

Dialogue and Existence in Jorge Luis Borges's 'The Secret Miracle': A Buberian Reading

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Abstract

This article offers a Buberian reading of Jorge Luis Borges's story 'The Secret Miracle' ('El milagro secreto'), a work that deals with the persecution of the Jews following Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. Borges read and translated Buber in his youth, at a time in which he had become interested in Jewish mysticism and Jewish culture in general. By examining Borges's tale in relation to key notions in Buber's moral philosophy, this article seeks to produce an interpretation of 'The Secret Miracle' as a tribute to the Jewish people. Reference to other works dealing with Nazism is made in order to highlight the influence of Buber in Borges's moral-philosophical thought.

Keywords

Anti-Semitism, Dialogic Intersubjectivity, Ethics, Jorge Luis Borges, Martin Buber, Nazism

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) expressed deep concern about the propagation of fascism and Judeophobia in many parts of Europe and the Americas. The story ‘The Secret Miracle’ (‘El milagro secreto’), which deals with the killing and persecution of the Jews following Hitler’s invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, can be seen to illustrate this preoccupation in connection with the moral philosophy of Martin Buber (1878–1965), whom he had read and translated in his youth. While Borges was keen to acknowledge the contribution of Jewish intellectuals to the development of Western thought, he also felt proud of the vestige of Sephardi blood flowing in his veins, as he wrote to his Jewish friend in Geneva, Maurice Abramowicz: ‘Les Acevedo (la famille de ma mère) sont de (*sic*) séphardites, de (*sic*) juifs portugais convertis. Je ne sais trop comment célébrer ce ruisseau de sang israélite qui coule dans mes veines’ (‘The Acevedo [my mother’s family] are Sephardic, converted Portuguese Jews. I don’t know how to sufficiently celebrate this stream of Israelite blood that runs through my veins’).¹ These two factors – the emotional and the intellectual – must have reinforced his sympathy for the fate of the Jews during the Second World War and his belief in the capacity of Judaism to assert the moral strength of its people amid the crushing forces of Nazi Germany.

Borges’s familiarity with the works of the Austrian-born Jewish philosopher has been noted by scholars. Jaime Alazraki, for instance, highlights Borges’s obscure reference to Buber in the story ‘La secta del Fénix’ (‘The Sect of the Phoenix’) together with the essay ‘Sobre Chesterton’ (‘On Chesterton’), where Borges refers the reader to the collection *Tales of the Hasidim*.² Efraín Kristal, on his part, points out that during his adolescent years in Geneva Borges worked on a free translation into Spanish of a tale from *The Legend of the Baal-Shem* (a collection of stories from the Baal-Shem cycle reworked by Buber), in which ‘the apparent harshness of God is a

shield for a love his people are not yet ready to bear'.³ Although Borges's rendition of the text 'downplays the pious aspects of the tale' – as Kristal indicates –,⁴ the legend's firm belief in the spiritual redemption of the Jews might be germane to a positive reading of 'The Secret Miracle', as the final words attest: "“You will not die, my friends,” the call spoke to the land. “Earth of the Lord, you will awaken and live.””⁵ More recently, both Lisa Block de Behar and Yitzhak Lewis have published stimulating work on Borges's understanding of the Hasidic tradition in relation to Buber.⁶ Of particular relevance to my purpose here is Lewis's analysis of how Borges conceptualized the Zionist movement. In this respect, he shows how the writings of Buber and Gershom Scholem – the noted scholar of Jewish mysticism – constituted two contrasting poles around which Borges articulated notions about tradition and rupture with regard to the Jewish people and their faith. In his analysis of the poems Borges dedicated to Israel between 1967 and 1969, which are marked by the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1967, Lewis observes Borges's ambiguous stance about the Zionist project and the creation of the State of Israel earlier in 1948. If there is a verse that captures, in a nutshell, the essence of Borges's position on this matter, it may be found in the poem 'Israel, 1969', where the poetic voice exclaims: 'Serás un israelí, serás un soldado' ('You shall be an Israeli. You shall be a soldier').⁷ Borges's conception of the Jewish people as the People of the Book, free from nationalistic devotions and dogmatism, is here entirely subverted.⁸ What this poem signals, as Lewis demonstrates, is a fracture in the traditional image of the Jew, indeed, a fissure in Jewish religious identity, precisely the type of break Buber would have wanted Zionism to avoid.⁹ Without entering into the political debate about the Zionist project, which is central to Lewis's discussion, what I would like to highlight here is the notion of continuity that is emphasized in Buber's historical understanding of Judaism:

The historical narrative of an ongoing dialogue between man and God, which Buber constructs in *I and Thou*, offers the account of a continuity leading from Moses's encounter with God on Mount Sinai to Buber's own philosophy. Breaks in this historical continuity are formed when man replaces 'Thou' (the second person interlocutor) with 'It' (the absent, distant, third person), under which conditions *a dialogue is no longer possible*.¹⁰

Because of the rupture with tradition that can be perceived in 'Israel, 1969', Lewis rightly concludes – in my view – that what we have here is a radical problematization of the idea that 'the Jewish historical narrative is a continuous dialogue with God'.¹¹ This statement, nevertheless, has methodological implications for a reading of 'The Secret Miracle', published twenty-five years earlier. Does the story convey the same degree of pessimism? If we accept this premise, the underlying meaning of the narrative would be defeatist. Yet, how can we reconcile this view with Borges's deep admiration and support of the Jews, an admiration that includes their capacity for endurance throughout centuries of persecution and discrimination?¹² To address this difficulty, it becomes necessary to draw a distinction between the levels of dialogical interaction that are present in the story, namely, that between man and man, and that between man and God. From this perspective, while Nazism shattered to pieces the rights and dignity of the Jews (thus replacing the 'I-Thou' relation with what Buber designates as an 'I-It' relation), the story can still be seen to uphold the possibility of a dialogue with God, Buber's 'eternal Thou'. This implies that the break with tradition noted by Lewis in the poems about Israel had not yet taken root in Borges's conceptualization of Zionism in the early 1940s, that is, before the creation of the State of Israel and the ensuing conflicts with its Arab neighbours.¹³

Unfortunately, Borges made few comments about Buber throughout his works. Some years before the publication of 'The Secret Miracle', for instance, Borges wrote a diatribe against Nazi cultural revisionism in which he simply observes the inclusion of Buber's name among the German-speaking writers of outstanding merit banned by the Third Reich.¹⁴ Elsewhere, he qualifies his judgment by praising Buber's argumentative style for its exceedingly poetic qualities:

I remember reading, some thirty years ago, the works of Martin Buber. I thought of them as being wonderful poems. Then, when I went to Buenos Aires, I read a book by a friend of mine, Dujovne, and I found in its pages, much to my astonishment, that Martin Buber was a philosopher and that all his philosophy lay in the books I had read as poetry. Perhaps I had accepted those books because they came to me through poetry, through suggestion, through the music of poetry, and not as arguments.¹⁵

In contrast to the traditional mode of critical philosophical discourse, Borges favours here a poetical approximation to ontological and metaphysical questions which, nevertheless, carries the hallmark of a genuine existential concern. While the philosopher aims to construct a strictly rational exposition of being, the poet makes use of symbols and images which are capable of exciting the reader's moral and speculative sensibility.¹⁶ Poets, moreover, have at their disposal a set of rules around which poetic activity can be organized. Poetry as craftsmanship or 'know-how' is a command of the rules that govern language in its capacity to represent a given aspect of reality. While Borges's mature literary practice seems to endorse the classical mode of poetic representation, one in which the writer asserts the universality of words, he nonetheless remained

mindful of the inherent limitations of language.¹⁷ The written word, he proclaimed in his youth, is an agonizing word in as much as it can hardly transmit the wealth of extra-linguistic effects, such as the speaker's gestures, emphasis and tone, that accompany the spoken word.¹⁸ If poetry is always in danger of losing its essential dialogic nature, the portrayal of a dramatist whose work becomes the very justification of his existence acquires in 'The Secret Miracle' a particular significance in so far as it is precisely through dramatic performance and recitation that the power of poetic speech can attain its full potentialities, as Buber knew well: 'All poetry tends toward drama. Every lyric work is a dialogue the partner of which speaks in a superhuman language.'¹⁹

For Borges, too, speech constitutes the essential manifestation of being. Indeed, speech is the true mirror of the soul. In ontological terms, this implies a correlation between language and existence: the greater the transparency of verbal expression, the greater its plenitude in the order of being. In Borges's own words: 'Saber cómo habla un personaje es saber quién es, [...] descubrir una entonación, una voz, una sintaxis peculiar, es haber descubierto un destino' ('To know how a character speaks is to know who he is, [...] to discover an intonation, a voice, a peculiar syntax, is to discover a destiny').²⁰ The latter view of literature as the revelation of human destiny permeates Borges's entire production and may be seen as the wellspring of his poetic inspiration. Yet, while his attention to delineating the forces that shape a character's destiny is driven by an ethical concern (an issue that was very much influenced by his interest in the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer), he consistently refrained from making explicit moral judgements in his work. In his opinion, a more effective way of gauging a moral situation is by characterizing the actions of men. By showing the workings of evil, for example, a writer can articulate a moral reflection on the cruelty of life in general and the wickedness of human nature

in particular. In Borges's view, this is to be inferred from the interplay between character and situation as exhibited in the text.

As already indicated, 'The Secret Miracle', which was first published in the journal *Sur* in 1943, dramatizes a situation of extreme anxiety in the face of evil and destruction.²¹ Jaromir Hladík, the fictional playwright and intellectual whose last days are recounted in the story, is interrogated by the Gestapo following the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia and condemned to death for his Jewish affiliation: 'Su apellido materno era Jaroslavski, su sangre era judía, su estudio sobre Boehme era judaizante' (p. 508) ('his maternal surname was Jaroslavski, his blood was Jewish, his study of Boehme was Judaizing', p. 185). Just before his execution by firing squad is due to take place, the 'physical universe' (p. 190) stands still for the duration of a year so that he can complete his drama. In conversation with Richard Burgin, Borges describes this moment as an 'unassuming miracle' in as much as it is 'wrought for one man only', and accentuates the fact that the character justifies his life 'by something *known only to God*', as no tangible segment of the work is left for posterity.²² Hence the religious if not mystical quality of the story, as Borges himself goes on to suggest: 'A personal pact between God and the man. And also, [...] this is a common idea among the mystics, the idea of something lasting a very short while on earth and a long time in heaven, or in a man's mind.'²³

Given the fantastic aspect of the story, which contrasts sharply with its realistic framework, Hladík's supernatural experience has been interpreted as the manifestation of a fictional event in which the burden of empirical reality has the final say, as the conclusion of the story seems to suggest: 'Jaromir Hladík murió el veintinueve de marzo, a las nueve y dos minutos de la mañana' (p. 513) ('Jaromir Hladík died on March 29, at 9:02 in the morning', p. 191). The story

is then seen as a tale about self-delusion and fantasy or as the expression of the ultimate triumph of death over hope and survival. Critic Marta Inés Waldegaray, for example, comments:

Hablar de un “milagro secreto” resulta paradójico, hasta podría ser pensado como un oxímoron, porque justamente la condición necesaria para que un milagro sea reconocido como tal es que sea dado a conocer y que existan testigos que lo declaren. En la medida en que sólo Dios y el protagonista participan del milagro y que no quedan pruebas de él, puede atribuírsele al fenómeno, no el carácter de sobrenatural, sino el de alucinatorio, ilusorio.

(To talk about a ‘secret miracle’ is paradoxical and might even be thought of as an oxymoron, because the necessary condition for a miracle to be recognized as such is precisely that it be made known and that there are witnesses to declare it. To the extent that only God and the protagonist participate in the miracle and that there is no further evidence of it, the phenomenon might be more properly considered to have a hallucinatory or illusory character rather than a supernatural one.)²⁴

Edna Aizenberg, on the other hand, gives the story a positive reading when she states that ‘despite the Nazi Final Solution, Borges’s miniaturization [of Jewish intelligentsia] is not a swan song but an affirmation of continued life’.²⁵ As in many other instances in Borges’s fiction, the texture of the narrative is imbued with such a degree of ambiguity that it becomes difficult to discern what the author might have intended to say. From a Buberian perspective, nevertheless, the fact that the miracle is ‘known only to God’ (as highlighted in Borges’s statement) can be seen as the element that gives a deeper religious-existential meaning to the story. On this point,

three important elements underlined by Buber in his writings, namely, the notion of ‘encounter’, the concept of ‘dialogue’, and the process of artistic creation, can help elucidate the issue at stake.

In the analysis of the human condition elaborated in his seminal work, *Ich und Du (I and Thou)*, Buber notes that those who merely dwell in the realm of material experience remain attached to selfish needs and aspirations. This form of existence is blind to the possibilities offered by a free and spontaneous relation with the world we live in: ‘As experience, the world belongs to the primary word *I-It*. The primary word *I-Thou* establishes the world of relation.’²⁶ For Buber, the interaction between human beings in the modern industrialized world has acquired a subject-object quality that hinders the manifestation of genuine intersubjectivity: ‘The development of the ability to experience and use comes about mostly through the decrease of man’s power to enter into relation’ (pp. 38–39).²⁷ The consequent systematization of social life diminishes our capacity to relate, which in turn makes it more difficult to encounter the divine in our daily life. Thus man becomes isolated in a world of pragmatic ends devoid of spiritual meaning and a sense of moral responsibility to the Other. The solution to this predicament, he argues, is essentially a dialogical one, since human beings can transform the ‘It-world’ of material experience into a ‘Thou-world’ of genuine encounter, such as it occurs in our relation with nature, the arts, with other human beings and, especially, with God, the ever-present ‘eternal Thou’. Buber argued that a genuine meeting between the ‘I’ and the ‘Thou’ constitutes a glimpse of the ‘eternal Thou’: ‘The relation with man is the real simile of the relation with God; in it true address receives true response; except that in God’s response everything, the universe, is made manifest as language’ (p. 103).²⁸

In fashioning Hladík's moral character, Borges portrays an individual who strives to reach out to the Other in an attempt to grasp a higher understanding of human existence, even if the latter is in effect his executioner. Consider the following statement: '[Hladík] imaginó que los ya remotos soldados compartían su angustia: anheló comunicarse con ellos' (p. 512) ('He imagined that the already remote soldiers shared his anxiety; he longed to communicate with them', p. 190).²⁹ Later on, the narrator says: 'Llegó a querer el patio, el cuartel; uno de los rostros que lo enfrentaban modificó su concepción del carácter de Roemerstadt' (p. 513) ('He grew to love the courtyard, the barracks; one of the faces endlessly confronting him made him modify his conception of Roemerstadt's character', p. 191). Thus, while acknowledging the gravity of the situation, the protagonist's reaching out to the world that surrounds him helps to inform his work. Yet, no dialogue between Hladík and the German soldiers ever takes place. The possibility of establishing a reciprocal line of communication between men and nations had been smashed to pieces by an ideology that sought to destroy 'the morality of the humane'.³⁰ A new 'political religion'³¹ had come to replace the liberal values of justice, respect and equality with an obsession with military might and racial hegemony. As Buber warned a few years before the rise of Nazism, the problematic element in modern nationalism (including Jewish nationalism) 'is the will-to-power, greedy to seize and establish power. [...] A will-to-power, less concerned with being powerful than with being "more powerful than", becomes destructive'.³²

Hladík's attempt to reach out to the Other is met with silence. Indeed, under the conditions created by Nazism the 'I-Thou' relation would never flourish, fueling instead, as Leonardo Senkman puts it, 'un lenguaje de violencia radical que cancela el discurso junto con la subjetividad de la víctima' ('a language of radical violence that cancels the discourse as well as the subjectivity of its victims').³³ In a 1928 lecture, Buber refers to the call that goes unanswered

in the following terms: ‘The events that occur to human beings are the great and small, untranslatable but unmistakable signs of their being addressed; what they do and fail to do can be an answer or a failure to answer.’³⁴ In the same way, Hladík’s invisible drama, which is appropriately entitled ‘The enemies’ (‘Los enemigos’), becomes the expression of a historical tragedy; a catastrophe so great (as it turned out to be after the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps) that it still resounds in the European consciousness. Borges’s story, then, is a work that impacts the reality of its readers, as it compels us to reflect on contemporary issues such as political violence, xenophobia and religious intolerance.

The failure of the interaction between Hladík and the German soldiers who are about to execute him is further illustrated in the passage in which he is offered a cigarette:

Hladík, más insignificante que desdichado, se sentó en un montón de leña. Advirtió que los ojos de los soldados rehuían los suyos. Para aliviar la espera, el sargento le entregó un cigarrillo. Hladík no fumaba; lo aceptó por cortesía o por humildad. Al encenderlo, vio que le temblaban las manos. El día se nubló; los soldados hablaban en voz baja como si él ya estuviera muerto. (pp. 511–512)

(Hladík, more insignificant than pitiful, sat down on a pile of firewood. He noticed that the soldier’s eyes avoided his. To make his wait easier, the sergeant offered him a cigarette. Hladík did not smoke. He accepted the cigarette out of politeness or humility. As he lit it, he saw that his hands shook. The day was clouding over. The soldiers spoke in low tones, as though he were already dead.) (p. 189)

While this episode serves to highlight the psychological tension of that moment – the tremor of the hands that light the cigarette, the eyes that avoid the prisoner’s gaze, the lowering of the voice –, the Biblical echo at the end of the passage (‘The day was clouding over’), which alludes to Christ’s death on the cross, and by inference to his subsequent Resurrection, gives the story a particular eschatological twist.³⁵ This implicit parallel with the crucifixion of Christ has a symbolical significance in so far as it reinforces the idea that God has not abandoned Hladík and, by extension, his people. While Nazism had severed the fraternal bonds between men, thus causing the collapse of a genuine encounter with the Other, there still remained for the faithful the possibility of initiating a dialogue with God. As I have already noted in relation to Buber’s historical understanding of Judaism, the idea of an ever-present dialogue between man and God is characteristic of his thought. ‘No other community of human beings’, he affirmed, ‘has entered with such strength and fervor into this experience [i.e. the dialogical situation] as have the Jews.’³⁶

The contrast between victim and executioner in the context of the Nazi slaughter of the Jews allows for a comparison between ‘The Secret Miracle’ and the story ‘*Deutsches Requiem*’, published by Borges three years later.³⁷ Both narratives explore the medium of biographical writing as an attempt to articulate a life experience that is about to come to an end. Otto Dietrich zur Linde, ex-commander of a Nazi concentration camp, is found guilty of war crimes by a court of justice and awaits his execution by firing squad the following day. While he adheres stubbornly to the Nazi creed of violence in contempt of Divine justice – ‘Que el cielo exista, aunque nuestro lugar sea el infierno’ (p. 581) (‘Let Heaven exist, even though our dwelling place is Hell’, p. 146) –, Hladík, in stark contrast, affirms his willingness to reach out to the Other in the here and now of his existence.³⁸ The same positive trait applies to David Jerusalem, the

fictional poet in the story *'Deutsches Requiem'*: 'Pobre de bienes de este mundo, perseguido, negado, vituperado, había consagrado su genio a cantar la felicidad. [...] Jerusalem se alegra de cada cosa, con minucioso amor' (p. 578) ('Poor in the goods of this world, persecuted, denied, vituperated, he had dedicated his genius to the praise of Happiness. [...] Jerusalem takes joy in each thing, with a scrupulous and exact love', p. 144).³⁹ Clearly, the ethos of the two stories is rooted in the contrasting worldview of their protagonists. Moreover, there is something deeply tragic about zur Linde's fate, for he must submit to the transformation of his inner self in order to become a true Nazi: 'Poco diré de mis años de aprendizaje. Fueron más duros para mí que para muchos otros ya que a pesar de no carecer de valor, me falta toda vocación de violencia' (p. 577) ('I will say little of my years of apprenticeship. They were more difficult for me than for others, since, although I do not lack courage, I am repelled by violence', pp. 142–143). Ironically, he is willing to sacrifice the illustrious achievements of German civilization for a political doctrine that promises this-worldly redemption as a reward for hatred and destruction (there was indeed a shocking moral contradiction between the barbarity of the Jewish Holocaust and the fascination of high-ranking Nazi officials with various forms of high culture).

By accepting the extreme consequences of Hitlerism, zur Linde is ultimately forced to turn his obsession with violence and brutality against himself: 'Ignoro si Jerusalem comprendió que si yo lo destruí, fue para destruir mi piedad. Ante mis ojos, no era un hombre, ni siquiera un judío; se había transformado en el símbolo de una detestada zona de mi alma' (p. 579) ('I do not know whether Jerusalem understood that, if I destroyed him, it was to destroy my compassion. In my eyes he was not a man, not even a Jew; he had been transformed into a detested zone of my soul', p. 145). His rejection of pity and compassion coincides with Nazi insensitivity to mass murder. Heinrich Himmler, for example, considered pity as a 'serious impediment' to the

annihilation of the Jews and ordered such human ‘weakness’ to be swept aside.⁴⁰ Indeed, after referring to pity as the greatest of sins, zur Linde adopts a thoroughly criminal stance. Thus, his passive murder of David Jerusalem is described as a necessary step in this process of moral transfiguration. Not only does he suppress a basic moral principle – ‘Thou shalt not kill’ – in order to conform to Nazi ideology, but in doing so he also surrenders his capacity for moral autonomy and individual responsibility.⁴¹

As well as underlining the factors that led to the transformation of his inner character, zur Linde’s testimony outlines the external circumstances that shaped the course of his existence. This juxtaposition between moral agency and an overwhelming sense of inevitability attached to the course of his life is underscored throughout the narrative. For zur Linde, as for the Nazis, it was important to dissociate the notion of free will from any kind of moral determinism. Hence his dogmatic reading of Schopenhauer: ‘En el primer volumen de *Parerga und Paralipomena* releí que todos los hechos que pueden ocurrirle a un hombre [...] han sido prefijados por él’ (p. 581) (‘In the first volume of *Parerga und Paralipomena* I read again that everything which can happen to a man [...] has been preordained by him’, p. 143). In the said work, Schopenhauer argued that ‘all the events that determine a man’s actions together with the causal connection that brings them about, are [...] only the objectivation of the same will that manifests itself in him’.⁴² In this essay, Schopenhauer examines the idea of fate as conforming to an individual’s inborn character, a circumstance that he calls ‘transcendent fatalism’. He defines it as that which ‘gradually reveals itself from the experiences in the course of a man’s own life’.⁴³ This ‘secret and inexplicable power’ that guides our lives is further described by Schopenhauer as ‘the inner compass, the mysterious characteristic that brings everyone correctly on to *that* path which for him is the only suitable one’.⁴⁴ This idea allows zur Linde to transform the deterministic outlook

of Schopenhauer's moral philosophy into an apology of the will to power embodied in Nazism. Within this ideological framework, the goals of the individual became subservient to those of the State. As Otto Dietrich, the Third Reich's Press Chief and State Secretary to the Propaganda Ministry put it: 'The individual acts freely only when his actions instinctively harmonise with the natural racial tendencies of the community of which he forms part and to which he is bound by the indestructible ties of blood. In other words, the common ancestry, the common blood, is the source of real liberty.'⁴⁵

In contrast to the fascist subjection of the individual to the religion of the 'mass State',⁴⁶ zur Linde is unable to resolve the contradiction between his allegiance to the Prussian 'I will' and the obliteration of the self under Hitler's rule: 'Individualmente, mis camaradas me eran odiosos; en vano procuré razonar que para el alto fin que nos congregaba, no éramos individuos' (p. 577) ('Individually my comrades were disgusting to me; in vain did I try to reason that we had to suppress our individuality for the lofty purpose which brought us together', p. 143). Zur Linde's inability to break up with the constraints of Nazi ideology, together with his staunch individualistic attitude, determines his fate. On the other hand, both Jaromir Hladík and David Jerusalem are able to perceive the self as part of a natural order that transcends the narrow limits of dogmatic subjectivity. The fundamental distinction between 'person' and 'individual' which is implicit here is expressed by Buber in the following terms: 'The person looks on his Self, individuality is concerned with its My – my kind, my race, my creation, my genius. Individuality neither shares in nor obtains any reality. It differentiates itself from the other, and seeks through experiencing and using to appropriate as much of it as it can' (p. 64).

While Hladík's impossibility to communicate with the German soldiers underscores the helplessness to which the European Jews were subjected by the Nazis, the fundamental

dialogical relation between him and God remains alive: ‘Habló con Dios en la oscuridad. *Si de algún modo existo, si no soy una de tus repeticiones y erratas, existo como autor de Los enemigos. Para llevar a término ese drama, que puede justificarme y justificarte, requiero un año más. Otórgame esos días. Tú de Quien son los siglos y el tiempo*’ (p. 511) (‘In the darkness, he addressed himself to God: *If I exist at all, if I am not one of Your repetitions and errata, I exist as the author of The Enemies. In order to bring this drama, which may serve to justify me, to justify You, I need one more year. Grant me that year, You to whom belong the centuries and all time*’, p. 188). In order to perceive the nature of the communication that takes place here, it is essential to understand the role of speech in Judaism. As I have already mentioned in connection with Buber, the possibility of a meaningful interaction between man and God is seen as the fundamental principle of the Jewish faith:

The great achievement of Israel is not so much that it has told mankind of the one, real God, the origin and goal of all that exists, but rather that it has taught men that this God does in very reality hear when they speak to him, that men can be natural with him, that we human beings can stand face to face with him, that there is communion between God and man. [...] Israel taught and showed: the real God is the God who can be spoken to, because he is the one who speaks to men.⁴⁷

In the story, it is through a dream that Hladík hears the voice of God: ‘Una voz ubicua le dijo: *El tiempo de tu labor ha sido otorgado*’ (p. 511) (‘An ubiquitous voice said: *The time for your work has been granted*’, p. 189). The response to his plea, and the subsequent granting of the miracle, function as an affirmation of Hladík’s faith. In this respect, the allusion to the game of

chess at the beginning of the narrative places the story within the ethical dimension of true existence as a fundamental *dialogue* with the Other, a key notion in Buber's philosophical anthropology: '[Hladík] soñó con un largo ajedrez. No lo disputaban dos individuos sino dos familias ilustres; la partida había sido entablada hace muchos siglos. [...] El soñador corría por las arenas de un desierto lluvioso y no lograba recordar las figuras ni las leyes del ajedrez' (p. 508) ('[Hladík] dreamt a long-drawn-out chess game. The antagonists were not two individuals, but two illustrious families. The contest had begun many centuries before. [...] The dreamer ran across the sands of a rainy desert – and he could not remember the chessmen or the rules of chess', p. 184).⁴⁸ The intertextual link can be found in the essay 'Historia de los ecos de un nombre' ('A History of the Echoes of a Name'), first published in 1955,⁴⁹ where Borges refers to Buber's analogy between human life and a game we play against a frightening and unpredictable opponent: 'Buber [...] escribe que vivir es penetrar en una extraña habitación del espíritu, cuyo piso es el tablero en el que jugamos un juego inevitable y desconocido contra un adversario cambiante y a veces espantoso' ('[Buber] writes that to live is to enter a strange house of the spirit, whose floor is the chessboard on which we play an unknown and unavoidable game against a changing and sometimes frightening opponent').⁵⁰ Indeed, in his critique of Heidegger's conception of human existence, Buber argues that:

Life is not lived by my playing the enigmatic game on a board by myself, but by my being placed in the presence of a being with whom I have agreed on no rules for the game and with whom no rules can be agreed on. This presence before which I am placed changes its form, its appearance, its revelation, they are different from myself, often terrifyingly different, and different from what I expect, often terrifyingly different. If I stand up to them, concern myself

with them, meet them in a real way, that is, with the truth of my whole life, then an only then am I 'really' there.⁵¹

For Buber, 'man can only become whole not in virtue of a relation to himself but only in virtue of a relation to another self'.⁵² Buber makes this assertion in opposition to Heidegger's ontology. Heidegger – he claims – considers the self in relation to its own mode of existence, a notion that in Buber's opinion can only constitute a 'semblance of real life'.⁵³ In Heidegger's phenomenological analysis, Buber argues, man becomes 'the man who can no longer really live with man, the man who now knows a real life only in communication with himself'.⁵⁴ In contrast, for Buber it is the *interpersonal* nature of genuine speech that leads to the question concerning the essence of being and thus to an understanding of the ethical ground on which human existence must be rooted.⁵⁵ As I have already shown, this idea is central in Borges's story.

The supernatural event contrived by Borges in 'The Secret Miracle' allows Hladík to accomplish his work, albeit in a way that is only known to God. This situation, which eliminates any tangible evidence of its objective validity, offers him the ideal conditions for artistic creation. From a Buberian standpoint, this paradox might be explained if we consider that 'actual artistic conception exists only when the idea of the work [...] is encountered as a Thou in the exclusivity of relationship, which has eliminated everything experienceable'.⁵⁶ Seen from this perspective, the material limitations imposed on the character, far from determining the failure of his endeavour enable him to achieve a higher level of ontological truth. This idea is further illustrated by Buber: 'From the point of view of the experienceable world, one would have to designate this conception of the work as fiction, as something fictive, which is merely given to

me in imagination. But in the world of Thou, this contemplated work to which I stand in relation as to a Thou has a thoroughly immediate and unconditional reality.’⁵⁷ This ‘immediate and unconditional reality’ is inherent in Hladík’s work because it exists in a transcendental realm grounded on his faith; it exists, in the truest theological sense, in the eyes of God, the ‘eternal Thou’. Thus, the work can be considered to exist unconditionally in the highest form of reality. Because of this, its existence as an empirically verifiable object becomes irrelevant. From this perspective, Waldegaray’s assertion that ‘en el ámbito divino ese texto es invisible y por lo tanto ilegible’ (‘in the divine realm that text is invisible and therefore illegible’), proves to be inadequate.⁵⁸

The miraculous event that allows Hladík to justify his existence is possible because of his faith. This does not prevent him from dying (an outcome that is never put into question in the narrative), but he dies with the satisfaction of having completed his work before God. As opposed to the nightmarish circularity depicted in the first draft of the play – ‘el delirio circular que interminablemente vive y revive Kubin’ (p. 510) (‘the circular delirium which Kubin unendingly lives and relives’, p. 188) –, the conclusion of his work indicates that human life is not necessarily destined to be a series of meaningless or futile repetitions: ‘Minucioso, inmóvil, secreto, urdió en el tiempo su alto laberinto invisible. Rehízo el tercer acto dos veces. Borró algún símbolo demasiado evidente: las repetidas campanadas, la música’ (p. 512) (‘Meticulous, unmoving, secretive, he wove his lofty invisible labyrinth in time. He worked the third act over twice. He eliminated some rather too-obvious symbols: the repeated striking of the hour, the music’, p. 191). Buber, who advocated the essential freedom of a life engaged in dialogue, wrote that the man who is able to step out of the ‘It-world’ into the world of relation is able to find guaranteed ‘the freedom both of his being and of Being’ (p. 51).

In this story, then, Borges presents a view of human agency that is at odds with other writings, including ‘Poema conjetural’ (‘Conjectural Poem’), ‘La escritura del dios’ (‘The God’s Script’), and ‘El evangelio según Marcos’ (‘The Gospel According to Mark’), which convey a strong feeling of individual helplessness and defeat in the face of destiny, and offers instead the possibility of salvation through dialogue with God, one which transcends the boundaries of subjectivity in order to reach a higher level of spiritual existence. Again, Buber’s distinction between ‘self’ and ‘community’ in the context of the Jewish and the Christian faith helps to clarify this idea: ‘One of the main points in which Christianity differs from Judaism is that it makes each man’s salvation his highest aim. Judaism regards each man’s soul as a serving member of God’s Creation, which, by man’s work, is to become the Kingdom of God; *thus no soul has its object in itself, in its own salvation.*’⁵⁹

In his book *After the Evil*, Richard Harries points out that ‘the imperative to remain human, to live or to die with dignity, is of surpassing importance’.⁶⁰ Together with Edna Aizenberg, Harries reminds us of the example of Charlotte Salomon (1917–1943), the German Jewish artist who drew hundreds of pictures of her life before being deported to Auschwitz, where she was killed by the Nazis. Harries writes that Salomon ‘solemnly dated her works “1940–42 or between heaven and earth outside our time in year 1 of the new salvation”’.⁶¹ In ‘The Secret Miracle’, on the other hand, Hladík dies as a Jew with the knowledge that his earthly existence has been justified before God. While he was still alive, writing liberated and empowered him. In death, his dignity and humanity were not destroyed but gained strength and meaning. For this reason, the question of whether or not Borges upheld religious beliefs in his personal life (beliefs which, in turn, would determine the true value of the narrative), is irrelevant for my reading. Equally so are the empirical demands of verisimilitude and verifiability. What matters is the way in which he

was able to imbue his character with the capacity to overcome adversity through the affirmation of the Jewish faith.⁶² Despite ending the tale with a harsh corroboration of empirical reality, the transcendental nature of Judaism and its redeeming power remains intact in the story. From this perspective, ‘The Secret Miracle’ can be read positively as a tribute to the Jewish people, the people for whom Borges always expressed deep love and admiration.

Notes

¹ Borges to Maurice Abramowicz, 11 October 1920, in Jorge Luis Borges, *Cartas del fervor. Correspondencia con Maurice Abramowicz y Jacobo Sureda (1919 1928)*, edited by Cristóbal Pera (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutemberg, Círculo de Lectores, Emecé, 1999), 110–112 (p. 110).

² Jaime Alazraki, ‘Borges and the Kabbalah’, *TriQuarterly*, 25 (1972), 240–267 (p. 243).

³ Efraín Kristal, *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), p. 42. See also Berta Kleingut de Abner, *Marcel Schwob – Jorge Luis Borges: marginalidad y trascendencia* (San Juan: Universidad Nacional de San Juan, 2006), p. 205.

⁴ Kristal, *Invisible Work*, p. 42.

⁵ Martin Buber, *The Legend of the Baal-Shem*, translated by Maurice Friedman (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 77. The book was first published in German as *Die Legende des Baalschem* (Frankfurt am Mein: Rütten und Loening, 1908).

⁶ Lisa Block de Behar, ‘Antecedents of an Unexpected Poetic Affinity: Jorge Luis Borges as Reader of Martin Buber’, in *Thinking With Borges*, edited by William Egginton and David E. Johnson (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group Publishers, 2009), pp. 183–201; Yitzhak Lewis, ‘Borges, Zionism and the Politics of Reality’, *Variaciones Borges*, 35 (2013) pp. 163–180.

⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Israel, 1969’, in *Elogio de la sombra, Obras completas*, 3 vols (Barcelona: Emecé Editores, 1989), II, 384, line 26. Unless otherwise indicated, all further quotations from Borges’s complete works will be taken from this edition.

⁸ ‘[Borges] was enthusiastic about the State of Israel, but the Judaism that interested him was the culture of the Diaspora’, Shalom L. Goldman, *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews, and the Idea of the Promised Land* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 213. See also Edna Aizenberg, *The Aleph Weaver: Biblical, Kabbalistic and Judaic Elements in Borges* (Potomac, MD.: Scripta Humanistica, 1984), pp. 8, 122–123.

⁹ In this respect, see Eva Jospe, ‘Encounter: The Thought of Martin Buber’, in *Encounters in Modern Jewish Thought: The Works of Eva Jospe. Volume One: Martin Buber*, edited by Raphael Jospe and Dov Schwartz (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2013), pp. xlv–lxi (p. lviii): ‘Buber had been prominently associated with the Zionist movement ever since its inception. He had met Theodor Herzl already in 1898, and had entered into a close working relationship with him. But this relationship ended when Herzl’s political and Buber’s cultural Zionism proved incompatible. For Buber (along with Aḥad Ha-Am), this movement was infinitely more than a “nationalistically” motivated endeavor to settle Jews in Palestine. [...] Their resettlement in Palestine must make of Jews what they had always been meant to be, allowing them “to become what we are,” a people imbued with the profound humanity and deep spirituality of what should be their blueprint for living: the Hebrew Bible.’

¹⁰ Lewis, ‘Borges, Zionism and the Politics of Reality’, p. 168; my italics.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹² See Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Israel’, *Sur*, 254 (1958) 1–2 (p. 2): ‘Podríamos decir que Israel no sólo es una entonación, un exilio, unos rasgos faciales; una ironía, una fatigada dulzura, una voluntad,

un fuego y un canto; es también una humillación y una exaltación, un haber dialogado con Dios, un sentir de un modo patético la tierra, el agua, el pan, el tiempo, la soledad, la misteriosa culpa, las tardes y el hecho de ser padre o ser hijo' ('We could say that Israel is not only an intonation, an exile, some facial features, an irony, a sweet weariness, a will, a fire and a song; it is also a humiliation and an exaltation, a dialogue with God, a pathetic way of seeing the earth, the water, the bread, the time, the solitude, the mysterious guilt, the afternoons and the fact of being a father or being a son.')

¹³ 'Borges, when confronted with the perilous situation of European Jewry in the 1930s and their murder by the Nazis in the 1940s, supported postwar Zionist aspirations', Goldman, *Zeal for Zion*, p. 213.

¹⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, 'Una exposición afligente' ('A Disturbing Exposition'), *Sur*, 49 (1938), 66–67 (p. 66); Jorge Luis Borges, *The Total Library: Non-Fiction, 1922–1986*, edited by Eliot Weinberger, translated by Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 2001), pp. 200–201 (p. 200).

¹⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, *This Craft of Verse*, edited by Calin Andrei Mihailescu (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 32.

¹⁶ See Bernal Herrera Montero, 'Borges y la literatura', *Filología y Lingüística*, 13.2 (1987), 35–50 (pp. 49–50); Carlos R. Stortini, *El diccionario de Borges: el Borges oral, el de las declaraciones y las polémicas*, second edition (Buenos Aires: Editorial Miscelánea, 1989), p. 30.

¹⁷ See, for example, Jorge Luis Borges, 'La postulación de la realidad', in *Obras completas*, I, 217–221.

¹⁸ See Jorge Luis Borges, *El idioma de los argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Gleizer, 1928), pp. 181–182.

¹⁹ Martin Buber, ‘On Polarity: Dialogue After the Theater’, in *Martin Buber and the Theater*, edited by Maurice Friedman (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1969), pp. 53–74 (p. 70). See also in the same collection, ‘Drama and Theatre’, pp. 83–87.

²⁰ Borges, ‘La poesía gauchesca’, in *Obras completas*, I, 179–197 (p. 181). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own. For Borges’s literary use of vernacular language, see Humberto Núñez-Faraco, ‘Literature and Ethics in Borges’s Early Work’, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 79 (2002), 771–789.

²¹ Jorge Luis Borges, ‘El milagro secreto’, in *Obras completas*, I, 508–513; translated by Anthony Kerrigan as ‘The Secret Miracle’, in Jorge Luis Borges, *A Personal Anthology*, edited by Anthony Kerrigan (New York: Grove Press, 1967), pp. 184–191. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the main body of the article.

²² *Jorge Luis Borges: Conversations*, edited by Richard Burgin (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), p. 25; my italics.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Marta Inés Waldegaray, ‘“La otra muerte” y “El milagro secreto”: relaciones entre literatura e historia’, *Variaciones Borges*, 17 (2004), 187–197 (p. 194).

²⁵ Aizenberg, *The Aleph Weaver*, p. 129. For a contrasting view, see Evelyn Fishburn, ‘Reflections on the Jewish Imaginary in the Fictions of Borges’, *Variaciones Borges*, 5 (1998), 147–148.

²⁶ Martin Buber, *Ich und Du* (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1923); translated by Ronald Gregor Smith as *I and Thou* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1938), p. 6. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the main body of the article. On the notion of ‘experience’, Buber writes: ‘This word *erfahren* [to experience] really means going over the surface of things. [...] Is it indeed true that

this is our life, that this I our world? [...] It is rather that in these moments the human being stood in relation to a Thou, and this was precisely the essential character of this relationship, which, as long as it lasted, left no room for an I and manifested this Thou only as Thou, but not as It, not as He, nor as She', Martin Buber, 'Religion as Presence', in *Buber's Way To 'I and Thou': The Development of Martin Buber's Thought and His 'Religion as Presence' Lectures*, edited by Rivka Horwitz, translated by Esther Cameron (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988), pp. 19–129 (pp. 72–73).

²⁷ See Ehud Luz, 'Buber's Hermeneutics: The Road to the Revival of the Collective Memory and Religious Faith', *Modern Judaism*, 15.1 (1995), 69–93 (pp. 79–81). On the philosophical background, see Paul Mendes-Flohr, *From Mysticism to Dialogue: Martin Buber's Transformation of German Social Thought* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1989), pp. 16–17, 62–65, 72–74.

²⁸ See Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism, Religion, and Death: Thirteen Essays* (New York: New American Library, 1976), pp. 39–60; Luz, 'Buber's Hermeneutics', pp. 72–73.

²⁹ Compare León Dujovne, 'Henri Bergson y Martin Buber', in *Conferencias de Jorge Luis Borges en el Instituto de Intercambio Cultural y Científico Argentino-Israelí*, edited by Mario Cohen (Buenos Aires: Instituto de Intercambio Cultural y Científico Argentino-Israelí, 1967), pp. 113–126 (p. 121): 'Para Buber el hombre es ser moral, precisamente, cuando dialoga con un prójimo; [...] se dialoga con el ser entero, se dialoga sin reservas, se dialoga en una actitud en la que aún si se discrepa con el otro, se confirma al otro en el derecho a la discrepancia recíproca' ('For Buber, man is a moral being, precisely when he dialogues with the other. [...] One speaks with the whole being, without reservations, and in an attitude in which even if you disagree with others, you acknowledge the right of others to reciprocal disagreement').

³⁰ Robert Musil, ‘Ruminations of a Slow-witted Mind’, in *Precision and Soul*, ed. and trans. by Burton Pike and David S. Luft (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1990), pp. 214–34 (p. 215).

³¹ On the history of the concept, see Hans Maier, ‘Political Religion: a Concept and its Limitations’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8:1 (2007), 5–16.

³² Martin Buber, ‘Nationalism’, in *Israel and the World: Essays in a Time of Crisis* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), pp. 214–226 (p. 216). The text corresponds to Buber’s address to the twelfth Zionist Congress in September 1921.

³³ Leonardo Senkman, ‘Borges y el mal del nazismo’, in *Borges en Jerusalén*, edited by Myrna Solotorevsky and Ruth Fine (Frankfurt am Main and Madrid: Vervuert Verlag, Iberoamericana, 2003), pp. 167–180 (p. 178).

³⁴ Martin Buber, ‘The Faith of Judaism’, in *Israel and the World: Essays in a Time of Crisis* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), pp. 13–27 (p. 16).

³⁵ Compare Matthew 27: 45; Mark 15: 33; Luke 23: 44–45. See Goldman, *Zeal for Zion*, pp. 215–216, who highlights Borges’s holistic reading of both the Old and the New Testament.

³⁶ Buber, ‘The Faith of Judaism’, p. 16.

³⁷ ‘*Deutsches Requiem*’, in *Obras completas*, I, 576–581. Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths, Selected Stories and Other Writings*, edited and translated by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1964), pp. 141–147. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the main body of the article. For a contextualization, see Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones, *Borges y el nazismo: Sur (1937–1946)* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2004), pp. 135–221; Annick Louis, *Borges ante el fascismo* (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2007), pp. 283–308.

³⁸ Buber, *The Legend of the Baal-Shem*, p. 22: ‘Each man has a sphere of being in space and time which is allotted to him to be redeemed through him.’ Compare Martin Buber, *The Way of Man According to the Teaching of Hasidism* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. 31: ‘The environment which I feel to be the natural one, the situation which has been assigned to me as my fate, the things that happen to me day after day, the things that claim me day after day – these contain my essential task and such fulfillment of existence as is open to me.’ See also Jospe, ‘Encounter: The Thought of Martin Buber’, p. lix.

³⁹ Compare Dujovne, ‘Henri Bergson y Martin Buber’, p. 126: ‘[Buber] sostuvo que en la historia el que vale no es el que tiene éxito; de pronto es el “fracasado” quien tiene más significación ética’ (‘[Buber] argued that in history the one who is worth is not the one who is successful; perhaps it is the “loser” who has the most ethical significance’). See also Luz, ‘Buber’s Hermeneutics’, pp. 76–77.

⁴⁰ Gómez López-Quñones, *Borges y el nazismo*, pp. 176–177; Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 246.

⁴¹ On the issue of moral autonomy, see Hannah Arendt, ‘Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship’, in *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), pp. 17–48 (p. 42). See also Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006 [1963]), pp. 292–295.

⁴² Arthur Schopenhauer, ‘Transcendent Speculation on the Apparent Deliberateness in the Fate of the Individual’, in *Parerga and Paralipomena*, translated by E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), I, pp. 201–223 (p. 214).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 209 and 206, respectively.

⁴⁵ Otto Dietrich, *A Revolution in Thought* (Berlin: Terramare Publications, 1939), p. 21. Dietrich was put on trial at Nuremberg and sentenced to seven years in prison.

⁴⁶ Carlo Levi, *Of Fear and Freedom*, translated by Adolphe Gourevitch (London: Cassell, 1950 [1939]), p. 87.

⁴⁷ Martin Buber, 'The Interpretation of Chassidism', in *Mamre. Essays in Religion*, translated by Greta Hort (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1946), pp. 65–148 (pp. 100–102).

⁴⁸ As is well known, Borges employed a few number of symbols and images to represent the illusory or bewildering quality of existence. The game of chess, in particular, is associated in his poetry with a deterministic view of human agency, as can be seen in the poems 'Ajedrez' (from *El hacedor*, in *Obras completas*, II, 191), and 'De que nada se sabe' (from *La rosa profunda*, in *Obras completas*, III, 100]. In Hladík's dream, on the other hand, the game of chess illustrates the dreamer's predicament in so far as it represents a conflictive situation from which there seems to be no possibility of escape. As I hope to show below, this situation is overturned at the end of the narrative.

⁴⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, 'Historia de los ecos de un nombre', *Cuadernos del Congreso por la Libertad de la Cultura*, no. 15 (1955) 10–12; included in *Obras completas*, II, 128–131.

⁵⁰ Borges, *Obras completas*, II, 129; *The Total Library*, p. 406.

⁵¹ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, translated by Ronald Gregor-Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 197. The text corresponds to Buber's inaugural course of lectures at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1938.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Compare Erin Graff Zivin, *The Wandering Signifier: Rhetoric of Jewishness in the Latin American Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 155–156, who highlights the ethical dimension of the story from a Levinasian perspective.

⁵⁵ See Haim Gordon, *The Buber-Heidegger Controversy: The Status of the I-Thou* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp. 151–158; Jean Greisch, ‘The “Play of Transcendence” and the Question of Ethics’, in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, edited by François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2002), pp. 99–116 (pp. 108–113). The dispute between Buber and Heidegger falls outside the scope of this paper.

⁵⁶ Buber, ‘Religion as Presence’, p. 63.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 64. Compare Buber, *I and Thou*, pp. 24–27.

⁵⁸ Waldegaray, “‘La otra muerte’ y ‘El milagro secreto’”, p. 195. Compare Martin Buber, ‘Biblical Leadership’, in *Israel and the World*, pp. 119–133 (p. 133): ‘The real work, from the Biblical point of view, is the late-recorded, the unrecorded, the anonymous work. The real work is done in the shadow, in the quiver.’

⁵⁹ Buber, *The Way of Man*, p. 26; my italics.

⁶⁰ Richard Harries, *After the Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 37.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35. See Edna Aizenberg, *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires: Borges, Gerchunoff, and Argentine-Jewish Writing* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England; Brandeis University Press, 2002), p. 134.

⁶² Compare Jospe, ‘Encounter: The Thought of Martin Buber’, pp. lx–lxi: ‘Where was our Divine Partner when we implored Him for a word, a sign, some response to our prayer, our outcry, in Auschwitz? [...] There seem to be truly God-forsaken times when, for reasons of His own, God hides His face (Deut. 31:18, 32:20, Is. 8:17, 45:15, 53:3). All man can do then is suffer

silently, and silently wait for a new revealing. This suffering is not passive, however. It constitutes an act of faith: the faith that God will re-establish His presence to us, and that we shall once again “know” Him as Job “knew” Him—in the sense of serving as a witness to God’s presence, which is encounterable ever anew.’