Digging for hrönir: a second reading of "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"

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Our century's greatest miniaturist": this is how Borges is billed in Amazon.com. And rightly so, for reading Borges from this perspective, pondering in the possibilities of meaning that attention to detail illuminates, is invariably a richly fruitful experience. At its best, such close textual analysis offers the joy of discovering how hitherto intuited "truths" about the overall design of a story are imaginatively played out in its narrative. Armed, therefore, with the necessary magnifying lens I have embarked on this reading of "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" to look for different reflections in the story of its main conceit, namely, that the world is permeated by ideal and idealized duplications of something essentially undefinable. These duplications are called *hrönir*, Borges's invented word referring to ideas, dreams and desires that are metaphorically projected onto the real world as solid, poetic objects. The story suggests that these hrönir will invade our real world in the future, when "the world will be Tlön" (*Collected Fictions*, 81) but once we are able to recognize the hrönir for what they "really" are (I use the adverb advisedly), we can see that the announced future (Orbis Tertius) is already here, and has always been. Awareness of this phenomenon allows us to see these ideal copies, the hrönir, as constitutive elements of our real world.

The critical literature on the philosophical implications of the depiction of idealism in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is concerned mainly with philosophers mentioned in the story: Berkeley, Hume, Russell, Meinong. But I think that its relevance could be fruitfully explored with regards to realist-based philos-

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ophies. For example, how much the story's *Orbis Tertius* has in common with the notion of World 3 as discussed by the scientific philosopher Karl Popper is a topic that has not been addressed so far. Though it exceeds the aspirations of this article, I am interested in the shared presence of hrönir-products of the mind that are real in the real world – in both posited third worlds. I am arguing for an affinity between Borges's solidified metaphors and Popper's notion of the third world as a man-made product which exists in reality. In *Objective Knowledge* (159) Popper writes:

> I suggest that it is possible to accept reality or (as it may be called) the autonomy of the third world, and at the same time to admit that the third world originates as a product of human activity.[1]

In what follows I shall concentrate on the presentation of idealism and on matters of narrative technique by focusing on a hrön-driven reading of the story that sees the presence of hrönir from its inception onwards. Eventually, we may think of the story as being not so much about a world that has become permeated by idealism, but as being itself an illustration or embodiment of this idea, the experience of this, its dominant conceit. Put into other words, apart from all other readings, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is about itself, a hrön. The German theologian Valentinus Andreä's invention of a secret society which eventually becomes the creation of the Rosicrucian order is an inescapable precedent. In Tlönian parlance, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is a hrön that derives from it, or is engendered by it. This idea, put forward in *A Dictionary of Borges* (1990), has been followed by several erudite discussions of the relationship between the history and aims of the Rosicrucians and the Borges story. I am concerned mainly with the aesthetic elaboration of this co-incidence.

My briefest of resumes of what is perhaps Borges's most convoluted story will focus on some of the points that are most rel-

[1] There is of course no specific suggestion that Popper had Borges in mind though his explanation follows closely the spirit of Tlön albeit with a different slant. I am indebted to Google who placed the two writers in uncommented juxtaposition in a web-page entitled *Orbis Tertius*, creating from a virtual link a 'real' one. (Popper does not use the term *Orbis Tertius* but speaks of World 3 and third world)

evant. Part I starts with a conversation about the novel between a fictional or semi-fictional Borges and a fictional or semi-fictional Bioy Casares. The latter is challenged to substantiate an unguarded quotation about mirrors and fatherhood, which he alleges to have read in a reprinted encyclopedia, in an article on a land called Uqbar. The two of them set out immediately to consult the article which at first cannot be found, but eventually Bioy produces it: it consists of four pages describing with minute detail the geography and history of the land of Uqbar, adding "the memorable feature" that its literature refers not to its reality, but to the ideal regions, Mlejnas, and more particularly, Tlön.

This is a detective story, with gradual revelations. In Part II we learn about the chance encounter of a book, *A First Encyclopedia of Tlön, Vol XI*, whose 1001 pages (never an innocent number, and even less if contained within the two 1's of eleven) describes a perfect universe that is entirely consistent with the idealism of its congenital nature: its languages are devoid of nouns, its main discipline is psychology, its philosophies are concerned with fantasy (materialism caused an uproar), its beliefs are absolutist.

What transpires eventually is that the content of the found XIth volume and all that can be deduced from it is the invention of a secret society first formed in the early 17th century in Lucerne or London, and which resurfaced two centuries later, in 1824 in Memphis, Tennessee, with New World ambitions of planetary grandeur. This explanation appears in a famously predated postdata (1947 in a story published in 1940; with the passing of time the effect and implications of this "joke" are being lost, to say nothing of less prominent postdatings to 1941, 1942 and 1944.)[2] Towards the end, the reader has come to understand the society's invented Tlön to be a metaphor for a utopia, a non-place that is ideal in its eponymous immateriality and perfection and reas-

[2] 1941, the discovery of a handwritten letter, 1942, the arrival of the mysterious objects, 1944, the discovery of the 40 volumes of the *The First Enciclopedia of Tlön*, etc. in a Memphis library. Olea (261) expands on the in-joke of the 1940 postdatum as it appeared in *Sur* in May 1940 and in the *Antología de la literature fantástica* in that same year.

sured by this explanation about these fictional universes would safely dismiss them as counterfoils to the real world in which we live. But hot, heavy, pulsating material objects are disturbingly invading it from the fantastic world of Tlön.

These are the famous hrönir of my title. The mystery of their materiality remains unexplained in a footnote, a space in the margins where it sits, threatening the text.

Hrönir: The concept is imprecise and has been subjected to nit-picking debate (Juan-Navarro 74). In what follows I take Borges's neologism hrön to be the singular of hrönir and Ur simply another variant, in spite of the term's implied connotations of ancestral origins. Its definition "the thing produced by suggestion, the object brought forth by hope" (78) applies to all three. (A richer and more complex discussion of Ur can be found in White [*Variaciones Borges* 15, pp. 50-55]).

Hrönir are slightly, or lightly, deviating duplications of an unspecified original. The first explicit appearance of a hrön comes towards the end of main body of the story: "Two persons are looking for a pencil; the first person finds it, but says nothing; the second finds a second pencil, no less real, but more in keeping with his expectations. These secondary objects are called *hrönir*, and they are, though awkwardly so, slightly longer" (77; my emphasis in first italics. "Awkwardly so" in the original is "de forma desairada," a nebulous term with different and even contradictory connotations.). What follows is a brief explanation of how the first hrönir allegedly came about, unsuccessfully at first, then by chance, then by design. Crucially, because this is what makes up the story, a hrön engenders another. I quote:

> A curious bit of information: *hrönir* of second and third remove—*hrönir* derived from another *hrön*, and hrönir derived from the *hrön* of a hrön—exaggerate the aberrations of the first; those of fifth remove are almost identical; those of ninth degree can be confused with those of the second; and those of the eleventh remove exhibit a purity of line that even the originals do not exhibit. The process is periodic: The *hrönir* of the twelfth remove begin to degenerate. Sometimes stranger and purer than any *hrön* is the *ur*: the thing produced by suggestion, the object brought forth by hope. The great golden mask I have mentioned is a distinguished example. (78)

We note that, in keeping with other Borgesian classifications, this is not a smooth progression but rather a tongue-in-cheek sequence. No logic underpins it: hrönir derived from other hrönir go from exaggerating the aberrations of the first, to being almost identical with it, to beginning to degenerate if unnoticed: *esse est percipi*, to be is to be perceived. Nor is it obvious that the "great golden mask" differs from other archaeological findings such as an archaic sword, two or three clay amphorae or the verdigris'd and mutilated torso of a king. My point is that once we know they are there, we, like the archaeologists of Tlön, will find hrönir everywhere, as a constitutive part not only of reality but, pertinently, also of the narrative.

Let me start with some field work, some digging for hrönir in this, second reading. I recall the famous opening line: "Debo a la conjunción de un espejo y de una enciclopedia el descubrimiento de Uqbar" ("I owe the discovery of Uqbar to the conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopedia") (68).

"The conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopedia": In support of my argument regarding the presence of hrönir throughout the narrative text, I suggest that both these foundational components, the mirror and the encyclopedia, are tinged with hrön-like qualities, reflection, duplication, falsification. Borges has written extensively about the mirror as a distorting metaphysical and philosophical symbol, as for example in "El espejo de los enigmas" ("The Mirrors of the Enigmas"). Also about the personal terrors that mirrors held for him as a child and beyond (Vázquez 80-81). Their aggressiveness, denoted by the phrase "nos acechaba," seems a constant attribution, whose undertones of "hounding," or "laying in wait" are perhaps not sufficiently stressed in Hurley's rendering of "troubled." The active, engendering, hrön-producing qualities of mirrors is continued in Part II, described as a memory lingering "in the illusory depths of mirrors" (70). Therefore, instead of the objectiveness usually associated with mirrors, here they reflect active hrönir, echoing our wishes, or fears and what springs from them.

If mirrors are not the source of a passive reproduction, neither are encyclopaedia the presumed objective summaries of human knowledge of their originators' dreams, but—as Borges has of-

ten parodied and never more wittily or influentially than with his "Chinese Encyclopedia" and its ludic enumerations—arbitrary inventions of a desired order alleged to represent reality (we have just seen an example of this in the classification of hrönir). In the story, encyclopaediae appear as hrönir not only in their distorting duplication of an indefined reality, but as hrönir engendering other hrönir, such as reprints and pirated copies of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Significantly, the relevant encyclopaedia article discussed here exists only as a recognizable hrön, to be "found," by the willing reader, in a "*misleadingly*" titled (my emphasis) copy of *The Anglo-American Cyclopedia,* Vol. 46, "elongated," in the manner of hrönir, by the addition of Pages 917-921.

What is more, it is only found when needed; when not needed, it obviously disappears, as is evident from all those vols. 46 without them. As an aside, or perhaps not, Borges, in a private conversation with Psiche Hughes and me, said that he owned a set of this work. This is an assertion that Allan White (51) validates when he claims to have found the elusive work through the catalogues of the Library of Congress, and actually consulted it. But the work he has consulted may well come under the category of hrönir, the product of his desire, because it transpires, from the picture he produced (in an internet version of the *Variaciones* article) that what exists is the *Anglo-American Encyclopaedia,* not the *Anglo-American Cyclopaedia,* a small difference White knowingly shades (my emphasis). It is possible that the word "misleading" refers to this slippage, but I think this would be too reductive an interpretation. I believe Helft's argument that, in a convoluted and roundabout way, Borges was teasingly referring to the 11th Edition of the Britannica—which he, of course, did own—is more persuasive. Helft (166-67) observes that a 1917 reprint would more likely be of the valued 11th 1911 edition and not of the older 1902 one; also, the invented *Anglo-American Cyclopedia* of 1917 has the same "black-and-gold spines" as the 11th.[3]

Finally, for now, "Bioy's" casual citation "Mirrors and copulation are abominable, for they multiply the number of man-

[3] I'm afraid that unlike Helft, I naively failed to pick up Borges's mischievous leg-pulling.

kind" (68). turns out to be yet another Borgesian hrön, in that it is a slightly altered version of what exists in and earlier piece on "Abominable mirrors" in the story of Infamy, "Hakim, the masked Dyer of Merv," and a small variation on its alleged source. In the first, "mirrors and paternity are abominable because they multiply and affirm it [the earth]" (43), in the second, "Mirrors and fatherhood are hateful because they multiply and proclaim it [the visible universe]" (69). Mankind, the earth, the visible universe; copulation, fatherhood: these are metonymic associations which by themselves would not justify comment beyond those already noted, but as I argue that the aphorism is a foundational hrön of the story it becomes significant to show it to be itself a hrön. The need to justify the gnomic citation is suggested as the springboard for what is to follow, which we can now recognize as an expedient hrön that will engender a chain of hrönir, starting with the the land of Uqbar. Let me substantiate the claim by examining its provenance.

The first of these is *History of the Land Called Uqbar (1874)* by Silas Haslam, a not too oblique reference to Borges himself: his much loved and talked about grandmother was a Haslam. A supporting footnote adds weight to the claim by mentioning that Haslam had also published *A general history of labyrinths*. The joke was prophetic in that, as has been said (Christ 182), "Borges and the Labyrinth are synonymous".[4] That's as may be, but Borges and "Borges" are not, as one of them argues in "Borges and I." One is a hrön, presumably the one morphed into Silas Haslam.

The other founding figure is said to be Johannes Valentinus Andreä, reputedly the author of *Lesbare und lesenswerthe Bemerkungen über das Land Ukkbar in Klein-Asien* (1641), which translates roughly as "Readable and Readerworthy Comments on the Land of Uqbar in Asia Minor." This book, whose title sounds as if it is mocking the length and pretentiousness of German titles, is clearly apocryphal. It does not figure among Andreä's accepted or even disputed works, and yet, like the Haslam reference, a case

[4] For further comment on Haslam and *The general history of labyrinths* see Helft's assiduous research (166-67; the reference to Thomas Ingram should read Thomas Moore).

can be made for its essential authenticity. I shall come back to this in due course.

The Uqbar that is based on both these imaginary yet plausible works, hrönir of actual works by the two real authors, is a land that almost by definition has been willed into existence; unsurprisingly, it comprises many hrönir, and even inverted hrönir. For example, the pithy saying discussed earlier as a foundational hrön is attributed to one of its heresiarchs. A heresiarch, as the name implies, is the leader of a heretical sect: in the context of what we are discussing, this could be seen as a hrön in that it is a "secondary imitation" of what is considered the accepted orthodoxy, the "real." An alternative reality, a lie. On the same lines, though more immediately persuasive, is the case of the impostor Smerdis, who is mentioned as an unspecified metaphor. I quote: "Of the historical names, we recognized only one: the impostor wizard Smerdis, and he was invoked, really, as a metaphor" (69). I suggest that he is invoked as a metaphor or better, an example, of a hrön in keeping with the overall metaphor of the story. I explain: Smerdis was a real prince who was killed and replaced by Smerdis the usurper, who then ruled for seven months. The people knew he was an impostor, yet pretended that he was the real prince because he granted them remission from taxation. So, the impostor became a hrön, willed into reality, and the falsified, deviated, secondary Smerdis was accepted, albeit temporarily, as being the real prince.

My favourite illustration of a hrön relates to the allegory of nine coins that are said to be "lost" and "found" and which is considered "scandalous" because it presupposes the permanence of substance.

> On Tuesday, X is walking along a deserted road and loses nine copper coins. On Thursday, Y finds four coins in the road, their lustre somewhat dimmed by Wednesday's rain. On Friday, Z discovers three coins in the road. Friday morning, X finds two coins on the veranda of his house. (75)

The coins are gradually accounted for but a complex debate ensues as to whether the found coins are identical or simply equal to the lost ones. There are many reasons for the narrator to term

the foregoing allegory a "sophism" and consider the argument offered to be "specious," but a fundamental humorous and no doubt intentional fallacy, which to my knowledge has so far not been detected, is contained in the anecdote itself. For the two coins that X himself finds were lying not on the road where he had lost them, but on "the veranda of his house": thus, while the first seven coins may have been the originals or their hrönish duplications, the last two could only have been hrönir, objects of the imagination and desire.[5] The fact that this difference in the status of the first seven and last two coins is glided over seems to me to be an indication that all nine coins were hrönir.

In a story that means to indulge in contradiction, undermining all absolutist notions, there are, unsurprisingly, inverted hrönir to be detected. One would be the Gnostic belief mentioned in it that is said to hold that "the visible universe was an illusion." In my particular reading, I offer this as an example of an inverted hrön, a hrön that bites its own tail, because instead of solidifying the illusory as do the hot invading objects from the fictonal Tlön, it melts the materiality of the real universe into the illusory. Another reverse hrön appears in the section on geography, where three names that relate to existing countries are interpolated among a majority of made-up names (eleven), also a case of the "real" world perturbingly invading the fictional. These inverted hrönir are witty illustrations of Borges's scepticism which leads him to undermine all totalities.

I could extend my digging to the rest of the story, as well as to the rest of Borges's fiction. A similarly driven reading might consider the wizard's creation of his son in "Circular Ruins" as the embodiment, literally, of a hrön, and equally Emma Zunz's invented story when it is accepted as evidence. Also, Pierre Menard's visible work can be seen as a series of attempted hrönir as well as his invisible work, both his 20th century, Nîmes-based willed version of *Don Quixote* and particularly all those suggested readings of real works "distorted" by differently imagined authors. And we

[5] The common-sense explanation that they might be different coins does not affect their being considered hrönir, the point being that they are presented in the same breath as the rest.

could think about the hrönir in "Lottery in Babylon," "The Secret Miracle," "The Other Death," "Averroes's Search," "The Theme of the Traitor and the Hero,"... the list is endless.

But returning to *Tlön*, "I come now to the ineffable centre of my tale" (282). By this I mean the reference to De Quincey, Writings XIII.

Here I shall chase one largely overlooked reference, this fleeting mention of De Quincey's "unexpected pages" in which the writer Andreä is identified as "a German theologian who in the early seventeenth century described an imaginary community, the Rosy Cross—which other men later founded, in imitation of his foredescription" (70). Borges, or the narrator claims to have come across these "unexpected pages" "some years later," that is to say, after the events started by that mirror and encyclopedia in the *quinta* in Ramos Mejía. In a story famous for its various postdatings, this particular postdating of the information about Andreä can be seen as a tease, a throwaway remark intended to disguise its significance in terms of the story's main conceit. A second reading of the story allows us to understand this passage as a "low degree hrön" that the society of tlönistas duplicates, in the deviated way of hrönir. Yet what does De Quincey's account of Andreä add to "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"?

Let me recall Borges's own tribute to the English writer in "The *Biathanatos*": "To De Quincey (to whom my debt is so vast that to specify one part seems to repudiate or to silence the others ..."

Ronald Christ (160-204), in his wonderful monograph, *The Narrow Act,* examines what he calls the profound connection between the imaginations of De Quincey and Borges, noting their shared interest in idiosyncratic scholarship, in the fantastic undercurrent in life, in the notion of the microcosm or what he terms "striving for alefdom," and so on... And yet, inexplicably, he fails to address this allusion to De Quincey in his discussion of "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." Other critics have mentioned it, but to my knowledge, it has never been discussed in depth or detail.

However, and perhaps ironically in the light of my reading, Alfonso de Toro points out specifically the case of "Tlön" to support his contention that "we learn nothing" from allusions in

Borges. I do not wish to engage here with de Toro's argument on two way signification in intertextuality but in defence of my own argument I will focus momentarily on his discussion of Borges's literary references. I quote:

> If we were to ask ourselves what we have learned by reading Carlyle that may contribute to our interpretation of Borges' stories, the answer is: nothing. We experience exactly the same situation with Johannes Valentinus Andreae (1586-1654). (78-79)

De Toro's reasoning is based on the fact that Andreä's book on Uqbar *(Lesbare und lesenswerthe Bemerkungen über das Land Ukkbar in Klein-Asien)* is fictional. He acknowledges that "In *Writings* we find a detailed summary of Andreae's life and work" but adds that "as with Carlyle, however, we are no further ahead with regards to the traditional constitution of signification" (79). Because Borges uses made up texts, he argues, there is no dialogue with the invented text such as one would find with Cervantes and the novel of chivalry, concluding that with a made up text there can be no intertextuality, that is to say no stated reference and transformation of that reference.

But that is a flat reading of the made up text, one that is not attuned to the subtleties of Borges's use of allusion. I hope to show what a reading that does not dismiss every allusion as a hoax but follows up its potential can reveal.

In *Writings* De Quincey dwells on the background that led the German theologian to devise a plan to redress what he considered the evils and abuses of the times by the agency of a secret society. He explains that to this end he wrote (anonymously) two satirical books, the *Fama* and the *Chemical Nuptials of Christian Rosycross,* both published in 1610 or thereabouts—the date roughly corresponds with what was happening in Lucerne or London in the Borges story. The books relate the life of the legendary Father Rosy Cross who travelled in the East, where he learnt great mysteries and upon his return became the founder of the order that bears his name.[6] Andreä relied confidently on the prevalent interest in the occult, envisioning that many would seek to connect with a

[6] Rosy Cross is said to have lived for 106 years, from ca 1378 to ca 1484.

secret society that professed to be the depositary of Oriental mysteries, and to have been in existence for the last two centuries. We know that he succeeded in his calculation and the Rosicrucian order was eventually formed. Leibniz and Descartes are among those who wrote in, but they did not manage to connect; however, De Quincey (411) informs us that in the library at Gottingen there is a body of letters dated from 1614-1617 addressed to the imaginary order of Father Rosycross. From their description, we can vividly sense the "prodigious commotion" that ensued from Andreä's publications: "the more coyly the invisible society retreated from the public advances, so much the more eager and amorous were its admirers, and so much the more bloodthirsty its antagonists" (411). The dream that Andreä inserted into the real world became a reality, a pulsating fantasy solidified.[7]

This may have been the principal originating hrön in the Borges story, but in De Quincey's *Writings* Andreä's plan is linked to a hrönish precedent: I refer to his reference to the comet that appeared in 1572 and which, because of the earlier teachings and prognostications of the famous alchemist Paracelsus, was believed to be "the sign and harbinger of the approaching revolution" (401). This invasion from another space of a solidified fantasy is the hrön that engendered indirectly the Rosicrucian hrön, and in time, Borges's hrön.

And now for some "traces" of De Quincey's account in "Tlön." In the *Writings*, it is stated that the invented society's members, sworn to secrecy, would disperse "agreeably" to their destination, and, before their decease, appoint their own successors. The same "hereditary arrangement" applied to the members of "Tlön's" secret society, who spread to the New World, where they surfaced significantly also after two hundred years, and continued with their secret enterprise. In fact, De Quincey's chapter on Rosicrucians and Freemasons is full of snippets of information that can be seen duplicated, as deviating hrön, in "Tlön." For example, Father Rosy Cross's burial place, which contained a selection of items such that were the order to disappear it could be reconstructed "by means of this vault." *Ex ungue leonem*, like Vol. XI of 1001 pag-

[7] The society became extinct by the end of the 18th century.

es long *The First Encyclopedia of Tlön.*[8] A common striving for an "alefdom"?

Echoes of the architectural layout of the vault resonate in "The Immortal" and "The Library of Babel," while its contents remind us of Tlön: mirrors, of course, but also a book written upon vellum called T, "which has since become the most precious jewel of the society" (after the Bible). And a number of deliberate anachronisms, a constituent feature, as already mentioned, of the Borges story.[9] A key aspect of Andreä's *Fama* is that "it teems with internal arguments against itself" (410); this brings to mind the debate in Ramos Mejía that engendered the story of Tlön, regarding how one might go about composing "a first person novel whose narrator would omit or distort things and engage in all sorts of contradictions" (68). And then, that in Tlön "works of a philosophical nature invariably contain both the thesis and the antithesis...of every argument" (77).

Also from the *Writings* we can perceive that Andreä and Borges share some interchangeable features such as "satirical writings that show that he, meaning Andreä, but so applicable to Borges—looked through the follies of his age with a penetrating eye." Another is self-inscription which in Andreä's case is what leads De Quincey to believe that he was, indeed, the disputed author of the mysterious books that, as he puts it, became the "accidental occasion of the foundation of the Order." His family's armorial bearings were a St Andrew's Cross and four Roses: 'By the order of the Rosy-cross he means therefore an order founded by himself.'[10] I need hardly point out the Borges parallel.

One last indulgent finding of a point in common: when Andreä was compelled to hide his authorship "he pretended to ridicule the whole thing as a chimera" but, a footnote tells us, that "it is easy to discover the tone of a writer who is laughing not *with*

[8] The order had its own peculiar language, perhaps "hlör u fang axaxaxas mlö"?

[9] For example, the *Vocabularium*, by Paracelsus, who lived a century or more after the reputed death of Rosy Cross, and the reference to the Protestant faith several centuries before its coming into existence.

[10] Luther's coat of arms also had a cross fixed on a white rose in, but this does not invalidate De Quincey's argument.

the laughers but *at* them." How often has Borges done just that (I am thinking particularly of the narrator in "Pierre Menard," "The Aleph" and "Guayaquil").

In conclusion: what the allusion to De Quincey's *Writings* adds to "Tlön, Uqbar Orbis Tertius" is fundamental. First, it shows how, in a roundabout way Andreä can be said to have written the fictional *Lesbare und lesenswerthe Bemerkungen über das Land Ukkbar in Klein-Asien* (taking 'Uqbar' as a metaphor for Rosicrucianism). But more significantly, De Quincey offers a historically factual precedent, an example from the real world as the engendering hrön of the fictional Tlönian universe.

By way of an afterthought: I began with the suggestion that "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is the embodiment of its main conceit, the hrön, and hope to have persuaded some readers of this. But it appears that the power of the hrön extends beyond the confines of the story. The ultimate ironic proof of this belongs to Borges who in an interview (Christ, 285) confessed that he had thought that he had invented the word yet, when he began to learn Old English, found this not to have been the case, that 'hron' already existed and was one of the words for whale. His hrön was but a hrön, willed into existence.[11]

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[11] I wish to express my appreciation to Humberto Núñez and Silvia Dapía for their valuable comments.

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