

MAGICAL REALISM

JORGE LUIS BORGES | GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ



JORGE LUIS BORGES

1899-1986



LIFE & WORKS

- Cosmopolitan or local? (“there are no camels in the Koran”); multilingual
- December 24, 1938, he “becomes Borges”
- 1946 “promotion”; 1955 Director of National Library
- 1961, Prix Formentor
- *Ficciones* (1944); *El Aleph* (1949); *Labyrinths* (1962)
- Writes from the “highest” of perspectives: philosophical idealism



THEMES

- *Mise-en-abyme*
- Dream and reality, cross-contamination
- Cyclical time
- The double, or universal man [sic] (identity of men)
- Universe is a (divine or demonic) text
- Mirrors, labyrinths, chess, libraries
- Mathematics, philosophy, logic (paradox)
- Footnotes and fake scholarship







THEMES

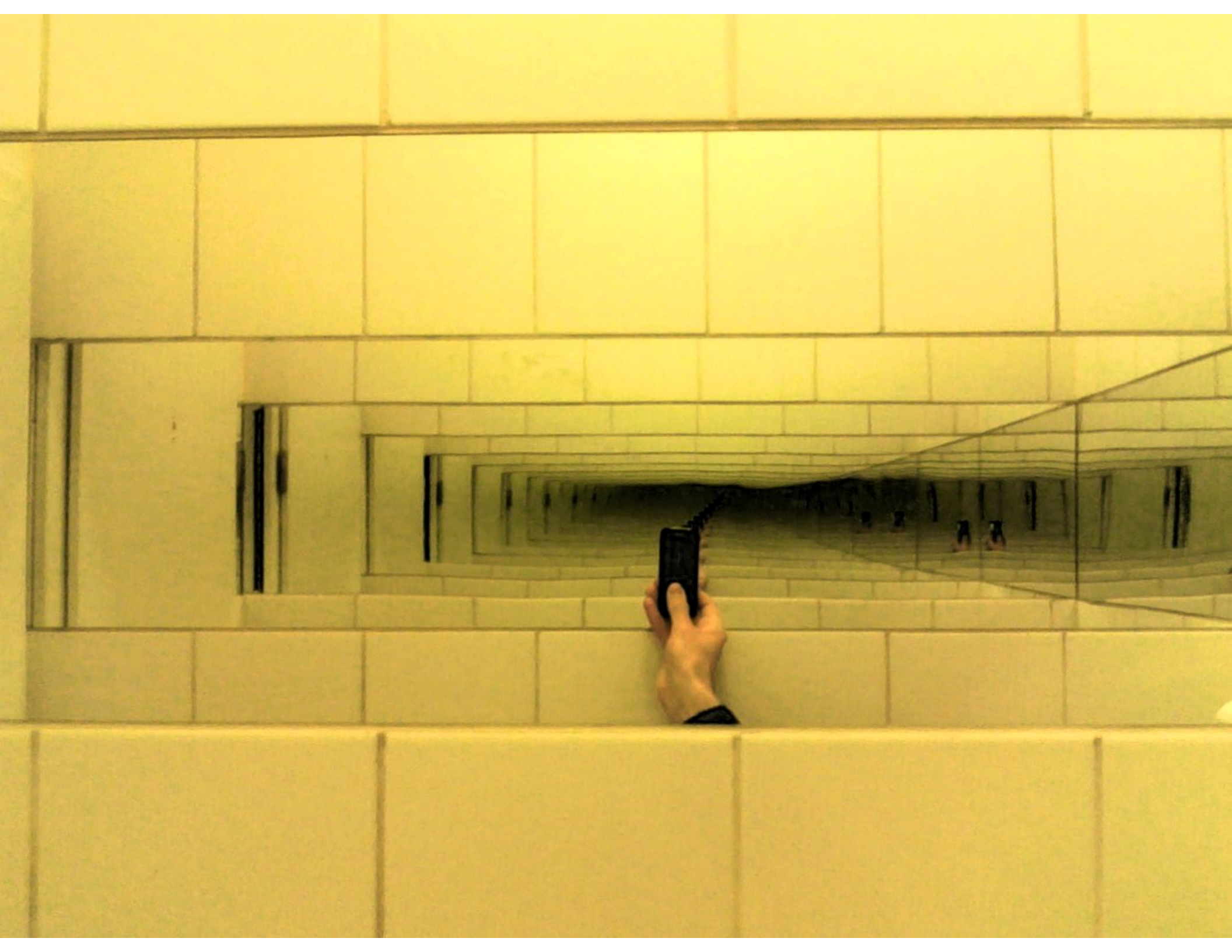
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It only takes two facing
mirrors to build a labyrinth.

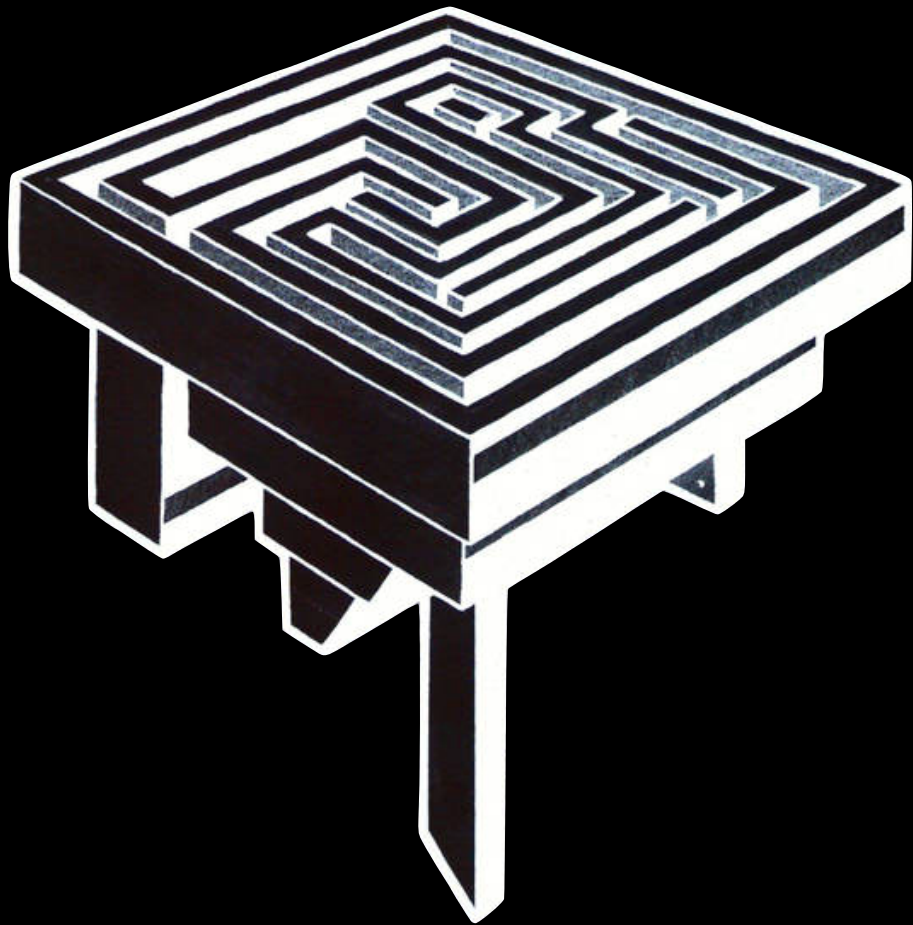
Jorge Luis Borges



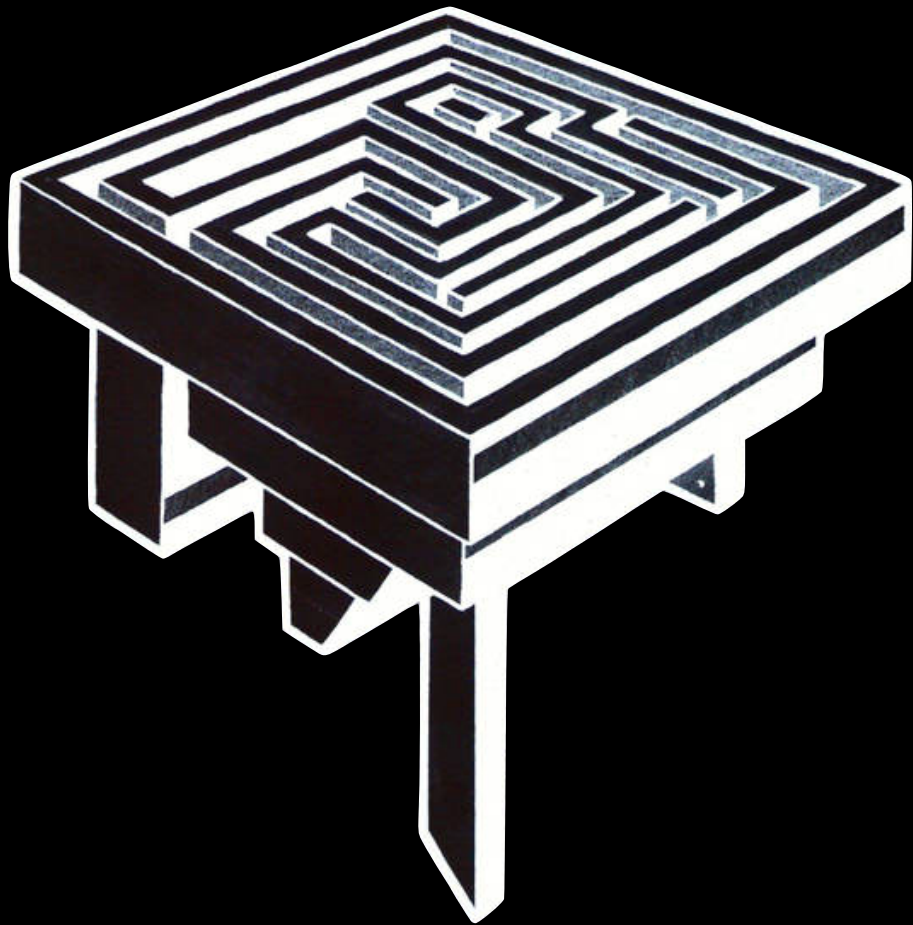
TLÖN, UQBAR ORBIS TERTIUS

- World as divine/
demonic text
- World as thought,
language, literature
- Unity of time, space and
identity
- *hrönir*
- Postscript, "reality
yielded" [title "Orbis
Tertius"]

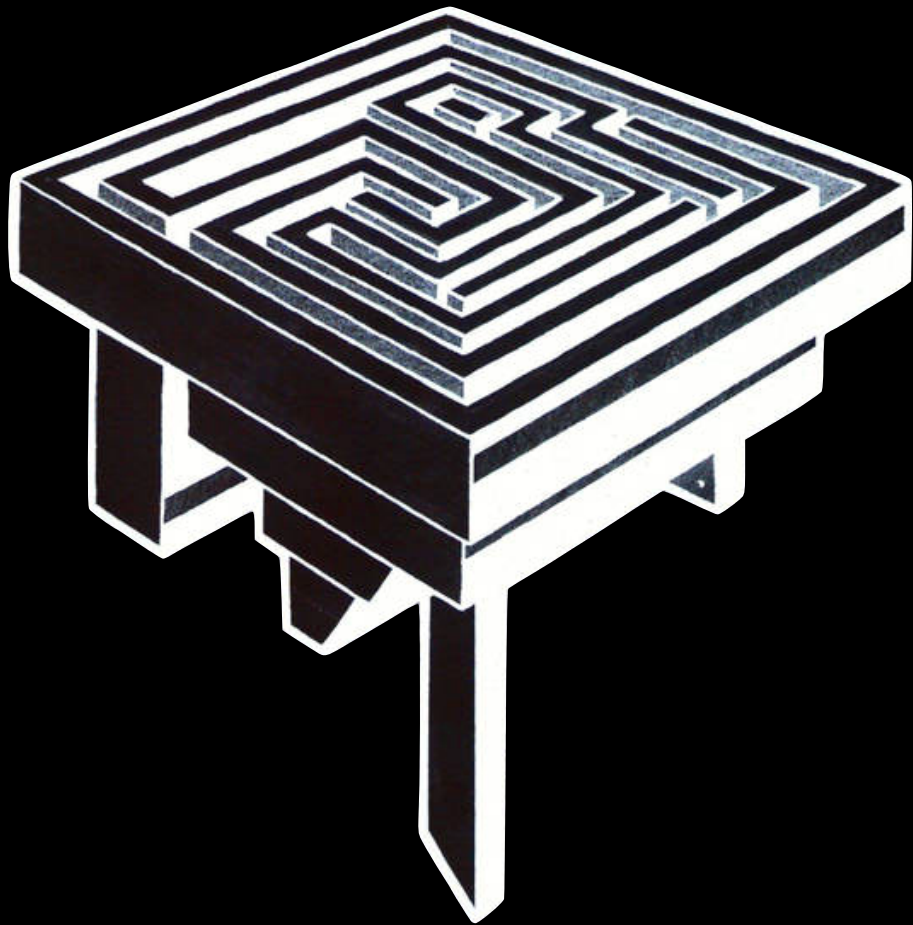




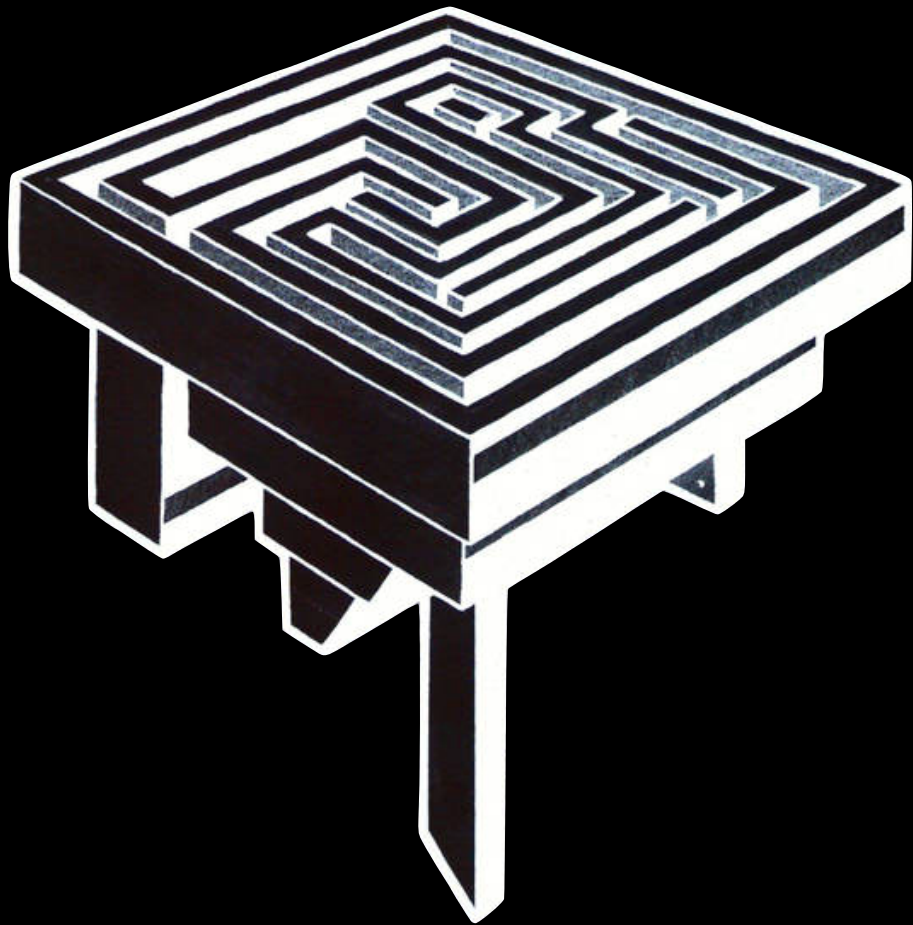
It is conjectured that this brave new world is the work of a secret society of astronomers, biologists, engineers, metaphysicians, poets, chemists, algebraists, moralists, painters, geometers... directed by an obscure man of genius (7).



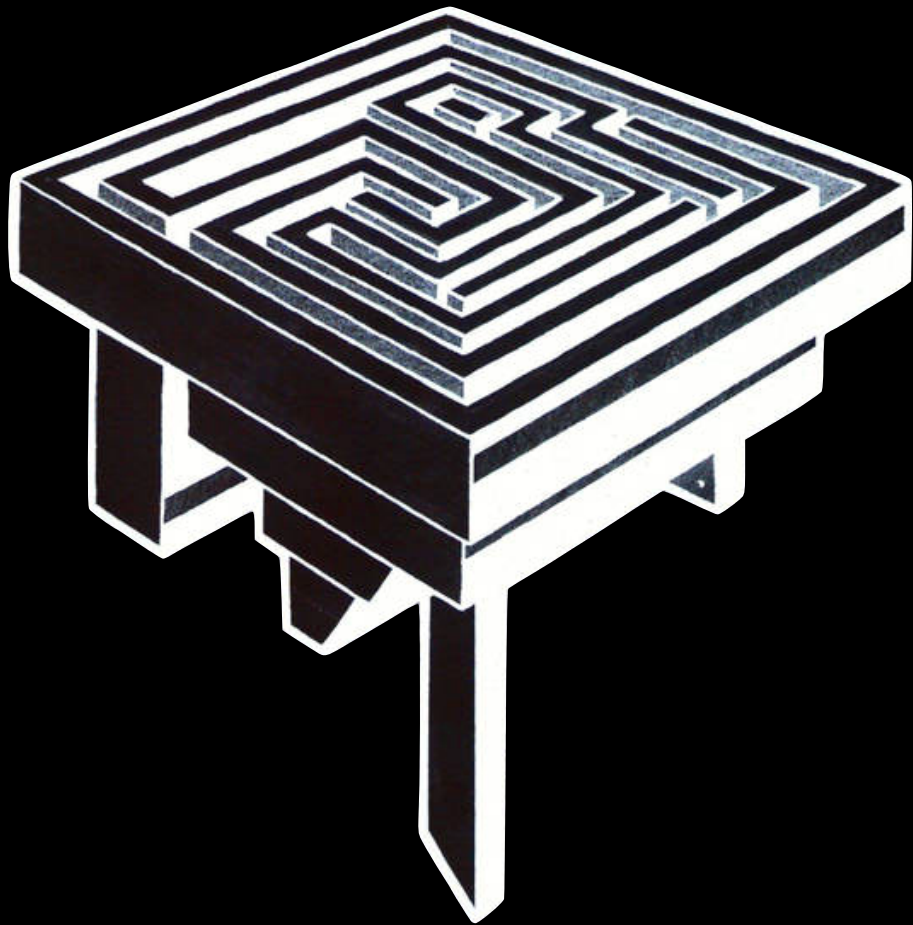
...the history of the universe—and in it our lives and the most tenuous detail of our lives—is the scripture produced by a subordinate god in order to communicate with a demon. Another, that the universe is comparable to those cryptographs in which not all the symbols are valid and that only what happens every three hundred nights is true (10-11).



There are no nouns in Tlön's [language]: there are impersonal verbs, modified by monosyllabic suffixes (or prefixes) with an adverbial value. For example: there is no word corresponding to the word "moon," but there is a verb which in English would be "to moon" or "to moonate." "The moon rose above the river" is *hlör u fang axaxaxas mlö*, or literally: "upward behind the onstreaming it mooned" (8).



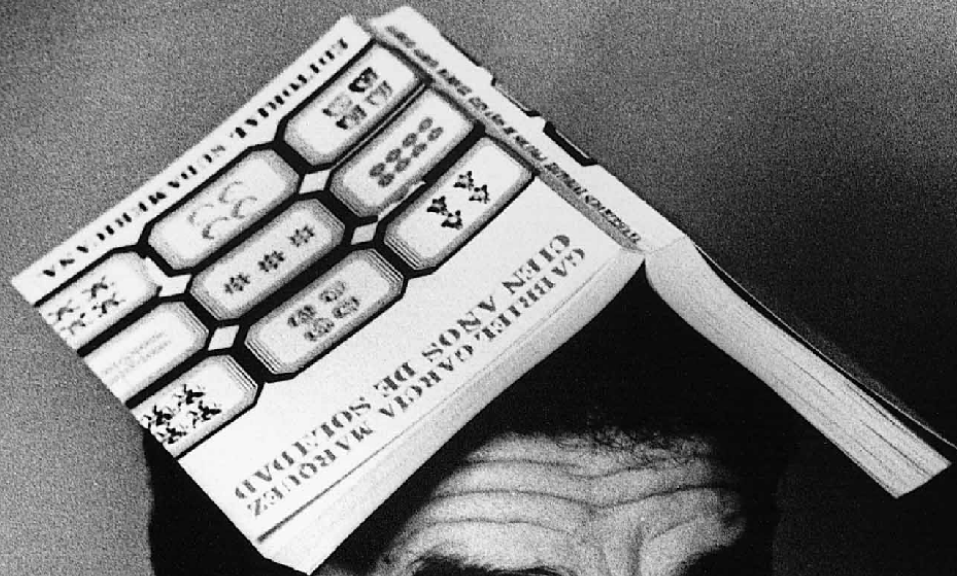
Two persons look for a pencil; the first finds it and says nothing; the second finds a second pencil, no less real, but closer to his expectations. These secondary objects are called *hronir* and are, though awkward in form, somewhat longer... The methodical fabrication of *hronir* (says the Eleventh Volume) has performed prodigious services for archaeologists. It has made possible the interrogation and even the modification of the past, which is now no less plastic and docile than the future (15).



Manuals, anthologies, summaries, literal versions, authorized re-
editions and pirated editions of
the Greatest Work of Man
flooded and still flood the earth.
Almost immediately, reality
yielded on more than one
account. The truth is that it
longed to yield. Ten years ago any
symmetry with a resemblance of
order—dialectical materialism,
anti-Semitism, Nazism—was
sufficient to entrance the minds
of men. How could one do other
than submit to Tlön, to the
minute and vast evidence of an
orderly planet? (20)

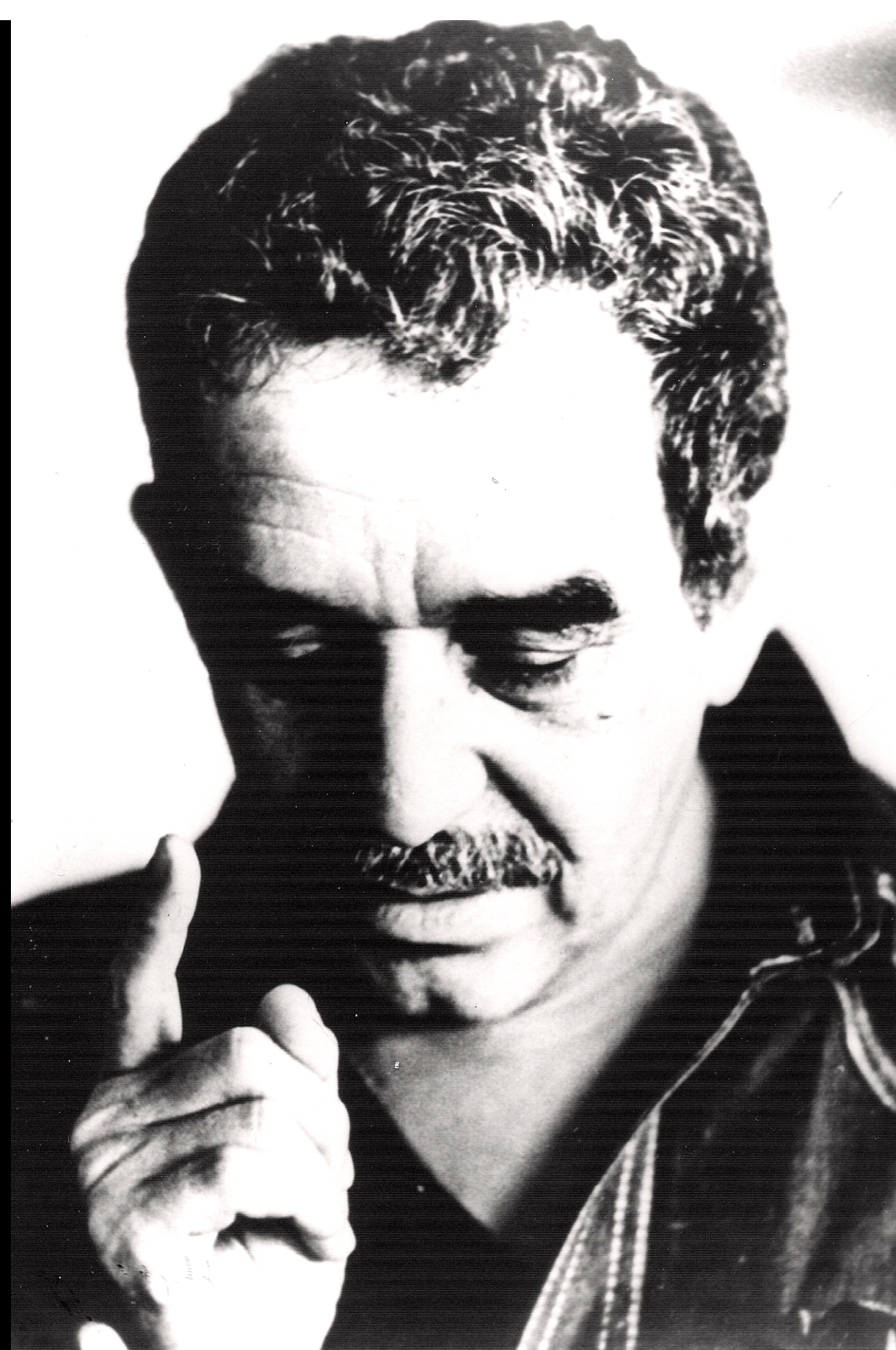
GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

1927-2014



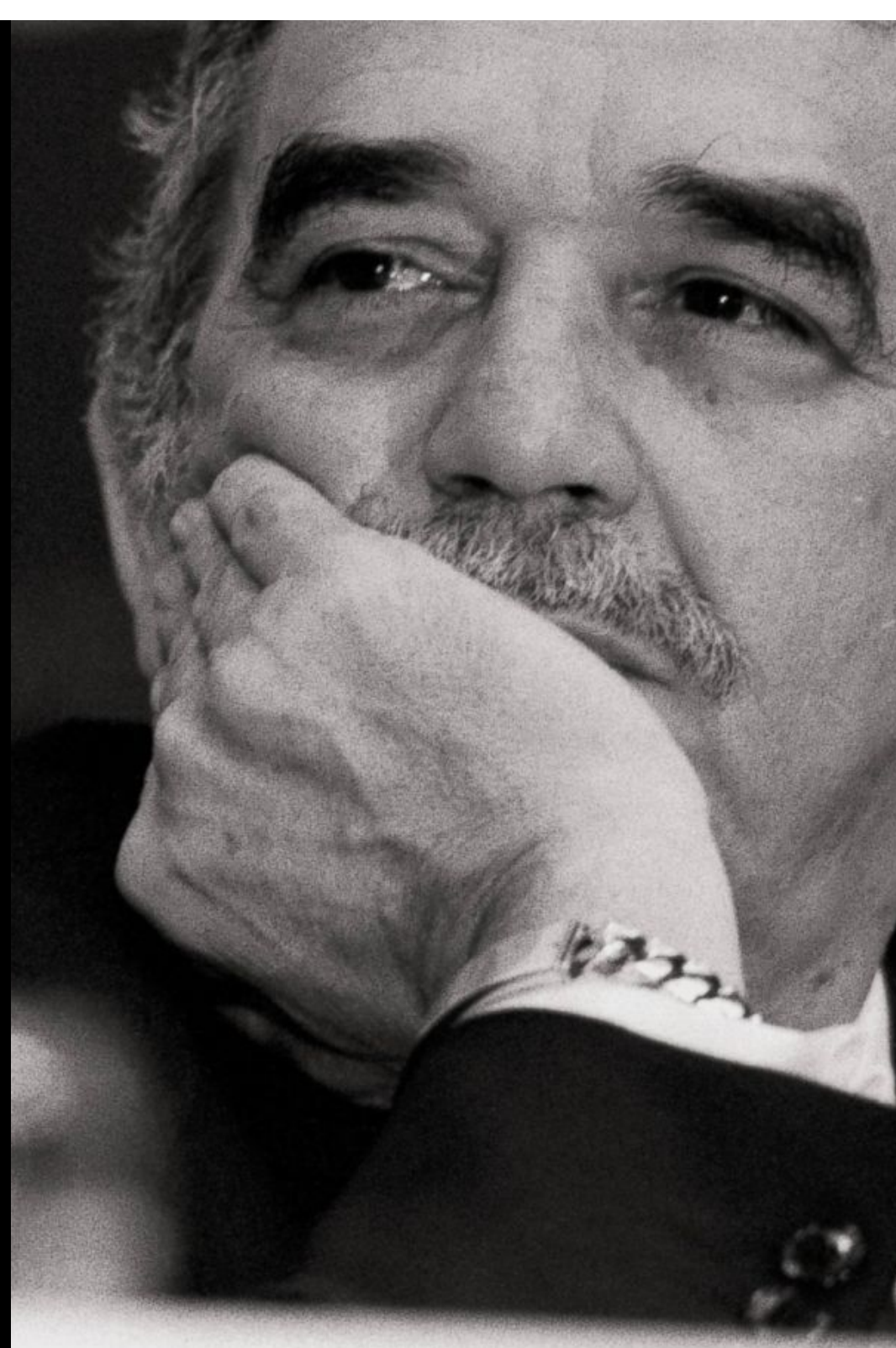
LIFE & WORKS

- Colombian; journalist turned writer; fearless
- Wins Nobel Prize in 1982, largely for *Cien años de soledad* (1967)
- Outsold only by the *Quixote* in Spanish
- Only six novels, including *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985)



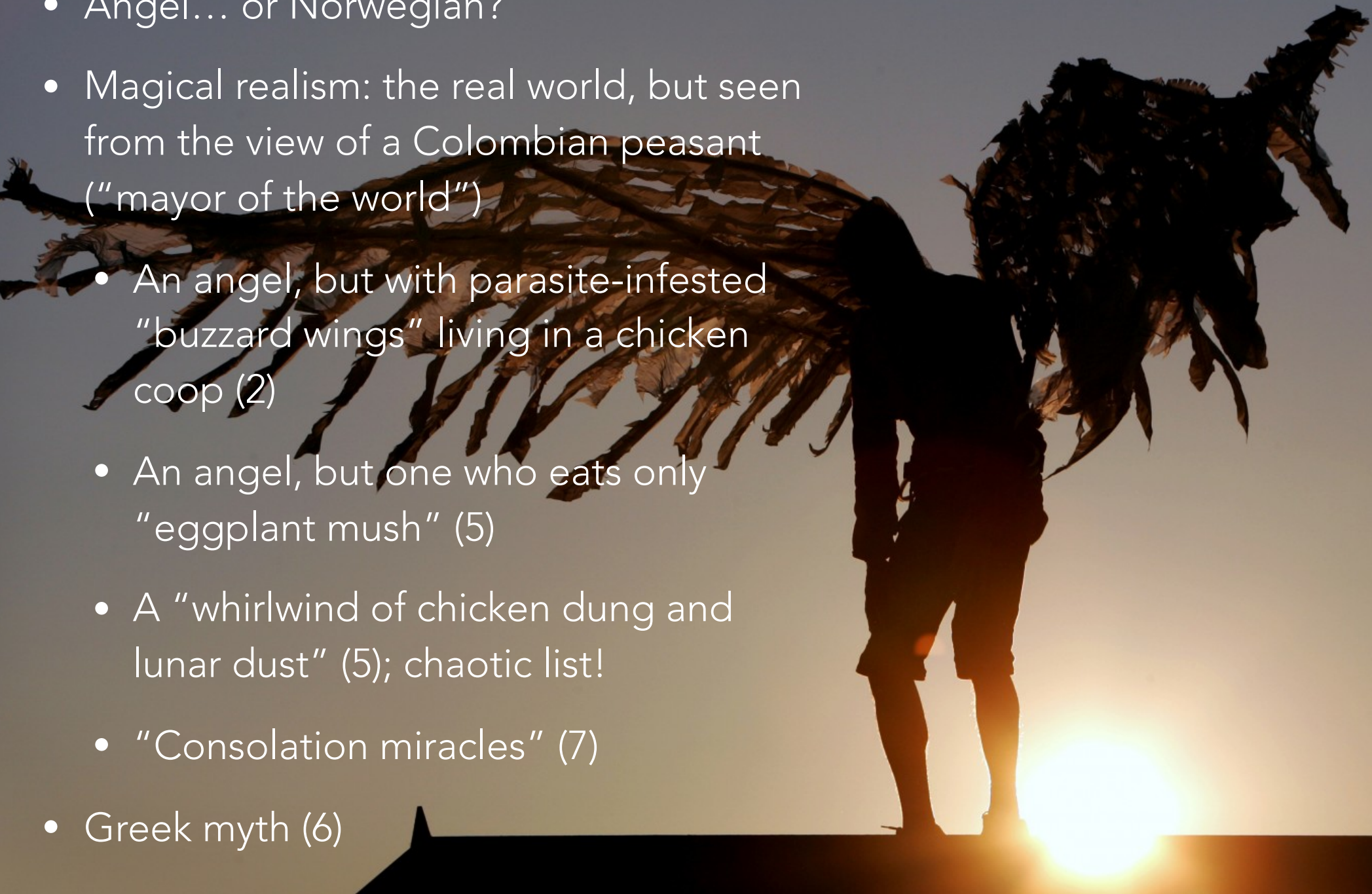
THEMES

- From Faulkner: narrate a brutal present and past as if it were Greek myth; not a disguise
- From Borges: present the "unreality of reality"
- Loneliness and solitude; love; wonder and impossibility; many varieties of time
- Macondo



A VERY OLD MAN WITH ENORMOUS WINGS

- Angel... or Norwegian?
- Magical realism: the real world, but seen from the view of a Colombian peasant ("mayor of the world")
 - An angel, but with parasite-infested "buzzard wings" living in a chicken coop (2)
 - An angel, but one who eats only "eggplant mush" (5)
 - A "whirlwind of chicken dung and lunar dust" (5); chaotic list!
 - "Consolation miracles" (7)
- Greek myth (6)



His huge buzzard wings, dirty and half-plucked were forever entangled in the mud. They looked at him so long and so closely that Pelayo and Elisenda very soon overcame their surprise and in the end found him familiar. Then they dared speak to him, and he answered in an incomprehensible dialect with a strong sailor's voice. That was how they skipped over the inconvenience of the wings and quite intelligently concluded that he was a lonely castaway from some foreign ship wrecked by the storm. (2)



They never found out whether it was because he was an angel or because he was an old man that in the end he ate nothing but eggplant mush. His only supernatural virtue seemed to be patience. Especially during the first days, when the hens pecked at him, searching for the stellar parasites that proliferated in his wings. The only time they succeeded in arousing him was when they burned his side with an iron for branding steers, for he had been motionless for so many hours that they thought he was dead. He awoke with a start, ranting in his hermetic language and with tears in his eyes, and he flapped his wings a couple of times, which brought on a whirlwind of chicken dung and lunar dust. (5)



Besides, the few miracles attributed to the angel showed a certain mental disorder, like the blind man who didn't recover his sight but grew three new teeth, or the paralytic who didn't get to walk but almost won the lottery, and the leper whose sores sprouted sunflowers. Those consolation miracles, which were more like mocking fun, had already ruined the angel's reputation when the woman who had been changed into a spider finally crushed him completely. (7)

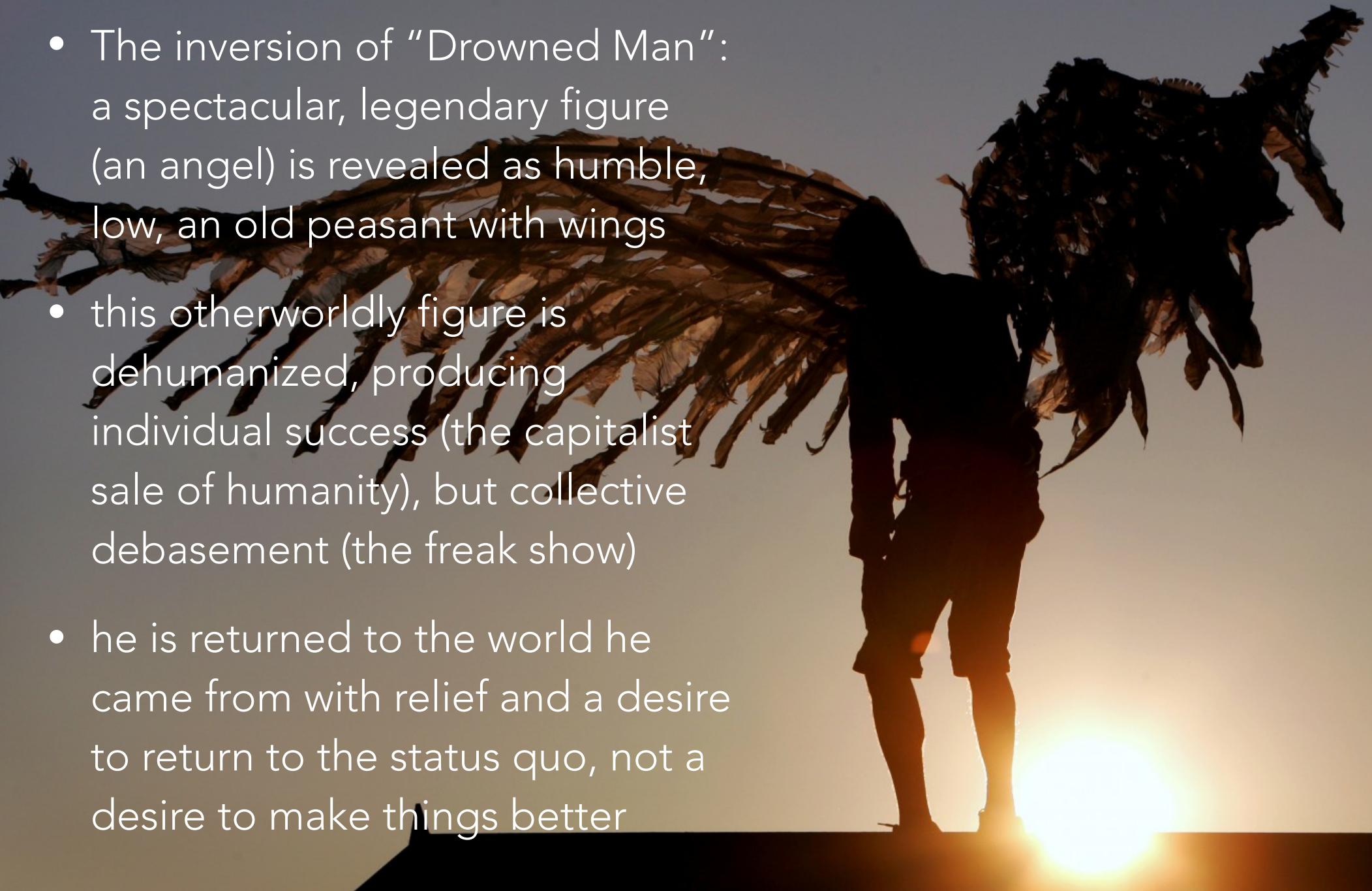


It so happened that during those days, among so many other carnival attractions, there arrived in the town the traveling show of the woman who had been changed into a spider for having disobeyed her parents. The admission to see her was not only less than the admission to see the angel, but people were permitted to ask her all manner of questions about her absurd state and to examine her up and down so that no one would ever doubt the truth of her horror. She was a frightful tarantula the size of a ram and with the head of a sad maiden.



A VERY OLD MAN WITH ENORMOUS WINGS

- The inversion of “Drowned Man”:
a spectacular, legendary figure
(an angel) is revealed as humble,
low, an old peasant with wings
- this otherworldly figure is
dehumanized, producing
individual success (the capitalist
sale of humanity), but collective
debasement (the freak show)
- he is returned to the world he
came from with relief and a desire
to return to the status quo, not a
desire to make things better



THE HANDSOMEST DROWNED MAN IN THE WORLD

- A tale for *children*?
- Alien figure (2)
- The fantastic turns mundane (3)
- Sublime is humanized by loneliness and shame (4-5, 6); "Esteban"
- Greek myth (7)
- Effect of humanizing the other: collective utopia, "Esteban's village" (8)



...the women stayed behind to care for the drowned man. They took the mud off with grass swabs, they removed the underwater stones entangled in his hair, and they scraped the crust off with tools used for scaling fish. They noticed that he bore his death with pride, for he did not have the lonely look of other drowned men who came out of the sea or that haggard, needy look of men who drowned in rivers. But only when they finished cleaning him off did they become aware of the kind of man he was and it left them breathless. Not only was he the tallest, strongest, most virile, and best built man they had ever seen, but even though they were looking at him there was no room for him in their imagination. (2)



They secretly compared him to their own men, thinking that for all their lives theirs were incapable of doing what he could do in one night, and they ended up dismissing them deep in their hearts as the weakest, meanest and most useless creatures on earth. They were wandering through that maze of fantasy when the oldest woman, who as the oldest had looked upon the drowned man with more compassion than passion, sighed:

“He has the face of someone called Esteban.” (3)



They could see him in life, condemned to going through doors sideways, cracking his head on crossbeams, not knowing what to do with his soft, pink, sea lion hands while the lady of the house looked for her most resistant chair and begged him, frightened to death, sit here, Esteban, please, and he, leaning against the wall, smiling, don't bother, ma'am, I'm fine where I am, just to avoid breaking up the chair, and never knowing perhaps that the ones who said don't go, Esteban, were the ones who later on would whisper the big boob finally left, how nice, the handsome fool has gone. (4)



...everything would be different from then on, that their houses would have wider doors, higher ceilings, and stronger floors so that Esteban's memory could go everywhere without bumping into beams and so that no one in the future would dare whisper the big boob finally died, too bad, the handsome fool has finally died, because they were going to paint their house fronts gay colors to make Esteban's memory eternal and they were going to break their backs digging for springs among the stones and planting flowers on the cliffs...



...so that in future years at dawn the passengers on great liners would awaken, suffocated by the smell of gardens on the high seas, and the captain would have to come down from the bridge in his dress uniform, pointing to the promontory of roses on the horizon, he would say in fourteen languages, look there, where the wind is so peaceful now that it's gone to sleep beneath the beds, over there, where the sun's so bright that the sunflowers don't know which way to turn, yes, over there, that's Esteban's village (8).

