

**T**HE TALES OF BORGES: LANGUAGE  
AND THE PRIVATE EYE  BY JOHN CA-  
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A Borges tale is a deliberate impoverishment of the created universe, a celebration of the ability of language to abstract from the teeming experience of man. Language so used is highly reductive, and one might argue that it does violence to the elusive untidiness of the human milieu in the interest of an elegant comprehension. But Borges (the Borges we are creating) proposes that the mind is reality, and consequently, that utterance is creation, and the created tale a created universe. The familiar and incomprehensible world of man is immediately and totally comprehensible to God, whose fiction it is. Human fictions are intelligible metaphors echoing God's unintelligible language, for of course, there is a gulf between the word of man and the unfathomable divine word, the *Logos* which creates the cosmos. The function of the tales of Borges is to bridge this span and so to mediate between the chaotic plenitude of the world and God. They are abstractions from an inchoate experience which, through increasing abstraction and refinement, approach the condition of God—the void which mystics have described. The tales, as language, stand between the world and the Absolute; Borges, the mystagogue, leads us from the world to vision. In order to make his fictions a vehicle for the infinite I AM he forges strategies of creation so reductive that his tales are reduced to absence—ghostly paradigms which lead the private eye to mystery and disappear. In the following essay we will be concerned with the techniques Borges uses to create artifacts which vanish, like the Cheshire cat, leaving the reader to gaze fixedly at the lingering smile of the author, and then, at a nothingness which is divine. (1)

<sup>1</sup>This essay figures as an attempt to demonstrate the relative optimism of Borges' vision. For opposed readings, see Frank Dauster, "Notes on Borges' Labyrinths," *Hispanic Review*, 30 (1962), 142-148; and also, L. A. Murillo, "The Labyrinths of J. L. Borges: an Introduction to the Stories of *El Aleph*," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 20 (1959), 259-266.

## Berkley, and Blindness

The remarkable Bishop Berkley, a philosophical idealist well-known to Borges, proposes that matter, space and essence do not exist. A peach, for example, is not solid, nor does the name correspond to the essence of peach. Rather, this fruit is the sum total of its attributes to the degree that they impinge upon human sensoria: the peach of the idealist is a pinkandyellowtenderroundness, or, if eaten, a softanddribblingsweetness. This means in effect that there are as many peaches as there are experiences of peach and men with points of view upon a peach. The ripe softness which falls unperceived in the wilderness, on the other hand, does not exist.

Such theories redound on language. To put it simply, Berkley proposed a reality which can be described rigorously only in terms of adjectives, verbs and adverbs. Nouns, which are the linguistic equivalents of essence, designate something which does not exist; they are only pseudo-statements, empty substitutes for the real thing. (It is understood that when Berkley himself uses nouns they have only metaphorical value.)

In a Borges story, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," we find a remarkable example of the language which one might extrapolate from the philosophy of Berkley:

Las naciones de ese planeta son—congénitamente—idealistas. Su lenguaje y las derivaciones de su lenguaje—la religión, las letras, la metafísica—presuponen el idealismo. El mundo para ellos no es un concurso de objetos en el espacio; es una serie heterogénea de actos independientes. Es sucesivo, temporal, no espacial. No hay sustantivos en la conjetural *Ursprache* de Tlön, de la que proceden los idiomas "actuales" y los dialectos: hay verbos impersonales, calificados por sufijos (o prefijos) monosilábicos de valor adverbial. Por ejemplo. . . : *Upward, behind the onstreaming it mooned.*

Lo anterior se refiere a los idiomas del hemisferio austral. En los del hemisferio boreal (de cuya *Ursprache* hay muy pocos datos en el Onceno Tomo) la célula primordial no es el verbo, sino el adjetivo monosilábico. El sustantivo se forma por acumulación de adjetivos. No se dice *Luna*: se dice *aéreo-claro sobre oscuro-redondo o anaranjado-tenue del cielo* o cualquier otra agregación.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Ficciones* (Buenos Aires: Emécé Editores, 1956), pp. 20-21. All subsequent citations from *Ficciones* are from this edition. Citations from other works

The reality of the proto-Tlönese conjectured by Borges is one remove the less from language than the reality of materialists. For the latter, the process which leads to language begins with a concourse of objects in space, proceeds to a perception of an object, and thence to words as the expression of perception. In Tlön the process *begins* with perception, and consequently the perception and its expression intimately merge, just as they do in consciousness. If mental processes are reality, a word can become the world; but we must remember, some parts of speech are more real than others, since they do not abstract from perception (as do moon, peach, circle) but merely give it voice.

Borges takes Berkley as seriously as he ever takes anyone, and we might expect that the idealism involved, which imperceptibly confuses words with being, would be discernible in his prose. However, on examining the language of Borges' tales, we find he never uses the hypothetical language of Tlön which he describes. The discovery is unsurprising, since both he and his reader are earth-dwellers. But it is surprising to find that a disciple of Berkley uses language which can only be characterized as anti-idealist in nature; in effect, his diction, rather than abounding in the adjectives and adverbs typical of Tlönese, is unusually short of these parts of speech. In its unusual reliance on nouns, an idealist would say, the diction of Borges is a vehicle for insubstantial essences. His style lies at the pole opposite local color (and local sound, odor, taste, touch); it is as universal as it is colorless.<sup>3</sup>

The tendency of Borges to rarify the referent of his language does not stop at diction. Rhetorical figures, which he also confuses with world-view, join in the task of surveying a path to nothingness. The process begins with metaphor and progresses to metonymy. Let me explain myself. According to the Berkleian scheme of things there are neither genera, nor species, but only individuals,

of Borges are from the following editions: *El Hacedor* (Buenos Aires: Emécé Editores, 1960); *El Aleph* (Buenos Aires: Emécé Editores, 1957); and *El Aleph and other Stories* (New York: Dutton, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> There are critics who argue that the surprises in Borges' prose, and its more dramatic effects, are created more by adjectives than by nouns. (See Rodolfo Borello, "Estructura de la prosa de J. L. Borges," *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 55, (1963), 486; and Jaime Alazraki, *La prosa narrativa de J. L. Borges* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1968), p. 172.) However, substantives typically dominate both the tone and content of his tales, and adjectives stand out the more in that flat, abstract plain. A simple comparison with Rubén Darío demonstrates how far Borges takes us from sense experience and adjectival splendor.

and more, only individuals as subjectively apprehended by individuals. Our familiar peach, therefore, is not only a single and unique softanddribblingsweetness, but also a myriad such uniquenesses contingent on the number of minds contemplating them. Such a peach is infinite peaches. Consequently, metaphors must substitute for nouns, in an idealist's universe. (And conversely, nouns are but metaphors.) Not *the peach* is in question, as an essence common to peaches, but softanddribblingsweetness #1, which is *like* softanddribblingsweetness #2, and so on. Now, metaphors are scarce in the work of Borges, but nonetheless, repetition, leitmotif and symmetry accumulate into what might be called a fanatically metaphorical vision of the universe. Borges relishes similitude. The self-acknowledged poverty of his themes is the consequence and cause of their repetition, as in indefatigable linguistic mirrors. The point is: in an idealistic world metaphors allow one to rise above the level of the individual. All the terms are retained in a simile, but a higher unit is formed which in a sense supplants the noun. Therefore metaphors can act as noun surrogates.

But Borges takes the abstraction of metaphor further: similarity becomes contiguity in his frequent use of metonymy. Such statements as "Como todos los hombres de Babilonia, he sido procónsul; como todas, esclavo." (F 67) subtly become "un solo hombre inmortal es todos los hombres. Como Cornelio Agrippa, soy dios, soy héroe, soy filósofo, soy demonio y soy mundo, lo cual es una fatigosa manera de decir que no soy" (F 21). In other words, Borges does not only use metonymy frequently as a rhetorical device: he also metonymizes human existence. The immortal is not every man as he exists in the uniqueness, the chaos of detail, of his private life. The immortal is all men in that his life is *like* all men's. For these men the verb *is* applies to essence—they are all men as the word peach is all peaches. Metonymy abstracts from reality; it is on the path to nothingness. When the immortal states that to be everyone is to be annihilated, his statement has significance on two levels: first, it means that an individual is defined by his limits, and therefore that to have no limits is to have no de-fin-ition; but also, it means that one man can only become all men through a process that carries him above reality into the non-existence of abstraction.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Other tropes are confused with being. Hypallage, the displacement of an attribute from its normal setting, is a perfectly natural phenomenon if every

We must conclude that, if Borges subscribes to Berkley's theories, he must be conscious that his stories are veils over an abyss. But that is his strategy: to displace a void with vanishing ink. The underlying rationale can be better understood if we ascribe it to the Author as Librarian (to echo Updike). Borges makes this remarkable statement in his autobiography: "If I were asked to name the chief event in my life, I should say my father's library. In fact, I sometimes think I have never strayed outside that library. . . I have always come to things after coming to books" (A S 209 and 213). Borges asks us to believe that he does not traffic with the concrete details of daily life, but rather, that he holds a book between himself and the world. Words, not the world, imprint themselves on his sensorium; he cannot see the trees for the word 'forest'. The example Borges chooses to illustrate this phenomenon is the gaucho. Long before he saw these men, whose business it is to herd cows, he read about them in highly dramatic Argentinian literature, which portrayed the gaucho bloodsoaked, fighting in romantic stress, with knives, on the mysterious pampa. Little wonder that he did not recognize gauchos when he saw them in the flesh. They were perhaps too small, and dusty, and dull. And when he found out what they were, their suddenly acquired glory was borrowed from the imagination's memories: "When I learned that the farmhands were gauchos, like the characters in Eduardo Gutierrez, that gave them a certain glamor. I have always come to things after coming to books" (A S 213).

From his childhood Borges has been content with a world made of words. He is satisfied inside his library. Words are perhaps empty signs, but they allow man to generate reality rather than suffer it. Tlön is such a world. God's fiction, our world, has all the intricacy of a labyrinth without the apparent center. Divine order is an intolerable vision to human eyes, for it seems like chaos. However, in a library, amid the repetitions, symmetries, confines and definitions of human thought—the labyrinths which lead to centers—one can take refuge from the vertiginous contemplation of reality. But is this true? If one submits to Tlön, the ordered planet, the encyclopedia, the shattering contemplation of the infinitely disorderly world is replaced by progressive rarification

thing is potentially everything else. The "transparent tigers" and "towers of blood" of Tlön are, so to speak, avatars of hypallage. For a compilation and discussion of hypallage and metonymy in Borges, see Alazraki, pp. 176-186.

of being into pure thought, which ultimately ends in a vertigo of mindlessness. The library is a closed and infinitely echoing system. Its symmetries and repetitions create perspectives which accelerate us into an infinite void, as if we were standing between facing mirrors. The librarian is familiar with such repetition: like the immortal, he has seen it all. "Todo, entre los mortales, tiene el valor de lo irrecuperable y de lo azaroso. Entre los Inmortales, en cambio, cada acto (y cada pensamiento) es el eco de otros que en el pasado lo antecedieron, sin principio visible, o el fiel presagio de otros que en el futuro lo repetirán hasta el vértigo. No hay cosa que no esté como perdida entre infatigables espejos" (A 22). In the immense perspectives of his memory and anticipation, the immortal increasingly finds that his past is bled of immediate sensory detail. The substance of his life is lost in distance until at last only words, abstract outlines, remain. "Cuando se acerca al fin, ya no quedan imágenes del recuerdo; solo quedan palabras . . . (A 25). Every biography in every library describes him. He is as dead as words. And likewise, only words remain for the librarian.

Both the immortal and the librarian are led by simile to abstraction and ultimate destruction; they are led from a vision of the world to the surrogate vision of words, and through words to a vision of nothingness. We cannot at this point in our argument, ignore Borges' gradual loss of sight. A man nearly blind, as he is, has approximately the immortal's vision of the past: that is, an image which dims increasingly to leave only abstract words echoing in the memory. In the world of Borges there is no present image that is not remembrance. And memories soon decay into language. Borges is left with words and he believes them to be nothing. However, there are rewards for those who live in the darkness of recall, for it is from the insubstantial shadows of the mind that works of art are elaborated. In his parable of Homer and himself, Borges makes that point concisely. The Homer of living mortal eyes dwelt in the delights of a sensory present; it was his eventual blindness that turned him to his memory and his art. Borges, like the latter Homer, traffics in semblance, as when he creates a tiger with his verse: "Es un tigre de símbolos y sombras/Y no el tigre fatal, la aciaga joya" (H 76). The tiger that is fiction is not the living tiger, but it is a jewel in its own right; like the tiger of Blake (of whom Borges is well aware) it burns bright and symmetric in the darkness. We are to imagine Borges happy with such figments.

## Abulafia, and Vision

The scrutiny of blind men focuses on insubstantial works in an internal darkness. But mystics who can see with bodily eyes still seek, with an inner vision, the void at the center of their being: "the hidden God who remains eternally unknowable in the depths of His own Self, or to use the bold expression of the Kabbalists 'in the depths of His nothingness'."<sup>5</sup> Borges has read the work of such men, and the kinship of his work with theirs must contain something of the deliberate. The parallels are most striking with the thought of Abraham Abulafia, a medieval rabbi, and a fascinating exponent of prophetic Cabbalism.

Abulafia, like other Jewish mystics, believes that "Only when the soul has stripped itself of all limitation and, in mystical language, has descended into the depths of Nothing does it encounter the Divine" (M. T. 25). Only the physically or voluntarily blind can contemplate, in this secret void, the light that shines in the darkness. The problem is, of course, the manner in which the mystic strips himself of existence—that is, of sensory perception, of emotion and consciousness. Since he cannot shed his natural self he must make it transparent, so that it does not block the vision of the infinite, terrible and passionately desired Nothingness which lies behind. Not having an object of contemplation in which to immerse himself to reach a state of ecstasy, such as the Passion of the Christian mystics, the early Jewish mystic turns, as it were, to an absolute object. That is, he needs to empty his vision by contemplating an object that is nothing in itself and projects him beyond itself. Abraham Abulafia finds such an object in the Jewish alphabet, and more specifically, in the holy Name of God, "absolute, because it reflects the hidden meaning and totality. . . . Whoever succeeds in making this great Name of God, the least concrete and perceptible thing in the world, the object of his meditation, is on his way to mystical ecstasy" (M. T. 133). But Abulafia goes one step further in order to sever all relation to the senses; he advocates concentrating upon the permutations and combinations of the letters of the name of God—a contemplative object which, we must agree, is absolutely senseless.

Anyone fond of contemplating the stories of Borges will have

<sup>5</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1941), pp. 13-14. All subsequent citations from Scholem are from this edition.

recognized, by now, the principal elements of his tale, "La Biblioteca de Babel." For in effect the library is composed of all the permutations and combinations of the letters in an hypothetical alphabet—babble, in short. (It is surely no accident that the alphabet in question comprises twenty-two letters, exactly the number in the Hebrew alphabet.) The library includes every book written and unwritten. It is infinite, like God, and like God incomprehensible. Borges creates an universe which boggles the mind by the simple process of combination. Our minds empty at the prospect of this "least concrete and perceptible" of things, and consequently, we are made into apprentice Jewish mystics by the tale, which brings us to approximate the contemplation of God.

Like many of the short stories of Borges, "La Biblioteca de Babel" is designed to self-destruct in a few pages, in spite of its deceptive plausibility. Borges is accustomed to erect hypothetical universes based on one or more impossible premises, but apparently consistent otherwise. (In this, his work has much in common with Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, which presents a fiendishly logical but inverted world.) One good example of the deterioration of plausibility is the language of Tlön. We discover, after some intricate pondering, that the distinction between nouns and adjectives, which we took so seriously at its face value, is ultimately untenable. For of course, adjectives, adverbs and verbs are as much abstractions from the reality of a perception as any noun is. Pink and Yellow, Tender, Juicy and Round do not exist as such; an untold number of pinks and yellows, tender, round and juicy things do. A language truly proper to Tlön would need to invent a one-to-one correspondence between sign and object, which would correspond to the uniqueness of every possible constituent of every possible perception. It follows that there is not only one unit sign per irreducible perception in the planet Tlön, but also that each individual upon the planet must create his own language, for there is no provision—as there is in Berkley—for a God to orchestrate all points of view into one common reality. Since philosophy is private fantasy, Tlön is a world of solipsists, in which there are as many metaphysics as metaphysicians. We have been led to the ultimate impossibility of civilization upon that planet, for communication becomes impossible if every language is private. And that impossibility is compounded by another problem: language itself, which is an abstraction, is reduced to a



variety of exclamation, a vocalized equivalent of the pointed finger, if a "word" corresponds to every fragment of perception (and combinations thereof). Etcetera, for the quagmire of contradiction extends much deeper.

As we look at the conceptual center of a Borges tale, it recedes and evaporates. Often, impossibilities of setting also help volatilize the tale. Imagine, for example, the architecture of the library of Babel: small hexagons repeated to infinity in all directions, with an airshaft down the center of each hexagon piercing the next lower hexagon, and so on to infinity. Now, when a librarian dies he is tossed down that shaft, to disintegrate and disappear in his endless fall. Perhaps the airshaft is a symbol of the analogous void at the center of a Borges story, down which the reader vertiginously falls—the contemplation of nothingness which is, after all, a metaphorical death. But the fall is an impossibility. All objects must be weightless in the library since matter in that universe is equally distributed to infinity. Impossibilities accumulate. The library thus cancels itself out of existence. Like the philosophies of Tlön, the conjectural worlds of Borges refute themselves.

"La Biblioteca de Babel" is necessarily inconsistent, for it takes a metaphor—the universe is like a library—to metonymy, and the library becomes a universe. After all, the isolated elements of our world make no more sense than, say, an egg alone with its shadow in the infinite plain of a surrealist painting. (What laid the egg, and to what purpose?) Both Tlön and the library of Babel are impossible because they are not realities sufficient to themselves, as in science fiction, but fragments of our very world pretending to be a universe. The inconsistencies, contradictions and paradoxes are generated by the attempt to translate our reality into impossible modes of being. Of course, there is always willing suspension of disbelief to shore up these tottering alternatives to our usual cosmos. Such a suspension, however, is discomfiting to the reader, for while he is up in the air, Borges slides a reality beneath his feet which is not only hypothetical, but also impossible. And thus, like the mystic, the reader finds himself contemplating his world as if it were an absolute, something "having no validity of its own," in the words of Scholem, something which allows him to see through itself as through a glass clearly, and then face to face, with Nothing.

### The Vision of the Private Eye

A Borges tale is a search. In "El otro tigre" the author admits that his tiger, compounded from articles in encyclopedias, fashioned from literary tropes, is not the living tiger decimating buffaloes in the tropics. He perseveres in seeking a third tiger, which is neither verse nor flesh and blood, a transcendent being, like the third man of the Bible (H 76). Language, which recreates the tiger in abstraction, is not an end in itself, but a mediating process in a search for the preternatural and ultimately real tiger. Like the mystics, Borges believes that words ("palabras humanas") are privileged to give access to the indefinable beyond—the third tiger will not be in the words ("el verso") but through them. Naturally, Borges seeks more than just a tiger; he seeks the ideal cosmos for which it stands. And he makes the reader active in the quest, so that the response of his audience—the ignorance, anticipation and discovery—is part of the structure of his stories. Much as the reader of mystery novels is enlisted in the enterprise of catching the criminal, the reader of Borges' stories participates in the search for Mystery. We are transformed into private eyes.

The analogies between a Borges story and the mystery novel are many. Typically, a mystery tale begins with a murder. Detectives undertake the task of working their way through a labyrinth of clues to the center, that is, to the revelation of the murderer. Suspense makes time important for the fiction in progress, since it continually projects the reader toward the future unmasking. The denouement, however, enables the detective to see past events atemporally, as a simultaneous sequence or pattern of facts, which inevitably lead to the conclusion. Having reached the center of the labyrinth, the detective sees the false clues, false paths, as false, and the one true path comes to have the inevitability of destiny.

A similar structure is characteristic of Borges' stories, with a crucial difference: the death invariably occurs at the end of the narration. As a consequence of this transposition, the reader often does not know he is reading a mystery until the final revelation, which coincides with a death or murder. Then, in a retroactive investigation, the key events and sundry facts of the tale are seen as a tissue of clues, and death assumes the inevitability which it has in mysteries. However, the inescapable course of a past event is one thing, an inescapable future is entirely another.

The fate of the victim in a standard mystery novel is to be expected, since it concerns the past. But analogous destinies in the tales of Borges, projected into the future, come to be a secular variety of predestination. The private eye, in retrospect, discovers that the end could not have been otherwise. By definition there is only one path to the center of the labyrinth.<sup>6</sup>

The death which ends a Borges tale is more often an epiphany than a physical dying. Like the coyote pursuing the road-runner in cartoons, reader and character are led along in the chase until they discover themselves running on the air, over an abyss. At first, in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," nothing is fantastic, nothing impossible. Some eccentrics imagined a world, and elaborated it in writing. But at the end of the fiction an image of God appears, fashioned from a metal which is not of this earth, and at that point the fiction assumes an uncanny reality. The private eye then faces the mystery which the clues create; having discovered infinity, he is annihilated. Here also the normal process of the mystery tale is reversed, for in such fictions the death is no mystery, but only the events which lead up to it. In Borges, the events leading to the death are no mystery, but the death is, since it allows the private eye to see those events as infinite in the mirrors of reflection. It is mysterious, and terrible, to realize that what had seemed microcosm is macrocosm, that time is eternity and free will, destiny. Thus the solution is the mystery, the mystery is vision, and the vision, death, for the private eye is the murdered man.

Like a mystic rapt in ecstasy, the private eye passes outside of time at the moment of revelation. At the moment of death in his investigation, history becomes destiny in becoming memory. From the vantage point of the conclusion the private eye sees the fiction as a whole, like paintings in internal space. It is this change in dimension which invites the introduction of spatial metaphors, like the labyrinth, to explain the narrative. The short stories of Borges, also, pass from the synchronic to the diachronic mode at the moment of revelation. The private eye of "La muerte y la brújula," in his epiphany, realizes that the preceding murders determine the point on which he is standing. After generating a perfect geometric figure with his presence, he must fix it with his

<sup>6</sup> The insight of the private eye is based on form and repetition, for destiny is symmetry. Typically, the detective sees that his fate is not unique but corresponds to a pattern vertiginously repeated into the past and future, a pattern anticipated and therefore determined

death. Again we find that the language of Borges is the antithesis of the *Ursprache* of Tlön, which recognizes time but ignores space, for his fictions give ultimate allegiance to their atemporal armature, to a metaphoric space. And more, it is often an abstract geometric space: a circle, a lozenge, a labyrinth. To say that fate is defined by a geometric figure is not only to take it outside of time, it is a symbolic refinement into divinity. From ancient times, as Borges very well knows, the abstractions of geometry have been analogues for God—pure ideas, perfect and present. Like Abulafia's letters, geometric figures are empty of content, and therefore the thinnest of veils between man and God.

At the moment of death, at the beginning of a mystery novel, and at the beginning and end of a Borges tale, the future is past. A Borges tale leaps from time to timeless space, from the earthly to the eternal, from a "network of meaning and correlations" to a "mystical now," from a world like the immortal's which accumulates echos, repetitions and monotonies, to a transcendence.<sup>7</sup> In the process, language itself is transcended, since the fictions pass beyond both meaning and time. Like music, such tales can be transposed into a spatial, absolutely abstract notation, and like music, they are themselves untranslatable into meaning.

Like the mythical Catoblepas, the hypothetical worlds of Borges devour themselves as casually as they devour everything else. This appetite for nothingness, however, is not pessimistic. Rather, it is a dispassionate vision of an idealistic reality, a variety of nihilism in the service of truth. Borges creates comprehensible abstractions which mediate between an incomprehensible world and an incomprehensible Absolute; they are a systematic *reductio ad absurdum* (from a multifarious experience, to God). He writes, in part, to project the realization that fictions are no more than feeble efforts to organize a reality which, to be real, must seem chaotic from the human point of view. Words must yield to the incomprehension, the salutary terror generated by a clear vision of the universe. But we are not only concerned with a metaphysics and a mystic death, for the reverse side of the radical irony involved is also a defense against the dangers of the imagination. In the following, and concluding, ethical postscript, we recreate Borges' argument against applied fiction.

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<sup>7</sup>In the words of Scholem, it is a progress from allegory to symbol; see pp. 26-27.

Without a doubt, Borges is his father, essentially, in Borgesian fashion. They are both omnivorous and omnific literati. And of the ideas born in Borges we are immediately concerned with the philosophical anarchy implicit in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." As the story begins there is mysterious mention of "an atrocious and banal reality" (F 13) whose meaning remains in potential as we read on. The first clue to this mystery appears in a postscript, dated 1947. We discover that the creation of Tlön is financed by a man incongruously called Ezra Buckley, who intends to supplant God by demonstrating that mortal men can create a world (F30). Buckley's vision is necessarily banal; a world created by men is inescapably reductive and simplistic. This conjecture is confirmed as the story ends and the narrator muses: "Hace diez años bastaba cualquier simetría con apariencia de orden—el materialismo dialéctico, el antisemitismo, el nazismo—para embelesar a los hombres. ¿Cómo no someterse a Tlön, a la minuciosa y vasta evidencia de un planeta ordenado? Inútil responder que la realidad también está ordenada. Quizá lo éste, pero de acuerdo a leyes divinas—traduzco: a leyes inhumanas—que no acabamos nunca de percibir. Tlön será un laberinto, pero es un laberinto urdido por hombres, un laberinto destinado a que lo descifren los hombres" (F 33-34). Ten years ago the narrator had published his tale in the "Anthology of Fantastic Literature." It was true fiction then. But, by 1947, World War II had made the conclusion necessary. Naziism had applied its fictions to the world, made them indestructible with armor and defended them to the death (a phrase which usually means the death of others). Tlön also began as a genuine, and therefore perishable, fiction in the eighteenth century, but it became corrupt in its invasion of our planet. One can impose symmetry upon words but not upon the world. Elimination of extraneous detail creates the uncluttered universe of human fiction; however, to do this with real men means killing the supposed clutter, or enslaving it to social systems. The stories we have studied implicitly advocate a humane anarchy. They are anti-dogmatic; which is to say that Borges proposes, but also disposes. And in his perfectly disposable work we learn to recognize, among other things, the little distance that lies between madeness and madness.