

Norris makes no indictment; he praises the purity and emphasizes the goodness. Vandover as the artist may rebel against such unnatural purity, but in his rebellion he falls beneath the weight of the brute which infests all natural relationships. His ruin is due not to the unnatural repression of natural instincts, but rather to his toleration of them; he fails to subdue the brute by work, will, or innocence, the traditional bulwarks of religious morality against the terrors of religious determinism.

I would like to suggest that the scientific orientation so often ascribed to Norris as a "naturalist" writer has been overemphasized. Although Norris and the American naturalist movement as a whole did absorb scientific determinism, this was done in terms of previously existing religious pressures. It is the imposition of Calvinist determinism on the newer scientific material that produced the unique coloration of American naturalism in patterns of romance and brutality, degradation and purity, realism and rhetoric.

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THE LABYRINTHS OF JORGE LUIS BORGES
AN INTRODUCTORY TO THE STORIES OF *THE ALEPH*

By L. A. MURILLO

Jorge Luis Borges is the outstanding writer of Spanish America today. He is best known abroad as the author of fantastic and ingenious short stories that are in their own enigmatic way the translucent expression of the spiritual crisis of the twentieth century. Of the several volumes of his short stories, the most varied and perhaps the most significant is *El Aleph*.¹ The stories of *El Aleph* comprise a very small book; but, as the title implies,² the little book is like a rare glass, strangely cut and painfully polished down by its author, to serve like the glass of a timeless telescope for probing the immense extent of the human past, and then, and at the same time, as a cosmic glass to be used for microscopic insight into the human present. A little book with an outrageous ambition for its size. But its contents are extremely interesting; they are the latest and best example of Borges' gifts as a storyteller.

The fabric of Borges' stories is many-threaded and many-colored. Behind the fabric, like a skeletal structure, stands one idea, expressed consistently through a variety of images: the labyrinth. The labyrinth is one of the most mysterious and one of the oldest representations of the inner life of man. Like the circle and the cross, it is a symbol that expresses, through geometrical balance, a unity of opposites. The simplest image of the labyrinth is a coil, a swirl.³

¹ Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1949; second edition, 1952. Quotations are from the second edition. This article on *El Aleph* is an abbreviated version of a paper read before the New England Chapter of the AATSP at the Modern Language Center, Harvard University, in January, 1957. Other collections of short stories by Borges are: *Historia universal de la infamia* (1935), *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (1941), *Ficciones, 1935-1944* (1944), *La muerte y la brújula* (1951). A complete and up-to-date bibliography on Borges may be found in the excellent study by Ana María Barrenechea, *La expresión de la irrealidad en la obra de Jorge Luis Borges* (Mexico City, 1957). A partial bibliography may be found in *Cuentos de Jorge Luis Borges*, Monticello College Edition (Godfrey, Ill., 1958).

² The book takes its title from the final story, "El Aleph," in which the narrator (Borges), under extremely problematical conditions, sees the *Aleph*, a concept of space that contains all the others, hence, all of creation and all of the universe. Borges is, of course, exploiting the cabalistic nature of the term in order to achieve a multiplicity of possible connotations. See J. L. Ríos Patrón, *Jorge Luis Borges* (Buenos Aires, 1955), p. 101, n. 8; and for a brief discussion of the mystical and symbolic meanings ascribed to letters in the medieval Kabbalah, J. Abelson, *Jewish Mysticism* (London, 1913), pp. 98-106.

³ W. H. Matthews, *Mazes and Labyrinths; A General Account of Their History and Developments* (London, 1922), contains descriptions of the many kinds of labyrinths and their uses up to the present. It is more than probable that the labyrinth coil (or design) and the spiral symbol are related in several ways, in the manner of performing ritual dances, for instance. D. A. Mackenzie, *Migration of Symbols and Their Relations to Beliefs and Customs* (New York, 1926), has a full study on the spiral but does not relate it to the labyrinth coil.

From the earliest times this coil has been identified with the magical powers that man has aspired to possess and to control. In our present socialized life the most common picture of it would be a fingerprint. How strange it is to think that we bear upon our fingertips a coil, a "labyrinth," that identifies us impersonally and almost infallibly to state agencies and detective bureaus. Anthropologists have been amazed to discover the wide extent of the knowledge of the labyrinth among primitive peoples. One of the most curious instances is that of a New Zealand tribe whose men tattoo on their faces a series of labyrinthine coils. "¡Quizá en mi cara estuviera escrita la magia . . . !" says the magician-priest in the story "La escritura del Dios" (p. 108).

As a first step into the labyrinth of Borges, it will be necessary to keep in mind the details of the classical myth of Theseus and the Cretan labyrinth. This is the labyrinth which was built by Daedalus on the orders of King Minos and which housed the Minotaur (a king-beast). The Athenian youth entered the labyrinth as one of a group of young people who were to be sacrificed to the man-bull; with the help of Ariadne's thread he was able to make his way out after slaying the monster. There are two additional points that should be kept in mind: first, the Cretan labyrinth is an artifice, an ingenious creation of intelligence and of art, and as a corollary, the way to its center (and the way out) is easily accessible to its author, or to anyone who has the "key," the right directions; second, the labyrinth houses a king-monster to whom a certain number of victims are sacrificed at intervals.

According to the best information, the earliest labyrinths in Egypt, from whom the Cretans borrowed the idea, were temples, which were later used as burial places for kings.⁴ In such a temple the Egyptian priest performed a ritual in which the king, and then eventually a beast-god substituted for the king, was killed that the power of life might be reborn. The religious beliefs of the ancient Egyptians required that the dead king be provided with treasures or provisions for life after death. Much later, when Egyptian culture was in decline, the temple-tombs of the kings were designed with intricate and secret passages, in order to protect the dead kings and their treasures from thieves. Eventually the labyrinth would be built to lure the reckless and the fearless into its corridors, to thwart them, and to put an end to them. These labyrinths were devised by men like Daedalus, the ingenious artificer, or by builders and designers boastful of their skill to bewilder and to confuse.

At this point the reader of Borges will recognize the relevancy

⁴ Karl Kerényi, *Labyrinth-Studien, Labyrinthos als Linienreflex einer mythologischen Idee* (Zürich, 1950), illus. 5.

⁵ C. N. Deedes, "The Labyrinth," in the volume *The Labyrinth: Further Studies in the Relation Between Myth and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. S. H. Hooke (London, 1935), pp. 3-42.

of all this to the fantasy of *The Aleph*. The labyrinths of Borges are constructed with just such material, infinitely detailed. The following group of propositions or generalizations may serve as a key to this labyrinth of labyrinths. (1) The entire universe is a labyrinth, and the inner life of man, the self, is a labyrinth. (2) The person moving toward the center of the labyrinth, the victim to be sacrificed, the victim being drawn into the net-trap, is equal in identity to the killer waiting in the center. (3) The ingenious designer of the labyrinth will fall a victim to his own creation; that is, he will be punished for his pride. (4) The victim and the killer are one and the same person. (5) These two opposite movements or tensions that come to a meeting point and annul one another are the drama of the self, its desires, its will, and its death.

Each of Borges' stories contains one or several variations of the labyrinth theme. In *The Aleph* it is not overly difficult to make out the nucleus of images that Borges uses for the labyrinth: the plan of a city, the sands of the desert, a spider web, a flaming pyre, and the dream state. These are the simplest images, and to simplify the discussion further, we will consider each in turn, illustrating it by reference to one story in this order of increasing complexity.

"No precisa erigir un laberinto, cuando el universo ya lo es. Para quien verdaderamente quiere ocultarse, Londres es mejor laberinto . . ." (p. 120). The modern city, like a hive of a million beings dependent upon one another, is a man-made labyrinth. For Borges, almost any geometrical detail, a corner, a line, or even a window pane, is an allusion to the labyrinth of the universe that men, in spite of their cleverness and their originality, will imitate.

The story "Emma Zunz" takes place in Buenos Aires. Emma is a nineteen-year-old girl who takes upon herself the task of avenging the unjust death of her father. As she moves through the brothel district of Buenos Aires in search of a stranger who will serve as an instrument of justice, her figure is flashed and distorted in the labyrinth of bright mirrors that reflect her nervous movements; as she moves through the streets of Buenos Aires on her way to shoot Loewenthal (her employer who is guilty of the crime her father was convicted of), she has become a fallen woman moving toward the center of a labyrinth where her fate will be inextricably bound to that of her victim, to the center where her efforts to execute divine justice will be thwarted.

In the story "The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths"⁶ the desert of infinite sands is the labyrinth of the universe, and the perplexing, scandalous structure built by the architects and magicians of the king of Babylon is its blasphemous imitation by man. The king of Babylon, wishing to mock the simplicity of his guest, the

⁶ This story is properly to be read as part of "Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto," but Borges does not present it as one of his own original stories. See the note to the Epilogue of the second edition, p. 157.

king of Arabia, asked him to go into his labyrinth. The king of Arabia implored divine aid and found the way out. When he returned to Arabia, he gathered his armies and laid waste the kingdom of Babylon; he captured the king, tied him on a swift camel, and took him out to the desert. There he said to him:

"¡Oh, rey del tiempo y substancia y cifra del siglo!, en Babilonia me quisiste perder en un laberinto de bronce con muchas escaleras, puertas y muros; ahora el Poderoso ha tenido a bien que te muestre el mío, donde no hay escaleras que subir, ni puertas que forzar, ni fatigosas galerías que recorrer, ni muros que te vedan el paso."

Luego le desató las ligaduras y lo abandonó en mitad del desierto, donde murió de hambre y de sed. La gloria sea con Aquel que no muere. (pp. 124-25)

In the story "Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto" the labyrinth image is the spider web. The king Abenjacán, a tyrant of an African desert tribe, so oppressed his peoples that they rose against him, and he was forced to flee for his life. He escaped with Zaid, his cousin and Visir. This is the first version of the events that followed. One night in the desert the two fell asleep, and a slave kept watch. "Esa noche creí que me aprisionaba una red de serpientes. Desperté con horror; a mi lado, en el alba, dormía Zaid; el roce de una telaraña en mi carne me había hecho soñar aquel sueño" (p. 116). Then the king took a knife and slit the throat of his cowardly Visir.

In a kind of death rattle, Zaid uttered some strange words that the king was unable to make out; later he understood them to mean this: "Como ahora me borras te borraré, dondequiera que estés" (p. 117). In order to forestall this threat—from a dead man (who was a coward)—Abenjacán (but not Abenjacán, rather Zaid, as we learn later) made his way to England and built there, in Cornwall, on a height overlooking the sea, a reddish labyrinth of many corridors leading to one central chamber, where he hid with the slave and a lion and, supposedly, a treasure that he had managed to salvage.

Here we have a classical tale of the labyrinth: a king in a kind of tomb with a lion to help him guard the treasure. But the builder of the labyrinth is Zaid who has pretended to be Abenjacán; that is, he has identified himself with the man he wishes he were. The man in the center of the labyrinth, then, is not the king, but a man who has disguised himself, identified himself with the king, in order to kill him.

But here is the second (and the true) version of what happened that night in the desert. That night the manful king slept and the cowardly Zaid kept watch. "Dormir es distraerse del universo y la distracción es difícil para quien sabe que lo persiguen con espaldas desnudas. Zaid, ávido, se inclinó sobre el sueño de su rey. Pensó matarlo, pero no se atrevió" (p. 122). Zaid fled with the treasure and the slave and made his way to England. Eventually, and as Zaid expected, the king tracked him down. Zaid hid in the center of the labyrinth and waited, and when the king appeared, he shot him from

a trap door. Then he defaced the king, the slave and the lion, to make identification impossible, to insure his own identity as Abenjacán.

Two young Englishmen, a poet and a mathematician, have told us this story. The king was slain in a labyrinth that his double built to trap him, and the double, unworthy of him, left him, a faceless corpse, in the labyrinth now become a tomb. "Simuló ser Abenjacán, mató a Abenjacán y finalmente *fué Abenjacán*. —Si—... Fué un vagabundo que, antes de ser nadie en la muerte, recordaría haber sido un rey o haber fingido ser un rey, algún día" (p. 123). The ironical ending is complete, of course, only when we understand that once the king is dead, there can be no identity for the living Zaid. He is simply a nobody. His fate was intimately bound, through envy, hatred, and fear, to Abenjacán's.

Borges ends his stories on this level of rather thin-sliced irony. Each of the stories in *The Aleph* will disclose to the careful reader a similar design marvelously worked out. The few details discussed here can only suggest the symmetry, the geometrical balance of opposites, and the evasive dialectic of Borges' art. An arabesque design, like that of the *Thousand and One Nights*, transposed into the intellectual terms of the Occident, would be one way to describe this art of combining fantasy and metaphysics.

The identity of opposites is the theme of another little masterpiece, "The Theologians," in which the labyrinth is a flaming pyre. Aureliano and Juan de Panonia form, together, a prototype. Both are sixth-century warriors of the pen in the front ranks of Christ. Juan is the object of Aureliano's envy and hate and later becomes his victim. As theologians, Aureliano is the orthodox defender of the Christian revelation, accuser and inquisitor. Juan is the heretic and the scapegoat, a theologian unjustly accused and convicted by his rivals of professing unorthodox opinions. Religious dogma is fervor of doubt and fervor of faith, a tension of opposites that need and complete one another.

The dazzling treatises of Juan aroused first the envy and then the animosity of Aureliano. Juan was so successful in his attacks upon the heretical belief in cyclical, ever-returning events and personalities that he brought about the condemnation of the heresiarch Euforbo, who was tied to the stake and set afire. Euforbo shouted from within the flames:

Esto ha ocurrido y volverá a ocurrir. No encendéis una pira, encendéis un laberinto de fuego. Si aquí se unieran todas las hogueras que he sido, no cabrían en la tierra y quedarían ciegos los ángeles. Esto lo dije muchas veces. (p. 36)

The coiling flames are the labyrinth in which the orthodox and the powerful will lose their way among the passions that impel their dogmas, only to end up in the center of the labyrinth that is their fate.

Aureliano sees these flames many years later as they curl and mount around the wretched figure of Juan, whom he denounced on

the basis of a single sentence taken out of context from one of those brilliant treatises. "Aureliano no lloró la muerte de Juan, pero sintió lo que sentiría un hombre curado de una enfermedad incurable, que ya fuera parte de su vida" (p. 42). Once Juan is dead, Aureliano bears no identity; he has no incentive, no cause to live for. Death comes to him by fire, in a flash of lightning.

El final de la historia sólo es referible en metáforas, ya que pasa en el reino de los cielos, donde no hay tiempo. Tal vez cabría decir que Aureliano conversó con Dios y que Éste se interesa tan poco en diferencias religiosas que lo tomó por Juan de Panonia. Ello, sin embargo, insinuaría una confusión de la mente divina. Más correcto es decir que en el paraíso, Aureliano supo que para la insondable divinidad, él y Juan de Panonia (el ortodoxo y el hereje, el aborrecido y el aborrecido, el acusador y la víctima) formaban una sola persona. (p. 43)

Una sola persona . . . Borges, here, is evidently pointing to the meaning of his story. This rhythmic movement of characters through the labyrinth of their lives to the consummation of their selves reproduces, in a kind of psychic allegory, the dramatic ritual of the slaying of the king. The self begins by identifying its desire and its free will with the annihilation of the rival, and then it may or may not discover that in doing so, it was not acting according to its desire and its freedom, but in accordance with a law, a dialectic of life, that converts individuals into prototypes. This psychic rhythm, we might say, is the swirling of anguish in the ritual killing of the self.

In "The Theologians" the self, Aureliano, found release in death and the hereafter. There is only one story in *The Aleph* in which the self attains a superior identification that provides a new life: "La escritura del Dios," the most fantastic, most intricate of Borges' stories. Its close is a climax of multiple suggestions and ironical significations.

The tale is as intricate as an infinite dream. The labyrinth of the universe appears in two forms: the deep, circular cell in which the magician-priest Tzinacán is imprisoned, and the design of spots on the skin of the jaguar or tiger which has been put into the other half of the cell and which the priest can see for only a few seconds a day (at noon, through a grating, by the light of a small round hole in the high ceiling) when the jailkeeper lets down food and water for both the prisoner and the tiger. Written somewhere on the tiger is the scripture of the god. Whoever knows and utters this magical sentence is immortal and all powerful.

When Pedro de Alvarado came upon the sacred pyramid of Qaholom, he laid waste to it and tortured its magician-priest because he refused to reveal the location of a treasure. "Me laceraron, me rompieron, me deformaron y luego desperté en esta cárcel, que ya no dejaré en mi vida mortal" (p. 107).

This happened many years ago, when he was young. During the tortuous nightmare of his imprisonment beside the jaguar, he recalled the traditional belief that his god had written a magical sentence some-

where in the universe. With the power that the sentence would give him he would kill the Spaniards and restore the religion of his god. It was inevitable, within the circumstances of his prison life, that he should conclude that this sentence was written there on the jaguar's skin; and through the years, as he aged, as his mind grew darker and his spirit weakened, he began to grasp an order in the lines that he could see only for a few seconds through the grating that separated him from the jaguar's jaws—a labyrinth studied through a labyrinth.⁷ The effort drained away his mind and his will.

Un día o una noche—entre mis días y mis noches qué diferencia cabe?—soñé que en el piso de la cárcel había un grano de arena. Volví a dormir, indiferente; soñé que despertaba y que había dos granos de arena. Volví a dormir; soñé que los granos de arena eran tres. Fueron, así, multiplicándose hasta colmar la cárcel y yo moría bajo ese hemisferio de arena. Comprendí que estaba soñando; con un vasto esfuerzo me desperté. El despertar fué inútil; la innumerable arena me sofocaba. Alguien me dijo: *No has despertado a la vigilia sino a un sueño anterior. Ese sueño está dentro de otro, y así hasta lo infinito, que es el número de los granos de arena. El camino que habrás de desandar es interminable y morirás antes de haber despertado realmente.*

Me sentí perdido. La arena me rompía la boca pero grité: *Ni una arena soñada puede matarme ni hay sueños que estén dentro de sueños.* Un resplandor me despertó. En la tiniebla superior se cernía un círculo de luz. Vi la cara y las manos del carcelero, la rodaja, el cordel, la carne y los cántaros.

Un hombre se confunde gradualmente, con la forma de su destino; un hombre es, a la larga, sus circunstancias. Más que un descifrador o un vengador, más que un sacerdote del dios, yo era un encarcelado. Del incansable laberinto de sueños yo regresé como a mi casa a la dura prisión. Bendije su humedad, bendije su tigre, bendije el agujero de luz, bendije mi viejo cuerpo doliente, bendije la tiniebla y la piedra.

Entonces ocurrió lo que no puedo olvidar ni comunicar. . . . (pp. 109-10)

. . . the mystical union with God. He saw a wheel (circle) of water and of fire that contained the meaning of the universe. It was then that he finally deciphered the tiger script.

But the man who now understands the divine plan of the universe is no longer the man who sought to decipher the script in order to avenge himself.

Que muera conmigo el misterio que está escrito en los tigres. Quien ha entrevisto el universo, quien ha entrevisto los ardientes designos del universo, no puede pensar en un hombre, en sus triviales dichas o desventuras, aunque ese hombre sea él. Ese hombre *ha sido él* y ahora no le importa. Qué le importa la suerte de aquel otro, qué le importa la nación de aquel otro, si él, ahora, es nadie. Por eso no pronuncio la fórmula, por eso dejo que me olviden los días, acostado en la oscuridad. (pp. 111-12)

⁷ Here Borges is contrasting the horizontal labyrinth of the moving jaguar and the vertical labyrinth of the cell (stone) and the grating. The labyrinths may refer to organic and inorganic matter respectively. The circumstances under which the magician-priest decipheres the script suggests the working conditions of the modern scientist who seeks knowledge for its power or for its own sake. I believe that J. L. Ríos Patrón (pp. 39-45, and "El laberinto de Borges," *Sur*, n. 233 [1955], pp. 75-79), in an otherwise penetrating discussion, does not appreciate sufficiently the very complex nature of Borges' labyrinthine irony.

The self has undergone a death and a rebirth. But the ironical circumstances in which the mystical union is attained and the script of the god deciphered annul the positive power of the birth experience. Is the decision to withhold uttering the magical sentence a divine revelation, or is it the self-delusion of a helpless prisoner overcome by a kind of delirium? The new birth of the self proves to be a denser, more perplexing labyrinth, and what was apparently a way out of one labyrinth turns out to be only another corner, and then a forking into another labyrinth whose existence the reader of Borges will not have anticipated.

As a representation of the inner life of man, the labyrinth has always symbolized man's insecurity in the world and his attempts to propitiate, control, or possess the powers that seemingly decide his destiny. Wherever the labyrinth has had a religious significance, as in ancient Egypt and Babylon, its center was likened to the center of the world, and the possession of the power it signified, to a participation in the actions of a divinity. The tortuous and secret way to its center was the initiatory phase of a ritual. In modern literature the labyrinth has no such religious significance. It is indeed a symbol of man's insecurity and of his efforts to find a center of meaning to his existence, but he is lost within the infinite number of passages that consciousness brings to his awareness.

In the stories of Borges the labyrinth, with all its multiple associations, symbolizes 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. Not the least ironical point of this little book is that the resources of its highly sophisticated and esoteric art, the ingenuity and exotic erudition of its author, have as their purpose (in a manner curiously parallel to the "scientific" discoveries of anthropologists and psychiatrists) the revelation of the oldest, most primitive, and most constant despairs of man. From within the hollows of his labyrinths, Borges echoes that postscript of our age by which we manage to survive: not until now has man known himself to be such an odd creature that, in his deepest despair, despair may be a comfort to him.

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PAUL CLAUDEL AND THE SENSORY PARADOX

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In the theater and poetry of Paul Claudel there are so many statements and situations that seem to go against the natural laws of sense perception that they may be considered to comprise one of the important themes of his imaginative work. In this paper I propose to study Claudel's sensory paradox, especially in the light of the concepts and the literary figures he used.

The paradox is often presented epigrammatically, under which condition it is couched in the shorter literary figures, such as oxymoron, epigram, and antithetical and paradoxical statements. Also, whether it be a question of an epigrammatic statement or of a longer situation, within the broad lines of the basic contradiction there seem to be three principal ways in which the natural laws of sense perception are apparently subverted. The following two quotations are examples of the most common of these ways:

"Qu'importe le jour? Éteins cette lumière!
Éteins promptement cette lumière qui ne me permet de voir que ton visage!"
(Beata, in "La Cantate à trois voix")¹

Ce sont les yeux pendant que je vivais qui m'empêchaient de voir.
(The Stranger, *Sous le rempart d'Athènes*)

For both individuals, factors that are normally aids to perception—light in Beata's case and the very eyes of the blind Stranger—act instead as deterrents to it. Furthermore, a contrary idea is implied, that darkness and blindness would serve to aid their vision.

There is a different type of apparent contradiction in the next two passages.

Parce qu'ils ont entendu ce mot hors du temps dont leur cœur avait besoin.
... (explaining why certain individuals are dissatisfied with life; "Sainte Thérèse," *Feuilles de saints*)

Toutes les créatures à la fois, tous les êtres bons et mauvais sont engloutis
dans la miséricorde d'Adonaï!
Ignoreraient-elles cette lumière qui n'est pas faite pour les yeux du corps?
Une lumière non pas pour être vue mais pour être buc, pour que l'âme vivante

¹ Quotations from Claudel's poetry and theater are based upon the as yet incomplete *Œuvres complètes* (henceforth *O.C.*), 15 vols. to date (Paris, 1950-1959); for that part of his theater which has not yet appeared in *O.C.*, quotations are based on *Théâtre*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2 vols. (Paris, 1947-1948). If a poem used in this paper is classified as part of a collection in *O.C.*, the collection title is supplied parenthetically in the text. The major divisions in the plays (*acte, journée, partie*) are parenthetically indicated in the text by roman numerals, along with the scene number in an arabic numeral, if there is a subdivision.