

## The Immortal

Guide based on:

Evelyn Fishburn & Psiche Hughes, *A Dictionary of Borges*  
Various reference books.

**Bacon, Francis** (1561-1626) An English courtier, jurist and philosopher, best known for his *Novum Organum* (1620) and *Essays* (1625). The *Novum Organum* sets out his plan for restructuring scientific knowledge. The *Essays* deal with family life, virtues and vices, religion, education, health, politics, friendship and beauty. Lab. 135 (105): in Essay 58, 'Of Vicissitude of Things', Bacon begins with Solomon's dictum 'There is no new thing under the sun'. He then discusses the recurring calamities in human experience -earthquakes and deluges, religious discord, wars and the fall of empires - and ends by warning us not to 'look too long upon these turning wheels of vicissitudes lest we become giddy'. Lab. 135 (106) *Aleph* 7

**Cartaphilus, Joseph** A fictional character in 'The Immortal'. His name alludes to the legend of the Wandering Jew, which first appeared in a thirteenth-century chronicle by Roger Wendover. According to Wendover, a certain Cartaphilus (believed to be St Joseph of Arimathea), taunted Jesus on his way to the Cross and was told by him that he would have to wait on earth until he returned. Cartaphilus lived to a hundred and then reverted to thirty, at which age he was destined to remain until the end of the world. Lab. 135 (105): the legend of the Jew condemned to wander about the world until Christ's second coming has been told in several versions and was a popular subject in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Through these reworkings the legend shares with the *Odyssey* the fate of 'immortality' (see 'Las versiones homéricas' in Disc.). Lab. 135(105) *Aleph* 7

**Smyrna (Esmirna)** A city on the west coast of Asia Minor. Lab. 135 (105): in 'The Immortal' the mention of Smyrna establishes an early link with Homer, one of whose reputed (and disputed) birth-places it was. Lab.135(105) *Aleph* 7

**Faucigny Lucinge, Princess of** An Argentine friend of Borges, née Lidia Lloveras, who married Prince Faucigny Lucinge and went to live in Paris. Salvador Dali in his *Diary of a Genius* refers to her death with regret, together with the death of aesthetic movements such as surrealism and existentialism. Lab. 40(16) *Ficc.*31

**Pope, Alexander** (1688-1744) An English poet and satirist. In 1711 Pope published his *Essay on Criticism*, an epigrammatic *tour de force* aimed at reproducing the style and paraphrasing the themes of Roman satire. *The Rape of the Lock*, a mock epic published in 1712, was also written on classical lines. The *Essay on Man* (1733-4), a work of vast scope, deals with the relation of man, nature and society. Lab. 135: Pope's most daring achievement was to translate the *Iliad* (1720) and the *Odyssey* (1725-6). These translations, though at times distant from the originals, aimed at reproducing their effects in the context of Pope's time. Pope was severely criticised. In his essay on the translators of Homer, comparing different translations of the same passages, Borges praises Pope's version for the richness and spectacular quality of his language. As for 'accuracy', Borges considers that since the original meaning and intention of the author are irrecoverable, because there is no 'definitive text', to judge the quality of a translation by its 'faithfulness' is a futile task (*Disc.* 105 ff). Lab. 147

(116); before final publication, Pope's translation of the *Iliad* was delivered to subscribers in instalments. Lab.135(105) *Aleph 7*

**Salonika (Salónica)** A Greek port north west of Athens, once Macedonia's natural outlet to the sea. Lab. 135 (105): the Spanish spoken in Salonika was probably Ladino (a mixture of old Spanish and some Hebrew). Salonika's Jewish colony was greatly augmented in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by an influx of Sephardic Jews from Spain. Lab.135(105) *Aleph 7*

**Macao**

A Portuguese colony on the South China Sea, the earliest European port in the Far East, dating from the sixteenth century. It was later identified with smuggling and gambling. Lab. 135(105) *Aleph 7*

**Ios** A Greek island in the Cyclades said to be the burial place of Homer. Lab. 135(105) *Aleph 7*

**Thebes Hekatompylos (Tebas Hekatompilos)** The ancient capital of Boeotia, home of the mythical king Oedipus and the scene of other Greek tragedies. Lab. 135 (106): the epithet 'Hekatompylos', 'with a hundred gates', is applied to Thebes by Homer in his list of the Trojan allies to indicate its wealth and power (*Iliad* 2. 505). Lab. 151 (120): the king of Thebes who saw two suns refers to Euripides' *Bacchae* (918): Pentheus, king of Thebes, grandson of Cadmus, the city's founder, has been initiated in the Dionysian rites and sent mad; he appears on the stage in a daze and utters the words: 'Why now! I seem to see two suns; a double Thebes; / Our city's walls with seven gates appears double.' Lab. 135 (106) *Aleph 7*, Lab. 151 (120) *Aleph 37*

**Diocletian, Gaius Aurelius Valerius (Diocleciano)** (245-313) Roman emperor from 284 until his abdication in 305. In 286 he reorganised the administration of the vast empire by sharing his power with Maximian, a colleague at arms, and in 293 with two assistants. The empire was divided into four parts, each controlled by one of its four Caesars who were united by religious bonds and later by ties of marriage. Lab. 135 (106): Diocletian was in charge of Thrace, Asia and Egypt. In 296 he led his army to quell the rebellion of Achilleus in Egypt, and was exceptionally ruthless in the accomplishment of this task. Lab. 135(106) *Aleph 7*

**Berenice** A city in southern Egypt on the Red Sea, founded in memory of his mother by Ptolemy Philadelphus in the third century BC.

**Mauretania (Mauritanos)** An ancient kingdom in north Africa corresponding now to north Morocco and central Algeria. The kings of Mauretania became Roman vassals as early as the second century BC. Two centuries later Mauretania was annexed to the Roman Empire by the Emperor Claudius and divided into two provinces. Lab. 135: (106): in the fourth century, during the tetrarchy of Diocletian, Mauretania and other regions of north Africa were the scene of rebellions against the Roman army led by Maximian, the Emperor's colleague.

**Alexandria (Alejandría)** The principal port of Egypt, founded by Alexander the Great in 332/1 BC. Lab. 136 (106) refers to the war of the Romans against Egypt whose capital Alexandria became. In 30 BC Octavian (later Augustus) overthrew the

last of the Ptolemies. The city and the rest of the country fell under Roman rule, and many rebellions were put down. Lab. 125 (95): by the second century AD Alexandria had become a focus of Hellenistic and Jewish learning. Heretical doctrines, such as those of the Gnostics and of Origen spread within its walls. [...]

**Mars (Marte)** The Roman god of war.  
Lab.136(106) *Aleph 8*

**Ganges** The sacred river of the Hindus, who believe that bathing in its waters washes away all sins. The Ganges rises in the Himalayas, runs through the northern plain of India (now Bangladesh) and flows into the gulf of Bengal. Lab. 136(106) *Aleph 8*

**Elysian Plains (Llanura elísea)** In Greek mythology the destination of heroes to whom the Gods had granted immortality. Lab. 136(106) *Aleph 9*

**Pactolus (Pactolo)** A river in Lydia (now Turkey), famous for the gold contained in its sands. Lab.136(107) *Aleph 9*

**Gaetulia (or Getulia)** A country of North Africa extending from the Atlas Mountains to the Atlantic coast. In the second century BC the people of Gaetulia joined Jugurtha (d.104 BC), king of Numidia, in his resistance to Rome. After the Mauretians became Roman subjects in AD 40, the Romans made frequent sorties in Gaetulia. Lab. 136 (107): though there was no proconsul in Gaetulia (the region was not entirely subordinated), the Gaetulians served in the auxiliary forces of the Roman Empire. Lab. 136(107) *Aleph 9*

**Arsinoë** A city of Upper Egypt, west of the Nile, of which extensive ruins remain.  
Lab. 137(107) *Aleph 9*

**Troglodytes** One of various races or tribes of men (chiefly ancient or prehistoric) inhabiting caves or dens (natural or artificial); a cave-dweller, cave-man. [from: *The Oxford English Dictionary*]

\* \* \*

Pliny describes the inhabitants of the most remote parts of the North African desert beyond Gaetulia. Among these he mentions the troglodytes who 'dig out caves and use them as habitations, feed on the flesh of snakes, lack the use of language and speak not in words but in shrieks'. [from: *Dictionary of Borges*]

**Tartarus (Tártaro)** In classical mythology an abyss below Hades where the Titans were imprisoned by Zeus. Later it became a general term for the underworld.  
Lab.137(107) *Aleph 9*

**Satyr** [in Mythology] One of a class of woodland gods or demons, in form partly human and partly bestial, supposed to be the companions of Bacchus.

In Greek art of the pre-Roman period the satyr was represented with the ears and tail of a horse. Roman sculptors assimilated it in some degree to the faun of their native mythology, giving to it the ears, tail, and legs of a goat, and budding horns. In the English Bible the word is applied (without precedent either in the LXX or the Vulgate) to the hairy demons or monsters of Semitic superstition, supposed to inhabit deserts. [from: *The Oxford English Dictionary*]

**Crete (Creta)** A Greek island in the south Aegean. [...]

**Marcus Flaminius Rufus (Marco Flaminio Rufo)** A fictional Latin name with the connotation 'flame' and 'red' (Rufus), contrasted with Joseph Cartaphilus, an 'earthen man, with grey eyes and grey beard' (see Christ, *The Narrow Act*, NY 1969, 206). Lab.138(108) *Aleph* 12

**'Argos...This dog lying in the manure'** ('Este perro tirado en el estiércol') In the *Odyssey* Odysseus' faithful dog, who is the first to recognise him on his return to Ithaca. Lab. 143 (113): the passage describes how Odysseus had raised and trained the dog but never hunted with him before leaving for the Trojan war. Nineteen years later Argos is lying 'on the deep pile of dung' which is to be used for manure: 'Now, as he perceived that Odysseus had come close to him, / he wagged his tail, and laid back both his ears...' and died (*Odyssey* 17. 290-327). Lab. 142/3 (112/13) *Aleph* 17/8

**Thessaly (Tesalia)** An area of north-central Greece inhabited at least since 1000 BC in which was situated the beautiful Vale of Tempo. Thessaly passed to Macedon in 344 BC and two centuries later became part of the Roman province of Macedonia. Lab. 143 (113): the river mentioned here could be the Peneus or one of its two tributaries, the Titaesios or the Enipeus. Lab.143(113) *Aleph* 18

**Homer (Homero)** The first and greatest Greek poet, of Ionian origin, who seems to have lived between the ninth and eighth centuries BC: the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, both of which were transmitted orally (how far our present texts were remodelled by others remains a matter of dispute). According to legend Homer was blind. Nothing is known about him, but the homogeneity of the language and inspiration of the two poems, together with the consistency of their characters, points to a single originator. Borges studied at length the many translations of Homer's poems and discussed their different merits, displaying a partiality for the versions of Pope. He was particularly interested in the range of interpretations that emerge in the translations, and the impossibility of distinguishing, within the text, between what is intrinsically Homer's and what is part of the heritage of language; he concluded that the original meaning of a text could never be recaptured (*Disc.* 105). Borges also felt a certain affinity with Homer, no doubt heightened by his blindness; he suggested that Homer, on losing his sight, realised that poetry was his destiny: compelled to look for experience within himself, he gained in inspiration (*Hac.* 9-13). Lab. 138 (108): 'the rich Trojans from Zelea...': these 'words in Greek' which the narrator of 'The Immortal' repeats in his delirium, are a quotation from the passage in the Catalogue of ships in the *Iliad* listing the Trojan allies (2.824-7). The men from Zelea were led by Pandarus to whom Apollo had taught his skill with the bow. Lab. 140, 148 (110, 117): a 'reprobation which was almost remorse': these words too 'belong to Homer' in so far as they refer to the insinuation of Helen's guilt when, after the abortive duel between Paris and Menelaus, she reprimands Paris for not having fallen on the battlefield *Wad* 3.385ff.). Lab. 144 (114): the poem about a war of 'frogs and mice' refers to the mock epic *Batrachomyomachia* intended as a satire on the *Iliad* and traditionally attributed to Homer.

**Hindustan (Indostán)** The land of the Hindus, comprising the valley of the Punjab and Upper Ganges. *Ficc.* 38, *Aleph* 143: sometimes, as here, Borges uses the term for

India in general. Aleph 32 (46): the history of strife between Hindus and Muslims in the Punjab and other regions of India is long and violent. Hindu religious practices are polytheistic and, though they fall into different forms of mysticism, all 'teach that the world is illusory', as Borges states (Other Inq. 152). Lab. 144 (114): recurrent mythic themes are to be found in most Hindu religions, such as time seen as an endless repetition of the year, the notion of repeated creations, the idea of eternal return and the doctrine of transmigration.

**Wheel (rueda)** A universal symbol. Lab. 150 (119): its circular form, without beginning or end, has been used as an emblem of eternity, 'monotony' and the recurrence of events. Lab. 144 (114): in some Hindu religions, as well as being the weapon of the god Vishnu and the 'mandala' or axis of the earth and centre of energy, the wheel is also the 'kala chakra', symbol of the continuation of life through multiple individual manifestations, and of alternating patterns of destruction and rebirth, marked by the inward and outward breath of Brahma. Brahma is also referred to as 'Wheel'. Lab. 206 (172); a symbol of perfect totality, the wheel can allude to the Divinity present in its creation. Lab. 144 (114) *Aleph* 20, Lab. 150 (119) *Aleph* 35, Lab. 206 (172) *Aleph* 120

***Poem of the Cid (Poema del Cid)*** An anonymous epic poem, regarded as the greatest literary masterpiece of Castile. Written c.1140, it is the earliest surviving poem of the Iberian peninsula. It narrates the exploits of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, the partly historical and partly legendary knight known as El Cid, meaning 'lord', and his love for his wife Ximena. El Cid fought for the Castilian king Alfonso VI, but on being wrongly accused and banished he became a soldier of fortune, fighting sometimes for the Christians and sometimes for the Moors. Though idealised, El Cid is basically an ordinary man, with greater spirit and courage but without the missionary zeal or crusader's ideology of his French counterpart in the *Chanson de Roland*. El Cid fights for *averes*, land and money, which were to be won, within an accepted code of honour, by fighting. The firm characterisation and the dramatic narrative, probably intended for oral performance, recaptures the life of a man who has inspired generations of Spaniards and remained Spain's favourite hero. Lab. 145 (114); the term 'rustic' probably refers to the subject matter of the poem: a frontier society, sober and dry like its habitat, the Castilian plateau, reflected in a terse style which conveys excitement without undue recourse to poetic ornament or dramatic intensity. Lab.145(114) *Aleph* 20

**Virgil (Virgilio)** (70-19 BC) The national poet of ancient Rome, author of the *Eclogues*, ten short pastoral poems in imitation of Theocritus; the *Georgics*, four long poems describing different aspects of rural life; and the epic *Aeneid*, revealing the divinity of Rome and the Julian family, supposedly descended from Aeneas, to which the Emperor Augustus belonged. Virgil's greatness, beyond his technical and narrative ability, lies in his sensitive insight, his image of cosmic suffering and his compassion towards human weaknesses: 'There are tears for misfortune and mortal sorrows touch the heart' (*Aeneid* 1. 462-3). A visionary note rings through Virgil's poetry, as he depicts an ideal society, stripped of treachery and corruption, returning to the innocence and simplicity of country life and the appreciation of old spiritual and religious values. Lab. 123 (93) and Aleph 72 (111) refer to the fourth Eclogue, famous for its prophetic tone. During the early centuries of Christianity the Sibylline allusion to the birth of a child bringing a new age - *'Iam nova progenies coelo*

*demittitur alto* ('A new-born child comes down from heaven above') - was believed to refer to the birth of Christ. The true identity of the child alluded to is still debated. Lab. 123 (93) *Ficc.* 166, Aleph 72 (111) *Aleph* 79

**Heraclitus (Heráclito)** (d. 480 BC) A Presocratic philosopher, of whose work only oracular fragments remain. His philosophy, in opposition to that of Parmenides, was based on the principle of permanent movement in nature due to the continuously changing character of its primordial element, fire; the process takes the form of a perpetual conflict of opposites, struggle and unity. This concept found echoes in the dialectics of Hegel. Lab. 145 (114): isolated epigrammatic remarks by Heraclitus on his contemporaries and predecessors survive, mainly pungent and contemptuous. Lab. 145(114) *Aleph* 20

**Agrippa, Cornelius (Cornelio Agrippa)** Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535), a German author of Latin texts on magic and the occult who fought against the condemnation of witchcraft. He was Professor at the University of Dôle and Pavia. Persecuted by the Inquisition, he was imprisoned for a time in Brussels. His writings, based on an explanation of the world in terms of Pythagoras' numerology and a Cabbalistic interpretation of the Hebrew alphabet, aim to demonstrate that God is best reached through magic. Lab. 145(115) *Aleph* 21

**Tangier (Tánger)** A town in Morocco, on the straits of Gibraltar. Lab. 182 (150): Tangier was an important Muslim centre at the time of the Almohad dynasty. Lab. 146 (116) *Aleph* 22, Lab. 182 (150) *Aleph* 93

**Stamford Bridge** A village on the border of the East Riding of Yorkshire, seven miles from York, where Harald Hardrada, king of Norway, was defeated in 1066 by Harold, king of England. Lab.146(116) *Aleph* 22

**Harold II** (1020-1066) The last Anglo-Saxon king of England, who was defeated and killed by William the Conqueror at the battle of Hastings. Harold assumed the crown on the death of Edward the Confessor in 1066 in the face of two other claimants, Harald Hardrada of Norway whom he defeated at Stamford Bridge and William of Normandy. Lab. 146(116) *Aleph* 22

**Harald Hardrada** (1015-1066) The son of a Norwegian chief who fought against the Danes under King Olaf II of Norway. At the King's death, Harald took refuge in Russia and served under the Prince of Kiev; from there he enlisted in the army of the Byzantine Emperor Michael IV. His military exploits form part of Byzantine and Norse medieval history. King of Norway from 1047, Harald expanded Norse rule over Orkney, Shetland and the Hebrides, and claimed the throne of England at the death of Edward the Confessor in 1066, allying himself with the rebel Tostig against the new English king, Harold II. He was defeated and killed on 25 September 1066 at Stamford Bridge. Lab. 146(116) *Aleph* 22

**Hegira (Hejira)** From the Arabic *hijrah*, emigration: the term for the starting point of the Muslim era, dated at 622 AD, when Mohammed fled from Mecca to Medina. The second caliph, Umari, introduced the Muslim calendar, which began with the first day of the lunar month, 16 July 622. Lab. 146 (116): the seventh century after the Hegira would therefore correspond to our fourteenth century. Lab. 146(116) *Aleph* 22

**Bulaq** (also **Bulak**) Once a suburb of Cairo, now part of the city, renowned for its museum of Egyptology. Lab. 146(116) *Aleph 22*

**City of bronze** (*Ciudad de bronce*) A tale from the *Thousand and One Nights*, whose theme is the universal triumph of death. Viewed by Amir Musa from the top of a mountain, the city appears to have no human beings in it, only bronze statues and vampires. Bronze columns, tombs, domes and sepulchral inscriptions are the dominant images, and the narrative concludes with the lament: 'Why is man born if he must die?' In an annotation to his translation of the *Thousand and One Nights*, Lane explains that the city's image was associated in the Arab mind with that of temples, statues and tombs in Egypt. Lab. 146 (116): the story of the city of bronze follows that of Sinbad the Sailor. Lab. 146(116) *Aleph 23*

**Sinbad** (**Simbad**) One of the characters of the *Thousand and One Nights* whose numerous sea journeys and adventures are spread over many nights. The tales of 'Sinbad the Sailor' are part of a group of independent stories later added to the original nucleus. Borges often draws a comparison between the seafaring Sinbad and Ulysses (e.g. *Siete noches* 70). Lab.146(116) *Aleph 23*

**Samarkand** (**Samarcanda**) Uzbek Samarqand, city in east-central Uzbekistan that is one of the oldest cities of Central Asia. In the 4th century BC, then known as Maracanda, it was the capital of Sogdiana and was captured (329) by Alexander the Great. The city was later ruled by Central Asian Turks (6th century AD [from: *Encyclopedia Britannica*]

\* \* \*

[...] Samarkand reached its height in the fifteenth century, as capital of the empire of the Islamic Mongol ruler Tamerlane. Lab. 146 (116): playing chess in Samarkand is plausible. The game, known among both the Arabs and the Persians, was introduced into Islam from Persia and was given patronage at the court of Tamerlane. Lab.146(116) *Aleph 23* [from: *Dictionary of Borges*]

**Bikaner** (**Bikanir**) An Indian city, founded in 488 in the Thor Desert in north Rajasthan. The princely state of Bikaner was loyal to the Mongol Islamic dynasty in Delhi which ruled over most of India from 1526 to 1857. Lab. 147 (116): the attention given by the Arabs to the study of astrology throughout the Middle and Far East makes 'professing' this science in Bikaner plausible. Lab. 147 (116) *Aleph 23*, *Aleph 33* (48) *Ficc.* 38

**Bohemia** A province of Czechoslovakia and the centre of many artistic and cultural traditions. Lab. 147 (116): professing astrology in Bohemia could be a veiled allusion to Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) who came to Prague Observatory in 1600 and established the laws of planetary motion which later enabled Newton to formulate his theory of gravitation. See *Clementinum*. Lab. 147(116) *Aleph 23*

**Kolozsvár** The Hungarian name of Cluj-Napoca, capital of Cluj *judet* (county), northwestern Romania. The historic capital of Transylvania. [from: *Encyclopedia Britannica*]

**Leipzig** A German city and important cultural centre south west of Berlin. Lab. 147 (116): the presence of the narrator of the 'Immortal' in Leipzig after 1638 may be a pun on Leibniz, who was born here in 1646. Lab. 147(116) Aleph 23

**Aberdeen** City and historic royal burgh (town) astride the Rivers Dee and Don on Scotland's North Sea coast. Aberdeen is a busy seaport, a centre of Scotland's fishing industry, and the commercial capital of northeastern Scotland. [from: *Encyclopedia Britannica*]

**Vico, Giambattista** (1668-1744) An Italian philosopher and historian who propounded a cyclical theory of the history of mankind. In *Scienza Nuova* (1725), he envisages human societies as passing through periods of growth and decay: from the age of the beasts to the age of the Gods, from the age of heroes to that of men. [...] Lab. 148 (118): Vico set out his ideas on the 'Homeric question' in 'The Discovery of the True Homer' in the third book of *Scienza Nuova* (para. 803/90). Remembering Aristotle's definition of Homer's characters, Vico describes them as universal symbols, 'imaginative universals', to which the Greeks attached particulars proper to their specific 'genus': 'to Achilles the properties of heroic valour and all the feelings and customs arising from these natural properties'; 'to Ulysses all the feelings and customs of heroic wisdom'. Homer himself, according to Vico, is but the symbol of different authors to whom, with time, people have attached different characteristics proper to the wandering poet: he was poor, he was blind and he moved from one town square to another singing his epics. We do not know for sure where Homer was born, but we accept that he wrote poems whose geographical settings are far apart; we are told that he never went to Egypt, yet we accept his description of the land and its customs; we do not know when he lived, and explain the differences between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by saying that the first was written in his youth and the second in his maturity, although, in fact, centuries lie between the two works. 'The Greek people were... Homer,' concludes Vico. 'Lost in the crowds of Greek peoples', he 'is justified for having made men of Gods and Gods of men.' Lab. 103 (73) *Ficc.* 139, Lab. 147 (116) *Aleph* 23

**Patna** The name of the ship in Conrad's novel *Lord Jim*. Lab.147(116) *Aleph* 23

**Bombay** The second largest city of India, whose name derives from the Portuguese Boa Bahia, meaning 'good harbour'. Aleph 31 (45): Bombay has a university and is a notable publishing centre. Lab. 147 (116) *Aleph* 23, Aleph 31(45) *Ficc.* 35

**Eritrea** Country of eastern Africa, situated on the Horn of Africa

**inter alia** (Latin) Among other things

**Cordovero, Nahum** A fictional character with biblical and historical associations. Nahum, which in Hebrew means 'comfort' or 'source of comfort', is one of the twelve minor prophets of the Old Testament. Cordovero (Moses ben Jacob), who lived in Safed, a centre of Cabbalism in the seventeenth century, was held to be the greatest theoretician of Jewish mysticism (see G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, NY 1961, 252). His teachings, which exerted a marked influence on his contemporary Isaac Luria, dealt with questions of immortality and the transmigration of souls. Lab. 149 (118): *A Coat of Many Colours*, the title of Nahum Cordovero's fictional text,

refers to the long-sleeved coat given by Jacob to Joseph, his favourite son (Gen. 37:3). Its some hundred pages suggest that it is itself a *cento* (*cien*), a work made up of quotations and fragments of other works. Lab. 149(118) *Aleph* 25

**Jonson, Ben** (1572-1637) An English dramatist, contemporary with Shakespeare, whose best-known plays were *Every Man in his Humour* (1601), *Volpone* (1606) and *The Alchemist* (1610). Lab. 149 (118): the assertion that Ben Jonson defined his contemporaries 'with bits of Seneca' is an allusion to *Timber; or Discoveries made upon Men and Matter* (1640), a posthumous collection of essays whose text is derived in part from Seneca the Elder, Pliny and Quintilian. Seneca's inspiration is to be observed particularly in essay 63 on poets, 69 on style, 70 on famous orators, and 72 on other writers, including Bacon. In 63, for example, referring to the undeserved applause bestowed on the poetry of John Taylor (1578-1653), Jonson comments sarcastically: 'Not that the better have left to write or speak better but that they that heare them judge worse', an echo of Seneca's 'non illi peius dicunt sed hi corruptius judicant' (*Controversiae* 3, praef.). Writing of Shakespeare and the claim that 'he never blotted a line', Jonson commented: 'Would he had blotted a thousand.' Shakespeare, he explains, flowed with such facility that at times 'he should have been stopped': 'sufflaminandus erat', an allusion to the emperor Augustus' remark about the orator Atevius (Seneca, *Controversiae* 4.7) Lab. 149(118) *Aleph* 26

**Seneca, Lucius** (c.55 BC - c.39 AD) A Roman writer, born in Spain, often referred to as Seneca the Elder to distinguish him from his son, the Stoic philosopher appointed by Agrippina as tutor to her son Nero. Seneca the Elder was the author of a work on rhetoric, *Oratorum sententiae divisiones colores*, in which he rejected the artificial, often decadent language of some of his contemporaries in favour of the disciplined classical style of Cicero and Livy. The argument is presented through examples taken from famous rhetorical teachers, which are divided into ten books of *Controversiae* (some only preserved in fragments) and at least one (surviving) book of *Suasoriae*. The sketches of the people described form an interesting comment on the literary life of the early Empire. Lab. 149 (118): Seneca's sharp observations and sarcastic judgments give his writings an epigrammatic quality which makes them eminently quotable.

**Ross, Alexander** (1590-1654) A Scottish divine, author of poetical, philosophical and theological works in Latin and English. His most ambitious book, *A History of the World*, was intended as a continuation of the work begun by Sir Walter Raleigh. In his preface Ross claimed to be more conversant with the dead than with the living, a fact that Borges may well have had in mind when quoting him in the context of 'The Immortal'. Among Ross's Latin books are the eight volumes of *Virgilius Evangelizans* (1634), which presents the life of Jesus in the words of Virgil. The first five books refer to biblical episodes and their allusion to the figure of Christ. Book 6 describes Christ's birth; book 7 the prophecies of his life and miracles; book 8 to 12 the life, death and resurrection; book 13 his ascension to Heaven and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Each passage is referred to the *Aeneid*, *Eclogues* or *Georgics* by book and line number. Lab. 149 (118): being composed of phrases from the writings of another author, *Virgilius Evangelizans* is an example of a 'patchwork' text alluded to in Nahum Cordovero's *Coat of Many Colours*. Lab.149(118) *Aleph* 26

**Moore, George** (1852-1933) An Anglo-Irish writer, author of novels, plays and short stories. Moore was educated in France and 'found his English style in French'. Borges remembers jokingly that Moore 'pledged to find fourteen errors in any of the sonnets of Baudelaire' (*Borges mem.* 124). Lab. 149 (118): the reference to Moore's 'artifices' is to his contorted syntax and startling juxtapositions. To create an unbroken narrative, Moore introduced such stylistic devices as the substitution of the present participle for the verb in finite form, so as to achieve a more flowing sentence; the repetition of certain words within the same paragraph, to cement together the various sentences; and the change from narrative to conversation without indentation or inverted commas. He also introduced striking anachronisms, as in *The Brook Kerith* (1916), where Jesus is presented as the son of a carpenter who does not die on the cross and with whose living presence St Paul is confronted when preaching about the crucifixion; or as in *Heloïse and Abelard* (1921), where a twelfth-century French context provides the background for characters who behave as they would in modern times. Lab.149(118) *Aleph* 26

**Eliot, Thomas Stearns** (1888-1965) An English poet and critic, born in USA. Eliot was the author of 'The Waste Land' (1922), an allegorical poem expressing man's need for salvation, and *Four Quartets* (1936-42), a series of poems evincing a preoccupation, shared by Borges, with time, individuality and the place of man in history. Lab. 149 (118) refers to Eliot's allusive vocabulary and deliberate anachronisms introduced 'to forge an appearance of eternity' (*Disc.* 122). [...]

**Pliny the Elder (Plinio)** (23-79 AD) A Roman writer, author of the 37 volumes of *Historia Naturalis*, a source of information on every branch of natural sciences known to the ancient world. Pliny was exceptionally industrious and wide-ranging in his interests and wrote also on grammar, military strategy and Roman history. His scientific zeal was the indirect cause of his death for, in order to observe closely the eruption of Vesuvius, he set sail towards it and lingered too long and too near the volcano. [...]

**De Quincey, Thomas** (1785-1859) An English essayist, remembered chiefly for *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821). De Quincey exerted a strong influence on Borges's fiction (see Christ, *The Narrow Act*, NY 1969). Though Borges never wrote specifically on De Quincey, he acknowledged his 'vast debt' to him (Other Inq. 89) and often quoted from his collected *Writings*, generally citing the 1889/90 David Masson edition.[...] Lab. 149 (118): the 'interpolation' mentioned refers to the description of the City of the Immortals inspired by De Quincey's account of a set of plates by Piranesi. These plates, illustrating the visions of De Quincey's delirium, present images of 'gothic halls' and stairs which reach 'an abrupt termination, without any balustrade, and allowing no step onwards to him who should reach the extremity' (vol. 5, 439). The plate called 'The Gothic Arch' from the *Carceri set* may be particularly relevant.

**Descartes, René** (1596-1650) French mathematician, scientist, and philosopher. Because he was one of the first to abandon scholastic Aristotelianism, because he formulated the first modern version of mind-body dualism, from which stems the mind-body problem, and because he promoted the development of a new science grounded in observation and experiment, he has been called the father of modern philosophy. [from: *Encyclopedia Britannica*]

**Chanut, Hector Pierre** (c. 1604-1667) A French diplomat, ambassador to Sweden and counsellor to Queen Christina. Chanut had a fluent knowledge of Hebrew, classical and modern languages, law, science and philosophy. He was a friend of Descartes, whom he introduced to the queen and with whom he remained in correspondence. Lab. 149 (118): the epistle referred to, in *Lettres sur la morale*, is Descartes's letter to Chanut dated 1 November 1646 describing what savage people think of monkeys: 'They imagine that monkeys could talk, if they so wished, but refrain from doing so for fear of being obliged to work' (cf. Lab. 142 (112)). Lab. 149(118) *Aleph 26*

**Shaw, George Bernard** (1856-1950) An Irish playwright, who began his career in London in 1876 as a music critic and political journalist. [...] Lab. 149 (118): *Back to Methuselah* consists of five linked plays whose time-span stretches from 4004 BC to AD 31,920. The theme of the last three is praise of longevity, which culminates in the last play of all, *As Far as Thought Can Reach*. People are born from an egg at the age of seventeen and, after four years of youthful pleasures, evolve into mature beings who, with the passing of time, are granted the experience of all that life can give. Lab. 144 (114): the saying that 'in an infinite period of time, all things happen to all men' is fashioned after the words of the She-Ancient to the Newly Born: 'Everything happens to everybody sooner or later.' Lab.149(118) *Aleph 26*

**Sábato, Ernesto** (1911-) An Argentine scientist and writer, author of novels, such as *The Tunnel* (1948) and *On Heroes and Tombs* (1961), and of critical work such as *Uno y el universo* (1945) and *Heterodoxia* (1953). Sábato focuses on the condition of modern man, whose alienation often leads to despair. The psychological and philosophical concerns of his writings do not, however, detract from the depth of characterisation in his fiction. Sábato has always shown respect for Borges and interest in his work. When, at the annual literary competition of 1942, Borges failed to receive the first prize for his collection *The Garden of Forking Paths* Sábato was one of the twenty-one writers who protested and contributed to 'Reparation to Borges'. In 1968 he published *Tres aproximaciones a la literatura de nuestro tiempo* (Three Approximations to the Literature of Our Time) in which he wrote on three leading literary figures: Robbe-Grillet, Borges and Sartre. Lab.148(118) *Aleph 25*