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Detections: Borges and Father Brown

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In *Other Inquisitions, 1937–1952*, Jorge Luis Borges affectionately mentions G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown stories and hints that along with Poe's they are influences on his own stories of mystery, crime, and detection. Borges' stories may be understood better by looking at Chesterton's priest, and at the way both authors experiment with conventions of the mystery genre to examine the supernatural and the nature of evil. Because of the enigmas and paradoxes of his character, the unprepossessing Father Brown, a small man with a dough-face and sea-flat eyes, has a distinct personality which especially appeals to Borges and affects his own detective fiction: the perfect figure for the butt of a joke, Borges sees, Father Brown is also the perfect figure for getting in the way and solving metaphysical jokes.

Out of place in the physical world, Father Brown is always in the right place for the supernatural. His "mind was all of a piece, and he was unconscious of many incongruities" ("The Crime of the Communist").[1] As a priest he is a believer in magic and mystery who consistently produces the most mundane and naturalistic solutions. He works by reason and faith both, and the two are never at odds owing to a middle sense, intuition, which keeps him from acting mistakenly even if truth is not revealed to his intellect: he has a mystic's cloud on him when evil is near. When he doubts, he doubts only because he is not certain whether a case calls for a policeman, a doctor, or a priest. But if Father Brown, as a professional celibate, has a sexlessness about him which puts him further outside the human ordinary (unresponsive to the power of sex, he is not corruptible like ordinary men), nevertheless he is thoroughly a gentleman. The traditionally distinguishing features of the gentleman—power, rationality, and responsibility—mingle in Father Brown with the spy's invisibility and unreality, although in the priest these last two are treated as virtues, not as defects of character. Invisibility comes from his being so unobtrusively in the middle of things (he is, after all, a good priest doing his job), and his unreality is a supremely other-worldly quality. Detachment is his superiority. It fits him for super-impressions and mystical illuminations as well as reasoned solutions. The priest's sense of environment and his comfortable fondness for obscure, unique oddities and trinkets make him a perfect Borgesian character. Mysteries of Good and Evil, God and Devil, Body and Soul, Reason and Faith, Innocence and Guilt, Truth and Falsehood, Appearance and Reality, Time and Eternity, come up continually in the "fantastic" Father Brown tales.

[1] G. K. Chesterton, "The Crime of the Communist," in *The Father Brown Omnibus* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1951), p. 931. All quotations from Chesterton's stories are from this volume.

The crimes in these stories are less crimes against man and society than actions symbolic of evil; the criminals are less criminals than wicked jokesters or representatives of malign forces in the universe; and the solutions are less interesting than the process of solving an apparently chaotic, mysterious, cruel, sometimes wry universe (substitute "universe" for "crime"). But although Chesterton's is a symbolic world, one that guarantees the necessity of intuition and reason, his symbolic world also produces "The romance of the police force" which is, Chesterton said in "A Defense of Detective Stories," "the whole romance of man. It is based on the fact that morality is the most dark and daring of conspiracies. It reminds us that the whole noiseless and unnoticeable police management by which we are ruled and protected is only a successful knight-errantry."[2] Father Brown is the romance-knight doing in the demons that tyrannize humanity for their own benefit. To the extent that the stories suggest the universe itself is at fault, they suggest that the evil is suprahuman. The power of the knight consequently appears suprahuman; but when he proves the evil was human after all, that it is after all explainable by human reason and by naturalistic cause and effect, he has the power, human but mystical, to discover Truth. As William O. Aydelotte said, the fictional detective "understands the meanings and possibilities of life."[3] The world of Chesterton's detective story is still ordered, responsive to fixed moral laws. Man has free will, and the detective, knowing the moral laws of life, has the power to engineer destiny.[4]

If Borges' idea of control is different, there are rhetorical and intellectual devices, paradox and irony, and devices of atmosphere and imagery in Chesterton that he has found congenial. For instance, Chesterton anticipates Borges' use of "all that mystery which is alternately veiled and revealed in the symbol of windows and of doors" ("The Dagger With Wings," p. 571). And in "The Man in the Passage," Chesterton develops an image that is a Borges favorite, the mirror:

> *. . . the glittering interior of the great actress's dressing-room. . . .was fitted and filled with looking-glasses at every angle of refraction, so that they looked like the hundred facets of one huge diamond. . . .* (p. 282)
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> *Every time he pulled out the frame of a new glass, a new black figure of Father Brown appeared; the absurd glass chamber was full of Father Browns, upside down in the air like angels, turning somersaults like acrobats, turning their backs to everybody like very rude persons.* (pp. 286–87)

Looking down the corridor at the murderer, Father Brown sees himself in the mirror; later, each suspect describing the murderer describes a grotesque self.

[2] G. K. Chesterton, "A Defence of Detective Stories," in *The Art of the Mystery Story*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1946), p. 6.

[3] William O. Aydelotte, "The Detective Story as a Historical Source," *The Yale Review*, 39 (September, 1949), 84.

[4] George Grella, "Murder and Manners: The Formal Detective Novel," NOVEL: *A Forum on Fiction*, 4 (Fall, 1970), 45. On this and other points about the detective story I follow Grella and Aydelotte.

Each man is the man in the passage, any man could be the murderer. More than angles of vision and refraction, the mirror is a central image for a complex conception of personality, identity, and good and evil. And, like mirrors, the mask in both Chesterton and Borges represents other faces, other potential identities. The mask is an expression of the one enduring constant that exists in Borges' world—the artist's consciousness of self. As Father Brown himself puts it, "for the enjoyment of the artist the mask must be to some extent moulded on the face. What he makes outside him must correspond to something inside him; he can only make his effects out of some of the materials of his soul. . . . an artist will betray himself by some sort of sincerity" ("The Dagger With Wings," pp. 581–82).

Many of the Father Brown stories begin in strange light—at dawn, dusk, or twilight—when objects stand out in heavily colored relief. Oppressive atmospheres invariably correspond to human oppressions in bold images in which nature and man reflect each other like mirrors.

> *A stormy evening of olive and silver was closing in, as Father Brown, wrapped in a grey Scotch plaid, came to the end of a grey Scotch valley and beheld the strange castle of Glengyle. It stopped one end of the glen or hollow like a blind alley; and it looked like the end of the world. . . . it reminded an Englishman of the sinister steeple-hats of witches in fairy tales. . . . This note of a dreamy, almost a sleepy devilry, was no mere fancy from the landscape. . . .*
> *. . . the late Earl of Glengyle. . . . was the last representative of a race whose valour, insanity, and violent cunning had made them terrible even among the sinister nobility of their nation in the sixteenth century. None were deeper in the labyrinthine ambition, in chamber within chamber of that palace of lies that was built up around Mary Queen of Scots.* ("The Honour of Israel Gow," p. 101)

As adjectives and nouns couple, the paragraph tunnels from the ordinary into an extraordinary world of man-and-nature and comes out at the end in the supernatural. The ordinary "scene" turns into a "fantasy" or "vision" or "illusion." In several stories Chesterton explains that reality reminds us of art because art—painting, opera, fiction—apprehends and expresses reality:

> *the outline of these fantastic court uniforms against the empty scenery, striped with dark sea and sand, had something suggestive of comic opera; and reminded the spectator of* The Pinafore. ("The Green Man," p. 875)

> *caryatides and carved masks of comedy or tragedy look down from corners of the building upon the grey confusion of the garden paths.* ("The Dagger With Wings," p. 563)

"Reality" perceived in a Chesterton story is therefore synonymous with "fantasy" and "vision" and "illusion." Reality is the vision induced by the bold distortions of art which apprehend a unity of nature and man.

Borges on the other hand makes the imaginative leap and takes it as a given that literature anticipates history—fiction is reality and reality is a fiction. His reality is more disturbing than Chesterton's fantastic world, both because Borges sees no metaphysical unity between "good" men and a universe benevolent toward man's moral aspirations, and because his mysteries spread their stain over his other genres of philosophy and critical essay, genres that we are not used to having so unreassuringly eerie.

There is mystery in the very conception of his world, whereas Chesterton's mystery too often simply is imposed stylistically. Father Brown believes that there are to mystery "two different ideas: mystery in the sense of what is marvellous, and mystery in the sense of what is complicated"; since the marvellous "is power coming directly from God (or the devil) instead of indirectly through nature or human wills" ("The Wrong Shape," p. 131), the inflated spookiness of eerie colors, similes, and adjective-noun combinations is too obviously due to manipulations by Chesterton the stylist to be marvellous (or to cause any willing suspension of disbelief). Chesterton's most successful stories are the man-made mysteries, the complicated as opposed to the marvellous. How well rationalism can solve these complicated puzzles is shown by the simplicity of the endings, where Chesterton makes rational, ordinary, and mundane solutions that pull back from confrontation with mystery into the manageable world of reason and doctrine. The natural environment, initially used to deepen the obscurity, functions for a time as an impediment to the solution, getting in the way of mind until in a bold turn Father Brown is able to pierce the mysteries of the non-logical in environment and prove the superiority of mind and faith to nature and matter. That proof is no miracle.

It is just the reverse in Borges, where spirit and reason both are thwarted by physical impediments. Borges' way of solving the mystery presented by these impediments is to construct a world that is analogous to them (and therefore itself a joke) from which the only outs are joking or death. Characters themselves may do this (Nolan in "Theme of the Traitor and Hero" and Scharlach in "Death and the Compass" both devise elaborate hoaxes which seem to parallel or be synonymous with the orderly world of Ryan and Lönnrot, the reasonable deductive characters), or characters may suffer a great prank that confuses and dissipates their world. Borges may object to Chesterton's naturalistic solutions, but the lesson he learned from Chesterton is to give possible interpretations of a mystery and then follow up with facts which support one of the possibilities and in a sense verify the hypothesis. It may be withholding or ignoring some facts, and selecting others as essential facts to verify the hypothesis, but it is the counterpart of Chesterton's rational solution. For instance, Nils Runeberg in "Three Versions of Judas," believing that "God did not want His terrible secret divulged on earth," believes he is guilty of "that dark crime. . . . blasphemy against the Spirit."[5]

[5] Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 99.

Because everything is left tentative in "Three Versions of Judas," the only conclusion to draw from the facts presented, Runeberg's conclusion, is that God was not Christ but Judas. Runeberg dies mad, perhaps (always perhaps) a victim of a sublime affliction. His madness also "verifies" the hypothesis, simply because the hypothesis cannot be disproved. Borges is at his best when he is able to concoct a mystery that cannot be verified finally even through guilt and suffering; a mystery, melting into human myths and dreams, which explores the secret history of a man's life. Mystery is the only reality we are assured of.

"The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim," a 1935 tale, lays out directions and tendencies more famous if not so transparent in later and better stories. We are given a summary of the plot of a novel by the Bombay lawyer Mir Bahadur Ali; it is in its second edition—the first is impossible to come by—and it is now subtitled "A Game with Shifting Mirrors." Borges' is a story A about a novel B, or more precisely a criticism of the novel which would stand as a valid critique had the novel ever existed. Borges goes the step beyond the creation of the story and makes his story out of the essay, compounding critical act with critical act. The device of the mock criticism allows him to strip away all non-essential possibility, to make the reader experience the analysis of possibility. (Borges cuts out the circumstantial details of detective procedure and the quantity of incidents that usually go into a dramatic crisis. He aims at a mood, and the agency that caused that mood is discovered only in its effects; otherwise it is excluded from the analysis.) The fictitious novel stands as a symbol of the processes being examined: plot is reduced to a set of symbols, an archetypal pattern labyrinthine and circular.

The elements Borges concocts his stories out of are infinite and timeless, because he believes in reducing a man's whole life to only a few moments or episodes. The "best detective stories" for Borges "are not those with the best plots" but those which "tell a story symbolic of processes that are somehow inherent in all human destinies."[6] If men's lives are blind performances of "a secret drama determined and premeditated by God," then "the history of the universe—and our lives and the most trifling detail of our lives—has an unconjecturable, symbolic meaning."[7]

Due to its symbolic meaning, "Three Versions of Judas" is more typical and better Borges than "The Shape of the Sword" or "Theme of the Traitor and Hero." In the latter story the plot is a conspiracy, man-made, to execute a traitor and redeem a hero. The traitor and the hero are the same man, James Kilpatrick, who willingly plays his dual part in the drama that becomes Irish history. Although the drama takes over the world of experience it is nevertheless a "literary" plot. The truth can be deciphered. It is a Chestertonian mystery, more complicated than marvellous. It is not truly a paradox in nature and the spareness of the facts is due simply to the writer's withholding information from us—in the same way that the historian Ryan, writing a book on his ancestor Kilpatrick, withholds his discovery of the hoax and perpetuates it as "history." "The Shape of the Sword,"

[6] Jorge Luis Borges, *Other Inquisitions, 1937-1952* (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1966), p. 91.

[7] Borges, *Other Inquisitions, 1937-1952*, p. 131

using the idea of the double, is more interesting for its treatment of guilt. The criminal John Vincent Moon, for the purpose of the narration, adopts the betrayed hero's role, but ends by confessing that it is he that is guilty, like Judas, of denouncing the hero. He has a need to reveal his story this way. His narrative makes him more victim than victimizer because he is condemned to live always pursuing himself in the identity of the man he betrayed, this exchange of identity exonerating him of guilt even as it nails the guilt in with great force. The shape of the exchange underlines Moon's (and probably Borges' own) thesis that "I am all other men, any man is all men, Shakespeare is in some manner the miserable John Vincent Moon."[8] The secret, symbolic meaning (which is the history of the universe?) is that Moon is both traitor and hero, simultaneously and endlessly criminal and detective. Borges' is a universe of guilt and self-pursuit and all crimes in this universe are continuous. They go on happening endlessly, endlessly confirming and dissolving human identity.

Borges' stories leave cause and effect a tentative hypothesis at best, and because they question sequence they make time a philosophical question. Without these features of the detective story format, his stories turn into metaphysical abstracts of thesis and antithesis (and occasionally synthesis, although he is more concerned with dramatizing propositions and philosophical positions than with solutions). Everything in Borges is tentative and toying. With the one exception of "Death and the Compass" he has no formal detective; the opposition is always so vaguely presented that we are not certain it is "evil"; usually the detective becomes a part of the conspiracy, which blurs the distinctions between the "good" men and the criminal; if suprahuman power is at work it is seldom given to men to know, much less to receive; there appear to be effects without causes; and the only truth is that the universe is a mystery. Borges does not give his reader a comfortably optimistic view of life as the mystery story traditionally has done, proving the world a meaningfully planned and simple place to cope with, physically and morally. Borges uses this popular form for working out uncommon ideas and dreads and disorders, less to discard them than to test their validity. If it is all a gimmick and a game, the conventions of hypothesis and paradox nevertheless are useful for investigating mysteries of time and personality. Violence and crime, pursuit and flight, obscure guilt and enigmatic punishment are assumed in the mystery genre, as is the mysteriousness of identity; deceptive appearances and false clues are expected. And Borges knows that mysteries do happen in time and space. A murder committed at time M and solved at Z began to be committed at A when the mystery's links began to come together. Space contracts as the people involved are linked together. These links hold the meaning of the experience. There is an order somewhere in these links if they can be put together. Crime in Borges never quite happens in the present but is a revelation of the forking paths of the past coming together for a moment before diverging again.

The mystery genre offers unreality, inaccuracy, distortion, deception, and hiding

[8] Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, p. 70.

of truth and identity to a mind obsessed with deciphering a more precise equation for an unbelievable universe. The mystery format for Borges satisfies both his awareness of the way things are and his desire to order them, even if the order is an image of disorder, because the detective story is also a genre for wish-fulfillment. The mystery form is perfect for the labyrinthine imaginings, documented with verisimilitude, of that concrete universe Borges dreams of, that mathematically exact world in which geometrical but terrible lives are constructed for men to live.

Because the mystery, superficially, is a tentative genre (and because we do not believe it has the intelligence of the serious novel and do not expect it to offer a substantial account of human life), mystery stories can get away with being largely problematical and hypothetical. Borges uses the mystery story for ironical testing of theories—trying out the artistic possibilities of philosophical idealisms—and for incorporating, even when he is most serious, the cosmic prank. His medium is not adequate to the thought—the formal conventions and apparatus of the mystery story are ineffectual in solving the philosophical mysteries of the universe—but by belittling the medium Borges suggests his idea and also breaks through the conventions of the mystery story to symbols of the reality that embody a special archetypal truth. Writers who push toward a new view of reality often begin if not end as satirists and parodists. Borges sports with literary conventions in behalf of a special vision, and his approach is carried out by new or altered literary conventions. In Borges what is not there is as important as what is.

One major feature Borges drops is the mystery's obsession with justice. In the genre generally, if there is a mystery there is a crime, and if there is a crime there is a detective to solve it, to see that truth is discovered and justice done. Generally mystery fiction is socially oriented with the criminal an anti-social figure committing crimes against the laws of men and God; but since Borges avoids a social context he avoids such legal and ethical distinctions, and his criminals have nothing to do with the mechanism of society. If they are disobedient or sinful they either are not punished or there is no relief in the punishment and they go on committing their crimes endlessly, endlessly reaffirming themselves. Borges' mysteries are not concerned with human justice any more than they are mysteries a reader can decipher for himself: we follow the narrative to be amazed by the dexterity of the creative mind. However much we are engaged by its puzzles, detective fiction is a sport, and we are a passive audience as dazzled by the process of solution as by the puzzles themselves. It is an advantageous feature of the genre that underlines Borges' sense of the individual as an observer of the spectacle of the universe. We watch the Borgesian universe as if *it* were a crime, staggered spectators of the hypotheses that try to track it down.

Chesterton's stories "remind us that we live in an armed camp, making war with a chaotic world, and . . . the criminals, the children of chaos, are nothing but the traitors within our gates."[9] In Chesterton, civilization represents a reconstruction

[9] Chesterton, "A Defence of Detective Stories," p. 6.

of a lost paradise and the detective is the conserver of the best morality that men have devised, theological laws translated into secular concepts in a community of men. In Chesterton's world, where power comes directly from God or the Devil, the forces clearly are Good and Evil, and men are only the agents of these polar sources of power. But where Father Brown speaks of heathen gods and "that ancient sorrow that is in the heart of all heathen things" ("The Honour of Israel Gow," p. 109), Borges dramatizes heresiarchs and traitors who vainly mock their grotesque, fallible loyalties and idealisms by acting them out to eventual failure. In the marvellously complicated Borgesian labyrinth there is no explicit separation of Good and Evil, or Soul and Body, God and Devil, Truth and Falsehood. In his universal labyrinth one passage leads to the face of God, another to its opposite; down one curving corridor in time we meet a Christ, down another a Judas, and sometimes we double back and the one face melts into the other. Mutability and multiplicity are built into the very personalities of the characters. The enemy is within. Borges' mind, like one of Chesterton's villains, "is woven not only out of elaborate schemes but out of all sorts of secret languages and signs and dumb signals and wordless pictures which are the names of nameless things. He is the worst sort of man that the world knows; he is the wicked mystic" ("The Dagger With Wings," pp. 566–67). The Borgesian universe (like Poe's also) is suited to the mysticism of the supernatural tale rather than the rationalism of the detective story. Unconcerned with justice, Borges is an illusionist who creates mysteries only in order to investigate them—in other words, he is a disillusionist.

Two Chesterton passages are interesting in this connection. "The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic," the great French detective Valentine muses in "The Blue Cross" (p. 8). And Chesterton's Flambeau, before he became a policeman, was a criminal who "always made up the story myself, and acted it as quick as I chose. This detective business of waiting about is too much for my French impatience" ("The Honour of Israel Gow," pp. 113–14). Borges, who shows that same French impatience for the long story, as creative author rules himself out and substitutes the criminal-acting and the detective-appreciating. One of Borges' masks is in pursuit of another: the detective seeking an aesthetically pleasing pattern pursues the criminal who has the freedom and power to create mysterious labyrinths by his actions. The criminal tries out different styles and stories exploring the possibilities of an identity or of a philosophical system for ordering the universe and constructing a world. The detective is a spier-out of secrets, a seeker for truth in the system, one who expects to wander labyrinths following nothing but the illogical and the senseless until sense is made and a pattern takes shape. The detective, only a critic, finds (or imposes) real patterns on the creation, explicating its shape, its irrelevancies and excrescences, and perhaps finds his own personality in the artist-antagonist. (Borges says that what defines Chesterton's nature is a "precarious subjection of a demoniacal will."[10] Chesterton's "The Blue Cross" goes so far as to give Father Brown the "criminal"

[10] Borges, *Other Inquisitions, 1937–1952*, p. 88.

role by having him play the puzzling jokes which anticipate and therefore determine the criminal's "jokes.") In Borges it is less an act of justice than an act of appreciation which tests the validity of the criminal's creative action. The more clues a protagonist gathers the closer he gets to a solution of the mystery; and the closer he gets, the more his antagonist flies, proving the correctness of the protagonist's hypothesis. But if the antagonist-criminal is punished, his punishment is never the result of a sinful presumption in breaking the law. Punishment is rather his greatest self-justification, the affirmation of identity. Punishment is a reward for presumption, a sign that what he has presumed, merely by the fact of the crushing response to it, exists as hypothesized.

Borges believes that art is not a mirror of the world but the creation of new possibility within the world, and he assigns this creation to the jester, the outlaw, the traitor, the heresiarch. Power shifts from the traditional holder of power, the detective, and goes to the criminal; it is the criminal who has control over the world and men's destinies, for in a universe of labyrinths only he has real strength by way of his community with the "devious" universe, not with a moral community of men. Borges counts on our awareness of this convention for the reversal of the power roles to be meaningful, but (because he never puts conflict in terms of good and evil) the moral element disappears in a world where the oppositions are simply power against power, intelligence against intelligence, each man trying to make facts fit a hypothesis. That intelligence may lead to self-destruction is a moral that is only obliquely drawn. Just as intelligence in the service of the criminal is likely to be his greatest weapon, and destruction the greatest justification of his power to create, the paradoxical danger for the detective is not in a false interpretation or a misreading of clues and symbols but in the correct reading. In "Death and the Compass," Lönnrot deciphers the mystery devised by Red Scharlach and goes to his death as surely as a needle points north. It does not pay to guess right about the nature of the universe. Death is the end of the Borgesian mystery, not its beginning.

There are several intended genre ironies in "Death and the Compass." First, Borges jokes with clues, which normally in mysteries suggest that there is a great noumenal world not available to the ordinary intelligence; "things" of the ordinary world are symbols or clues or pieces of a larger coherent pattern. The mystery story ordinarily differentiates between luminous symbols like these and incidental, non-vital facts, and only the superior mind can see the symbol or significant fact that illuminates the mystery of "things." For Lönnrot to get himself killed means that the capacity to interpret symbols is no path to wisdom and power. The previous deaths are nothing less than clues to Lönnrot's own, and it is the temporarily god-like criminal with the ingenuity to devise such a mystery who controls the life and fate of other men. Secondly, since a detective's strength is in his intuitive sense of rightness, the criminal's victory over Lönnrot demonstrates how Borges' treatment of the genre is no solace to us. Ordinarily, since we cannot guess mysteries, we rely on the detective; but with "Death and the Compass," believing we are as intellectually competent as Lönnrot is, we share his illusion of competence through the presentation and analysis of the facts. The

criminal plays toward the detective's strengths as is customary, so that when the reliable detective is killed we are made to feel insecure about our fallible equipment for reading clues and symbols. Worse, in the stories without a detective, there is no one to step in and give us a solution; we feel even more unprotected. Mystery fiction generally contrives to intensify, then minimize guilt and the fear of death, whereas Borges' treatment, making death not the beginning of the mystery but the climax, increases guilt and fear. We think we like surprise endings, but Borges proves that we may feel disoriented by an abstract anxiety when confronted by surprises we did not expect. Imagine Father Brown murdered on a case.

We are never allowed, however, to sympathize with Borges' characters. Each needs the answer suggested by the enigma he faces, and what it is necessary to have each one manages to create for himself. The solution, the self-punishment or death, stands up in spite of any intellectual or moral objections because it is an emotional explanation of verifiable facts, not a principle that is always true.

But the problems of the tales are not ethical or even emotional. They are philosophical. Borges' philosophical labyrinth is an image that is offered as a "fact" instead of a fantasy or an interpretive evaluation. (Like Chesterton, Borges presents us with a new set of facts. Unlike Chesterton's, this set is a new form of the universe.) Just as the "cosmos" Tlön replaces this world in the story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," Borges' symbols intrude into and become the world of experience: the labyrinth, or encyclopaedia, library or chinese garden is always a symbol, but a symbol of nothing else so much as a symbol of the psyche itself. Facts are not there to represent a vision of the "real" world, or to claim that they have a symbolic reference. Borges' is a possible world; his mysteries and clues are symbols of this labyrinth of the mind trying to make sense of itself, and we cannot dispute the labyrinth with reference to another more real world. Borges' literary affinities are finally the only clues worth following, since he puts us on to them as if to say that literature is the reality from which his symbols come, and his symbols gain their reality from the reality of literature. That he sounds so much like Chesterton means Borges can be understood better with reference to the forms of detective literature. He comes from no world of ordinary experience we are familiar with.

"Don't you feel in your heart that these contradictions do not really contradict; that there is a cosmos that contains them all? The soul goes round upon a wheel of stars and all things return; perhaps Strake and I have striven in many shapes, beast against beast and bird against bird, and perhaps we shall strive for ever. But since we seek and need each other, even that eternal hatred is an eternal love. Good and evil go round in a wheel that is one thing and not many. Do you not realize in your heart, do you not believe behind all your beliefs, that there is but one reality and we are its shadows; and that all things are but aspects of one thing; a centre where men melt into Man and Man into God?"

"No," said Father Brown.

. . . "I've scarcely ever met a criminal who philosophized at all, who didn't philosophize along those lines of orientalism and recurrence and reincarnation,

and the wheel of destiny and the serpent biting its own tail." ("The Dagger With Wings," pp. 574–80)

Chesterton and Borges both play with similar notions of contradiction, necessity, circular time, and transcendental reality. Borges, like a criminal philosophizing along those lines, builds them into the plot, the events, the images, the color and texture of his narratives until they become the facts of the narrative world. The more impossible the creation, the more like the Maker Borges is; and the more impossible, incredible, and fictionalized we seem to be ourselves, the more fantastic—the more like Borges'—our world becomes. It is when Borges' irony contradicts Borges' mystical vision that he offers his "No" of disbelief in his universe—in "the wheel of destiny and the serpent biting its own tail"—complicating his creation and discovering, perhaps, a truer consciousness of experience. But which Borges is it that finally has the truth, the detector or the heresiarch? Irony is disbelief that negates the creation and identity, and forces the process of confrontation with the reality of the self to begin again.