“Nominativi fritti e mappamondi” (Fried names and global maps)

Nonsensical and imaginary maps from
Victorian to post-colonial times

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Nominativi fritti e mappamondi” is not, as the reader might surmise, a fragment from Carroll or Lear: it is a quote from Domenico di Giovanni, called “il Burchiello”¹, a XV century Italian poet, who, were he better known, would prove to the world that nonsense is not a literary genre born in XIX century England, but a universal dimension of the mind, which, at given times, becomes the mode of choice, or even the only possible mode of expression. It might signify, for instance, that “names written on world maps are fried”, or that “global maps and names can whirl dizzily to the point that they get blurred and are fried”, or that “if you want to explore the world map, you must first go and fry the names”, or that “names and world maps are parallel tracks, which may converge only when fried”. We will take “fritti”, “fried”, in the sense of “hollow, repeated, predictable” as in “aria fritta”, “hot air, prattle”, or in the sense of “dead, broken”, as in “sono fritto”, “I am done for”. Names, global maps and fry are the meshes of a net linking the identity search ratified by the imposition of a name, the encounter with the strange and the unknown, leading man to draw a map of the world, with the existential anguish that these operations unleash.

The Hunting of the Snark, an Agony in eight fits, composed by Lewis Carroll in 1874 — an epic hunt of the monster, a confrontation with the Impenetrable, whose main characteristic is that “it always looks grave at a pun” — tells us how the protagonist, a Baker, when boarding the ship, has forgotten his luggage, “forty-two boxes, all carefully packed, with his name
painted clearly on each”, and, even worse, “he had wholly forgotten his name”. Therefore he answers to calls such as “Fry me!” or “Fritter my wig!”. Martin Gardner in this connexion quotes the expression “fry me for a fool and you’ll lose your fat in the frying”, and thus links it to the meaning “to dupe, to swindle”, and also mentions the nautical meaning “to undo, to shred the sails”, or in this case the wig, putting at risk the voyage or the head. However, he uncompromisingly concludes that “fritter my wig!” means “to mix a wig with batter and fry it in oil or lard to make wig fritters”, as would be appropriate for a baker.

As to the exact meaning of “nonsense”, the only possible answer is the one repeatedly offered by Carroll, that he had not the slightest idea of what it meant.

Journeys, in mapped or unmapped lands, are always a discovery of the self, an excursion into the inner dimension of conscience, at least in so far as they are an exploration of the outer dimensions of time and space. They lead to a deeper recognition of one’s self, through the confrontation with the Other. Each physical journey has an imaginary element, and nonsense, madness, dream, and fantasy are imaginary journeys which mark a transformation or progress in the individual’s perception of reality. Silvia Albertazzi observes that fantasy (but we could extend the remark to imagination) may even be considered an amplification of the journey theme, the abolition of spacial and temporal boundaries. Time and space in modern scientific theories are closely interrelated, because time becomes the yardstick, with which to measure space, and both are irreversible and unstable. Fantasy is rooted in the mind, rather than in time and space, and it disturbs the psyche precisely because it does not correspond to the laws of reason, much in the same way as apparent and relative time does not correspond to absolute, mathematical time.

“Caelum, non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt” warned Horace and Seneca. Travelling in itself is not sufficient to bring about change, but it is certainly indispensable to discover one’s true self. It is both the blessing and curse of travel that man cannot get rid of himself. Man always arrives at a place he knows; he leaves and returns to a room, generally to the bed where he was born and where he dies. However, the length and the progress of the journey are unpredictable, even when, as happens in *Voyage autour de ma chambre* by Xavier de Maistre, the room has the familiar traits of everyday
life, and is “située sous le quarante-cinquième degré de latitude, selon les
mesures du père Beccaria; sa direction est du levant au coucher; elle forme
un carré long qui a trente-six pas de tour, en rasant la muraille de bien près.
Mon voyage en contiendra cependant davantage; car je traverserai souvent
en long et en large, ou bien diagonalement, sans suivre de règle ni de
méthode. — Je ferai même des zigzags, et je parcourrai toutes les lignes
possibles en géométrie si le besoin l’exige”, because the main character
moves following the track of his ideas 6.

Innocent Smith, the mysterious hero of Chesterton’s Manalive, goes
around the world end up discovering England, and, armed to the teeth and
ready to explain himself by gestures, lands to plant the British flag on top of
a temple, which proves to be the Brighton Pavillion. He thus conjugates the
safe and the hazardous, the fascinating terror of the long journey and the
intimate tranquillity of the man who goes back home. He understands that
secrecy and mystery belong to the known and the commonplace, and not to
the rare and the unknown; he accepts that circling the globe may be the
quickest way to arrive where we already are. Man always discovers the
things he already knows and does again the things he has already done. J. M.
Barrie, in Dear Brutus, reminds us that it is useless to blame the gods: man
is the instrument of his own destiny, and even when he is offered a second
chance, he keeps following his old track. As truth dawns on Purdie, he
exclaims: “It’s not Fate, Joanna. Fate is something outside us. What really
plays the dickens with us is something in ourselves. Something that makes
us go on doing the same sort of fool things, however many chances we get”.
Rather than being a deterministic cynic, Barrie is the creator of the “other”
place par excellence, the Neverland, the island which is not there, but in fact
was there (whether Barrie knew it or not, it was the name of a district in
Australia, another mythical world turned upside down). Barrie draws the
map of the Neverland, that is of the human mind, as that of a place where
everything changes and whirls around dizzily, though some traits are still
identifiable. More directly than any other, this map is a transcription of the
unconscious, of memory and desire: it creates and fixes, rather than
describing a reality which is never what it seems, where commonplace and
extraordinary, vessels, princes, school, dwarfs, braces and dative verbs
happily coexist:
I don’t know whether you have ever seen a map of a person’s mind. Doctors sometimes draw maps of other parts of you, and your own map can become intensely interesting, but catch them trying to draw a map of a child’s mind, which is not only confused, but keeps going round all the time. There are zigzag lines on it, just like your temperature on a card, and these are probably roads in the island; for the Neverland is always more or less an island, with astonishing splashes of colour here and there, and coral reefs and rakish-looking craft in the offing, and savages and lonely lairs, and gnomes who are mostly tailors, and caves through which a river runs, and princes with six elder brothers, and a hut going fast to decay, and one very small old lady with a hooked nose. It would be an easy map if that were all; but there is also first day at school, religion, fathers, the round pond, needle-work, murders, hangings, verbs that take the dative, chocolate-pudding day, getting into braces, say ninety-nine, threepence for pulling out your tooth yourself, and so on; and either these are part of the island or they are another map showing through, and it is all rather confusing, especially as nothing will stand still.

The Neverlands are distinctively different from one another: on John’s island flocks of flamingoes fly over a lagoon, while on Michael’s flocks of lagoons fly over a flamingo, but on the whole the Neverlands have a family resemblance, and if they stood still in a row you could say of them that they have each other’s nose, and so forth. On these magic shores children at play are for ever beaching their coracles. We too have been there; we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more.

Each map is a treasure map, an object of desire, the symbol of an indecipherable truth, around which riddles, duplications, forgeries and traps multiply. It wavers between two extremes which both, paradoxically, appear in Carroll. In Ch. XI of Sylvie and Bruno Concluded Carroll ironically designs a map that contains everything. The German professor explains to his little friends that the cartographers of his country experimented with wider and wider maps until they reached the scale of one mile to one mile. But the gigantic map could not be opened because the peasants wisely observed that it would cover the whole country and obscure the sun, so that they decided “to use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well”. Borges picks up the concept in “El Hacedor”, in a fragment entitled “Del rigor en la ciencia” from the (imaginary?) Viajes de varones prudentes by Suárez Miranda, libro cuarto, cap. XLV, Lérida, 1658.
... had bought a large map representing the sea,
Without the least vestige of land:
And the crew were much pleased when they found it to be
A map they could all understand.

'What's the good of Mercator's North Poles and Equators,
Tropics, Zones, and Meridian Lines?'
So the Bellman would cry, and the crew would reply,
'They are merely conventional signs!

'Other maps are such shapes, with their islands and capes!
But we've got our brave Captain to thank'
(And the crew would protest) 'that he's bought us the best —
A perfect and absolute blank!' (Fit II, st. 2-4)

The blank map obliterates the image, just as silence devours the word. The Hunting of the Snark shows that the exploration of the limits of being is a race towards death, the final port, expected and yet unforeseen. To exorcise the end means to run towards it. Death is the zero space, the blank map: it
takes you to the point of “vanishing away”. The attempt to reach the boundaries of human experience, to verbalize what has never been expressed and cannot be expressed, leads to the reversal of logic, to the fragmentation of language, and finally to silence. The Snark ballad, in a more anguished way than the Alice books, obliges us to face the deconstruction of the world, presents us with a quest which is not only Promethean, diabolic, doomed to defeat, like Ahab’s hunt in Moby Dick, but, far worse, meaningless. The map only indicates the ocean, the reference points on the edges of the map are all mixed up, and the signs to track the game are elusive. The five unmistakable marks which distinguish the warranted genuine Snark are, first, “the taste, which is meagre and hollow, but crisp”, its embarrassing habit of turning up late and shifting the appointed times, so that it has breakfast at dinner and dines on the following day, its slowness in understanding jokes which plunges it into anguish and makes it “always look grave at a pun”, its disputable preference for bathing-machines, the wheeled beach huts where the strait-laced Victorians changed their clothes into bathing suits, which it “constantly carries about”, persuaded that they “add to the beauty of scenes — /A sentiment open to doubt”, and finally ambition. The methods to hunt the Snark are complex and hapazard: the only safe way is:

‘To seek it with thimbles, to seek it with care;  
To pursue it with forks and hope;  
To threaten its life with a railway share;  
To charm it with smiles and soap! (Fit IV, st. 8)

It is impossible to predict when the Snark will prove to be a deadly Boojum. Hunters and hunted seem to be tied together by the unyielding capriciousness of fate, represented by the phonic chain of B’s connecting all the participants in the chase (Bellman, Baker, Banker, Butcher, Beaver, Billiard-marker, Barrister, Broker, Boots, Bonnet-maker) and the monster Boojum. The appointment between the Boojum and the Baker, who has lost his luggage and his name, who can no longer speak his native language when necessary, whose “form is ungainly”, whose “intellect small”, but whose “courage is perfect”, takes place as foreseen, greeted with a cry of jubilation and a torrent of laughter. The impact is all the more devastating and immediate for its absence of violence: the victim vanishes at the sight of
the enemy, without even being touched. The encounter, even the physical clash of overwhelming and death, never takes place. The victim, a prototype of the Victorian gentleman, with his solid virtues and stolid vices, is a partial self-portrait of Carroll, who signed his early writings B.B.

To embark on a journey, to draw a chart, to map the world, corresponds to the attempt to draw the lineaments of your own face, to interrogate its reflection in a mirror. The only map we have ready at hand to consult and decode is our body. In Positives, a collection of poems by Thom Gunn and photos by his brother Ander, covering the whole arch of human life, the weather-beaten face of the old man looks like a parchment:

The memoirs of the body
are inscribed on it: they make
an ambiguous story
because you can read
the lines two ways: as
the ability to resist
annihilation, or as the small
but constant losses endured

but between the lines
life itself! you can read
the plump puckers

while
the sentences cross and recross

(Please destroy in
the event of death)  11.

The man's face is an encoded message to be destroyed in case of death, perhaps even a secret order prearranged to self-destruct, after having been read. Borges affirms again in the Epilogue to “El Hacedor”:

Un hombre se propone la tarea de dibujar el mundo. A lo largo de los años puebla un espacio con imágenes de provincias, de reinos, de montañas, de bah’as, de naves, de islas, de peces, de habitaciones, de instrumentos, de astros, de caballos y de personas. Poco antes de morir, descubre que ese paciente laberinto de l’neas traza la imagen de su cara  12.
Therefore Borges is horrified by mirrors, “ante el cristal impenetrable / Donde acaba y empieza, inhabitable, / Un imposible espacio de reflejos”. Mirrors continue “elementales / Ejecutores de un antiguo pacto, / Multiplicar el mundo como el acto / Generativo, insomnes y fatales”. Man can cross the threshold of the world of mirrors, Alice passes through the looking-glass, entering a secret theatre where “Todo acontece y nada se recuerda” and where “como fantásticos rabinos, / Leemos los libros de derecha a izquierda” 13. But Borges must know, as Carroll knew, that the reason why nights are crowded with dreams and mirrors with figures, is that man himself is vanity and reflection.

If the mirror does not return an image, then the person does not exist, and it can only “softly and suddenly vanish away”. The mirror is the same and the opposite of the blank map: it creates and effaces the image, it works by addition but also by subtraction, it is the meeting point with one’s own self and with nothingness.

The text of the Snark is scattered throughout with tragic forebodings. The head of the expedition is a Bellman, the town crier who announced the funeral processions through the streets of London. The protagonist forgets his name before mounting on board, he wears seven coats and three pairs of boots, and carries an extravagant number of suitcases, i.e. identities and masks, which he constantly loses, speaks several exotic languages, German, Hebrew, Greek, Dutch, but forgets to communicate in English the message which proves vital to his safety. The uncle whose name he bears (but which we never learn) solemnly warns him about his doom on his death-bed (although this is not explicitly stated, Holiday, the illustrator, interpreted thus the affirmation that these were his last words).

The explicit information offered by Carroll on the meaning of the voyage is naturally elusive, baffling, and interrogative. In the dedications accompanying the gift of the first copies of the book to his little girl-friends, he wonders: “Is it life of which it tells?” He tenaciously resists all attempts at allegorical, moral, satirical, or political explanations. He turns down with gentle irony the hypothesis, proposed by a female reader, that the book is a quest for happiness, by acknowledging the fact that the Snark’s ambition and unaccountable preference for bathing-machines might be an indicator in that direction. Whenever asked, “What does it mean?”, he repeats with suave determination: “I meant that the Snark was a Boojum”. Carroll affirms in
“Alice on the stage”, The Theatre, April 1887, that the whole poem developed out of this line:

I was walking on a hillside ... when suddenly there came into my head one line of verse — one solitary line — ‘For the Snark was a Boojum, you see’. I knew not what it meant then: I know not what it means now.

The line seals the poem, which was composed backwards, with a mirroring procedure which reminds us of the Looking-glass book, in which the Jabberwocky appears. This progression/regression perfectly suits the forward/backward movement of the ship, where

... the bowsprit got mixed with the rudder sometimes:
A thing, as the Bellman remarked,
That frequently happens in tropical climes,
When the vessel is, so to speak, ‘snarked’.

But the principal failing occurred in the sailing,
And the Bellman, perplexed and distressed,
Said he had hoped, at least, when the wind blew due East
That the ship would not travel due West! (Fit II, st.7-8).

Martin Gardner observes that the agony pervading and structuring the ballad is the anguish of a man who fears and foretastes his death. The letter dominating the ballad, “B”, is for “to be”, and, modulated in higher or lower tones, according to the names of hunter and prey, Bellman and Boots, Butcher and Beaver, Bandersnatch and, by inversion, Jumb, it culminates in Boojum (a portmanteau of “Boo!” and “Fee, fo, fi, fum!”, the sound of the Ogre, the Devil or Bogeyman). The Snark is indeed a poem about the dilemma “to be or not to be”, the travail occupying the interlude between fullness and emptiness. The Boojum is more than Death: it is not true that it has no meaning, it signifies nothing. “It is the void, the great blank emptiness out of which we miraculously emerged; by which we will ultimately be devoured”. The hunt is, in Gardner’s words, a nonsense voyage from nowhere to nowhere, like the infinite rotations of the galaxies.

What are the conditions for undertaking such a voyage? One must set aside all conventional signs, reverse or eliminate all rules, either ignore or
encourage contradictions. One proceeds according to a blank map, starts at the arrival, mixes bowspirit with rudder, rids oneself of names and roles. All characters are recruited because they represent a profession or craft, but in fact only practice it on a specific condition which never takes place (the Butcher only slaughters beavers, the Baker only bakes “bridecake”). The unmistakable signs of the Snark all imply discrepancies or mistaken answers. The Snark thus appears to embody the chaos principle, it smacks of the hollow and the capricious, like a will-of-the-wisp, it never respects timetables, it does not understand jokes, it aspires to being something different from what it is, perhaps a Boojum, and it loves bathing-machines, traps where you uncover yourself, still remaining covered.

The adventures preceding the last fatal encounter, tell us that the members of the crew who manage to break away from set schemes and renounce traditional patterns of behaviour, like the Butcher and the Beaver, find a way to salvation. The Beaver, while everybody else is busily preparing for the hunt, keeps working at its embroidery, and keeps aloof from the general belligerent frenzy. The Butcher, feeling nervous and insecure, dresses up in kid gloves and an Elizabethan ruff, as if for a gala dinner, and wriggles and stumbles under the triumphant gaze of the Beaver, who finally sees him share its own unease. The mathematical lesson imparted by the Butcher to the Beaver in the valley of the creeping creatures, amounts to the affirmation that each thing is equal to itself, and, by a series of complex operations, reduces itself to its initial value. If you start with three, you arrive at three: that’s why “what I tell you three times is true”. Truth consists in accepting reality as it is, without trying to label, explain, modify or use it.

On the contrary the characters who abide by the rules, who embody the typical Victorian middle class “gentleman”, especially the Baker, the stupid and brave hunter, who challenges his fears and limits, but cannot think of himself in any other form, or the Banker, who is armed with “crossed” blank cheques, or the Barrister, who tries to indict the peace-loving, animal-loving Beaver, because it keeps making lace, once war is waged, all meet an ineluctable destiny. The Barrister, in his dream, meets the Snark, who first steals his role of defender, that is his identity, and then appropriates all the other possible roles in the trial, defendant, witness, jury and judge.

The Banker falls into the clutches of the Bandersnatch and is reduced to idiocy and silence. His face becomes black, his waistcoat white, and he is
metamorphosed from powerful magnate to a black minstrel or a clown: he becomes his social opposite, like a film negative.

The Baker who, night after night, grapples with the Snark in delirious dream fights, finally meets him in daylight and vanishes with a cry of triumph and terror.

Carroll, who felt the burden of an oppressive society, and at the same time feared the risks implicit in his quiet subversion of rules, wavers between the extremes of convention and rebellion, without possible mediation. With him black and white, empty and full are alternated and juxtaposed, with no possibility of nuances or amalgamation, as in a chessboard. Like another tormented Victorian writer, who passionately loved the “skinned stained veined variety” of experience, but could not dispense with moral choice, he was obliged to “part, pen, pack” life “in two flocks, two folds — black, white; right, wrong” 15. The marks on the map, the lineaments of personality may disappear or assume arbitrary references, but the rules cannot be drastically changed or laboriously developed into a new system, including the inheritance of the past and surpassing it.

The search for identity, the need to redesign the maps drawn by Europeans, are at the centre of the writing of the most important post-colonial authors, but they try and find different paths to overcome the stupefaction and anguish provoked by the absence or unreliability of reference points. Michael Ondaatje, in The English Patient (1992), gathers four outcasts, a Canadian nurse, a disfigured patient, a former intelligence agent and an Indian sapper, who defuses German bombs, in an empty Italian villa during the fight for liberation at the end of World War II. Order, reason, identity around them and within them have been distorted, maimed and splintered. The villa, with its broken roofs and doors, becomes one with the unweeded garden surrounding it, and is transformed into a symbol of transition, a threshold between human society, marked by thwarted tracks and undermined by explosive mechanisms, and the sea or the desert, which do not keep marks, change continually, cannot be possessed or controlled, and are thus a mirror of the human mind.

When the news of the explosion of the atomic bomb spreads, Kip (from Kipling), the Indian sapper brought up in England, takes up again his native identity and name, Kirpal Singh, and turns his back on the untrustworthy Europeans, “the dealmakers, the contract-makers, the mapdrawers”. To
Western individualists and capitalists, maps are superimposed upon reality, deform it and erase it. Brian Friel, in *Translations* (1980), shows how the English officers, with the ostensible task of making a new land register and new maps of Ireland, are in fact trying to catch and trap the natives in a net of collaboration far more compromising and suffocating than a simple operation of phonic translation. To the inhabitants of the former colonies, the map is identified with the body and the earth: it is individual and collective memory. Ondaatje’s ‘English’ patient, who lost his identity, colour and features when his plane fell and got burnt in the desert, acknowledges this truth at the end of the novel:

We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves. I wish for all this to be marked on my body when I am dead. I believe in such cartography — to be marked by nature, not just to label ourselves on a map like the names of rich men and women on buildings. We are communal histories, communal books. We are not owned or monogamous in our taste or experience. All I desired was to walk upon such an earth that had no maps.

The African writer Nuruddin Farah, in the novel *Maps* (1986), shows us the protagonist, Askar, born in Ogaden of a Somalian father and brought up by an Ethiopian woman, struggling to affirm his identity as a son and a man, and ready to use the spear and the pen to win autonomy for his country. But neither a person nor a book is a single map: they include, as A. Pajalich observes, “una serie di mappe parzialmente intercomunicanti e sovrapposte (diverse sia per le realtà che ritraggono — l’oggetto — sia per la personalità del cartografo-narratore — il soggetto)” 17. The map cannot be limited to reproducing reality mimetically, nor can it create an imaginary reverse duplication: it must capture and weave into reality imagination and dream. Personal and communal identity no longer develop in a sole linear direction, according to a cause-effect relationship, but grow in the shape of a rhizome, of a chaotic and vital “pluriverse”, where all the nodules have the same value. Pajalich relies on the theories of G. Deleuze and F. Guattari (both loved by Farah), who in *Mille Plateaux. Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, contrast the concept of the “open” paper, detachable, reversible, connecting in all dimensions, and of the rhizome, which always grows by multiple
entries, with the concept of mould, or cast, and of tree-root, that reproduces a self-enclosed identity. So one will directly rely upon receding lines, that make the strata to explode, the roots to be broken and new connections to be established.

The Australian poet R. D. Fitzgerald, at the beginning of the XX century, anticipated this metaphor in “The Hidden Bole”, in the powerful image of the banyan tree, whose branches turn down, take root and multiply in a growing maze, to the point that the original trunk disappears:

... and who knows
Where its true nucleus grows
When every shoot of progress makes the claim?
I see it as mass; even boughs the plan rejects,
Shed at the outmost fringe, are of the whole —
Sheltering, share the life their loss protects,
The main line of ascent, the hidden bole (ll. 139-145)

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1) *Antologia burchiellesca*, ed. Eugenio Giovannetti, Roma, Colombo, 1949, p. 25: “Nominativi fritti, e mappamondi, / E l’area di Noé fra due colonne/ Cantavan tutti Chirieleisonne/ Per l’influenza de’taglier mal tondi. / La luna mi dicea: ché non rispondi?/ E io risposi: io temo di Giansonne, / Però ch’io odo, che ’l Diaquilonne/ È buona cosa a fare i capei biondi. / Per questo le testuggini e i tartufi/ M’hanno posto l’assedio alle calcagne, / Dicendo: noi vogliam, che tu ti stufi. / E questo sanno tutte le castagne, / Pei caldi d’oggi, son si grassi i gufi, / Ch’ognun non vuol mostrare le sue magagne. / E vidi le lasagne/ Andare a Prato a vedere il Sudario, / E ciascuna portava l’inventario”.


5) Horace, *Ep.*, 1, 2, 27.

6) Xavier de Maistre, *Voyage autour de ma Chambre*, Paris, Flammarion, s. d., p. 31.
10) Jorge Louis Borges, *Tutte le opere*, ed. Domenico Porzio, Milano, Mondadori 1994, vol. I, p. 1252. “In that Empire, the Art of Cartography reached such Perfection that the map of only one Province would cover a whole City, and the map of the empire would cover a whole Province. In time, these Huge Maps were no longer satisfactory and the Colleges of Cartographers built a Map of the Empire, which equalled the Empire in largeness. Less Devoted to the Study of Cartography, the Following Generations realized that the vast map was Useless and, not without Empiety, they abandoned it to the rigours of Sun and Winter. In the Western Deserts broken Ruins of the Map are still to be seen, inhabited by Wild Animals and Beggars; in all the Country there is no other relic of Geographical Sciences” (tr. by the author).
12) J. L. Borges, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 1266: “A man undertakes the task to draw a map of the world. When years go by, he populates a space with images of provinces, realms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fish, houses, instruments, stars, horses and people. Just before he dies, he discovers that his patient labyrinth of lines traces the image of his face” (tr. by the author).
13) Ibid. pp. 1182-84. From “Los Espejos”: “... in front of the impenetrable glass / Where begins and ends, inhospitable, / The impossible space of reflexion ... elementary / Executors of an ancient covenant / (they continue) to multiply the world like the act / Of generation, in their fatal watch ... (they erect) a secret theatre (where) All happens but nothing is remembered ... (and) Where, transformed into fantastic rabbis, / We read the books from right to left”.
14) *The Annotated Snark*, p. 28.
15) G. M. Hopkins, “Spelt from Sybil’s Leaves”, ll. 11-12.
17) Armando Pajalich, *Filtrazioni e affiliazioni (nel testo periferico africano)*, Venezia, Supernova, 1994, p. 307: “a series of partially intercommunicating and overlapping maps (different both for the reality they represent — the object — and the personality of the cartographer-narrator — the subject)” (tr. by the author).
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