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# THEATRICAL INAUGURATION OF A PARALLAX VIEW: INTERTEXTUALLY - MEDIATED COMMUNAL MEMORY IN BORGES'S "TEMA DEL TRAIADOR Y DEL HÉROE"

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## Abstract

This article analyzes the mediation of historical events in "Tema del traidor y del héroe" by Jorge Luis Borges, wherein decisive revolutionary successes are the results of a staged performance—the dramatized execution of independence leader Fergus Kilpatrick. By mixing theater and history, Borges overcomes historical representation in terms of the binaries true/false and real/fiction. This article argues that the historical reality initiated by this performance is the result of an incessant literary mediation. Literature, specifically Festspiele and Shakespearean plays, helped establish a parallax view of the historical events and became the vehicle to validate them as ontological reality. Thus, the historical events, performed or otherwise, are inherently accompanied by literature, having the latter enlighten the former. When Ryan, the main character, discovers the historical theatricality, he also discovers that he cannot change the social significance of the historical events, and himself becomes a part of the historical narrative.

Keywords: historical mediation, parallax view, literature and history, representation.

## UNA VISTA PARALAJE: UNA MEDIACIÓN INTERTEXTUAL DE LA MEMORIA COMUNAL EN 'TEMA DEL TRAIADOR Y DEL HÉROE' DE BORGES

### Resumen

Este artículo analiza la mediación de sucesos históricos en "Tema del traidor y del héroe" de Jorge Luis Borges, donde sucesos decisivos fueron realmente un teatro—la ejecución dramática del líder de la independencia Fergus Kilpatrick—. Al mezclar teatro e historia, Borges supera la representación de lo histórico en términos binarios de verdadero/falso o real/ficción. El artículo argumenta que la realidad histórica inaugurada por el teatro es el resultado de una mediación incesante literaria. Lo literario, en particular, un Festspiele y obras de teatro shakesperianas ayudaron a establecer una vista paralaje de la historia además de ser el vehículo para validar lo histórico como real. Por tanto, lo histórico, ya sea lo teatralizado o no, es inherentemente acompañado por lo literario, haciendo que lo segundo se encargue de iluminar lo primero. Cuando Ryan, el personaje principal, descubre el teatro histórico también se da cuenta de que no puede cambiar el significado de los eventos en la sociedad, convirtiéndose él mismo en parte de la narrativa histórica.

Palabras claves: mediación histórica, vistas paralajes, lo literario y lo histórico, representación.

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The other day, I re-read a prefatory note of mine to a collection of these plays —*Les Mouches*, *Huis Clos* and others— and I was truly scandalized. I had written: “Whatever the circumstances, and wherever the site, a man is always free to choose to be a traitor or not...”. When I read this, I said to myself: it’s incredible, I actually believed that!

—Jean Paul Sartre, *Itinerary of a Thought*

Writing is dangerous from the moment that representations there claims to be a presence and the sign of the things itself. And there is a fatal necessity, inscribed in the very functioning of the sign, that the substitute make one forget the vicariousness of its own function and make itself pass for the plenitude of speech whose deficiency and infirmity it nevertheless only supplements.

Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

The main character in Jorge Luis Borges’s short story “Tema del traidor y del héroe” (1997) makes a great —yet unpublishable— discovery. In post-revolutionary Ireland, Ryan discovers that crucial historical events leading to Ireland’s independence were actually a well-rehearsed theatrical performance. As a historian, Ryan begins scrutinizing small clues in historical documents and comparing the content of historical narrative with literary narrative, unraveling that the theatricality of the enigmatic murder of Fergus Kilpatrick, his grandfather and hero of the independence, was actually his execution for his treason. The new-found information calls into question the understanding of Kilpatrick as a national hero whose enigmatic death in the eyes of the public logically climaxed his audacious revolutionary leadership. In the well-chronicled historical consciousness, Kilpatrick was literally murdered in an auditorium on the eve of the successful rebellion of Ireland. His contemporaries, enraged by the inexplicable assassination of their liberation leader, thinking that perhaps it was either motivated or executed by English police, rebelled and achieved the political emancipation to which Kilpatrick had dedicated his life and death. Now Ryan understands that the theatrical space included the entire city, which made the execution be *perceived* by the unsuspecting audience as a mysterious murder. Borges highlights these two opposite perspectives of the successes surrounding Kilpatrick by indicating them in the title of the short story, *traidor* and *héroe*, traitor and hero, having the latter bury the former through historical circumstances. Ryan’s encounter with the theatrics that established his grandfather as a hero in the national consciousness is thanks to —and in spite of— the conspirator’s meticulous attempt to eliminate from historical records Kilpatrick’s treason and performance. His accomplices, upon discovering his treason, crafted a theatrical performance to execute him publically in a manner that would enrage his following public and “apresuraran la rebelión” (Borges, 1997, p. 150). Kilpatrick participated enthusiastically in his theatricalized murder that in a sense would redeem him in front of his contemporaries by helping his own independence crusade. The unsuspecting public, unaware of participating in a city wide dramatization, validated Kilpatrick’s

scripted assassination as historical reality. For them, Kilpatrick was gunned down under mysterious circumstances, becoming a national martyr for leading the home-rule movement. Through his physical demise, the collaborators accomplished their desired political results: the independence of Ireland by enraging the public that adored him. Thus, the historical memory, or “la memoria apasionada de Irlanda”, chronicled his assassination endorsed by his contemporaries as ontological reality (Borges, 1997, p. 151). Ryan’s recognizes this double-ended performance —execute the traitor and create a hero— was not only inspired by fiction and chronicled by historical narrative, but it was also subsequently reaffirmed by both literature and historical narrative. This original intertextuality that surrounds Kilpatrick’s execution inaugurated a sociopolitical discourse of all the successes that continued to self-replicating as more publications validated previously published material. This plethora of intertextual cultural edifice has sustained the socio-politically accepted one-sided view of Kilpatrick for one hundred years despite clues pointing to its theatricality. Thus, we can claim that this cultural structure is both the reaffirmation of the successes of independence as ontological reality and the source of clues about the independence’s theatrical origin. Therefore, the same information that helps Ryan find the staged dramaturgy becomes his greatest obstacle to publishing his findings. He is unable to rewrite a comprehensive historical understanding contrary to the established symbolic order of the national consciousness.

This complexity in Borges’ short fiction has allowed his stories to cross national and academic borders since their publication. In 1944 “Tema del traidor y del héroe” first appeared in the literary magazine *Sur*. In 1945 it also appeared in *Artificios*, along with eight other stories that follow the same underlying topic: “simultaneous literary representation of existing and non-existing phenomena” (Wichmann, 2003, p. 161). *Artificios* eventually became the part two of the book *Ficciones*, in 1956, that was translated into English and published in 1962 by James E. Irby. In the United States academia, it found a natural home in the foreign language departments for students of Spanish. However, due to the philosophical and universal character of his literature, Borges’ *Ficciones* can be found in English, comparative literature, and even philosophy departments. Concisely written with just over twelve hundred words, the story centers on Ryan’s discovery in archival records and evidences in classical historiography indicating parallelisms between historical narrative and literature. This leads to the discovery of the theatrical performance of Fergus Kilpatrick’s execution that was perceived as martyrdom, as intended by the conspirators. The creation and maintenance of Fergus Kilpatrick as hero of the independence via a public execution was to camouflage the fact that he had provided information on the independence movement to English authorities that compromised previous attempts at rebellion, a fact unknown by most of Kilpatrick’s as well as Ryan’s contemporaries. Thus, the concept of parallax views help us to focus on the mediation of Kilpatrick’s perceived ontologies, moving away our analysis of what he is to what makes the audience see who he is. In particular, this allows us to locate our investigation on the -mediated

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(re)presentation(s) of historical events related to Kilpatrick. This mediation is the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega, of historical consciousness in the short story that endorses the discourse inaugurated by the historical theater.

The conspirators' effort to make Kilpatrick's double-crossing vanish by virtue of an urban theatrical production had its own, perhaps even (un)intended, consequences (Ryan believes it was done purposefully by James Alexander Nolan, the architect of the script). The hastily written play had compromising remnants not only of its own historical creation but also plagiarized portions that ultimately became part of "la memoria apasionada de Irlanda". This replicated content —parallelism between literature and history— as well as other unexpected archival inconsistencies reveal an attempt —and the failure— to have the theater and treason obliterated from all historical records. For example, Ryan finds a historical document mystifying due to the destruction of evidence: "Otro documento inédito le revela que, pocos días antes del fin, Kilpatrick, presidiendo el último cónclave, había firmado la sentencia de muerte de un traidor, cuyo nombre ha sido borrado. Esta sentencia no coincide con los piadosos hábitos de Kilpatrick" (Borges, 1997, p. 149). The erasure of Kilpatrick's name from the sentence he himself signed safeguarded his treachery from the scrutinizing public, while at the same time his signature reaffirmed his control over the independence crusade. Nonetheless, this historical document points to an incoherent facts in his known character. Approving the death sentence for a conspirator does not coincide with his reputable benevolent personality. Without concrete knowledge, Ryan senses that something is amiss, as if there is some type of invisible arch-manipulation. The existence of multiple inconsistencies (where consistencies are expected) in archival documents along with random consistencies (where inconsistencies are expected) between historiographic and literary content question the possibility of the smoke screen dramatization remaining eternally undiscovered. In other words, it was only a matter of time before the vanished parallax view was detected by a curious historian with knowledge of English literature. In Borges's short story, it just happened to be Ryan, the grandson of Fergus Kilpatrick. Thus, the associates' attempt to leave no loose ends was not as successful as they had anticipated, or they were artfully betrayed by Nolan, the playwright. At the same time, despite the (un)intended consistencies and inconsistencies that signal to Ryan the need to figure out what lies beyond the perplexing clues, the actual sociopolitical consequences of the theatrical performance inhibit the combined understanding —as both hero and traitor— of Kilpatrick. While both titles are intimately interconnected in the Kilpatrick's life on both an organic and symbolic level, they cannot coexist synchronously as a combined social understanding of his historical persona. The independence as understood by "la memoria apasionada de Irlanda" was only possible by his inexplicable murder that rallied a successful political movement beyond the original choreographed historical events. The theatrical performance created an effective sociopolitical understanding that had apolitical domino effect, creating an impossible-to-disentangle understanding/events in the national consciousness. Ryan has

discovered crucial historical information that challenges the very foundation of the national historical consciousness.

Due to the entrenched nature of the established understanding, the theatrical performance had a twofold goal: the deployment of a master narrative that delineated the ideological perspective from which the theatrical performance and the subsequent historical successes would be understood. In other words, historical successes would go hand-in-hand with the endorsed accompanying interpretation. As the implementation of a master narrative, the theatricalized execution established a specific meaning for the events that took place the days before, during, and after Kilpatrick's execution, forming a stable symbolic order. Kilpatrick as hero, around whom the historical events orbited, keeps this symbolic system stably meaningful. Indirectly, this master narrative demarcated what would be a printable and unprintable interpretation of the historical events. Anything that challenges the established symbolic order will have no place to exist.

We need to lay down the intellectual framework to conceptualize the deployment of one impossible-to-change symbolic world. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a literal parallax as the “difference or change in the apparent position of an observed object as seen from two different points”, and the figurative definition includes “the fact of seeing wrongly or in a distorted way”. The literal clarification —shifting perspectives based on physical movement of the observer— and the figurative definition —distorted perspectives based on erroneous information that feeds the observer— lay the foundation for our theoretical concept of parallax view: the inherent mediation between subject and object that results in uncombinable perspectives. This interposition ensures that either one or the other can be observed, but never both at the same time. Slajov Zizek (2006) analyzes this essential dynamic between the observing subject and the observed object that mediates between the two:

[T]he observed difference is not simply “subjective”, due to the fact that the same object exists “out there” is seen from two different stances, or points of view. It is rather that, as Hegel would have put it, subject and object are inherently “mediated”, so that an “epistemological” shift in the subject's point of view always reflects an “ontological” shift on the object itself. (p. 19).

This different perspective on the observer that reflects the different observed characteristics is the direct result of the mutual mediation among them. For the observer, each parallax perspective places the observed object within new background information that changes the object's perceived ontology, what Zizek calls ontological shift. This subject-object intermediation creates two incompatible parallax views of the perceived object as the background information of each changes its perceived substance. However, this is the case even if these two incompatible parallax angles are not the “difference between two positively existing objects, but a minimal difference which divides one and the same object from itself” (Zizek, 2006, p. 20). The object-splitting differences creates a new understanding that is experienced as a

new entity. Due to the inherent intervention that accompanies the ontological shift, this phenomenological difference cannot be grounded on the “substantial properties” of the object (p. 20). The object’s nature remains the same regardless of the observable perspective; what changes is the *implicit* mediation between the observing subject and the observed object that makes the latter appear as different to the former. Thus, the ontological shift, or the apparent outward change in ontological features, is not substantiated on existential properties; it is merely an arbitrated illusion stemming from the narratological viewpoint. In other words, there is no ontological shift, or change in the essence of the observed, but an interposed epistemological shift of the contemplated object.

This inherent epistemological mediation goes beyond whether Kilpatrick is or is not a hero or a traitor. Borges’s “Tema del traidor y del héroe” exposes the degree representation mediating between a perceived ontology and the observing public: in particular, the role that intertextual citation plays in inaugurating and preserving one perspective of Kilpatrick in the national consciousness. This overreaching intertextuality created, chronicled, and reaffirmed that which presented itself as ontological reality, generating a narrative-mediated national perception. However, while these alternative viewpoints contradict each other on the political surface —hero or traitor— they are intertwined with each other in the narrative, as if their existence is mutually dependent. On the symbolic level, each word, *traitor* and *hero*, has a place in the construction of a social paradigm that, in order to give the illusion of reflecting an ontological reality, needs the other to demarcate a conceptual difference. Both are signifiers within a system of signification, within which the content of each becomes meaningful due to the existence of the other in the articulation. The word *hero* is meaningful thanks to the existence of *traitor* and, vice versa, the label *traitor* is meaningful thanks to the concept *hero*. Both *traitor* and *hero* are part of the dichotomy of language used to create meaning by differentiation. They are words that “have meaning in relation to each other: each designates the absence of the characteristics included in the other” (Barry, 2009, p. 42). This binary opposition —full of assumed meanings thanks to the existence of the other— becomes the basis for the politically crystallized community that resulted from the historical junction. That is why the *traidor* and *héroe* dichotomy permeate throughout the short story as two sides of the same coin: close to each other and yet impossible to see both of them at the same time. These intimately interrelated yet publically uncombinable outlooks of Kilpatrick present a narrative of historical facts that is beyond the binary of trueness or falseness; the intricacies of the literary-inspired and politically-driven historical mythos of Kilpatrick surpasses this simple binary opposition. What we have in this short story is the exploration of the concepts *traitor* and *hero* as inherently mediated discursive constructs closely related to the fictionally created and literature-driven cultural space that generated, performs, and reaffirms a preapproved historical understanding. This mediation —or epistemological shift— makes the audience experience a delineated point of view as an ontological shift.

The factuality in the historical narrative, then, is neither true nor false but part of the overall “fabric of written history” in an encompassing sense of the words (Ludmer, 2002, p. 91). Thus, we should not see the short story’s factual events as a “simultaneous literary representation of existing and non-existing phenomena” (Wichmann, 2003, p. 161), but rather as how writing makes historical events appear in a true/false, existing/non-existing, hero/traitor dichotomy, establishing a specific symbolic order that serves political purposes. Since this duality creates a historical reality for the audience, once established, it becomes impossible to redefine.

## FROM WRITING TO HISTORICITY

Jorge Luis Borges credits his inspiration to G. K. Chesterton and G. W. Leibniz, the first for “discurridor y exornador de elegantes misterios” (Borges, 1997, p. 146), and the second for discovering that what “appears to be causal interaction among substances is really a ‘pre-established harmony’ among them” (Leibniz, 1995, p. 436). The “discoverer of mysteries” and the “pre-established harmony” also establish two parallel underlying topics that accompany the narrative. One produces a sense of a what-and-whodunit plot-driven thriller in Ryan’s detective-like investigation. Setting the story one hundred years after Kilpatrick’s baffling homicide, Borges creates suspense as Ryan unravels the enigma that has bewildered previous historians. The second is that, by acknowledging Chesterton and Leibniz, Borges highlights the cycle of textually recognizing what has been textually expressed before him — the intertextuality of ideas — that parallels the content of the short story: Ryan’s encounter with cryptic textual clues that point to a uniformity between historical-textual content and literary-textual content. This consistency between content in historical narrative and literature materializes in unique contents in the narrative. For example, the following trace is an echo between the life of Julius Caesar as represented William Shakespeare and Kilpatrick’s chronicled murder:

Los esbirros que examinaron el cadáver del héroe, hallaron una carta cerrada que le advertía el riesgo de concurrir al teatro esa noche también Julio César, al encaminarse al lugar donde lo aguardaban los puñales de sus amigos, recibió un memorial que no llegó a leer, en que iba declarada la traición, con los nombres de los traidores. (Borges, 1997, pp. 147-148).

These coincidences between Kilpatrick’s last days and William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* (based on an actual historical event) vaguely reveal a potential mysterious connection. This would not be important if it were not for more illustrations that underscore an inscrutable association between literature and historical narrative. Another intertextuality is the following:



La mujer de César, Calpurnia, vio en sueños abatir una torre que le había decretado el Senado; falsos y anónimos rumores, la víspera de la muerte de Kilpatrick, publicaron en todo el país el incendio de la torre circular de Kilgarvan, hecho que pudo parecer un presagio, pues aquél había nacido en Kilgarvan. (Borges, 1997, p. 149).

Before such odd parallelisms that affirm and reaffirm an underlying connection between literature and historical events, one can logically ask: Why do these literary references exist in historical narrative? Are they just random concurrences, or is there an anomaly at work here? That is the mystery Ryan wants to solve. Multiple correlations between historical narrative and literary narrative “inducen a Ryan a suponer una secreta forma del tiempo, un dibujo de líneas que se repiten” (Borges, 1997, p. 148). Ryan even ventures into metaphysical interpretations in thinking that “antes de ser Fergus Kilpatrick, Fergus Kilpatrick fue Julio César” (Borges, 1997, p. 148). While metaphysics could offer some intellectual insight, it could not completely explain the actual physical connections. These parallelisms that could be still understood as remarkable, random similarities are eclipsed by an even greater harmony: they become up-front plagiarism when “ciertas palabras de un mendigo que conversó con Fergus Kilpatrick en día de su muerte, fueron prefiguradas por Shakespeare, en la tragedia de *Macbeth*” (Borges, 1997, p. 149). What could originally be conceived as incidental harmonious affinities become deliberate literary piracy when certain words in *Macbeth* are reproduced verbatim by a beggar in Kilpatrick’s history. In the words of Leibniz, what appeared “to be causal interaction among substances is really a ‘pre-established harmony’ among them” (1995, p. 436). How could historical narrative have in its very content echoes, parallelisms, and direct word-for-word plagiarism of literature? What is the harmonious connection between the two? Before such a conundrum, Ryan finally decides to decipher what lies behind the intertextual residues in historical narrative. That is, he proceeds to discover the hidden parallax view — what is subjacent behind these (not so) small inklings. His detective aura takes form, preparing him for the discovery of his life.

These intertextual residues were (un)willingly incorporated during the creation and implementation of what became “la memoria apasionada de Irlanda”: the historical events that led to the independence of Ireland in which Kirkpatrick, despite his double perceived nature, had a central role. In one conclave, Kilpatrick, as leader of the independence movement, ordered James Alexander Nolan to find the spy among the conspirators, as the rebellion had always failed. “El país estaba maduro para la rebelión; algo, sin embargo, fallaba siempre: algún traidor había en el conclave” (Borges, 1997, p. 150). Diligently, the latter, after his investigation, proved that Kilpatrick himself had compromised previous attempts of national liberation. In other words, Kilpatrick, leader of the independence, was the “traidor ...en el conclave”. This new information mediates the perspective between the plotters and Kilpatrick: Kilpatrick endures a rapid ontological shift for the conspirators as their fierce leader becomes their traitor. And the punishment for treason is execution. Kilpatrick had to

die. However, while learning who among them the traitor is represents a step toward securing a successful rebellion (they would not be betrayed by an insider anymore), there is a sociopolitical facet that complicates this end. “Irlanda adoraba a Kilpatrick,” and thus “la más ténue sospecha de su vileza hubiera comprometido la rebelión” (Borges, 1997, p. 150). The public follows Kilpatrick religiously as their leader of the independence crusade. Making this new information public would have a counterproductive effect: if the public learned about his treason, it would compromise the tangible possibility of independence and sabotage their invested effort. The plotters had to figure out how to take advantage of the public’s love for Kilpatrick to culminate their home-rule crusade while at the same time execute him for treason. This paradox is the origin of the mediation regarding the nature of Kilpatrick in the story.

James Alexander Nolan had the intellectual tools to overcome the impending contradiction. In addition to being a close collaborator, he also had knowledge of English literature and had written an unpublished article about Swiss *Festspiele*. These were “vastas y errantes representaciones teatrales, que requieren miles de actores y que reiteran hechos históricos en las mismas ciudades y montañas donde ocurrieron” (Borges, 1997, p. 149). With vast knowledge of English theatrical heritage and the multiple forms of representing it, Nolan had the idea to execute Kilpatrick in an indecipherable form that could channel the awakened social anger and political awareness into a call to battle for independence. He turned to a *Festspiele* to carry out the death sentence in a form that not only would hide from the public Kilpatrick’s treason but, on the contrary, would highlight a carefully crafted master narrative:

Nolan propuso un plan que hizo de la ejecución del traidor un instrumento para la emancipación de la patria. Sugirió que el condenado muriera a manos de un asesino desconocido, en circunstancias deliberadamente dramáticas, que se grabaran en la imaginación popular y que apresuraran la rebelión. (Borges, 1997, p. 150).

The theater became the accepted solution following the logic that the actor’s character “*depends* —ontologically on the goodwill of the audience” (Leak, 2006, p. 106). And the public love for Kilpatrick was expected to corroborate his dramatized character. The accomplices, aware of both parallax views, accepted having Kilpatrick assassinated in a theatrical performance that would not only keep his prestige intact but also to cultivate the political movement they wanted. To do justice to their side of the parallax —executing the traitor— the revolutionaries accepted the public theater that would construct in the national imaginary a logical conclusion of his revolutionary leadership —Kilpatrick as a hero. The source of the intertextual residues in historical narrative was Nolan’s own literary creation that, under pressure to have the script done in a short time, included not only similar events from *Julius Caesar* but also direct plagiarism from *Macbeth*. In a paradoxical turn of events, the content of English literature —from the enemy— is used against English rule. Politics and literature are woven forever in Borges’ Irish history. Kilpatrick contributed

to the independence movement by adhering to Nolan's script and also improvising his own lines and actions on the spot, turning his execution into a historical spectacle fashioned from his original material and Nolan's type-scripted material with Shakespeare's plagiarized material. This literary mediation creates the illusion of an ontological change in Kilpatrick.

The theatrical production would present Kilpatrick as martyr of the independence movement by being assassinated under inexplicable circumstances, leading the public to think that perhaps it had been coordinated by English authorities. The *Festspiele* that took place over multiple days in Dublin was the artifice of changing the substance of Kilpatrick from leader to hero for the innocent public and from the condemned traitor to a theatrically mediated hero. For Kilpatrick, this was "el destino que lo redimía y que lo perdía" (Borges, 1997, p. 149). What the community saw and heard throughout the three-day theatrical performance that surrounded the assassination of Kilpatrick was a "constructed literary image, not a natural reality" (Barry, 2009, p. 156). What became part of "la memoria apasionada de Irlanda" was a theatrical representation of Nolan's script, a carefully masterminded narrative, that would impose one side of the parallax view of Kilpatrick. Bertolt Brecht (2005) creates this binary opposition between "natural reality" and "literary image" to highlight the "alienation effect" that results from the public's awareness of witnessing a staged drama. For Brecht, in the experience of a conscious theatrical, "the audience is prevented from feeling his way into the characters. Acceptance or rejection of the characters' words is thus placed in the conscious realm, not, as hitherto, in the spectator's subconscious" (p. 13). In the case of Kilpatrick, the audience was not aware of experiencing a theatrical performance but rather believed they were experiencing historical reality. Kilpatrick's contemporaries did not have the opportunity to accept or reject his spoken words. On the contrary, due to unconsciously participating in a *Festspiele*, the audience accepted it as reality. The presentation of Kilpatrick in front of an unsuspecting audience was designed to have (inter)textually-driven theater taken as ontological veracity. By having the public as audience and witnesses, the theatricality is (mis)taken as natural reality, creating the origins of intertextually-driven narrative with residues of its creation. However, due to the audience's obliviousness to the fact that they were observing a drama performance, this takes place without the "alienation effect," the realization that the theatricality is not ontological reality. While Kilpatrick and hundreds of other actors did their part in the scripted execution, it was Kilpatrick's loving public that turned the theater into ontological history. In the words of Umberto Eco (1986), through the public performance the "'completely real' becomes identified with the 'completely fake.' Absolute unreality is offered as real presence" (p. 27). The audience accepted Kilpatrick's execution as assassination, embraced him as a martyr for their independence, remembering every detail of his last days as part of the national consciousness that the rebellion was forging. The power of the theatrical performance penned and directed by James Alexander Nolan became embedded in the creation of the

modern Irish state that continues having an effect today as “la memoria apasionada de Irlanda.” The politically sponsored, fiction-inspired dominant understanding of the historical successes became the historical consciousness. Kilpatrick’s treason is buried in the triumphalist acceptance of his perplexing murder as the heroic climax of his revolutionary leadership. What remained were the unexpected archival inconsistencies and literary parallelisms in historiography that vaguely illuminate the fact that the historical assassination was not the organic ontological reality that the historical consciousness recorded.

## FROM HISTORICITY TO WRITING

The discovery of his great-grandfather as the traitor scripted into a hero via a theatrical performance creates a unique opportunity to explore the role of words in the construction of political identities with historical consequences. It is here where the linguistic and the political facets intertwine, almost fusing together in a form that is perhaps impossible to separate. While on the symbolic level the titles *hero* and *traitor* reflect meaning-generating binaries, on the political level we find the results of partisan motivations to achieve the anticipated independence. The political movement — what Carl Schmitt (2007) calls “the political” — extracts its legitimacy from Kilpatrick’s mysterious assassination. In other words, Kilpatrick’s actions were “object-splitting” enough to create a complete epistemological shift in the observing public. His performed actions were essential in consolidating the political movement of his contemporaries by establishing the final dividing line between the Irish people and English domination. In the words of Schmitt (2007), “The enemy is solely the public enemy, because everything that has a relationship to such a collectivity of men, particularly to a whole nation, becomes public by virtue of such relationship” (p. 28). It was the historical circumstances of the time — the political maturity, the discovered traitor, the enigmatic death, the hidden treason, etc.— that allowed the master narrative of Kilpatrick as martyr to be inaugurated in the social imagination, portraying the English as the enemy. Thus, the historical expediency of Kilpatrick as player cannot be overlooked. Although his joint conspirators condemned Kilpatrick to death for treason, they were willing to have the public —and history— accept him as a hero of the independence if it served their political purposes. Only by keeping the illusion of the traitor and the hero as separate ontological entities could the political movement be created after Kilpatrick’s apparent murder. Public acceptance of the carefully crafted martyrdom was indispensable in order to utilize the aforementioned historical circumstances. Thus, all goes back to which title within these specific conditions would most help to foster a successful revolutionary war of independence. On the political level, one title was acceptable for all those involved in the independence movement. For the plotters and the public —some conscious while others not— the title *hero* was compromised given the historical juncture.

That is why trying to find the “correct” title to label Kilpatrick’s actual ontology becomes a meaningless effort. This effort reduces the rich mediation that makes him appear as hero for the public. This complicates the discovery of the concealed parallax view, overshadowed and forgotten by theatrical performance, as it was the result of a partisan political motivation.

The deployment of “la memoria apasionada de Irlanda” is rooted in this fiction-inspired historical performance. We cannot deny the length narrative has helped in creating, executing, and perpetuating the conventional system of signification: The execution-taken-as-assassination of Kilpatrick is a historical event inspired by fiction in *Macbeth* and fictionalized history in *Julius Caesar*, chronicled by historical narrative, and maintained by a series of historical and cultural publications that have validated their publication, a type of continuous intertextuality. Borges highlights this literary mediation, stating that “Las cosas que dijeron e hicieron perduran en los libros históricos, en la memoria apasionada de Irlanda” (Borges, 1997, p. 151), merging the historical chronicles and memory as one national consciousness. History lives both in the community and in its historical records. To accentuate the relationship between history and literature, Borges underlines that renowned writers subsequently praised the hero in their poetry. For example, Kilpatrick’s name “ilustra los versos de [Robert] Browning y de [Victor] Hugo”, unveiling the continued intimate relationship between history and literature (p. 147). The latter as well as the former contribute in perpetuating the memory in the national consciousness. In this case, historical narrative as well as literary narrative have the same social function: authenticating the past as ontological reality. Hayden White and Robert Doran (2010) explain the similarities in function between the literary and historical narrative in relation to making the past present. Historians may own the official study of history in so far as they present it in a “comprehensive vision of historical reality” (p. x). However, their ownership of narrative of the past is not unique. “As a matter of fact, that claim can as legitimately be made for literary writers” (White & Doran, 2010, p. x). By deciphering the enigma, Ryan encounters not only the original intertextuality that gave life to the events leading to the independence, but also the subsequent intertextuality that reaffirmed them as actual reality. While the a priori intertextuality contributed ideas to create theatricality of history, the a posteriori intertextuality affirmed this theatricality as natural reality. However, a posteriori narrative — whether it is literature or historical narrative — has the role of providing the sense of describing an ontological historical truth that is accessible to the readers. This a posteriori intertextuality provides the cultural fixity, a sense of veracity that, provides “a comprehensive vision of [organic] historical reality” (White & Doran, 2010, p. x). Thus, Kilpatrick’s role in Irish history is highly mediated, ensuring that his role as martyr-turned-hero established itself as ontological reality in the national imaginary.

What Ryan finds is a national history resulting from intertextualities before, during, and after the execution of Kilpatrick that have sustain a one-sided understanding of Kilpatrick’s final days. His new-found information contradicts the hegemonic

understanding of Kilpatrick as hero in relation to national liberation. Ryan deliberates on what to do with these facts that undermine the established symbolic world. After considerations on whether to publish his discoveries, Ryan “resuelve silenciar el descubrimiento” (Borges, 1997, p. 152). The great-grandson of the hero decides to keep his findings to himself, withholding them from the public —just as the conspirators did a hundred years earlier. He realizes the clues were intentionally left by Nolan for someone to find out. Ryan’s decision to suppress his findings points to the power of the national master narrative of one parallax view in the public arena: one side of the parallax view triumphs over the other. The hero defeats the traitor (once again). Alternatively, it also points to the power of writing as mediation of the observable historical events. Historical literature chronicled an already mediated historical event without actually revealing the nature of the observed: Kilpatrick. That is why the great-grandson of the hero “[p]ublica un libro dedicado a la gloria del héroe” (Borges, 1997, p. 152). As such, Ryan commits himself to the traditional interpretation of his great-grandfather as a hero, closing any possibility of revealing the other compromising parallax view. In aligning himself with the hegemonic interpretation, Ryan’s book certifies the role of Kilpatrick in the independence. This historical endorsement of the performed history is the result of the trans-generational overreaching effect of being part of a scripted national history, as Ryan discovers. James Alexander Nolan wrote his script in such a way that would hint at its historical theatrical inauguration, but at the same time such information would not be publishable due to the overpowering accompanying discourse. Nolan not only wrote the past but also a potential future. In hiding his findings —just as the plotters did a hundred years earlier— Ryan lets the hegemonic parallax view continue to have its social and national function. Kilpatrick remains the center around which the historical events orbited. Ryan’s publication —along with those of Robert Browning and Victor Hugo— reaffirms the established system of signification initiated by the historical theater. And thanks to Ryan’s book, the parallax view of Kilpatrick as hero —inspired by literature and validated by more literature— continues in the “primer centenario de su muerte” (Borges, 1997, p. 247). With Ryan’s publication, his readers find themselves experiencing a “simulation” without a “referential being or a substance” just as Kilpatrick’s unaware public did a hundred years prior (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 12). This continuous fiction-inspired and literary-validating master narrative of national history creates a state of perpetual literary-sustained understanding of national history. Although the historical reality without an organic reference is created and sustained by Benedict Anderson’s (2006) “print-media”, what we have is a historical reality intimately mediated by intertextual literature. In Borges’s narrative, even Ryan’s hero-validating, history-reaffirming publication was perhaps part of Nolan’s scripted historical theater. In authenticating the literature-inspired historical performance —what became the national memory of Ireland— Ryan becomes part of Nolan’s scripted historicized fiction. This makes Ryan a type of asynchronous fellow conspirator of those who condemned his great-grandfather



to death, while at the same time he is part of the public that validates the historical events as ontological reality.

## CONCLUSION

Borges presents a historian's greatest, yet most difficult to publish, historical information for contradicting the hegemonic master narrative of history. While Ryan knows the subject-splitting qualities that create two parallax views of Fergus Kilpatrick, he also realizes the power of the established perspective inhibits the other view from combining into a joint social understanding. In narrating a historian that discovers the conventional interpretation of the assassination of the hero was a staged theatrical execution for his political treason, Borges highlights the intimate relationship between literature and historiography. It shows the power of the written word to create, chronicle, and reaffirm what has already been mediated between the observed individual and the observing public. Once established, the replication of this highly-mediated perspective ensures its survival. Ryan's contributions are a reaffirmation based on the assumption that Fergus Kilpatrick is a national hero. This cycle of repetition exposes a fundamental problematic of the written word: the importance of literature in grounding what has been understood as historical facts. Borges questions the essential emptiness that exists between the text and the actual ontological world by ascribing to society the delineated significance of highly interceded historical successes. And by having a historian give more importance to the accepted, now *fictionalized* understanding of history, Borges places historical narrative at the same level of fiction, the publications of which authenticates other publications, creating an unbreakable cycle of repetitions that endorse each other's mediated parallax view. In this short story, literature becomes not only the inspiration for the execution of the historical master narrative — the hero of the independence — but the perpetual replicator of it. The assumption that the written word represents historical truths faces the literature-inspired, literature-based and literature-perpetuated historical performance. In this case, the assumption that historical literature describes an objective truth, if it not highly questionable, at least reveals that is extremely arbitrated. This highlights the mediation as the only source of truth, following Jacques Derrida's (1997) statement that "There is nothing outside the text" (p. 158), specifically that meaning is achieved through textuality. Although many publications try to reaffirm the historical myth as understood by society, the only support is literature. That is not only due to the inability of the written word to guarantee truth but by the inability of historical successes to guarantee the meaning that society has bestowed upon it.

If there is truth in the parallax view, it is not in the event itself, but in its textual mediation. It is this fabric of intertextualities that helps in constituting, understanding, and reaffirming the historical perspective of Kilpatrick. When Ryan encounters

the hidden parallax view of history, he realizes that what society believes about the role of his great-grandfather in Irish history is not a misrepresentation of historical events; it is not even a partial representation of a historical event. It is the deliberate public performance of a fictionalized historical event that presented itself as real — by Kilpatrick and the rest of the plotters— and was validated as such by the loving public, which then became engrained in the national imagination. The irony of literature and history could not be more obvious. Due to the intricate links between the contents in national historical and literature in this short story, it becomes imperative to analyze the implication of the relationship between the creation and the perpetuation of Kilpatrick as a historical hero through literature in Borges's "Tema del traidor y del héroe". The intersectional relationship between literary fiction — Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*— becoming the source of the fiction-inspired historical theater — the public execution of Kilpatrick— the national importance of which can only be sustained by cultural replication. The audience is forever trapped in a circular discourse that continuously validates its own truth.

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