating something in these circumstances;
> So, do it.
>
> I want to get some more appetizing food served to me;
> Refusing to eat the peanut butter sandwich in front of me will (probably) contribute to my

getting something better served;
So, don't eat it.

Faced with this dilemma, George H. could do several things. He might deliberate, weigh the strength of his various desires, perhaps form some additional beliefs, and come up with a new plan: "I'll eat a little of the sandwich, leave the rest, and complain." Or he could vividly contemplate a plate of ham and eggs, as a way of adjusting the weights of his desires, so he can stick to the original plan. Or he might abandon the plan altogether.

But as I imagine him, George H. does none of these things. The first motivating complex simply seizes control of his hands and mouth, and he eats the sandwich. The second motivating complex might seize control of his thoughts. As George H. eats he thinks to himself, "You shouldn't do this. What sort of a weak-willed wimp are you, anyway?" The second cognitive complex has to be satisfied with mental exhortation, since the hands and mouth are not under its control.

Here I have succumbed completely to the temptation to personify these motivating complexes, as if there were two agents, competing for control of George H.'s effectors, one managing to seize control of the hands and mouth, the other managing only to control some conscious thoughts. This is a dangerous way of talking, but it comes naturally.

Such bifurcations of motivational structure are not uncommon, at least for many of us, usually when we are in the grip of some strong desire or emotion, or some dark debilitating mood, or some moment of light-hearted whimsy, that interferes with the orderly implementation of well-thought out plans and policies.

As a child I was imbued with many opinions that, in retrospect, I don't accept. Growing up in Lincoln, Nebraska, I was taught by my father and grandfather that Roosevelt was a demon, as were most Democrats, that there was something innately special about Nebraska football, that the supposed superiority of places like Yale and Harvard over our local university was a matter of snobbism of wealthy eastern patricians. I think all of these cognitive structures, though no longer my true beliefs, or even really beliefs at all, live a shadowy half-life in the darker regions of my psyche. When tired and annoyed, during those parts of my life spent with people of a certain patrician cast, who don't know or care where Nebraska is, these subterranean near-beliefs briefly seize control of my thoughts, although not usually my mouth. Perhaps, if I were as drunk as Mel Gibson was, I would find myself complaining

about Roosevelt and the New Deal and Democrats, or explaining the natural superiority of Nebraska football – irrationalities, I hasten to emphasize, far more innocent than those apparently dwelling in the dark side of Gibson's psyche.

So motivating complexes may be embedded in larger structures of beliefs about oneself and one's situation, desires and aspirations, intentions and plans, which do not form a coherent whole. Different complexes seize control of different ways of acting in various situations and moods. Borges in the story is not simply a personification of an inaccurate public persona, but one part of a not totally coherent self-concept. In certain moods the author is Borges; the public persona coincides with a subset of the author's psyche that often has control. At such times the author really does become a bit of an actor, a poser, writing and publishing things, giving interviews and talks, that strike him, in other moods, as alien and somewhat pompous, though not without interest and value. Perhaps in such productive authorial moods, the self-conception that is in control when he walks in the streets of Buenos Aires – anonymous, unaffected, unmotivated by larger ambitions – can control only an inner voice, that says things like, "You are being a pompous ass," or some more sophisticated Borgesian version of such a thought.

So interpreted, there are in some reasonable sense two selves corresponding to the two characters in the story, corresponding to two self-conceptions, two overlapping but significantly different complexes of desires, ambitions, and intentions that Borges finds within himself, each taking control in turn, as mood and situation change, and energy and ambition ebb and flow.

If so, the answer to the question posed by the last sentence should probably be "Borges." The writer may have originally had the thoughts the story tells us about. But someone had to write them down, edit them, polish them, and arrange for them to be published. This seems like the sort of thing Borges, and not the writer, would take the time and effort to do. That is, it is the sort of thing that the author, under the influence of his authorial cognitive complex, would do.[5]

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5 The reader interested in some of the ideas I have used in this essay can find relevant books and papers listed, and several papers online, at my website, http://www-csli.stanford.edu/~john/.

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