

## THE LABYRINTH OF ART IN FOUR FICCIONES OF JORGE LUIS BORGES

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JAMES JOYCE, RECOGNIZING IN THE DAEDALUS MYTH THE ARCHETYPAL representation of the artist, his condition, and his role, gave his hero Stephen the family or generic name of the old artificer. But Stephen, even though his series of epiphanies enables him to assemble a villanelle of rare parts, even though his growing awareness of the limitations of his sensitivity enables him finally to soar free of Irish mazes, Stephen only dimly perceives the dual and paradoxical nature of that mythic archetype. This dimness may account for Joyce's ambivalent attitude toward his subject-artist-self-as-a-young-man. For the artist must have not only the craft to plot a meaningful construct of intricate order out of chaotic experience but also the genius to rise above that construct and see it whole and escape it at whatever sacrifice.

Jorge Luis Borges, whose style has been called the antithesis of Joyce's,<sup>1</sup> employs the same archetype and explores its paradox with characteristically extravagant-but-brief excursions of wit, irony, and obscurity. Borges' master in the modern European fiction tradition is usually considered to be not Joyce but Kafka, and it may be that Borges has taken Kafka's oblique or implicit treatment of the labyrinth motif and made it explicit. In any case, it is no gratuitous punning that leads Borges to refer, in "The Babylon Lottery," to "a sacred latrine named Qaphqa."<sup>2</sup> Yet it seems to me that the writer closest to Borges in basic thematic and conceptual constructs is Nabokov, particularly the Nabokov of *The Gift* and *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, though of course in execution and style Nabokov stands with Joyce in contrast to

1. Cf. Anthony Kerrigan's Introduction to *Jorge Luis Borges, Ficciones* (New York, 1962), p. 9. All quotations from the stories are taken from this Evergreen edition.  
2. Page 68, but to Kerrigan's translation "sacred privy" here I have preferred that of Robert Lima; see Ana Maria Barrenchea, *Borges the Labyrinth Maker* (New York, 1985), p. 52. Borges' relationship to Kafka and many others is discussed in Marianne Kesting, "Das hermetische Labyrinth: Zur Dichtung von Jorge Luis Borges," *Neue Deutsche Hefte*, cmi (1965), 107-124. David William Foster, "Borges' 'El Aleph'—Some Thematic Considerations," *Hispania*, xlvii (1964), 56-59, also discusses Kafka's influence but notes a significant difference: "It would . . . be a bad guess as well as a mistake (from the point of view of his work's temper) to read his writings as a window upon a weird schizophrenic universe. Rather Borges has created this museum of the fantastic as a tool out of which to create his art" (p. 59). There may be noted here, however, a possible implicit misreading of or fallacious approach to Kafka.

Borges.<sup>3</sup> The various labyrinths of Borges' stories seem to be analogous with what Andrew Field calls "removes" in Nabokov's, devices by which the creator separates himself from his audience and his subject while at the same time involving a creator-persona in the subject and a projected-audience with that persona.<sup>4</sup>

There is universal recognition among Borges' critics of the importance of the labyrinth symbol or motif. But there is no general agreement about what it means. Some, like Bénichou and Anderson-Imbert, cite labyrinth as key symbol without attempting to explicate.<sup>5</sup> L. A. Murillo sees the labyrinth as a symbol of "the consciousness of man in our time: his fears, which for all their dreadfulness do not seem to differ much from the ancient fears of primordial man; his frustrated will to power, that more than ever resembles the frustrated conjurations of magical formulas; his helplessness, his anxiety, his dread of death, and above all, his despair."<sup>6</sup> Ricardo Gullon, too, speaks of "el laberinto interior."<sup>7</sup> Harriet S. Stevens sees the labyrinth as external, rather than internal: "símbolo del mundo, del universo, de esa misteriosa telaraña o red en que el hombre vive cautivo . . .";<sup>8</sup> and H. E. Lewald characterizes that externality as one of disorder: "The symbolism inherent in the labyrinth represents first of all an irrational universe whose multiplicity, or unknown factors, exemplifies a lack of order or apparent purpose."<sup>9</sup> Marianne Kesting, while agreeing with Lewald, introduces the suggestion of order through art: "Für Borges ist die Welt ein chaotisches Labyrinth von Spiegelungen, das nur durch die Wiederkehr der Gleichen, durch die Wiederholung eine Art Ordnung gewinnt."<sup>10</sup> Frank Dauster shifts the emphasis to the construction as a kind of order imposed on the disordered world: ". . . the multiple labyrinths which Borges constructs . . . are in the overwhelming majority intellectual constructions imposed by man on an incoherent and chaotic exist-

3. I had thought this insight was original until I found a remark in Amé de Viry, "Borges ou l'élément romanesque," *Nouvelle Revue Française*, xxv (1965), 1069-79, referring to Borges' method: "C'est exactement la démarche de l'auteur de *Lolita*" (p. 1077). See also Patricia Merivale, "The Flaunting of Artifice in Vladimir Nabokov and Jorge Luis Borges," *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, viii (1967), 294-309, and remarks by Alfred Appel, Jr., in his interview with Nabokov in the same number, p. 142.

4. See Andrew Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Art* (Boston, 1967).

5. Pierre Bénichou, "Le monde et l'esprit chez Jorge Luis Borges," *Les Lettres Nouvelles* (Nov., 1954), 681; Enrique Anderson-Imbert, "Un cuento de Borges, la casa de Asterión," *Revista Ibero-americana*, xxv (1960), 41.

6. "The Labyrinths of Jorge Luis Borges: An Introductory to the Stories of *The Aleph*," *Modern Language Quarterly*, xx (1959), 286.

7. "Borges y Su Laberinto," *Insula*, xvi (1961), 1.

8. "Infiernos de Borges," *Insula*, xviii (1963), 1.

9. "The Labyrinth of Time and Place in Two Stories by Borges," *Hispania*, xlv (1962), 630. Ana María Barrenechea, too, lists labyrinths as the first of the "symbols of chaos and the cosmos" in her *Borges the Labyrinth Maker*.

10. Page 120.

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ence."<sup>11</sup> Dauster thus approaches the present treatment that finds in the labyrinth a symbol of art.

Borges confesses that "The Babylon Lottery" is "not entirely innocent of symbolism."<sup>12</sup> but it is difficult to account for this singling out of the story since it employs the kind of symbolism common to most of the stories. And the labyrinth symbol is present in the lottery itself, which I take as the art-form of fate—the arbitrary imposition of order or a semblance of formal order upon chaotic human experience. But just as in much of Borges' work, in "The Babylon Lottery" one must appreciate the ironic inversions of the typical, the traditional, and the archetypal.

Borges describes the lottery's development in Babylon in terms of a capsule history of the development of organized religion. In its early forms it is largely dependent on primitive ritual and superstition, and is concerned with contact with the Company; but as it grows, the ritualistic element though retained becomes less significant than abstract considerations concerning the Company (God<sup>13</sup>), which administers the lottery. At the last, that is, at the present from which the story is presented, the concern focusses on heretical conceptions of the nature of the Company: e.g., "the Company is eternal and . . . will last until the last night of the world, when the last god annihilates the cosmos" (p. 71) or "the Company is omnipotent, but . . . exerts its influence only in the most minute matters: in a bird's cry, in the shades of rust and the hues of dust, in the cat naps of dawn" (*ibid.*) or the "conjecture, spoken from the mouths of masked heresiarchs, to the effect that *the Company has never existed and never will.*" (pp. 71 ff.)

The last example, in its reference to "masked heresiarchs," is reminiscent of the "mask factory" among the debris of which was discovered "that doctrinal piece of literature" defining the lottery as "an interpolation of chance into the order of the world" (p. 69). In both cases the image of masks suggests both anonymity and disguise, that is, both protection for true utterance and deliberate assumption of false utterance. The two actual mentions of labyrinth in the story also emphasize this sort of ironic tensiveness or thematic inversion. The first refers to the setting, "the labyrinth of the gods," where the primitive lottery was carried out in ritual cycles of drawings every seventy nights (p. 68). The second refers

11. "Notes on Borges' Labyrinths," *Hispanic Review*, xxx (1962), 148.

12. *Ficciones*, Prologue, p. 15.

13. The phrase "comparable to that of God" (p. 71) is ironic in its totally unnecessary inclusion.

to the "labyrinthian laws" of "the judgments of fate," that is, the drawings of the lottery (p. 69). And again Borges describes the lottery as "an intensification of chance, a periodic infusion of chaos into the cosmos." (*ibid.*)

Thus Borges' "symbolism" is a remarkably sustained piece of irony. "The Babylon Lottery" describes an attempt to impose a deliberate and infinitely various disorder upon an orderly world. Yet the lottery (both the story itself and the institutions it describes) is systematic and formal. In other words, it is a program (or programmatic presentation) designed to give a semblance of formal order, that is to say, a semblance of meaning, to the chaotic and ostensibly meaningless world of human experience. Any system, law, formal construct, planned pattern, or program embodies such an attempt, however transparently masked or artificial it may be. Artifice constantly protects sanity against disordered nature; art, by imposing form, gives a semblance of meaning to life. The labyrinth, as archetypal symbol of artifice, is maddening (literally) perhaps only because of the ultimate futility of the gestures of art, the falsefaced rituals of patterned humanity.

Where "The Babylon Lottery" describes the origin of a labyrinth, "The Library of Babel" attempts to describe a pre-created labyrinth. It is therefore among the most clearly Kafkaesque of Borges' stories. Though the word is only used once with reference to a single volume in the Library (p. 81), it is clear from the description of this "universe (which others call the Library)" that *labyrinthine* is the most accurate epithet for it.<sup>14</sup> The labyrinth consists of an apparently interminable sequence of interconnected hexagonal galleries. The pattern of each is very tightly and neatly ordered: a precise number of shelves per wall, books per shelf, pages per book, lines per page, and characters per line. But there is a contradictory disorder among all this order: no pattern has ever been discerned among the books themselves. Another anomaly: although there is no distinction among the galleries on one level (the different books in each are indistinguishable as to value or sense of any kind), there is a spiral stairway in each which "plunges down into the abyss and rises up to the heights." (p. 79)

There are, then, built-in hierarchies in this world of leveled and mirrored samenesses. And this world is populated, though sparsely, by seekers after truth, people who travel from gallery to gallery

14. Cf. Anna Maria Barrenechea, p. 61: "But the library is also the universe, and it is that labyrinth-universe metaphor which gives the concept of chaos its grandeur and horror."

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not in order to find their way out of the labyrinth but to find a clue to the order of the labyrinth, to make it possible to live meaningfully inside the labyrinth. The only way out is over the bannister into the abyss, and the ordered emptiness of the Library has no discernible order—the universe is a meaningless and abysmal chaos of artificial patterns.

Borges piles paradox upon paradox, the result being like a Shakespearian sonnet with endlessly multiplied quatrains. And the roles of art and artist in the story furnish the most meaningful paradox. The first-person speaker of "The Library of Babel" is also the writer of the story, and his story makes comments about writers and about stories. For although the Library is an allegorical universe, it is also the sum of its books or a symbol of Art: the identical structure represents polar opposites in the dialectic of life and art. The irony of such two-faced allegory is pointed by references to the polarity, as when the narrator says, "Methodical writing distracts me from the present condition of men" (p. 87). Thus a meaningless system of order ("methodical") is the weapon against the despair-producing formlessness of life ("condition of men"). But the "eternal voyager" in the Library is the archetypal artist, who hopes against hope to find "that the same volumes are repeated in the same disorder (which, repeated, would constitute an order: Order itself)" (pp. 87 ff.). This "elegant hope" is the potentiality of art to surprise, that is, to discover/invent, a formal order in life. Borges' library-labyrinth is at once the production and the denial of that order.

Another "solution" to the problems of life's meaninglessness and formlessness is another definition of art: the *recreation* of life. "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is a parable of that definition. Ana María Barrenechea describes the story as follows:

"Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" narrates the attempt of a group of men to create a world of their own until, by the sheer weight of concentration, the fantastic creation acquires consistency and some of its objects . . . which are composed of strange matter begin to appear on earth. To that fantastic world which becomes real, Borges adds a second plane of unreality which, in turn, tries to achieve a relative concreteness; this level consists in the duplication of *hrönir*. Through this method Tlön performs curious experiments such as producing objects . . . merely by the desire for their apparition. The story is constructed like a Chinese box: unreal worlds included one within the other and then, in turn, within the earth, which disintegrates on contact with such phantasmagorias.<sup>15</sup>

15. Page 38.

But if one is to agree with Lewald that this is "possibly [Borges'] most significant story"<sup>16</sup> one must recognize that it does not narrate the "attempt of a group of men" and the results of that attempt at all, but the progressive discoveries of the first-person narrator about them. In this context the use of the labyrinth as a metaphor of art becomes clear.

The brief opening section of the story describes the narrator's first experience of the country Uqbar. Late at night, a chance remark of Bioy Casares refers to an heresiarch of Uqbar and paraphrases a statement attributed to him in the *Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*.<sup>17</sup> Appropriately, Bioy Casares has been talking "about a great scheme for writing a novel in the first person, using a narrator who omitted or corrupted what happened and who ran into various contradictions, so that only a handful of readers, a very small handful, would be able to decipher the horrible or banal reality behind the novel" (p. 17—a description reminiscent of Ford's *The Good Soldier* among others). Then it is an observation about the mirror watching them that sets off the investigation into Uqbar. When the mysterious volume with four extra pages turns up, containing an article on Uqbar not found in other copies of Volume XLVI and not accounted for by the alphabetical key of title page and spine, it reveals that "the literature of Uqbar was fantastic in character, and that its epics and legends never referred to reality, but to the two imaginary regions of Mlejnas and Tlön" (p. 19). Thus an apparently realistic but totally unverifiable country directs us to an imaginary place two removes from reality.

The first part of Section II purports to be a slightly edited reprint of an article by the narrator describing his personal involvement in the discovery of the nature of Tlön. The narrator's casual friendship with one Herbert Ashe leads him to the discovery of Volume XI of *A First Encyclopaedia of Tlön* shortly after Ashe's death. The narrator has few concrete memories of Ashe, but one concerns a discussion of the duo-decimal numerical system (pp. 20 ff.), and later it is revealed (p. 26n) that Tlön employs the duo-decimal system. This eleventh volume "refers to both subsequent and preceding volumes" (p. 22), but though it covers only "Hlaer

16. Page 631.

17. It may be interesting to note here Adolfo Bioy Casares' capsule description of Borges' work: "exercises of an inexhaustible intelligence and a talented imagination, stripped of all human elements—pathos or sentiment—and written for intellectual readers, amateurs in philosophy, and near specialists in literature," *Encyclopédia de la Pléiade. Histoire des Littératures* (Paris 1956), II, 727, cited in Miguel Enguídanos, "Imagination and Escape in the Short Stories of Jorge Luis Borges," *Texas Quarterly*, IV (Winter 1961), 120.

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to Jangr" it is possible to infer from it a great deal about the languages, cultures, and especially philosophies of Tlön. The two outstanding characteristics of that planet are that its nations are "congenitally idealist" (p. 23) and that in its classical culture all disciplines are subordinated to psychology (p. 24). Materialism is impossible in Tlön, both as an abstract concept (its language has difficulty formulating such a paradox) and in the practical applications of science or mathematics; and metaphysics is "a branch of fantastic literature" (p. 25). As if in practical demonstration or proof of Tlön's belief that mind precedes matter or (to use Owen Barfield's phrase) that interior is anterior, the *Encyclopaedia* records the duplication of objects in secondary objects called *hrönir*. The existence and perpetuation and effacement of mentally-produced "objects in reality" take us to a third remove from reality and close the first part of Section II. But I must review two other items in this part that seem to me of the greatest importance.

When the narrator found Ashe's volume, months after his death, in the bar of a hotel in Androgué, he "began to leaf through it and felt a curious lightheadedness" (p. 21). There follows an elaborate occurrence of the classical rhetorical device of *apophasis* or *prae-teritio*:

. . . which I will not go into, since this is the story, not of my particular emotions, but of Uqbar and Tlön and Orbis Tertius. In the Islamic world, there is one night, called the Night of Nights, on which the secret gates of the sky open wide and the water in the water jugs tastes sweeter; if those gates were to open, I would not feel what I felt that afternoon.

Having said he will not describe his emotions, he does so with a characteristically learned allusion but with an uncharacteristically lyric elaboration. Having said that the story is not that of his individual awakening to this other world, he reveals that it is exactly that. This primary concern is developed more fully in the last section, particularly after another denial/admission of its primacy.

The second item is part of the narrator's speculative answer to the question "who had invented Tlön?" and concerns the essential problem of form in art: "To begin with, Tlön was thought to be nothing more than a chaos, a free and irresponsible work of the imagination; now it was clear that it is a complete cosmos, and that the strict laws which govern it have been carefully formulated, albeit provisionally" (p. 22). As in "The Library of Babel," the

paradoxical notion here expressed is of art creating a chaotic world opposite in every way to the real world. But when criticism<sup>18</sup> surprises the artistic order in that world, does it not also betray the chaos of the real world?

The last section of "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is a postscript relating the "many things [that] have happened since" the date of "the foregoing article" (p. 31). A manuscript letter was discovered which cleared up the mystery of Tlön. It was an imaginary country invented by a secret society dating back to the early seventeenth century. With each "master-scholar" electing a disciple to carry on the work, the project continued until 1824, when Ezra Buckley, a millionaire ascetic from Memphis, proposed to support the society in the invention of a whole planet, so long as it was secret and had "no truck with the imposter Jesus Christ" (*ibid.*). By 1914 the 300 collaborators had produced the forty-volume *First Encyclopaedia of Tlön*, which was to be the basis for a more detailed work to be written in one of the languages of Tlön and called, provisionally, *Orbis Tertius*.

The narrator then records the first two intrusions "of the fantastic world into the real one" (p. 32), both of which he witnessed personally and seemed "to have felt something of [their] premonitory character" (*ibid.*): a compass with letters from one of the alphabets of Tlön on the dial falling from a crate addressed to the Princess of Faucigny Lucinge from Poitiers; and a cone "made of a metal which does not exist in this world" (p. 33), a religious ikon of Tlön, fallen from the gaucho belt of a dying boy in Cuchilla Negra.

The last three paragraphs form a coda which begins with this sentence: "Here I conclude the personal part of my narrative" (*ibid.*). Again this is elaborate *apophysis*; the last three paragraphs, though dealing with matters of common knowledge, are the most intensely personal part of the story, since they not only imply individual judgments on general matters but also relate these matters to the private life of the narrator. All forty volumes were uncovered in a Memphis library, though "some of the more improbable features of the eleventh volume (for example, the multiplying of the *hrönir*) had been either removed or modified" (*ibid.*). Thus Tlön was made "not . . . too incompatible with the real world" (pp. 33 ff.), and objects from Tlön were disseminated

18. A further or inner paradox is the work of art, the short story itself, posing as a work of criticism concerning some other (and non-existent) work of art.



throughout various countries: "Reality gave ground on more than one point" (p. 34). The narrator explains the acceptance of Tlön by men's fascination for "any symmetrical system whatsoever." He argues, "why not . . . submit to the minute and vast evidence of an ordered planet? Useless to reply that reality, too, is ordered. It may be so, but in accordance with divine laws—I translate: inhuman laws—which we will never completely perceive. Tlön may be a labyrinth, but it is a labyrinth plotted by men, a labyrinth destined to be deciphered by men." (*ibid.*)

Borges the artist has adopted for this story one of his characteristically non-artist personae (scholar-critic-reviewer). The narrator clings to a faith in a mystical, mysterious world order and rejects the validity ("reality") of an artistic order imposed upon life. Perhaps there is an admonition to artists (like himself?) that art must be more than merely *compatible* with life, must discover formal order in life rather than import it from another imaginative cosmos. Not only the art of a Tolkien is suggested, however, because the narrator goes on to note that the discipline of Tlön "is the discipline of chess players, not of angels" (*ibid.*)—which again suggests the art of a Nabokov.

Noting how the language, history, and other disciplines of Tlön have changed "the face of the world" (*ibid.*), the narrator anticipates the future discovery of the hundred-volume *Second Encyclopaedia of Tlön*, the disappearance of English, French, and mere Spanish, and the coming of a time when "the world will be Tlön" (p. 35). The final two sentences read: "I take no notice. I go on revising, in the quiet of the days in the hotel at Androgué, a tentative translation into Spanish, in the style of Quevedo, which I do not intend to see published, of Sir Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial*" (p. 35). Is this irrelevant? Is it the intrusion of a Nabokov madman who says "There is a very loud amusement park right in front of my present lodgings" in the third paragraph of his Foreword to John Shade's *Pale Fire*? Can it, paradoxically, be an affirmation of faith in a world expressed by a withdrawal from that world? The narrator *does* take notice. In fact, he has imaginatively constructed a chronicle of the encroachment of Tlön, which itself is an imaginative recreation of life. The story has progressed through Uqbar, Tlön, the *hrönir*, and finally Orbis Tertius to a point four removes from reality; yet the fourth remove has turned back on itself and impinged upon reality (like the *hrönir* of the eleventh degree). In calling the colossal work of art that is Tlön a labyrinth,

the narrator suggests that there is another kind of labyrinth in life. The world of human experience is labyrinthine in its unfathomable and inescapable disorder; the constructions of art are labyrinthine in their intricate impositions of an order which may ultimately be seen whole by humanity.

The labyrinth-art metaphor is made explicit in "The Garden of Forking Paths," though it is framed by a rather conventional intrigue. Actually there is a double frame in the story, a very thin exterior frame being provided by a "manuscript editor" who introduces the story with a brief "historical" comment and intrudes at one other point with a footnote contradicting (unnecessarily and distractingly, but revealingly) a suggestion of the manuscript. The manuscript is a first-person deposition with the first two pages missing, constituting what Borges calls "a detective story" (Prologue, p. 15). The deponent, Dr. Yu Tsun, is relating his murder of Stephen Albert and its motive. A German spy, Yu Tsun has by his apparently inscrutable act outwitted his opposite number, Captain Richard Madden, and announced to his German chief the name of the target town, the site of a new artillery park. Ironically, the man he kills is a noted Sinologist whom Yu Tsun considers as great as Goethe and who has solved the ancient riddle of the labyrinth of Ts'ui Pên, Yu Tsun's great-grandfather. Thus his "triumph" is "abominable" and the last words of the deposition (and the story) refer to his "infinite penitence and sickness of the heart." (p. 101)

At the center of the story is the encounter between Yu Tsun and Stephen Albert and the latter's explication of *The Garden of Forking Paths*. This explication also seems to me central to Borges' symbolic use of the labyrinth. Yet Borges' great skill as a short story writer has enabled him to treat this encounter as a central element of the plot and at the same time to integrate its thematic material with both outer frames of the deposition and the editing thereof.<sup>19</sup>

The children who direct Yu Tsun to Albert's house tell him to bear left at every crossroad, and his memory is stirred to appropriate concerns:

The advice about turning always to the left reminded me that such was the common formula for finding the central courtyard of certain labyrinths.

19. This may be what Ana María Barrenechea is referring to when she talks about "a quadruple labyrinthine construction in which poetry, vagueness, and mystery are mixed—the ancestor's labyrinth imagined first in the form of vast boundaries, the cyclically interpreted novel, the same novel later relived in a plurality of destinies, and the suggestiveness of the path which leads him to the crime, from the station to the house." (p. 61)

I know something about labyrinths. Not for nothing am I the great-grandson of Ts'ui Pên. He was Governor of Yunnan and gave up temporal power to write a novel with more characters than there are in the *Hung Lou Méng*, and to create a maze in which all men would lose themselves. He spent thirteen years on these oddly assorted tasks before he was assassinated by a stranger. His novel had no sense to it and nobody ever found his labyrinth. (p. 93)

Yu Tsun goes on to meditate on "this lost and perhaps mythical labyrinth" (pp. 93 ff.) and indulges in "imaginary illusions" (p. 94) of multiplied mazes of space and time. At Albert's house, finally, he characterizes Ts'ui Pên's book as a "shapeless mass of contradictory rough drafts" (p. 96) and adds, "As for that other enterprise . . . his Labyrinth. . . ." The following exchange is an explanation on several levels:

"Here is the Labyrinth," Albert said, pointing to a tall, laquered writing cabinet.

"An ivory labyrinth?" I exclaimed. "A tiny labyrinth indeed. . . !"

"A symbolic labyrinth," he corrected me. "An invisible labyrinth of time. I, a barbarous Englishman, have been given the key to this transparent mystery. After more than a hundred years most of the details are irrecoverable, lost beyond all recall, but it isn't hard to image what must have happened. At one time, Ts'un Pên must have said; 'I am going into seclusion to write a book,' and at another, 'I am retiring to construct a maze.' Everyone assumed these were separate activities. No one realized that the book and the labyrinth were one and the same. The Pavilion of the Limpid Sun was set in the middle of an intricate garden. This may have suggested the idea of a physical maze."

"Ts'ui Pên died. In all the vast lands which once belonged to your family, no one could find the labyrinth. The novel's confusion suggested that it was the labyrinth. Two circumstances showed me the direct solution to the problem. First, the curious legend that Ts'ui Pên had proposed to create an infinite maze, second, a fragment of a letter which I discovered." (pp. 96 ff.)

The fragment says, "I leave to various future times, but not to all, my garden of forking paths" (p. 97), and it leads to Albert's conclusion:

"*The Garden of Forking Paths* is an enormous guessing game, or parable, in which the subject is time. The rules of the game forbid the use of the word itself. To eliminate a word completely, to refer to it by means of inept phrases and obvious paraphrases, is perhaps the best way of drawing attention to it . . .

"The explanation is obvious. *The Garden of Forking Paths* is a picture, incomplete yet not false, of the universe such as Ts'ui Pên conceived it to be. . . . He believed in an infinite series of times, in a dizzily growing,

ever spreading network of diverging, converging and parallel times." (pp. 99ff.)<sup>20</sup>

Lewald says that "in *El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan* . . . the labyrinth takes on a temporal structure,"<sup>21</sup> but that is only one dimension of its symbolic potentiality. Ts'ui Pên's philosophical notions about time extend into Yu Tsun's conceptions of the actions and events he is reporting and also extend over into the historical framework of the story, but there are physical mazes in the story as well. Furthermore, if we apply to Borges' "Garden of Forking Paths" Stephen Albert's solution to Ts'ui Pên's *Garden of Forking Paths*, we must search for a central concern of the author and an absent word—only awkward and indirect expressions referring to that concern. The solution is a dual one here: the labyrinth of infinitely multiplied possibilities is *life*, and it is also *art*. Ts'ui Pên's labyrinth is his novel, metaphorically called a labyrinth by both author and commentator; but his work of art is a metaphysical treatise attempting to describe symbolically the true nature of the labyrinthine universe. In Borges' work in general, the labyrinth symbol seems to operate just as it does in the nearly inscrutable manifestations of Ts'ui Pên's intellect.

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20. Albert I. Bagby, II, "The Concept of Time of Jorge Luis Borges," *Romance Notes*, vi (1964/5), 89-105, has confused Borges' story with Ts'ui Pên's novel; and without acknowledging most of the quotations, he has taken Stephen Albert's comments on Ts'ui Pên and made them Bagby's on Borges. Albert says, "*The Garden of Forking Paths* is an enormous guessing game, or parable, in which the subject is time" (p. 99); Bagby says, "This story is a guessing game in which the subject is time. The word itself, however, is never mentioned" (p. 101). The latter sentence is nonsense—both Albert and Yu Tsun speak often about time, explicitly—but it paraphrases what Albert says about the labyrinth novel.

21. Page 631.